

Murshida leads ‘attack from the beginning’ mindset

Joty and Co set up Asia Cup semifinal clash with India



SPORTS REPORTER

For a while, Murshida Khatun had been on and off from the lineup of the Bangladesh women's cricket team. Even in Bangladesh's crucial Asia Cup opener against Sri Lanka, Murshida's name was missing from the lineup. However, she staked her claim as a resurgent opener this Asia Cup in their thumping 114-run win against Malaysia in Dambulla yesterday as Bangladesh ensured semifinal clash against India.

Her career-best 59-ball 80, continuing on from her fifty in the previous match against Thailand, paved the way for Bangladesh's second-highest total in T20Is as they scored 191 for two against Malaysia. The attacking approach shown illustrated the aggression the Tigresses were looking to produce with the bat for a while.

Dilara Akter and Murshida got Bangladesh off to a flyer, notching fifty in the Powerplay. Murshida would then gather wind and skipper Nigar Sultana

Joty was able to take the opportunity to hit an unbeaten 37-ball 62.

Murshida said she was eager for an attacking start to set her own tempo, for in the previous game against Thailand, she needed 10 deliveries to open her account.

"I rectified the mistakes made in the previous game. From the beginning, I tried to carry the innings with singles. The start in the previous game was bad and I covered that later [with 50 off 55]. Today, the plan was to attack from the beginning," she said at the post-match press conference.

There were classy shots on offer and she reminded at the post-match ceremony that the cover drive was her favourite during the innings.

For Bangladesh and her, the biggest relief would be recovering from the continuous batting slump.

"It's good when batters return to runs in a stage like the Asia Cup. We will be trying now to put on a better performance [in semis] and recover from our lackings," she said.

The attacking intent from Murshida saw her smash 10 fours and a six, and although she regretted getting out on 80, the knock helped Bangladesh put on big partnerships on way to posting a mammoth total.

The essential piece of the puzzle for Murshida to make an impact on return was maintaining her process, also showcased in the recently-concluded Premier League in which she top-scored with 446 runs at an average of over 63.

"I tried to play the right way according to my process and I feel that's how it happened. Last six months, I worked really hard while playing the Premier League," she added.

Buoyed by the win, Joty and Co will be looking for something special in the semifinal against India.

"We're looking forward to playing good cricket, and executing game plans. I have belief in my team, I know how capable they are," skipper Joty sounded confident about their chances against a strong Indian side.



Cristian Medina bursts into celebration after his last-gasp equaliser deep into the stoppage time, helping Argentina snatch a 2-2 draw from two goals down against Morocco at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard in Saint Etienne on Wednesday. However, things turned ugly following Medina's goal as there was a hostile crowd reaction to Argentina's 106th minute equaliser. The goal was under review by VAR when the decision was taken to suspend the match initially with a message on the screen, addressing the crowd in the ground, saying "your session has been suspended, please leave the stadium" before the match was eventually listed as "finished" by the organisers. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sagor to start Bangladesh's Olympic campaign

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Paris Olympics 2024 campaign will begin today with archer Sagor Islam set to fight for his fate in the ranking round.

The curtains of the Olympics will be raised tomorrow but several disciplines, including football have already begun.

Sagor, who earned direct qualification to the event, will have the opportunity to navigate through favourable paths in the knockout rounds if he can manage a spot in the top 20 in the ranking round as such a finish will allow him to avoid the top seeds in the competition.

"It is true that good scores in the ranking rounds allow you to avoid the top players but you have to remember that 64 players will be taking part and they are all strong. So, I'm not really thinking about that and preparing myself for the knockout rounds," Sagor said yesterday.

Bangladesh shooter Robiul Islam will take part in the qualification round of the 10m Air Rifle single's event on July 28. Two days later, swimmer Samiul Islam Rafi will participate in the 100m Freestyle Heat and on August 3, swimmer Sonia Khatun will get to test her progress in the 50m Freestyle Heat. On the same day, Bangladesh's fastest man, Imranur Rahman will fight it out in the preliminary round of the 100m Sprint event.

Seeking personal bests a step towards ‘dreaming big’



SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The year 2024 marks the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh's maiden Olympic participation in Los Angeles and its 11th successive appearance in the 'Greatest Show on Earth'.

The recurring theme for Bangladesh since its first outing in the Olympics has been the athletes returning home empty-handed.

Golfer Siddikur Rahman and archers Ruman Sana and Sagor Islam's direct qualification to the Olympics is still considered the highest achievement for Bangladesh in the Games' history, as other athletes have only participated through wildcards or quota places.

During a recent interview with The Daily Star, swimmer Sonia Khatun acknowledged that their participation in the Olympics is akin to "token participation," as they are happy just to get the opportunity to feature in the global event alongside top athletes of the world.

This year, a total of five athletes from Bangladesh will take part in four disciplines -- archery, athletics, shooting, and swimming -- at the Paris Olympics,

and among them, Sagor qualified directly on his merit, while the remaining four -- shooter Robiul Islam, swimmers Samiul Islam Rafi and Sonia Khatun, and sprinter Imranur Rahman -- were handed wildcard entries.

Former Olympian and current BKSP shooting coach Asif Hossain Khan admitted the harsh reality of Bangladesh's chances in the Olympics, but he was hopeful that if these athletes can deliver their best individual performance in the meet, they can count their participation differently.

