

‘Japan tie helped against Singapore’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women’s football team coach Saiful Bari Titu felt the experience of facing Japan in an Asian Games fixture earlier in September helped his side turn more mature and clinical in their performance against Singapore yesterday.

Titu’s charges thrashed the Singaporeans, 12 places above 142nd-ranked Bangladesh, 8-0 to wrap up the two-match FIFA Friendly series with two victories, having won the first match 3-0 three days earlier.

Tohura Khatun scored twice while Rituporna Chakma added one as Bangladesh raced to a 3-0 lead by the 24th minute of the match at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.



The home side, who suffered a 3-0 loss against the same opposition in their only previous encounter six years ago, shipped five more goals in the second half to register an emphatic victory in front of a cheerful home crowd. Rituporna completed a brace as Sabina Khatun, Sanjida Akhter, Matsushima Sumaya and Shamsunnahar Jr scored a goal each.

Interestingly, the scoreline of yesterday’s match was identical to that against Japan, the former world champions. The fact that the women in red and green were on the receiving end of the thrashing three months ago spoke of the improvement of the side.

“The players improved a lot mentally following the game against Japan, which helped in today’s game,” Titu said at the post-match press briefing.

During the Asian Games, which was Titu’s first assignment as the head coach of the women’s team, Bangladesh suffered a 6-1 defeat against Vietnam before ending the campaign with a 1-1 draw against South Asian rivals Nepal. However, the veteran coach was only willing to enjoy the two victories against Singapore.

“Bangladesh won 8-0, wow!” was what Titu said when asked about his reaction after the victory.

“I didn’t expect such a big victory. Usually when you score a few goals, the appetite for more goals decreases. But today the players were aggressive right till the very end, which was surprising to me,” he added.

Rituporna, who made two assists apart from scoring a brace, termed the match as her best ever in the red and green shirt.

“This is my best match and a memorable one. I’m not disappointed at not getting a hat-trick. The team has won and that is the most important thing,” said the forward from Rangamati.



Bangladesh’s stand-in captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha were keen observers of the wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday during a training session. The duo had a chat with the pitch curator Gamini de Silva ahead of Bangladesh’s second Test against New Zealand, starting tomorrow. [Bottom] Spin is expected to play a pivotal role at the venue and the onus will be on New Zealand spinners Ish Sodhi and Ajaz Patel to make use of the conditions to help the visitors level the series after the Tigers took lead with a win in the first Test in Sylhet.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mirpur pitch and its ‘tackiness’ return to frame

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Bangladesh wrote a new chapter in Sylhet with their first-ever home Test victory over New Zealand. However, a much broader achievement awaits the hosts as the second and final Test of the series commences in Dhaka on Wednesday.

A home or away Test series win against one of the big Test nations is something Bangladesh are yet to taste. There have been Test wins over England and Australia at home but those series were drawn.

Tail-up Tigers have their eye on another maiden prize, no doubt, but the focus for now has turned towards the wicket at Mirpur’s Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS), likely pivotal to the fate of the series.

Close to evening yesterday, the pitch to be played on had worn the look of a flat deck with very little grass on it. Some of the dead grass was cut and the wicket would see a little bit more rolling as the match nears.

Head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, having observed the wicket ahead of the practice session yesterday, was seen in discussion with SBNCS’s head curator Gamini de Silva for quite some time after returning from Bangladesh’s nets session.

Earlier in the morning, New Zealand skipper Tim Southee and batter Kane Williamson appeared eager to extract some information from Mustafizur Rahman, who came in for white-ball practice at SBNCS. When Southee indicated something about seam while pointing to the wicket, Mustafizur motioned back that he did not have a clue, prompting laughter from the two New Zealand veterans.

Kiwi leg-spinner Ish Sodhi determined that the wicket



felt on the wetter side.

“Just getting here now, I think there’s certainly a lot more moisture in the air. Whether it’s been raining or not, I’m not too sure, but it certainly feels a little bit wetter underground,” Sodhi said, via a video provided by New Zealand Cricket (NZC).

“Potentially it could be a little bit more grass on the wicket or a little bit of tackiness, so it’s something I guess we’ll have a yarn about and figure out as the next couple of training days go.”

The tackiness is certainly expected at SBNCS, which has often produced slow wickets in the past. Mirpur Tests often do not go into the fifth day. Given the lack of grass, it would be interesting to see what Mirpur offers this time.

In the latest Test here involving Afghanistan, pacer had dominated proceedings, getting the ball to move around and extracting bounce. However, the Kiwis pace attack may likely discourage Bangladesh from playing on such a lively wicket.

