

In the T20 World Cup month, kabaddi and football garnered attention with Bangladesh retaining the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi title, where Arduzzaman Munshi called time on his career, and the women's football team losing 1-0 to Chinese Taipei in a friendly where Sabina Khatun was sidelined. To learn more about their individual and collective state, The Daily Star caught up with the two stalwarts.

'I have come this far overcoming challenges'

Bangladesh women's national football team's new coach Peter Butler recently benched captain Sabina Khatun in the second match against Chinese Taipei, later saying that he wants to give younger players more chance and use Sabina as an impact player more in future. Does this push the veteran forward towards the end of her international career? In an interview with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman, Sabina spoke about this issue and the experience of the two matches as well as the upcoming SAFF Women's Championship. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Before the FIFA friendly matches against Chinese Taipei, you said that Bangladesh would understand their position in world football playing against such a strong team. What is your assessment after these two matches?

Sabina Khatun (SK): I think the result of the first match would not have been that bad if we played in the formation that we

How do you see this?
SK: Every coach has told us the same thing. The coaches motivate the girls in different ways. The girls are ready to take the challenge of a competitive environment.

DS: The coach dropped some senior players from the starting eleven of the second match including you. How do you see this?



are used to playing. In the second match, the coach realised this and the girls played better.

DS: What have the team learned from the matches?

SK: The experience was that the girls who usually play the first half well also performed well in the second half. So the overall tempo has improved. Another thing that happened was we did not give up fight too early.

DS: What does Peter Butler want from the team and how much expectation have the team fulfilled?

SK: The new coach likes to play different formations. He tries to play high-line defence even though we used to play mid-line defence earlier. Every coach has a different philosophy which we all accept and respect. Every player also wants to present themselves the way the coach desires. The girls are trying to give 120 percent to learn things. I think the coach should talk to the girls to discuss which system they prefer and how they can do better.

DS: How do you evaluate the junior players, especially those who came into the senior fold from the under-19 squad?

SK: As they are coming through different age-level teams where they have already played age-level international matches, they did not perform badly.

DS: Butler said that he wants to create a competitive environment in the camp.

SK: I think the coach wanted to see new players in the second match and he did it.

DS: Do you think you are heading towards the end of your international career or can Sabina serve the nation for a few more years?

SK: Time will tell. Actually, I have come this far overcoming challenges. In my 14-year career, I have always had to give extra effort. I had to compete against younger players and I always pushed myself to secure my place. I could not have served the nation for so long had I not pushed myself the way I did.

DS: What type of preparation do you think Bangladesh need ahead of October's SAFF Women's Championship?

SK: I think it is really necessary to shift the camp elsewhere (from the BFF dormitory) because too many girls are staying there. A new environment may help the girls focus more on training, similar to the men's training camps. We don't need five-star hotel accommodation, but an open and relaxed environment should be good and it can be either at home or abroad.

DS: Do you believe Bangladesh can defend the title?

SK: Retaining the title depends on our preparation and training. We need to play at least four tough matches – one match each month ahead of the tournament – against superior opponents. Only then can we hope to defend the title.



'We need a tournament like Pro Kabaddi League'

Country's star kabaddi player Arduzzaman Munshi bid adieu to the game after leading Bangladesh to their fourth title in the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi on June 3 in Dhaka. The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman spoke with the Bangladesh Navy player about the ups and downs of his illustrious career and what steps need to be taken to improve the state of the game in the country. The excerpts are given below:

The Daily Star (DS): You ended your career in grand fashion. How did it feel?

Arduzzaman Munshi (AM): I never thought that my retirement would be so grand and memorable. I also did not expect that Bangladesh would win the trophy under my captaincy and I would be the best player of the tournament. It really can't be expressed in words.

When I decided that I would retire, I did not feel anything special about it. But the emotions became almost unbearable as the final approached. I had a sleepless night before the final, I was thinking that I will not represent Bangladesh any more. At one point I even started crying. I was restless throughout the night. The next morning, many people phoned me to talk about my retirement and the final but I switched off my mobile phone and tried to get some sleep.

DS: You debuted for Bangladesh in 2009. How was the country's kabaddi back then?

AM: Kabaddi was not in a good position as the performances of the players were not good. There also were shortcomings in organizing. In that period, we started returning home empty-handed from international competitions because we could not take enough preparation

and did not have proper training facilities. We had to wait for funds from the Bangladesh Olympic Association to start camp ahead of international competitions.

DS: Bangladesh used to regularly win silver at the SA Games and the Asian Games. But now silver has turned elusive...

AM: We won silver medals in Asian Games when countries like Iran, Pakistan were learning kabaddi from us. They improved year by year while we remained stuck. We are still behind them in terms of training and facilities. That's why we are not winning medals anymore.

DS: Ha-du-du, a different format of kabaddi, is played all across the country. Still, there is a dearth of talented players in kabaddi...

AM: Former captain Tuhin Taralder, Fedous, Monirul and I were ha-du-du players before entering kabaddi. There are still a lot of talented ha-du-du players. When I play ha-du-du matches in rural places, I encourage them to take up kabaddi. But they are unable to because there is no future in kabaddi, no financial benefits. I believe if the

federation trains young players and includes them in a pay-scale system or provides them jobs, the interest in kabaddi will grow.

DS: You played at the Pro Kabaddi League in India twice. What are the differences here and there?

AM: There is a gulf of difference. I would have never learnt about modern kabaddi had I not gone there. Why wouldn't they [Indians] play kabaddi? The players of franchise teams are being guided by physios, trainers, coaches and nutritionists. Unfortunately, our coaches can't get the best out of the players because of poor environment. I think if more players from Bangladesh are allowed to take part in that league, the players will try to improve their performance to get contracts. This will ultimately help the country's kabaddi.

DS: How much can Bangladesh benefit from Bangabandhu Kabaddi where strong teams are not competing?

AM: I don't think that the participants were weaker than Bangladesh. We lost to Nepal in

2017, to Thailand in 2016, Japan in 2010, Korea in 2016 and Sri Lanka in 2016. I have seen new players failing to cope with pressure and break down during international matches due to lack of experience. The benefit of holding this tournament is that players are gaining experience and learning how to manage different match situations. I think it will help new players against bigger teams in the Asian Games and SA Games.

DS: Do you regret not winning any medals in three Asian Games appearances?

AM: Of course, there is regret. In the three Asian Games that I took part in, the teams that won bronze were not superior to us. We got close, but could not win the medal.

DS: How can we improve the country's kabaddi?

AM: First of all, the financial benefits for kabaddi players have to be ensured. I think if the federation takes an initiative to hold a franchise tournament like the India's Pro Kabaddi League, then the new generation will be encouraged to take up kabaddi.

We also must improve the coaches by holding training course or sending them abroad for higher training. I am also interested in coaching and I would love it if the federation gives me the responsibility to train a group of young players by arranging a round-the-year training camp.