"To be honest, we are far behind other athletes from different countries. It's difficult to overcome the difference within a short time," said Asif, who won a gold medal in the 10m Air Rifle individual event in the 2002 Commonwealth Games and also participated in the Athens Olympics in 2004.

"I hope they deliver their best individual performance in Paris, so that they get the self-satisfaction of achieving what they previously had done," said Asif, whose opponent in the Manchester Commonwealth -- India's shooting legend Abhinav Bindra -- went on to win the first

individual gold medal for his country in the Beijing Olympics 2008.

Asif added that it's a failure of the whole process that Bangladesh is unable to clinch a medal in the Olympics till date.

"I would say it's an overall failure. We need to dream big. And then comes the execution after four years... I think we need a big collaboration between our athletes, officials, BOA, and sponsors, so that we can have a long-term plan for the Olympics and get a good result there.

"We are currently stuck in the middle of dreaming and helping others dream. I think there is a gap between these two for which we can't go ahead."

However, Asif was optimistic that someday they will scale the heights that India has achieved regularly of late, a country where "everything is managed locally" and without reliance on foreign coaches.

"There is a saying that a person gets mature at the age of 40. Our country is still unripe for the Olympics. I think it will take time. But I am hopeful that we can achieve something here as we did in other games like the Commonwealth, SA Games, and Asian Games."

Nadal, Alcaraz play down expectations

AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz know they won't win anything on reputation alone playing together at the Paris Olympics but vowed on Wednesday to do everything in their power to overcome a lack of preparation.

Nadal, the 2008 singles gold medallist, will pair up with Alcaraz in a tennis dream team at Roland Garros, looking to also add to the doubles title he won with close friend Marc Lopez at Rio in 2016.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion was keen to play down expectations though ahead of his final Olympics, with Nadal and Alcaraz teaming up for the first time.

"I understand the fascination, the hope of seeing us play together, (but) let's not think that this translates into success, I think that's a mistake," said the 38-year-old Nadal.

"At the end of the day, Carlos hasn't played much doubles and I haven't played much in either doubles or singles," he said at a Spanish team press conference in the Olympic Village.

Both Nadal and Alcaraz will also compete in the singles at Roland Garros, where Nadal has won the French Open a record 14 times. Alcaraz captured the title in Paris for the first time last month.

"We're going to give our all to try and at least leave with the peace of mind of having done everything possible," added Nadal.

Alcaraz said it was "a dream" to be able to make his Olympic debut in doubles alongside Nadal.

He too sounded a note of caution and insisted their star power was no guarantee of a medal.

"What I can say is that we're going to do give the best of ourselves... with great enthusiasm, let's hope we can enjoy it and play well," said Alcaraz, who beat Novak Djokovic again in this year's Wimbledon final.

Sagorika hattrick saves Bangladesh's blushes

SPORTS REPORTER

Young forward Mosammat Sagorika came off the bench and scored a hattrick as Bangladesh women's football team came back from a goal down to beat Bhutan 5-1 in the first of two FIFA friendly matches in Thimphu last night.

The best player and top scorer of the SAFF Women's U-19 Championship, which was held in Dhaka in February this year, scored the equaliser early in the second half before adding two more goals late in the game as Bangladesh avoided a potential banana skin at the Changlimthang Stadium in Bhutan's capital.

It was the first victory under British coach Peter Butler, who saw his side suffer 4-0 and a 1-0 defeats against Chinese Taipei at home in his first assignment in May-June.

Butler was full of praise of the young forward as she changed the game on its head after Bangladesh had conceded a sloppy goal in the first half and failed to mount a challenge against a side 23 places below them in FIFA ranking.

"Sagorika is a special talent. We've been warming her in the wings. The

style of football that we want to play really suits her because she's very quick over 5-10-15 metres," Butler said at the post-match press conference.

Bangladesh conceded their first ever goal against the South Asian minnows -- having gone 20-0 in the



previous four matches -- in the 13th minute of the game when Bhutan captain Pema Tshering profited from some disastrous communication error between Bangladesh goalkeeper Rupna Chakma and the defence.

"We made a few sloppy errors, mistakes -- self-inflicted. I think at times we tried to play in areas where

there wasn't really on to play," the coach said, adding that he made some tactical changes in the second half after "a bit of prompting from the team management."

While Bangladesh turned things around in the second half with veteran skipper Sabina Khatun and winger Ritu Porna Chakma also getting on the scoresheet, they also wasted a few more chances late in the game.

Butler felt his side 'lacked cutting edge in the first half' and could not gauge the opposition's style of play.

"I think we misunderstood a team who play very different to what we play. They're big and strong and they play very direct. We work on more passing movement pattern," Butler said.

The British coach, however, was pleased with the result.

"Pleased with the outcome. It's one game down but we've got one more game and it could possibly be a completely different team. A younger team for the second game," said Butler.

The second match will be held at the same venue on July 27.



Bangladesh wicket-keeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim plays volleyball with teammates yesterday during the national team's practice camp at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram ahead of the Tigers' Pakistan tour. Mushfiqur arrived three hours before the scheduled starting time of the training session and trained for six hours. The 37-year-old will feature in a two-day practice match, starting today at the same venue. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN