

COIN-TOSS CHAOS

SPORTS REPORTER

The final of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship ended in a chaotic manner owing to a controversial decision by Sri Lankan match commissioner Silva Jayasooriya Dilan, which culminated in Bangladesh and India sharing the glory.

The Sri Lankan ordered a coin-toss to decide the winner between Bangladesh and India after a marathon penalty shootout, where both teams took and converted 11 penalties following a 1-1 draw in the stipulated time at the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

After the penalties, Nepalese referee Rai Anjana, as per the recommendation of the match commissioner, called in both captains for a coin-toss, which fell in India's favour.

As the Indian team erupted in celebrations, the Bangladesh officials immediately furiously protested the coin-toss, as the tournament bylaws clearly states that in knockout fixtures, if the teams are all squared up after regular time, the fate of the game will be decided through penalties.

The match commissioner later realised his mistakes and approached the jubilant Indian team to resume the penalty shootout. But India refused the offer and left the ground while the

Bangladesh players remained on the field. After waiting well over the stipulated 30 minutes for the Indian team to return, the organisers announced Bangladesh and India as joint champions.

Earlier, forward Mst Sagorika, Bangladesh's breakout star in the tournament, once again stole the spotlight with a stoppage time goal in the second half to level the scores and take the match into penalties.

Bangladesh, who had defeated Indian 1-0 in the group stage, had started poorly in the match and conceded the lead in just the eighth minute.

India captain Nitu Linda's long ball found winger Sibani Devi Mongmeikapam, who made no mistake in driving the ball past onrushing Bangladesh goalkeeper Swapna Rani Mandal.

Bangladesh midfielder Sapna Rani tried her luck from a distance in the 35th and 36th minute unsuccessfully and after resumption, Ruma Akter narrowly missed the target in the 47th minute from a distance while Sapna Rani rattled the crossbar from a corner kick in the 87th minute. But six minutes later, Sagorika struck her fourth goal in the tournament with just one minute left in the clock, making way for the penalties and the chaos that followed it.



Thursday saw some bizarre events unfold at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur during the final of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship between India and Bangladesh. India were declared winners by virtue of a coin toss after the two teams could not be separated even after a lengthy penalty shootout which saw all 11 players of each side converting from the spot. However, Bangladesh players stayed on the ground, protesting such a stipulation, after which the match referee withdrew the result stating that the tournament had no such bylaws of deciding winners through a flip of the coin. The match ended at a 1-1 draw at full-time.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Athletics C'ship returns to BNS

SPORTS REPORTER

Following 37 months of inactivity, the newly renovated Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) is set to host the 47th National Athletics Championship, starting today.

The Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) held all of its seven events in the interim, including the 46th National Athletics Championship, at Bangladesh Army Stadium in Banani since the renovation works at BNS got underway in September 2021.

The previous athletic track was installed in 2005 but suffered wear and tear over the years, putting athletes at risk of suffering injuries.

Hence, a new track worth Tk 19 crore has been installed with events now to be measured in electronic timer.

Some 402 athletes from districts, divisions, universities, educational boards, BKSP, BJMC, and service teams will be participating in 40 events -- 22 for men and 18 for women.

However, the marathon and hammer throw events will be held in Purbachal and Army Stadium respectively, informed the speakers at the press conference at the BNS conference room yesterday.

The BAF officials also informed that they are going to start a long-term training program for 35 budding athletes who were picked from last year's Sheikh Kamal Inter-School Athletics Championships.

Solace in football during economic crisis

AGENCIES

In times of an economic downturn, Nigeria has found solace in football with the Super Eagles beating South Africa 4-2 on penalties on Wednesday in a thrilling Africa Cup of Nations semifinal.

The three-time champions will face hosts Ivory Coast, who dominated the Democratic Republic of Congo but had to settle for a 1-0 win in Abidjan in the other semifinal, in the final on Sunday.

Afrobeats tunes competed with cheers as the Nigerians celebrated a tense penalty shootout victory after a 1-1 draw following extra time in Bouake in the latest of many dramatic matches at this biennial African football showpiece.

At the Tiger Bar in the Ikoyi district of Nigeria's economic capital Lagos, the last penalty triggered an eruption of celebrations and dancing.

"For the first time in a long time we are excited, we are happy Nigeria beat South Africa," supporter Peace Nwanro said. "Nigeria will keep winning."

Both regular time goals came from the spot with captain William Troost-Ekong scoring after 67 minutes for Nigeria and Teboho Mokoena equalising from a spot-kick. One Nigerian goal was disallowed, adding to the drama.

"From the onset, I felt pressure," said Nigerian caterer Kayode Qudus. "Many people are expecting more from them. Nigeria is not really happy these days, but I think this will fetch us more happiness... we must win."

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is



Nigeria have scored 13 penalties at the Africa Cup of Nations, only Ghana have scored more in the competition's history (14).

Nigeria have won six penalty shootouts at the Africa Cup of Nations, the joint-highest tally in the competition's history alongside Egypt.

Ivory Coast have become the first host nation to reach the final of the continental championship since Egypt in 2006.

struggling with high living costs after the government introduced economic reforms aimed at reducing spending and bringing in more foreign investment.

For some, the victory over South Africa in football also added to the rivalry between the African giants after Nigerian performers like Burna Boy and Davido failed to win a Grammy at the recent music awards.

The relationship between these two nations has long transcended football into a full-blown, multifaceted rivalry spanning economics, music, and migration.

That rivalry was on full display on Monday after South African popstar Tyla was announced inaugural winner of the best African music performance at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles over four Nigerian acts.

While Nigerians were trying to make the win over South Africa a source of relief during a national economic meltdown, their long-time continental rivals were pointing to the Grammy's win and South African host Trevor Noah guiding the music awards as evidence of the country's global influence, despite the football loss.

SHORT CORNER

Papon mulling to open BNS partially

Youth and Sports Minister Nazmul Hassan Papon is mulling to open the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) partially before the expiration of its renovation works project comes to an end in December 2024. Papon inspected the country's premier venue yesterday for the first time since he took office.

Argentina's famous football fan Tula dies

Carlos Pascual, an iconic fan of the Argentina's national football team, has died at the age of 83. Pascual, who more commonly known as 'El Tula', became famous for cheering on the Argentina national team in various competitions and matches.

Asian Cup final biggest stage yet for Jordan's trailblazer Tamari

Son Heung-min was supposed to have been the star of the show in the semi-finals but instead it was Mousa Al-Tamari whose sparkling display fired Jordan to the brink of Asian Cup glory. The pacy 26-year-old made one goal and scored the other as Jordan saw off Son's South Korea 2-0 to surge into Saturday's final for the first time in their history. There they will meet hosts and reigning champions Qatar.

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A REFEREE'S REFUSAL TO LOSE HOPE

DIPANKAR ROY FROM KHULNA

In 1998, SM Kamrul Islam Babu, a native of Dhulgram village in Abhaynagar upazila, Jashore, badly injured both of his hands while working with a shallow machine at a fish enclosure.

He underwent a long and arduous treatment after the accident but in the end, the doctors had no other choice but to amputate both hands from the wrists.

Babu, a person who grew up very much involved in the sporting scenes in the Khulna region and had earned a black belt in martial arts from Bangladesh Dragon Karate Club in Dhaka, was dealt the cruelest of hands by fate.

Over a quarter of a century has passed since then. Babu now works as a serial and timekeeper of auto-tempos in the Abhaynagar market in Jashore to run a family of five, which included two daughters, a wife and his mother.

Babu prides himself of being able ride bicycle, motorcycle and also drive cars. He has also taught himself how to write, use a phone and do all day-to-day activities.

But what really sets apart Babu is the fact that he is always on call to serve as referee in football matches in Khulna and surrounding districts.

"You can master any task with will power. Nothing is impossible for human beings. A lot can be achieved with a little effort," Babu

told the reporter.

Babu is regularly seen running up and down the touchline as a linesman in Pioneer Football League matches as well as second and third-division games in 10 districts in the Khulna region, with the flag tied to his hand with a special rubber.

Having overcome an enormous obstacle on his way to fulfilling his dream, Babu had a simple but powerful message for anyone who is facing adversities: "Everything is possible if you try. Hard work does not discriminate. If you learn to work, you will get the results. No matter what happens, never lose hope."

Babu, who is a member of the Khulna District Football Referee Association, also gets offers to work as a referee in upazila level matches from other districts.

Even after the accident, Babu didn't lose his connection with sports as he regularly played football and also carrom, his other love.

He first stumbled onto refereeing in 2007, when he officiated a football game



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

in his village. After that, his reputation as referee soared as he was regularly getting called up to different places to officiate local

football games. In 2014, he met the general secretary of Khulna District Football Refere