

Will Tigresses be battle-ready for World Cup?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh women's team may have secured their ticket to this year's ICC Women's World Cup in India, but their qualification was anything but convincing.

Following a campaign culminating with a narrow escape, they now face the daunting task of preparing for the 50-over marquee event without any confirmed international series in the lead-up.

In Pakistan, Nigar Sultana Joty led from the front as the Tigresses began the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers on a high note, dispatching lower-ranked teams Thailand, Scotland, and Ireland.

But the real test came against stronger opposition -- and that's where the cracks appeared. Losses to West Indies and hosts Pakistan, both full-member nations, left Bangladesh's fate hanging by a thread.

In a twist of luck, a miscalculation by West Indies in their match against Thailand allowed Joty and Co to sneak into the main event by the slimmest of margins -- a superior net run rate of just +0.01.

Despite the outcome, few in the camp were satisfied with the overall performance.

"We played well against associate nations but couldn't do well against regular playing nations. We are trying to find out why," women's chief selector Sazzad Ahmed Shipon told The Daily Star yesterday, echoing concerns about the team's ability to compete at the highest level.

"We are trying to improve in a few areas like fielding and batting. We are also aware that the result wasn't so good that we should be overwhelmed. To be honest, we didn't expect to qualify like this," he added.

A major concern heading into the World Cup is the batting department. While the bowling and fielding units have shown some promise, the inconsistency and fragility of the top and middle-order batters have been recurring issues.

Although the Tigresses broke their highest total twice in the Qualifiers, their performances against the hosts and West Indies left much to be desired. If this trend is not addressed promptly and continues against the big guns, it could prove costly in India.

Adding to the uncertainty is the lack of international fixtures before the World Cup. The ICC's Future Tour Programme (FTP) doesn't include any scheduled series for Bangladesh, prompting Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to scramble for opportunities.

Discussions are ongoing with Sri Lanka Cricket regarding a possible away series. A tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa was initially considered but has since been shelved.

In the meantime, the Tigresses have embarked on a 29-day training camp featuring fitness and skill sessions across Mirpur, Cox's Bazar, and BKSP. Several national players are also participating in a series against South Africa's Emerging side, offering some valuable match practice.

The Emerging Asia Cup next month could also provide much-needed exposure for fringe players. "There are a total of six to seven players in the emerging team squad who have played for the national team," said women's national team manager S M Golam Faiyaz.

While BCB plans to install a full local coaching staff ahead of the tournament -- with head coach Sarwar Imran set to be joined by the emerging team's coaching panel -- the clock is ticking.

As things stand, Bangladesh's World Cup preparation remains precariously reliant on domestic training and internal matches, which may not be enough for a team who are yet to prove themselves against top-tier oppositions.

U-19s eye SAFF title with two expat forwards

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have set their sights on the title of the SAFF U-19 Championship with the inclusion of two expatriate forwards in the 23-member squad, which will fly for India this morning for the six-nation tournament, scheduled for May 9-18 in Arunachal Pradesh.

Bangladesh, who had emerged champions in last year's SAFF U-20 Championship, never got out of the group stage in SAFF U-19 Championship held in 2015 and 2023. However, this time the charges of Golam Rabban Choton are determined to produce good results on the back of three weeks' preparation at the Shams Ul Huda Football Academy in Jashore and BKSP in Savar.

"We started the training with 31 players including three expatriates. Out of them, Abdul Kadir from Italy and Farzad Syed Aftab from USA have been included in the final squad while Elman Matin from England could not secure a

place due to his performance," Choton said at an official press conference at the BFF House, adding that Farzad's finishing is good while Kadir can hold the ball and also score despite being a left-winger.

"No doubt, the strength of the attacking line-up will be better this time but the local players are also good and they can deliver good performances," said Choton, who was handed a men's team's responsibility after 10 years.

Captain Nazmul Huda Faisal said: "They are not expatriate footballers, they are now Bangladeshi footballers and part of the team. The inclusion of Farzad and Kadir will strengthen us the way Hamza Choudhury's inclusion did for the senior team."

Bangladesh will start their campaign against Maldives on May 9 before playing against Bhutan on May 11. Top two teams from each of the two groups will advance to the semifinals of the six-nation tournament.



