

Sabina crosses 150-GOAL MILESTONE

SPORTS REPORTER

When Sabina Khatun of Nasrin Sports Academy turned up in their last match of the UCB Women's Football League against Dhaka Rangers FC yesterday, the experienced forward knew she needed four goals to become top-scorer but did not have any other milestone in her mind.

The national women's team captain eventually scored five goals to topple Mosammat Sagorika's 15 and became the top-scorer for the third time in the league, but in the process also crossed the 150-goal landmark in the league.

"I knew about the top-scorer target, but it was my teammates who pushed me more for it. However, I did not have any idea about the 150-goal landmark," Sabina said after Nasrin won the match 13-0 to clinch the title.

"It is a big milestone for any footballer in top-flight football and I think it will be challenging for the girls (to break) in future," the experienced campaigner added.

This was the third time Sabina finished as the top-scorer, having done the same in the 2011-12 season

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Sabina Khatun

with 25 goals for Sheikh Jamal and then for Bashundhra Kings in the 2019-20 season with 35 goals.

It may seem that Sabina's sharpness in front of goal has diminished, but the national team captain provided a different view: "I always try to give my best rather than thinking of becoming the top-scorer. But when it seemed to me that it can be achieved if I give a bit more effort, then I try to do it."

"Earlier, the league used to be in double-leg format, so there were more

matches but this time the league was only single-leg," Sabina said. "I've been playing football for 14 to 15 years. When the junior players will play with a target, then they might want to cross my achievements and improve themselves."

Sabina also felt the league was more competitive this time compared to the last three editions due to the presence of Bangladesh Army SC.

The footballer from Satkhira also suggested to make the league longer to make it more competitive.

"If this league was held on home-and-away basis, it could have been more competitive because many teams were very close in the points table," Sabina said.

"We are not yet financially solvent and I think our financial benefit should be increased. The male footballers are playing the Federation Cup, the Independence Cup and the league. We need more competitions like Super League, Corporate league, etc. And there is no alternative to organising international matches if you want to increase the standard of the women footballers," said Sabina.



Nasrin Sports Academy captain Sabina Khatun and teammate Matsushima Sumaya pose beside their mothers after securing the title of the UCB Women's Football League 2023-24, having cruised to a 13-0 victory over Dhaka Rangers in their last fixture of the competition in Kamalapur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Ronaldo breaks Saudi Pro League scoring record

AFP, Riyadh

Cristiano Ronaldo broke the record for the most goals in a Saudi Pro League season when he struck for the 34th and 35th time in Al Nassr's final game of the campaign.

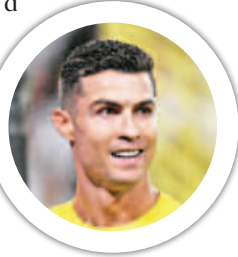
"I don't follow the records, the records follow me," the 39-year-old Portuguese forward tweeted afterwards.

The former Real Madrid and Manchester United star struck in first-half stoppage time and again in the 69th minute with a header as Al Nassr defeated Al Ittihad 4-2 at home on Monday.

The previous record for most goals in a single season was the 34 scored by the Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah in 2018-19.

Ronaldo, who led Portugal to victory at the 2016 Euros, has been selected for the squad for this year's edition in Germany next month - his 11th international tournament.

He is the most capped player in men's international football with 206 appearances and has scored a record 128 goals.



Shanto's cry for 'good wickets' brushed aside

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials Jalal Yunus and Gazi Ashraf Lipu were not keen on entertaining skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's accusations that standard pitches at home had primarily contributed to the Tigers' dismal performance in Twenty20 Internationals.

In an interview with AFP, Shanto put the onus on playing on good wickets at home to kickstart the cure to their batting ailment in the 20-over format.

"First of all, we have to play on good wickets," Shanto said.

"Some people can take it as an excuse, but it is really a fact that we play very few matches on good wickets," he added.

