

## Hosts thrash Korea in opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Three-time champions Bangladesh made a flying start in the 4th Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi, outplaying Korea 67-22 with 'five lonas' in the opening match of the 12-team tournament at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The hosts had lost to the same opponents in their last two meetings, getting thrashed 38-18 in 2018 Asian Games following a nerve-wrecking 35-32 defeat in the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup.

The charges of Abdul Jalil did not repeat the mistakes of the past as they completed a convincing win over the Koreans in front of a passionate home crowd who cheered the team throughout after the match got underway one hour after the scheduled time.

The crowd were especially behind captain Arduzzaman Munshi, chanting 'Munshi, Munshi' during his successful raids, of which there were many.

Mizanur Rahman, who was in doubt for the match after returning to the national team's fold just one week before the tournament, put on a stellar show alongside another star performer Al Amin as the men in red and green collected points from both raids and in defense.

Bangladesh led the first half 23-11 and kept widening the margin as the game progressed.

"Our team communication was really good, so the margin was also big. If we can keep this communication going among the players, I am confident that we can reach our target of becoming champions," said captain Arduzzaman, who had missed the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 following injury.

Coach Jalil believes the strategy was key in the Korea match.

"The footwork of the Korea team was initially good and we were losing points while trying to catch them. They were also attacking from one side to another. But they did not have a raider from the left side. So, we analysed it and started defending the opponents accordingly.

"They played wide but we defended closely. I think the strategy made the difference while our raiders - Munshi, Mizan and Al Amin - also performed boldly in the match," said coach Jalil.

Korean coach Jinseok Kang said that they have brought a comparatively young team.

"Most of our players are aged between 20 to 23. Though there are also a few old campaigners," said Jinseok.

Arduzzaman, who announced that he will retire after the tournament, said that although it was a new-look Korea team, the hosts didn't take them lightly. "It is true that I did not find the Korean players that I had played against before as most of their players are new. But they are still good. We were wary of them from the beginning."



Bangladesh players catch a South Korea raider during the opening match of the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi Tournament at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Defending champions Bangladesh started the tournament with a bang, beating the Koreans by 67-22 points.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Winning a dead rubber does not add much

SPORTS REPORTER

When your opponents rest key performers from the series in a dead rubber game, how fruitful are even positive results you get from the game? That is exactly what Bangladesh were left with after winning the third and final T20I against USA on Saturday.

The Tigers executed their plans against an understrength USA side in the third T20I but it will not erase the lack of impetus shown in first two T20Is.

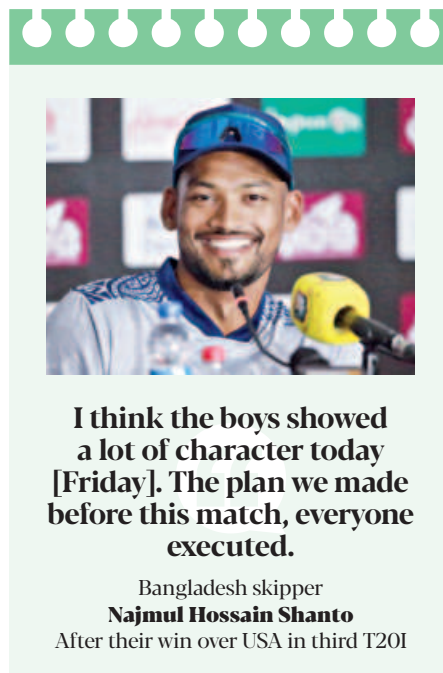
One of the major issues is that of performances of individuals having had a domino effect throughout the team. If things did not work out at the start, the latter players have not worked out a solution to winning matches, especially in case of batting.

The Tigers also failed to win the first two matches for favourable positions which puts their current confidence levels under the microscope. In the first game, death-over bowling lacked conviction but in international T20Is, defending 150-run scores is a difficult task.

In the second game, the Tigers appeared to be ambling towards victory before a disastrous batting collapse led to a series defeat.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto had said after the second loss that there was no skill-gap, instead there were mentality issues with the side. However, it is proven that skill-gap leads to such mental breakdowns and how far the team is addressing those issues was evident.

If the idea was to adapt to the USA



I think the boys showed a lot of character today [Friday]. The plan we made before this match, everyone executed.

Bangladesh skipper  
Najmul Hossain Shanto  
After their win over USA in third T20I

conditions, the first hurdle saw Bangladesh miss the train in terms of showing hunger and desire to perform.

After winning the first two games, USA did not even allow the Tigers to gauge themselves properly in the third T20I, simply by taking out some of their key players from the game. Their preparations are on track but winning a dead rubber does not add up much for Bangladesh despite a dominating 10-wicket win.

Stuart Law, who had served as

Bangladesh's under-19 coach recently and is the newly-appointed head coach of USA, said the home team's desire to win was greater.

"We had more desire and passion about the game in the first two matches," Law said.

"We wanted it a bit more than what they did. Today [Saturday] it was a different story. We may have relaxed a little bit. Bangladesh played pretty well. They will take this in their stride. We were in a privileged position today with the series in our hands. It was nice to give opportunities to other players," he added.

The mental game has already been won by USA and in the World Cup, tougher games await the Tigers. Najmul Hossain, Liton Das and Shakib Al Hasan are going through a rough patch with the bat while wicket-keeper Jaker Ali Anik's performances behind the stumps will not have boosted confidence heading into a major tournament.