Soumya Sarkar, Mustafizur Rahman, and Tanzid Hasan Tamim share a light-hearted moment during training as the Tigers kick off their preparations for the upcoming T20I series against UAE and Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BACK TO 10

Tigers in reverse gear in ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER

After nearly two decades, Bangladesh have once again slipped to 10th place in the ICC ODI ranking, a regression that starkly underscores how far the Tigers have fallen behind in what was once considered their strongest format.

The ICC released its annual rankings update yesterday across all three formats. While Bangladesh's position remained unchanged at ninth in both Tests and T20Is, they dropped one spot to 10th in the 50-over format.

The Tigers suffered a four-point decline, bringing their total to 76 rating points. In contrast, West Indies gained five points and leapfrogged Bangladesh to claim the ninth spot with 83 points.

The last time Bangladesh ranked this low in ODIs was

- Australia remain Test kings despite their lead narrowing slightly.
- India continue to rule both white-ball formats.
- Sri Lanka leapfrog to fourth in ODIs after strong home performances.
- England jump to second in Test rankings, overtaking South Africa and India.

in 2007 -- the same year they first rose to ninth -- and they had remained above that position until now.

Opportunities to gain rating points this year have been limited, as Bangladesh have played only three ODIs so far, all during the ICC Champions Trophy held in Pakistan and the UAE.

However, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side did themselves no favours with their performances, suffering



defeats to India and New Zealand, while their match against Pakistan was washed out.

This slide in the rankings is not merely the result of a few recent losses; rather, it reflects a prolonged struggle in the ODI format, particularly since the 2023 ICC World Cup in India.

Since November 7, 2023 -- the day they began their World Cup campaign with a win over Afghanistan -- Bangladesh have played 24 ODIs, winning only six, losing 17, and seeing one end in no result.

Their poor returns have extended across both ICC tournaments and bilateral series. Of their last six bilateral ODI series, they have managed to win only one, a 2-1 victory over Sri Lanka last year.

While the win-loss ratio paints a grim picture, what is arguably even more concerning is how consistently Bangladesh have appeared a step behind their opponents in adapting to the demands of the modern game.

This decline comes almost exactly eight years after Bangladesh achieved their highest ever ODI ranking -- sixth place -- on May 25, 2017.

Hopes of breaking into the top five have since faded, and the road back to that level now seems longer than ever.

Barca, Inter set for Milan showdown

AGENCIES

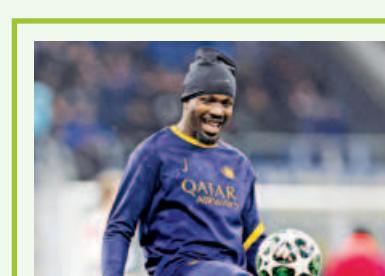
After a breathtaking 3-3 draw in Barcelona, European giants Barcelona and Inter Milan head to the San Siro on Tuesday for a decisive Champions League semifinal second leg with a place in Wembley's final up for grabs.

The first leg delivered one of the most entertaining matches of the competition, with Inter's Marcus Thuram scoring the fastest goal in Champions League semifinal history after just 30 seconds.

Denzel Dumfries then added a brace from set pieces, but Barcelona's firepower -- led by teenage prodigy Lamine Yamal and the red-hot Raphinha -- ensured the tie remained level heading into the return.

Barcelona's attack has been the tournament's most prolific, scoring 40 goals, just five shy of their all-time record of 45 in 1999-00.

Raphinha, in particular, has redefined his European legacy with 12 goals and 8 assists in 13 appearances. Only Cristiano Ronaldo (2013-14) has more direct goal involvements in a single season. Meanwhile, Yamal, just 17, continues to defy belief, his first-leg strike making him the youngest semi-final scorer in competition history.



Inter aim for a third CL final (after 2010 and 2023), while Barcelona seek their sixth (1994, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2015).

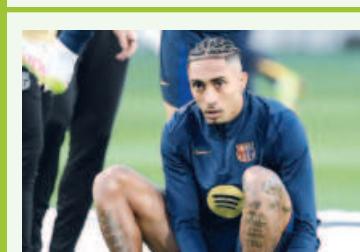
Barça have just one win in six away UCL matches against Inter and only five wins in 24 games in Italy (21%) -- their lowest success rate in any country.

