

Yeazran saves bolster BANGLADESH'S TROPHY CABINET

SPORTS REPORTER

When Sauravi Akanda Prity missed the first attempt in the penalty shootout of the SAFF U-16 Women's Championship final against India yesterday, the apprehension of a sinking ship close to the shore must have gripped the entire team.

India coach Biby Thomas Muttath had taken off regular goalkeeper Munni and brought on Surajmuni Kumari just before the end of regulation time. Surajmuni pulled off a brilliant save to deny Prity, later adjudged the most valuable player of the competition.

Then stepped up Yearzan Begum and changed the fate of the final with a starring performance under the bar, saving three Indian spot-kicks to help Bangladesh emerge as unbeaten champions with a 3-2 win.

Since the maiden success in the SAFF Women's Championship in 2022, Bangladesh women have now added three more accolades to their growing trophy cabinet by winning the SAFF Under-20 Women's Championship, SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship and SAFF U-16 Women's Championship titles.

Yearzan blocked the final attempt from Linda Divyani, sending her teammates and a handful of Bangladeshi supporters at the gallery into wild euphoria at the ANFA



Bangladesh players take a victory lap following a thrilling 3-2 win on penalties over India in the SAFF Women's U-16 Championship final, regaining the title at the ANFA Complex Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: SAFF

Complex in Lalitpur, Nepal.

"It is a different feeling to become the best goalkeeper in my debut international tournament. I want to thank my coach to

take me to this level. I am really happy. I want to dedicate this award to my coach and my father," said Yearzan, overwhelmed with emotion.

The final battle entered the dramatic shootout after Bangladesh defender Mariam Binte Hanna cancelled out India's Anushka Kumari's fourth-minute lead in the 71st

minute with a side-volley on a corner kick. And while Prity's effort was stopped and Alpi Akter's attempt came off the woodwork, Yearzan made sure Bangladesh regained the title of the age-group completion (played alternatively between under-15 and under-16 levels) since their maiden triumph in 2017.

Although Prity won the most valuable player award, she missed out on the top-scorer's trophy to India's Anushka Kumari by the odd goal. However, she wasn't disappointed at all for not winning the individual accolade.

"I don't have any regrets for not winning the top-scorer award because becoming the champions is the most important thing. We had confidence and belief that Yearzan could make the saves and deliver the trophy," said Prity, who scored five goals in the three round-robin matches of the competition.

Captain Arpita Biswas revealed that she had the confidence in her teammates, saying that ever since she touched the trophy at the pre-final photoshoot, she had her eyes on the ultimate prize.

"I was very excited to see the trophy at the pre-final event. I touched the trophy and since then I was determined to take this trophy home. I also transferred my dream to my teammates and told them not to allow India to take it."

Abahani's 'controversial' win over Usha

SPORTS REPORTER

A brace from Mohammad Abdullah helped title contenders Abahani edge Usha KC 2-1 in an intense Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League encounter at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

With back-to-back victories, Abahani now sit on top of the table but the decision of cancellation of Usha's equalizer by video umpire Latifur Rahman raised the question of the standard of video referral umpire.



On the back of 10-1 win over Dilkhusa SC in their opening match, Abahani took a 2-0 lead from open play through a brace from Abdullah before the half time. However, Usha, who had stunned holders Mariners 5-1 in their first match, showed character in the third quarter to pull one goal back, with Indian forward Mohammad Shariq converting from a penalty corner.

In the latter part of the third quarter, Usha's Indian recruit Ishrat Iktidar showed superb 3D skill to feed his countryman Aniket Gaurav, who put the ball in the back of the net. However, following an appeal from Abahani, video umpire Latifur cancelled the decision given by the on-field umpires, from Sri Lanka and Malaysia, over a high-ball issue. The decision though forced a halt of the match for 40 minutes before it resumed again.

"3D skill is a skill of controlling the ball by flicking it into the air, and it is being practised internationally. But the video umpire cancelled our goal. If it had been a foul play, then the on-field umpires could have ruled out the goal but they did not," protested Usha coach Ashiquzzaman over phone.

In the day's other match, Mariners handed a 13-2 defeat to Azad Sporting Club.

A lesson in T20 chases for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh might have missed out on the opportunity to seal their maiden T20 series against Sri Lanka in Sylhet on Saturday, but in the sense of preparation for the forthcoming ICC Twenty20 World Cup, the 2-1 series loss to the visitors was not a complete bust.

Some new players put their hands up with the bat while there were some positive signs in the bowling department as well. However, the failed chases also indicate that the Bangladesh batters are yet to find the correct blend between aggression and caution while batting second in the shortest format.

Bangladesh have one more T20 series left before the World Cup in June-July, a five-match home series against Zimbabwe in April.