Mustafizur Rahman's six-wicket haul on Saturday saw USA put on a below-par score. Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Soumya Sarkar's unbeaten stand then helped the Tigers cruise to victory, which should add a bit of self-belief at the top of the batting order.

"I think the boys showed a lot of character today. I think the plan we made before this match, everyone executed," Shanto had said after the game.

However, the team would do well knowing that things are not going to be as easy as the third T20I in the World Cup and rather than sporadic performances, they need to gather up as a team.

### SHORT CORNER

#### Hridoy wants Tigers to play 'at least T20 WC semifinal'

Bangladesh batter Towhid Hridoy said he wanted his side to qualify "at least for the semifinal" of the upcoming T20 World Cup, starting on June 2 in the USA and the West Indies. On Sunday, Bangladesh Cricket Board's official Facebook page posted a video recorded before the Tigers left for the USA in which Hridoy shared his thoughts on Bangladesh's chances in the major event.

#### Mbappe proud to leave PSG 'with head held high'

Kylian Mbappe said he was proud to leave Paris Saint-Germain with his "head held high" after winning Saturday's French Cup final, but said he would wait for the right time to confirm where he will be playing next season. "To finish with a trophy in a final, there is no better way," Mbappe told reporters after PSG beat Lyon 2-1 in the final.

#### Leverkusen's 'dream season' will long be remembered: Xabi

Bayer Leverkusen's German league and Cup double was the result of players keeping faith in the team throughout what turned into a dream season, their coach Xabi Alonso said on Saturday. Leverkusen added the German Cup to their Bundesliga crown with a 1-0 victory over second division Kaiserslautern.

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## Swimmer Jui breaks two national records

SPORTS REPORTER

Jui Akhter stole the limelight on the second day of Saif Powertec 36th Junior Swimming Championship, breaking two national records at the Syed Nazrul Islam Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday.

Jui, a BKSP student, clocked 1:25.07 minutes in the 100m breaststroke in girls' 15-17 group to break the previous record of 1:26.88 minutes made by Mariom Khatun in 2012.

The girl from Kushtia then produced another record in 800m free style, clocking 1:04.78 minutes to break Nazma Khatun's record of 1:12.15 minutes. All timings were recorded using hand-timing. "The way I trained, I was confident to perform well. I want to thank the BKSP coaches," said Jui, adding she dreams winning gold in the South Asian Games in future.



Bangladesh's star pacer Marufa Akter bagged a last-over hat-trick in the Women's Dhaka Premier League for BKSP against Mohammedan Sporting yesterday but it was not enough as table toppers Mohammedan romped to a 72-run win at BKSP ground four.

PHOTO: BCB

## Nadal bidding to avoid early French Open exit

AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal admits he will be facing "one of the toughest opponents possible" when he plays Alexander Zverev in the French Open first round on Monday.

This year's event was expected to be the 14-time champion's farewell to Roland Garros, but he has since insisted he could not confirm "100 percent" it would be his last appearance.

A hip injury and then a muscle tear had seen Nadal out of action for the most part since 2023 and that left him unseeded for the draw and vulnerable to a difficult opening round.

World number four Zverev arrives in Paris as one of the favourites for the title after winning the Rome Open earlier this month.

"Of course, on paper, it is not the best draw," Nadal said ahead of the match on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"I play against one of the toughest opponents possible, and at the same time, he came here winning the last event"

Nadal, who turns 38 in a week's time, has shown flashes of his best form in the clay-court swing, but was thrashed 6-1, 6-3 by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the second round of his last outing in Rome.

Nadal has a favourable head-to-head record over world number four Zverev ahead of their first meeting since the 2022 French Open semifinals, when the German left the court in a wheelchair near the end of the second set after injuring his ankle.

"I am not anxious. No, I am focused on trying to play well. That's it," said Nadal.

Zverev did not play again in 2022 after that ankle injury but has climbed the rankings again in recent months.



Rafael Nadal boasts a 7-3 winning record over Alexander Zverev.

Nadal lost only three of his 115 French Open matches, claiming the title a record 14 times.

However, Nadal has only played four tournaments since January 2023 after suffering a hip injury.

Zverev has reached the semifinals in each of the last three years at Roland Garros.

The 27-year-old has long been touted as a future Grand Slam champion but remains without one of tennis' four biggest titles.

"I can guarantee you Novak didn't want to play Rafa in the first round and (Carlos) Alcaraz didn't want to play, Jannik (Sinner) didn't want to play him," admitted Zverev.

"I don't want to play him in the first round, but it is how it is. Everybody now is excited for a tough battle and tough first round. I think he's excited and I'm excited for it."



A goalless draw with Real Betis on the final LaLiga matchday on Saturday was largely irrelevant with Real Madrid already confirmed the league champions as the game was all about celebrating the 34-year-old Toni Kroos, who bade an emotional farewell to Los Blancos fans in his final game at a sold-out Santiago Bernabeu. Kroos, who announced he would retire from football at the end of Euro 2024, tried to hold his tears back as he was accorded a guard of honour by his teammates, all wearing his number eight jerseys, the opposition and the fans holding up a giant flag with his face and the words "Thank you, legend".

PHOTO: REAL MADRID