Bangladesh had recently lost a three-match T20I series against the USA in Texas in their build-up to the World Cup, on the back of a 4-1 T20I series win against Zimbabwe at home. Despite the contrasting results, the Tiger's lacklustre batting in both series - ill-suited to the current trend of run feasts seen in the format - was brought into question.

Shanto had put the blame on the wickets in Chattogram for their string of poor batting displays after losing back-to-back fixtures against the USA and conceding the series. Chief selector Lipu, however, pointed out how the batters struggled to adapt to different conditions.

"I will note down all these before the World Cup and discuss after the World

Cup. I think that the exchange of opinions or words right now will not be fruitful for us," Lipu told The Daily Star on Tuesday when asked about Shanto's complaints about wickets at home.

"When the national captain accuses something, it should definitely be taken into consideration. However, you also have to adjust when you go abroad and face



slow wickets. Improving wickets at home will improve stroke-playing ability but you also must adapt and bat accordingly when you play on slower wickets. Both are important," he added.

Cricket operations chairman Jalal refused to indulge in the wicket-related talks and put the blame on the batters rather than the playing surfaces,

underlining how the batters' faulty application cost them the games against the USA.

"The matches we lost [against the USA], we lost because we failed to show the right application. Just look at the way we lost," Jalal told The Daily Star Tuesday.

"We bat on good wickets in Bangladesh. In one or two matches, it might be different. We have always given good wickets in Chattogram, the best possible wickets we have made there. The games were placed in Chattogram because of the good wickets on offer."

"Against Zimbabwe, I don't think we scored less because of the wickets. The Chattogram curator said they produced the best possible wicket. How many runs did we score in the last game [in Dhaka] where we lost by eight wickets against Zimbabwe? The wickets were good and there were more runs on offer. Our wickets have been good in the past few years and they have improved a lot," he said.

Opposing takes on Bangladesh's batting plight leave room for a sparkling debate. While it is true that good wickets suited to the modern style of T20Is become a key component in improving stroke play and the rate of scoring, the fact that Bangladesh's batting performances have been abhorrently inexplicable in their build-up to the World Cup, despite all of their international exposure, is more concerning than ever.

Olympiacos seek history against Fiorentina

REUTERS



Olympiacos have a chance to become the first Greek club to win a European trophy in Wednesday's Europa Conference League final, but they face a Fiorentina side still smarting from their defeat in last season's decider.

Jose Luis Mendilibar, who took charge of Olympiacos in February, is hoping he can repeat his achievements from last season when he became Sevilla manager late in the campaign and led them to victory in the Europa League.

"It would be amazing. We'd go down in Olympiacos and Greek football history," Mendilibar said in an interview with UEFA. "We couldn't win the league but we could win in Europe, like we did at Sevilla." "We know it'll be very tough against an Italian side who compete at the top, but you never know in finals, they're anyone's game."

Olympiacos began the season in the Europa League, but exited at the group stage. Ayoub El Kaabi is the player Olympiacos will look to for goals. The Moroccan is the competition's highest scorer this season despite his side not being involved at the group stage, netting 10 times in eight games.

Fiorentina are no stranger to finals, and after losing two last season they will be desperate to put things right and lift a trophy for the first time since 2001. Fiorentina, the first Italian club to win a European trophy when lifting the inaugural Cup Winners' Cup in 1961, have yet to repeat that success.

WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Waking up after decades of hibernation

ANISUR RAHMAN

Tariqzaman Nannu, a former hockey player and organiser, has been fighting an uphill battle for about two decades to try and revive women's hockey in Bangladesh which has been in hibernation since the 70s.

In post-independent Bangladesh, there was a deliberate effort to kick-start women's hockey, much before women's cricket or football was a thing in this part of the world.

Parvin Nasima Nahar Putul, a trailblazer in women's sports in Bangladesh, was among the first female players to take up hockey in the country.

"I played many other sports but my first game was hockey. In those days, a lot of educated girls played hockey," Putul told The Daily Star.

Putul, who was a college student when she started playing hockey, spoke about how the women's hockey was developing in the 80s.