This will be their 18th major European meeting, with only Bayern Munich vs Real Madrid

(28), Juventus vs Real Madrid (21) and Inter vs Real Madrid (19) played more often.

Lamine Yamal has scored five UCL goals this season -- only Erling Haaland, Kylian Mbappe, and Raul have scored more as teenagers in a single campaign.

Raphinha's 20-goal involvement (12 goals, 8 assists) is one shy of Cristiano Ronaldo's 2013-14 record.



However, history is not on Barça's side. The Catalans have managed just one win in six away games at the San Siro and have only five victories from 24 Champions League matches played in Italy -- their lowest win percentage in any nation. Compounding that, Barça have lost

their last four away semifinal matches in the competition.

In 2010, the last time they met in the CL semifinals, Inter won the first leg 3-1 at San Siro before Barça claimed a narrow 1-0 win at home -- not enough to prevent Jose Mourinho's men from progressing to the final, which they eventually won.

Inter, in contrast, are a fortress at home. Simone Inzaghi's men are unbeaten in their last 15 home Champions League games (12 wins), and they have triumphed in nine of their last 11 home semifinals in European competition. While their domestic form has wobbled lately, a gritty 1-0 win over Verona on Saturday snapped a five-match winless streak.

Having last reached the final in 2010 and won it in 2010, Inter will rely on their experience and defensive steel -- they had conceded just five goals in the tournament before the first leg.

Inzaghi must find a way to contain Barça's wide threats, particularly Yamal and Raphinha, with the latter playing the best football of his career under Hansi Flick.

A Champions League classic awaits in Milan, where Inter chase redemption and Barça dream of reliving European glory.

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

IPL

Mumbai vs

Gujarat

Live from 8:00 pm

SONY SPORTS 2

Champions

League

Inter vs Barcelona

Live from 1:00 am (Wednesday)

Bangladesh A crush NZ counterparts in Sylhet opener

STAR SPORTS REPORT

Bangladesh 'A' team outclassed their New Zealand counterparts in the first one-day of a three-match series, registering a dominating seven-wicket win at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The hosts' bowlers set up the win, with pacer Khaled Ahmed (Player of the Match) and spinner Tanvir Islam taking three wickets each, while Shariful Islam and Ebadot Hossain bagged a brace apiece to bundle out the visitors for just 147 in 34.3 overs after opting to bat.

Five New Zealand batters fell for ducks, with only Rhys Mariu (42) and Dean Foxcroft (72) reaching double figures.

In reply, Mahidul Islam Ankon (42*), Anamul Haque Bijoy (38), and Nurul Hasan Sohan (20*) guided the home side to 149-3 in 27.2 overs. There were handy contributions from openers Mohammad Naim (18) and Parvez Hossain Emom (24) too.

The two teams will clash next at the same venue on Wednesday. The series, originally scheduled for last September, was postponed after New Zealand imposed a travel ban on its citizens visiting Bangladesh.

Winning run ends for Under-19s

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-19 team suffered their second defeat in a six-match series against Sri Lanka yesterday, deferring their wait for a series victory.

The Young Tigers, who won the last three games after starting the tour on a losing note, lost by 27 runs in the fifth and penultimate fixture at the SSC Ground in Colombo.

The visitors had dismissed Sri Lanka Under-19s for 196 runs in 42.3 overs, with Samiun Bashir taking three wickets while Saad Islam Razin, Rizan Hossain and Farhan Shahriar took two wickets each.

Bangladesh got off to a poor reply with informant Zawad Abrar (7), Kalam Siddiki (1) and Azizul Hakim (4) leaving cheaply. Although there were five 20-plus scores in the middle order, the visitors were eventually bowled out for 169 in 45 overs.

The sixth and final fixture will take place in Colombo on Thursday.

Tigers' SL tour fixtures revealed

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will tour Sri Lanka for a multi-format tour featuring two Tests, three ODIs, and three T20Is between June and July 2025.

The Test series, starting on June 17, will kick off the new World Test Championship cycle for both sides.

The first Test will be played in Galle, with the second match scheduled to begin on June 25 Colombo.

This will be followed by three ODIs on July 2, 5 and 8.

The first two ODIs are set to be played in Colombo with the final fixture to be held at Pallekele. Finally, three T20Is are set to be played on July 10, 13, and 16 at Pallekele, Dambulla, and Colombo.