Meanwhile, the Tigers’ practice session was not anything out of the ordinary. Selectors Minhajul Abedin and Habibul Bashar showed up to watch the proceedings at the nets. Mahmudul Hasan Joy suffered a blow to the hand, having the head coach concerned, but he returned to bat again following some spraying. Hathurusingha was showing Joy the merits of a high elbow and less extravagant front-foot movement, in order to keep deliveries down instead of pushing at them.

It appears that playing long innings would be the deciding factor in Dhaka, and the hosts’ team management would be keenly focusing on that to attain at least a draw for a special series triumph.

Hopes high as BCL begins

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The 11th edition of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) – the country’s only franchise-based first-class competition – will begin today with four teams set to face each other on the way to glory in a single league format.

On the opening day, defending champions BCB South Zone will take on East Zone at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram while Central Zone will face North Zone at the outer ground of the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Members of the Bangladesh Test team will not feature in the first two rounds of the BCL as they will be busy with their international commitment in the ongoing Test series against New Zealand.

However, players of the Bangladesh ODI and T20I sides are set to play the first two rounds of the tournament, with Soumya Sarkar, Mahedi Hasan, Anamul Haque Bijoy, and Tanvir Islam playing for BCB South Zone.

The scheduling of domestic tournaments is often hindered due to assignments of the national side, leading to critics labeling the competition as a ‘picnic tournament’.

“This complaint was there in the past but over the past few years, we have increased the match fees of both the players and the umpires. We have improved the standards of the pitches, ball, transportation, and other facilities. I hope such local tournaments should also get some focus from the media and fans as well which will surely encourage the players to perform in a competitive atmosphere,” Bangladesh Cricket Board’s (BCB) tournament committee chairman Ahmed Sajjadul Alam told The Daily Star yesterday, mentioning that he has high hopes regarding the tournament being a competitive one this edition.

The BCB increased the match fees for the four-day games from Tk 65,000 to Tk 80,000 the previous season. The players now get a daily allowance of Tk 2500. The champion team will receive Tk 20 lakh while the player of the tournament, top run-getter, and top wicket-taker will be getting Tk 1 lakh each.

Six NCL umpires get penalised

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The umpiring controversy in the recently-concluded National Cricket League had resulted in BCB Umpires’ Committee open a fact-finding body. It has been learnt that evidence of poor umpiring was found and the BCB has pulled out six umpires from the Bangladesh Cricket League, which starts today.

The six umpires in question are Syed Mozahiduzzaman Swapan, Mohammad Wahid, Joyanal Abedin, Shyful Islam Jewel, Shafiuddin Ahmed Babu and Asad Ur Rahman.

The umpires have been officiating for a long time but their on-field decisions have often been questioned by the players.

“We have checked the videos and have asked the umpires for explanation. The process is still ongoing and we found that some of the decisions were wrong. They have been pulled out from BCL and any decision would be taken once the whole fact-finding process is completed,” BCB umpires’ committee chairman Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu told The Daily Star yesterday.

It was learnt that the umpires in question will not be officiating in any matches until the fact-finding committee completes its work.

Nigar strives for perfection

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Bangladesh women’s cricket team added another triumph in what has been an eventful year for them when they defeated South Africa in the first Twenty20 of the three-match series in Benoni on Sunday.

But captain Nigar Sultana, who had led the team in white-ball series wins at home against Pakistan, a bronze medal in the Asian Games and a drawn ODI series against India at home earlier this year, was far from satisfied with her team as she is still focused on areas of improvement.

“We need to play better in the next matches. It’s not like we have played really well in this game. We have made many mistakes. We have to fix those mistakes, only then can we do even better,” the captain said at the post-match press conference on Sunday.

The wicketkeeper-batter was particularly unhappy with the number of dot balls her team played during batting, which kept them from putting up an even bigger total on the board.

“We lacked in some departments – we



played around 40 (55) dots in our batting. We need to reduce that, the bowlers need to make less mistakes and express themselves even better,” said Nigar.

The Bangladesh captain had an excellent match as a batter and in leading the side. With the bat, she scored an unbeaten 21-ball 34 which helped the team set up a 150-run target. She also expertly handled her bowling options after following the injury to pacer Marufa Akter, who could only bowl two overs. Her gamble on 16-year-old Shorna Akter also paid dividends as the leg-spinner claimed 5-28 and took the team to a 13-run win.

B a n g l a d e s h , although, had the advantage of facing a South Africa side which was without most of their frontline bowlers due to injury and star batter Marizanne Kapp, who missed the match for her stint in the Women’s Big Bash.

But Nigar and Co did well to capitalise on the hosts’ weaknesses in the first match and have a chance to clinch a maiden series win over the opponents in any format in the next two matches on December 6 and 8.

