

'Keep faith on proven performers'

SPORTS REPORTER

Players of the Bangladesh women's team were upbeat yesterday on their rest day, riding the high of their tremendous 3-1 win over five-time champions India in their final group-stage match of SAFF Women's Championship in Nepal on Wednesday.

In that match, the team rose above the debate surrounding head coach Peter Butler's apparent dislike towards senior players and routed India to finish as Group A champions and will now face Group B runners-up Bhutan in the semifinal on Sunday.

Just a day before the crucial match against India, midfielder Monika Chakma dropped a bombshell, openly telling the media that coach Butler did not like the senior players and preferred fielding inexperienced juniors instead.

After the criticism, the English coach decked up the playing eleven against India with senior players who had helped the side clinch its maiden SAFF Women's Championship title two years ago and the players responded with a brilliant showing.

Following the win, captain Sabina Khatun revealed that former head coach Golam Rabban Choton, who had coached the side in their SAFF Women's Championship winning campaign in



2022, still has a positive influence on them while talking to the media at the team hotel in Nepal.

"I always try to talk to Choton sir before every match. We have had a good relationship for the last 14 years. I think he knows me better than I do. He knows every player," Sabina told the reporters yesterday.

"Sir told me that we would play the semifinals whether we win, draw or lose [against India]. But we all have to perform

well because we have a good opportunity to play the final. I just forwarded the message to all the players without mentioning his name because of the ongoing debate and I think every player did their job correctly," she added.

Choton, who parted ways with the team some 14 months ago, is currently in Dhaka and he corroborated what Sabina said.

"I usually try to avoid them because I am

not with them anymore. However, I am forced to pick up their calls sometimes after their repeated calls. I advised Sabina to perform well collectively."

Choton also urged the management to keep faith on the seniors as they are proven performers.

"The management should keep faith on the senior players because they proved that they are performers two years ago and also proved it against India on Wednesday."

"I think this disparity among the players is the result of how the team is being handled. Instead of blaming the players for poor performances, the management should focus on improving individuals and the girls have to perform as a team like they have done in the past," said Choton.

Although Bhutan thrashed Maldives 13-0 in their final group-stage match and are undefeated till now, Sabina is confident of doing well and reaching the final.

"In the semifinal, we will try to perform like we did against India. We want to perform well irrespective of the outcome of the match," said the 30-year-old captain.

Will Shakib play Afghan ODIs in UAE?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are yet to ascertain whether all rounder Shakib Al Hasan will feature in Bangladesh's three-match ODI series against Afghanistan, starting on November 6, in the UAE.

The BCB gave no definite answer about Shakib's availability despite the selectors sitting for a meeting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday to discuss the squads for the second South Africa Test followed by the Afghan series.

National selector Hannan Sarker told The Daily Star that they are waiting for the decision of the board president Faruque Ahmed on both matters – Shakib's availability and squad selection for the Afghanistan series.

Faruque is likely to return to the country after performing Umrah on October 26 or 27.

"The board will inform us regarding Shakib's availability. It's not about only Shakib. There might be injury concerns regarding any player and there can be personal issues as well. We will do it after the second Test," Hannan said.

"We are set to make an ODI team after a long time [first time since the Sri Lanka series in March]. So, we are looking to make the team after consulting with the president."

Shakib was expected to retire from Tests after Bangladesh's first match against South Africa which ended yesterday but due to security concerns, he decided not to return home for his Test swansong. This has put his farewell into limbo for the time being.

Now, his participation in the ODI series against Afghanistan – a format from which he intends to retire after the ICC Champions Trophy next year – is subject to many issues, including his availability, and selection.



Spin dictate terms in Pune and Rawalpindi

AGENCIES

New Zealand and England faced trials by spin on the opening day of their respective Tests against India and Pakistan yesterday.

Spin dominated heavily as India off-spinner Washington Sundar bagged seven wickets to help bundle out the Black Caps for 259 on Day 1 in Pune, while across the border, off-spinner Sajid Khan reigned supreme with six scalps in Rawalpindi to skittle out England for 267.

India were 16-1 at the close in Pune, losing captain Rohit Sharma for a nine-ball duck to a Tim Southee delivery that crashed into the off-stump via the pad.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, on six, and Shubman Gill, on 10, were batting with the hosts trailing by 243 runs.

Devon Conway, 76, and Rachin Ravindra, 65, led the New Zealand batting after captain Tom Latham won the toss.

Sundar, who was back in the side for the first time since 2021, justified his return with his first five-wicket Test haul from five appearances. After removing Southee to bring up his fifth wicket, the 25-year-old mopped up the tail in the final session.