Although the matches against Zimbabwe, who could not qualify for the 16-team T20 extravaganza, would give Bangladesh some decent match practice ahead of the tournament, it is unlikely to prepare the Tigers for the uphill challenges that a World Cup usually present.

In the Sri Lanka series, a common factor in both of Bangladesh's defeats was the top-order falling apart cheaply.

In the first match, the pressure of chasing 207 got the better of them as Bangladesh were three down inside five overs.

In the third one, chasing 175, the top-order imploded against pacer Nuwan Thushara, who struck four times inside



nine balls, including a hat-trick, leaving Bangladesh teetering on 24 for five inside six overs.

Ironically, Bangladesh's three most explosive innings in the series came in losing efforts. Nevertheless, the good sign is that the middle and lower-middle-order batters displayed some firepower, something the Tigers usually lack in T20s.

In the first match, it was the experienced Mahmudullah Riyad and young gun Jaker Ali, who together plundered 10 sixes and six fours and scored at a combined strike rate of 187.7 as Bangladesh finished just three runs short of Sri Lanka's tally.

In the third T20I, Mahmudullah and

Jaker could not repeat their heroics but Rishad Hossain showed his six-hitting prowess by plundering seven sixes, the most by a Bangladeshi batter in a T20I innings, breaking the record set by Jaker in the first game for smashing six maximums.

In between the two unsuccessful chases, the hosts had one successful chase in the second match in which openers Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar batted sensibly and without taking unnecessary risks, making 63 runs in the Powerplay.

After that, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy played their natural game and guided Bangladesh to their 166-run target with 11 balls to spare.

All three matches were played on greenish wickets with decent bounce, something that must have been a good test for the Bangladesh bowlers considering what they are likely to encounter on ICC-curated pitches in the USA and the West Indies in the T20 World Cup.

After being on the expensive side in the first match, pacers Shoriful Islam and Taskin Ahmed did well in the following two games. However, failing to make his variations come into play, the Tigers' most experienced T20 pacer Mustafizur Rahman struggled throughout, going for 10.91 runs per over in the series.

But more than the individual performances, the series gave the Bangladesh team a lesson on how to plan a chase on flat tracks in T20s, a lesson that could come in handy in the upcoming mega T20 event.



Focus on Shakib, Tamim as DPL begins

SPORTS REPORTER

Members of the Bangladesh national team will not be available immediately for the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL), starting from today across three venues, but the hype around the lone fifty-over club-based domestic competition of the country will not be dulled as star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and opener Tamim Iqbal are set to feature from the beginning of the tournament.

The focus will be on the two national team stalwarts - Shakib and Tamim, both of whom are sitting out the Tigers' ongoing home series against Sri Lanka - as they are expected to be in action on the opening day.

Tamim's Prime Bank will face Shinepukur Cricket Club at Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah and Shakib's Sheikh Jamal will take on Gazi Tyres Cricket Academy at BKSP-3 ground today.

Meanwhile, the domestic competition will also serve as a platform for Mohammad Saifuddin, playing for holders Abahani Limited. Saifuddin was overlooked for the national team despite playing a pivotal role in Fortune Barishal clinching their maiden Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) title earlier this month.

"We have a balanced side but the first match will be important and we will try to start with a win. I think the pressure is more to become the champions than playing good cricket," Saifuddin told reporters yesterday.

Saifuddin also felt that it was the right decision by the Tigers' team management to leave him out for the ongoing series as the 27-year-old himself did not want to rush things, having made a comeback following a back injury.

"Maybe it would have been too early and I think the team wanted what is best for me. It would have been difficult for me to return to the national team after playing high-intensity matches in a short span of time during the BPL as I also played the final [on March 1]. I think I will get the opportunity if I play well in the DPL. So, I don't want to rush."

Bayern Munich forward Harry Kane said he is enjoying every moment as he aims to break more records in Germany after scoring a record setting hat-trick in Bayern's 8-1 thrashing of Mainz 05 on Saturday. The England captain became the first player to score four hat-tricks in his first Bundesliga season as the champions cut the gap on leaders Bayer Leverkusen to seven points. The 30-year-old has scored 36 goals for Bayern across all competitions this season, equalling Uwe Seeler's record for most goals in a debut Bundesliga campaign by lifting his tally to 30. Kane is also inching closer to breaking Robert Lewandowski's record for the most goals scored in a Bundesliga season, which the Polish forward set by ending the 2020-21 campaign with 41 goals.



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis chats with Bangladesh's Mahmudullah Riyad at the team hotel in Chattogram as both the teams arrive in the port city for the upcoming three-match ODI series, starting from March 13. With the visitors winning the T20I series 2-1 in Sylhet, the Tigers will be hoping to bounce back with a better showing in their favourite format.

PHOTO: BCB