

U-17s fight back to set up final against India

SPORTS REPORTER

Saiful Bari Titu made some inspired substitutions as Bangladesh fought back from two goals down to beat Pakistan 8-7 on penalties in the semifinals of the SAFF U-17 Championship in Thimphu yesterday, setting up a final clash against defending champions India.

The goal-shy Bangladesh team, who were lucky to go through to the last-four battle with only a point and having scored a single goal in two matches, wasted a handful of chances to take the game by the scruff of the neck. They had to pay the price, too, going two goals down after the hour-mark, with the first goal conceded in the 32nd minute when Shahab Ahmed headed home Subhan Karim's corner. The lead was doubled right after the hour mark as Abdul Rehman dispatched from the spot after a through-ball had hit defender Siam Omit's right hand inside the Bangladesh box.

Desperate for a comeback, Titu made a number of substitutions, bringing on Mohammad Manik first and then Mithu Chowdhury and Akash Ahmed in a double change.

Manik reduced the arrears in the 74th minute, turning in a corner from Murshed Ali before taking the game into penalties



We started the match very well. We should have scored on two-three occasions. From there we were not able to control the game and after the first half too. So I made some changes to make an impact on the match. I must say it was a dramatic comeback. We were lucky, (scoring) in the final moments and then winning on penalties. But all credit goes to the players because they fought very well.

SAIFUL BARI TITU
Bangladesh coach

PHOTO: BFF

with a placing shot on a cut back from Mithu Chowdhury in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

Both teams changed their goalkeepers for the decisive spot-kicks as Alif Rahman Imtiage stood between the sticks for Bangladesh, replacing regular goalkeeper

Nahidul Islam.

It proved to be a long and nerve-racking ordeal for both teams as the first seven shots from each side were successful. However, Alif made a brilliant save against Pakistan's Abdul Ghani before Kamal Merdha converted Bangladesh's eighth

attempt to take Titu's charges to the final.

The final, to be played on Monday, will be a rematch of last edition's final, which was played in under-16 format, where India emerged victorious by 2-0 margin. India beat Nepal 4-2 in the first semifinal earlier in the day.

Kohli, Kayes renew ties from Brisbane

SPORTS REPORTER FROM KANPUR

Produced in Bangladesh, MKS Sports bats have been making the rounds locally and received a big boost when last year they received ICC approval to brandish their logo in international cricket.

MKS is an acronym of the names of the three partners: cricketers Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Imrul Kayes, and Shahin -- Rajshahi's 'bat doctor' Hossain Muhammad Aftab.

The very willows made it to Kanpur on Friday and were gifted to India superstars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma by Shahin, on behalf of the company, who informed members of the media that Kohli was particularly excited to receive the bat.

The gifts also renewed ties between Kohli and former Bangladesh opener Kayes, who both shared a camp in Australia.

"Virat and I were in Australia for many days in 2008 during a camp -- in Brisbane's Centre of Excellence for HP -- before making the national team," Kayes informed The Daily Star.

The gift of Bangladesh-made bats is a gesture that brings wider international recognition for Kayes and company. However, MKS Sports will have to compete against Indian and Pakistani bat manufacturers, who have over 50 years of experience, to carve out a space for themselves in the market.

While MKS is far off from known names in the bat industry for now, the excitement and feedback from Indian superstars should help the brand gear up for new challenges going forward.

Rishad and Co planning to fill in Shakib's shoes

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Shakib Al Hasan's decision to call it quits in T20Is has created a massive vacuum in Bangladesh's spin bowling department in the shortest format, one that would soon spread to the other two formats as well as he is set to retire from all forms of international cricket in the matter of months.

After leading the Bangladesh spin attack in all three formats for more than 18 years, the 37-year-old has officially entered the final stretch of his international career and speculations have already begun about how the Tiger's spin attack will shape up in his absence.

With 708 wickets to his name till yesterday, Shakib is Bangladesh's most successful bowler across formats by some margin. Pacers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (389) and Mustafizur Rahman (323) occupy the next two spots in the list followed by off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz (296), who made his international debut in 2016; 10 years after Shakib.

Miraz has long been touted to take over Shakib's role as an all-rounder in

the team, however, within a very short time Rishad Hossain, a leg-spinner who has the ability to tonk the ball, has also inserted himself in that debate at least in the shortest format.

It would be extremely difficult for anyone to step into Shakib's shoes but out of the current crop of spinners, which includes the likes of Taijul Islam, Nasum Ahmed, Mahedi Hasan and Nayeem Hasan, Miraz and Rishad look the best equipped to do so owing to their batting abilities.

The first test of how the spin attack will cop in the post-Shakib era will take place in the forthcoming three-match T20I series against India, starting in Gwalior on October 6.

Rishad, who is still very new to the international circuit with three ODIs and 24 T20Is, told the reporters in Mirpur yesterday that the spinners are already planning on how they can make up for Shakib's absence moving forward.

"The five to six of us spinners who are in the pipeline are discussing with each other about how to go about the matches in India and the upcoming games. We are talking about how we can cover his absence," Rishad told reporters ahead of

an inter-squad practice match.