While Sundar returned 7-59, Ravichandran Ashwin scalped three which took him past Australia's Nathan Lyon for wickets in the format (530) and placed him seventh in the list of leading Test bowlers.



New Zealand won the opener for their first Test victory in India since 1988 and are looking to clinch the three-match series, a feat they've never achieved in the country before.

Meanwhile, England fought back to reduce Pakistan to 73-3 at the close of the series deciding third Test after Sajid's standout display.

Sajid finished with 6-128 and Noman Ali grabbed 3-88 after a rearguard 89 by Jamie Smith enabled England to post 267, having stumped to 110-5 at lunch.

At the close, Pakistan captain Shan Masood and Saud Shakeel were both unbeaten on 16, with the home team still trailing by 194 and the match in the balance.

On a dry and spin-friendly Rawalpindi pitch, 13 wickets fell on day one with all but one going to the spinners.

After the Pakistan spinners' exploits, England's spinners came to the fore in the final session as Shoaib Bashir dismissed Abdullah Shafique for 14 and Jack Leach accounted for Saim Ayub who had made 19.

Gus Atkinson was the only fast bowler to grab a wicket on day one, dismissing Kamran Ghulam for three.

Haaland helps City to record unbeaten streak

Erling Haaland back-heeled home a stunning strike, the first of two goals, as City thrashed Sparta Prague 5-0 on Wednesday to remain unbeaten in their Champions League campaign. Phil Foden, John Stones and Matheus Nunes also scored for Pep Guardiola's side who climbed to third on the table with seven points after three games.

 City's 5-0 thrashing saw the Citizens break the record for the longest unbeaten run in European Cup/UEFA Champions League history. The win took Guardiola's side to 26 consecutive games unbeaten, breaking the competition record previously set by rivals Manchester United in May 2009.

 With 44 goals in 42 games overall, Haaland now sits joint 14th in the all-time list of Champions League top scorers.



Raphinha hattrick ends Barca's Bayern misery

A stunning hattrick from Raphinha helped hosts Barcelona hammer Bayern Munich 4-1 in a blockbuster Champions League group clash at the Olympic Stadium on Wednesday. Barca forward Robert Lewandowski also got his name on the scoresheet while England star Harry Kane struck for the visitors. The defeat leaves Bayern with only one victory from their opening three group games and in the bottom half of the table, while Barcelona have two wins and are in the top third.

Bangladesh pacer Khaled Ahmed has been included in the 15-man team in place of Taskin Ahmed for the second Test against South Africa, beginning on October 29, at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

SQUAD

Najmul Hossain Shanto (C), Shadman Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Liton Das (WK), Jaker Ali, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Hasan Mahmud, Nahid Rana, Hasan Murad and Khaled Ahmed.

with the right decisions.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto talked about facing problems in balancing the side without Shakib even a day before the Test but said that as the match would take place on a traditional Mirpur track, their experience of playing in Mirpur would help them set up the game.

But as it turned out, they had read the conditions wrong, hence made wrong choices and the outcome as a result did not fall in their favour.

South Africa's team management had decoded early that the moisture trapped in a wicket that has not been used for a while will help the bowlers and picked a balanced attack of two pacers and two spinners.

The first day's play saw plenty of seam and bounce for the faster bowlers with sharp turn for spinners. Pace would hold sway for the rest of the Test as Kagiso Rabada tormented Bangladesh with nine wickets in two innings.

Asked yesterday after the game whether in hindsight South Africa would have picked one more seamer, skipper Aiden Markram gave a knowing smile.

"In hindsight, with the toss and with the team, yeah definitely. The amount of seam movement and invariable bounce here and there, extra bounce here and there, you would have loved to have an extra seamer.

walked back on their improvement curve in Tests.

Shanto had said this Test was an opportunity since they have never beaten South Africa in Tests. But by picking just one pacer, they let that advantage slip away.

Taijul Islam did what he was supposed to do but Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Islam did not have the expected impact. The surface simply was not as conducive to spin as Bangladesh thought it would be. When the ball was old, they failed to break partnerships. Hasan remained a threat as the sole pacer, but only from one end.

Miraz outlined the tactical blunder without saying it.

"We expected to turn on this Mirpur wicket and that spinners would dominate. We have played with one pacer before," Miraz said, even as those tactics hurt Bangladesh's Test cricket in the long run.

"In Mirpur spinners usually dominate but the conditions became different," Miraz added.

Ruing Shakib's absence, Bangladesh devised a safe ploy, which ultimately did not work as they read the conditions wrong.

Moving ahead, when Bangladesh play a home Test without Shakib, the big question would be how they go about securing home advantage.