"We played hockey for five consecutive years from 1976. Usually we played matches in Dhaka but we also travelled to Tangail to play against the Tangail girls, Bharateshwari homes and the Narayanganj team.

"Ehtesam [Sultan] sir, Protap [Sankar Hazra] da, [Abdus] Salam bhai, Abdur Razzak [Sona Mia]

bhai and others toiled hard to train women's hockey players."

However, financial constraints and other shortcomings brought an abrupt end to this early endeavor.

"That time a team was selected for a tour of Pakistan but it did not happen. Women's hockey came to a halt because of organising and financial reasons," she said.

Even though the early attempts to establish women's hockey ended abruptly, the photographic evidence of that endeavour remain and one such photo inspired Nannu to begin his journey to bring back women's hockey.

"I was astonished to see an iconic photograph of the women's hockey team perhaps captured in 1977. The players, wearing hockey shorts, posed for the photos at the Paltan ground," said Nannu.

Nannu, who played hockey at the top flight from 1982 to 1996, got posted in Dhaka from Narayanganj as Sports Directorate's sports officer in 2001 and a few years later began the revival of women's hockey in Dhaka in 2006.

He arranged hockey training for the girls in Dhanmondi Qumrunnessa Girls High School, Dhanmondi Govt. Girls School and Vigarunnisa Noon High School but soon realised the error in his ways.

"After conducting the training

for a few years in Dhaka, I realised that the girls here are focused more on their studies. I need to go to the district level through the District Sports Offices.

"I then selected some districts to conduct the training for women's



PHOTO: BHF

hockey players that laid the foundation for the first national women's hockey competition in 2012," said the 62-year-old organiser adding that later three more national women's hockey competitions were held in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

Nannu informed that around 60 talented girls from 17 districts were picked for higher training under a

Sports Directorate programme.

Women's hockey again came under the spotlight in 2018 when Kolkata Warriors Athletic Club came to Bangladesh for a three-match series against Dhaka Eleven, a team formed from the trainees of

time later that year in Singapore. The hosts lost the series 6-0 but claimed a victory in their maiden participation in the Junior AHF Cup, defeating Sri Lanka 2-0.

Putul, who was the coordinator of Bangladesh women's hockey team in Singapore, said she was ecstatic to see the revival of women's hockey. "The girls of this generation play really well. I can't say how happy I am for the revival of women's hockey. I got involved with women's hockey at the age of 67 and took care of the girls twice a day during the camp."

Before retiring from the Sports Directorate as assistant director, Nannu in collaboration with BKSP, trained 18 players as community coaches for women's hockey who have kept the wheels of women's hockey rolling in districts like Dhaka, Narayanganj, Narail, Jashore, Jhenaidah, Patuakhali, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Cox's Bazar, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Thakurgaon.

Some of the trained hockey players have already switched to other sports while some have dropped out of the scene.

Nannu is hopeful that the chance to participate in international and domestic events will raise the spirits of the players and attract more girls to the sport.

"The federation will send a team to the upcoming Women's Junior

AHF Cup next month in Singapore

which will raise some hope for the girls who were frustrated with no competitions in recent past. We have also heard the federation will hold a women's hockey league, which will be a big step towards a good future for women's hockey."

BKSP, the country's lone sports education institution, opened a women's hockey department in 2020. Currently, 34 students are enrolled in the department of which 20 are in the 33-member preliminary squad for the Women's Junior AHF Cup.

"The national men's hockey team is full of BKSP players. So, BKSP feels that if the national women's hockey team is formed in the future, then our students will represent the national women's team," said BKSP's hockey head coach Zahid Hossain Raju, who will also coach the Bangladesh team in Singapore.

Despite Nannu's work and the efforts of the others involved, women's hockey is still in its nascent stage in the country.

Asked what is the prospect of women's hockey in the country, Nannu remained optimistic. "We have created a platform for them to come and play. I think the platform is still working and we just need to continue the process."