"Shakib bhai all of a sudden taking such a decision is very disappointing for us. Inshallah, we will try to gradually cover up with our best efforts," he added.

Rishad has recently staked a claim in one of Shakib's long-lasting records by becoming the second Bangladeshi to get a contract in Australia's Big Bash League (BBL), getting drafted in by Hobart Hurricanes for the upcoming season.

His brilliant stint in this year's ICC T20 World Cup where he took 14 wickets earned him global recognition and attracted interest from franchises from different leagues across the world.

He was picked by Toronto Nationals in the Global T20 Canada but could not get due to visa complications. He was also picked by Harare Bolts in the ongoing Zim Afro T10 but could not take part owing to national team commitments.

Rishad runs the risk of missing out on the BBL as well, as its schedule clashes with the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

BBL will run from December 15 this year to January 27 next year, while the 11th BPL is scheduled to start on December 27 and run until February 7.

Hobart, however, have two matches scheduled before the start of BPL, on December 19 and 21 respectively. So, the 22-year-old remains hopeful about getting the opportunity to get a taste of BBL.

"Hopefully I will be able to play a few Big Bash matches," said Rishad.

Wicket concerns mount after unusual rainfall

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM KANPUR

Persistent rain has plagued the second Test between India and Bangladesh since its opening day, marking an unusual weather pattern for this time of year in Kanpur. As the heavy downpour left players restless and eager for action, the visitors are particularly concerned about how the wicket will behave when play resumes today.

Following heavy showers on Friday evening and moderate overnight rain, both teams returned to their hotel early in the morning yesterday, signalling the second day's play would be completely wiped out.

The teams did not return to the stadium, given no matter how much the super sopplers continued their work, the drainage system was not adequate for all that water.

There was no post-day press conference yesterday due to rain, as it happened on the opening day. Instead, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto shared his thoughts in a video message via Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) media. Shanto talked about the disappointment felt by the cricketers.

"There was no play again today [Saturday], which is a disappointing thing for the players. Not much can be done about it, but had the game started, it would have felt good," Shanto said.

On Friday, Bangladesh had recovered well from the early loss of both openers. Jasprit Bumrah, in particular, got the ball to move at pace, but the slowness of the surface had also been evident. However, it did not mean that shots could not

"The wicket was good. The challenge here was the stop-and-start nature of the game so far."

NAJMUL HOSSAIN SHANTO



be played, as both Shanto and Mominul Haque's innings reflected.

"The wicket was good. The challenge here was the stop-and-start nature of the game so far," Shanto added.

A tricky ground to score on, 300 is considered a pretty good total. Bangladesh reached 107 for three on day one, and their two best Test batters, Mominul and Mushfiqur Rahim, were at the crease, with Liton Das, Shakib Al Hasan, and Mehedi Miraz yet to come.

"I think we lost one wicket too many... I won't say we are in a bad position," he felt.

Overall, it depends on how the wicket behaves if play is possible on day three, having been under covers for a while. "If we look at the game right now, we are sort of in a middling position.

"There is rain and not much sun to be had. In that sense, as the game progresses, it will be understandable how challenging the wicket is," said the Bangladesh captain, pointing to the fact that their innings is in the balance.

While Kanpur will be wishing that Sunday brings forth some sun and cricket, the Tigers will hope the dampness of the wicket at Green Park Stadium does not destabilise their second innings.



Cole Palmer made history in Chelsea's 4-2 rout of Brighton at home yesterday as the 22-year-old became the first player in the Premier League to net four goals in the first half. It was also his third league hat-trick, the joint-most for the Blues alongside Didier Drogba, Frank Lampard, and Jimmy Floyd-Hasselbaink.

PHOTO: AFP

Jayasuriya eyes series win, not milestone

AFP, Galle

Sri Lanka were just five wickets away from a crushing second Test and series victory over New Zealand on Saturday, with the tourists 199-5 at stumps on the third day, having followed on after collapsing to 88 all out in their first innings.

Tom Blundell was not out on 47 and Glenn Phillips on 32 when bad light forced an early end to play in Galle after debutant off-spinner Nishan Peiris took three top-order wickets.

"Obviously the first innings wasn't ideal. It was a bitter pill to swallow," said Blundell afterwards.

"Things were happening very quick. Sri Lanka are a very good team and their

spinners bowled really well."

Sri Lanka declared Friday on a mammoth 602-5 for their first innings, then spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took 6-42 for his ninth five-wicket haul as the visitors failed to get to three figures.

Jayasuriya will need to dismiss all five remaining New Zealand batsmen to equal the record for fastest bowler to 100 Test wickets, held since 1896 by England's George Lohmann who reached the milestone in his 16th Test.

"I love bowling in Galle," he said. "But that milestone looks

out of reach now.

"Obviously when you have runs on the board you can dictate terms like we did today," he added. "We will be delighted with a series win."

Resuming at a precarious 22-2 in their first innings, New Zealand's batsmen barely put up a fight and their highest partnership was the 20 added by last pair Mitchell Santner, who top scored with 29, and William O'Rourke (two).

Captain de Silva took five catches at first slip to tie the record for most in a Test innings by a non-wicketkeeper, a milestone shared with 15 others.

