

Electronic timers prove faulty again

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Swimming Federation's (BSF) expectation to make a long-awaited debut of the electronic timer was shattered at the National Swimming Complex when the US-made Daktronics device again failed to produce timing of all lanes at a time on the opening day of the 37th National Age-group Swimming Championships in Mirpur yesterday.

Despite the technical glitch of the electronic timer, the 24 events of the four-day championships continued by recording the timing with stopwatches, with BKSP 10-grade student Maisha Akhtar Mim bagging three golds by setting a new record (1:07.54 minutes) in the 100m freestyle of the Girls' 15-17 age group.

BSF general secretary Mahabubur Rahman Shahin on Tuesday said they were going to record the time in the electronic timer, as they found the device, which was installed in late 2019, functioning during the talent hunt programme in the second week of this month. But unfortunately, the electronic timer worth Tk four crore did not work on the opening day.

"The electronic timer did not work properly. We trialed the electronic timer by holding the boys' and girls' 200m butterfly events of U-18-20 groups, but Lane 4 and 5 could not produce timings, while another lane produced timing despite having no swimmer in that lane," said judge Saleh Ahmed, adding that they recorded the timing of all events on the stopwatches.

The local game's governing body also held the day's last two events under the electronic timer, and it was seen that the electronic board failed to show the timings of a couple of lanes on the board.

However, this reporter collected the timing sheet from the operator, and it was seen that the electronic timer produced timings of all lanes the swimmers competed in during the day's last event of the U-13-14 Boys' 200m freestyle event.

"The electronic timers of Lane 1 and 2 did not show readings because both swimmers quit the race before completing the distance. They also touched the steel handle of the starting point instead of touching the pad," said Engineer Ipl Shikdar of MI Tech International, which is providing the service to the BSF during the competitions.

Shikdar also claimed that the electronic timer produced the timing of all lanes properly during the trials, but the problem arises when the junior swimmers are competing.

"The budding swimmers don't have proper training of how to touch the touching pad, which is a sensor, so all lanes can't produce the timing at a time," said Shikdar.



Swimmer M Rabbi Rahman of Bogura Swimming Center clinched the gold medal in the 200m Butterfly event of the Boys' U-18-19 Group on the opening day of the 37th National Age-Group Swimming Championships at the National Swimming Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Rabbi took 2:23.93 seconds to finish ahead of Meherpur Swimming Club's Ramjan Ahmed, who bagged the bronze medal, clocking 2:31.48 seconds.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Nahid out, Soumya doubtful for Pak tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite pacer Nahid Rana's withdrawal from the upcoming Pakistan tour, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided not to include any replacement for him in their squad for the three-match T20I series, scheduled to start on May 28 in Lahore.

Meanwhile, Soumya Sarkar, who is also part of the team for the Pakistan tour, was not available for selection for the third consecutive match in the Tigers' ongoing UAE series yesterday due to persistent back pain. With Soumya said to be recovering slowly and needing additional time to gain full fitness, the left-hander may be a doubt for the Pakistan tour.

Nahid and two coaching staff – fielding coach James Pamment and trainer Nathan Keily – have withdrawn their names from the tour, BCB's cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim confirmed during a press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

Asked whether they would pick someone as Nahid's replacement, Fahim informed that the management does not see it as a necessity, as there are four more pacers in the 15-member squad, including left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman. Mustafizur will join the team in Pakistan soon after completing his Indian Premier League (IPL) stint with Delhi Capitals.

BCB had granted Mustafizur a NOC (no objection certificate) to play for Delhi Capitals in the ongoing Indian Premier

SCHEDULE	
First T20I	Wednesday, May 28 - Gaddafi Stadium
Second T20I	Friday, May 30 - Gaddafi Stadium
Third T20I	Sunday, June 1 - Gaddafi Stadium
Pakistan Squad	Salman Ali Agha (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Hassan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub

League for the period of May 18-24.

"Mustafizur will join the team. The squad was initially made up of 16 members in anticipation of a longer series, with additional pacers included. But now the management doesn't feel that many are necessary," said Fahim, adding that they have no issues with Nahid's withdrawal, as it's his personal choice.

Nahid recently travelled to Pakistan to

feature for Peshawar Zalmi in the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL), but after the tournament saw an abrupt postponement due to the conflicts between Pakistan and India, he returned home with another Bangladeshi cricketer, Rishad Hossain.

However, Rishad has agreed to tour Pakistan for the T20I series, which has been reduced by two games from its original schedule of a five-match series.

"In the cases of Nahid Rana or Rishad Hossain, it's understandable that such incidents can leave someone traumatised. There's nothing to blame...perhaps that's why Nahid has chosen to withdraw," said Fahim.

"Rishad also considered opting out, but after discussions, and with the head coach deciding to travel, it helped change his perspective. That might have influenced others as well," he concluded.

The PCB announced a revised itinerary of the three-match series yesterday, after having named a 16-member squad for the series earlier on the same day.

The series will begin with the first T20I on May 28, followed by the second fixture on May 30. The third and final T20I is set to take place on June 1.

All three matches of the series, all of which will be day-night affairs, will take place at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium. Bangladesh are scheduled to reach Lahore on May 25.

Questions linger as Sabina and four rebels stay sidelined

KHALID HOSSAIN

Bangladesh squad announcement is imminent ahead of their fast-approaching tri-nation series in Jordan, where two formidable oppositions beyond the South Asian region await.

However, it is apparent that the women's team would be missing their talisman Sabina Khatun and four other SAFF winners: Sanjida Akhter, Masura Parvin, Krishna Rani Sarkar, and Matsushima Sumaya.

Sabina is among the 10 Bangladesh players who have been taking part in the Bhutan Women's League, which began recently. This bunch also happens to be of the 18 seniors who had refused to play under head coach Peter Butler earlier in January this year.

Ahead of Jordan tour, calling up five of 10 rebels – Rituporna Chakma, Shamsunnahar, Rupna Chakma, Maria Manda, and Monika Chakma – playing in Bhutan to the national training camp may seem, on the surface, a step towards reintegration, but it also leaves more questions than answers.

In particular, Sabina's omission stands out like a sore thumb. She is Bangladesh's all-time leading goal-scorer, the captain who lifted two SAFF trophies on the trot. At 31, the right-footed forward is far from

having left her prime.

For Sabina, however, this experience is neither new nor a distant memory, as she, alongside 18 rebels, did not make the cut in last February-March's fixtures in the UAE.

Last year, around midway between Butler's appointment as permanent head coach and the 2024 SAFF Championship, she was benched in the second friendly against Chinese Taipei, and the decision was attributed to fitness by the English coach.

Interestingly, when interviewed a few months into Butler's tenure, she offered a measured assessment to The Daily Star:

"Every coach has a different philosophy, which we all accept and respect. Every player also wants to present themselves the way the coach desires. I think the coach should talk to the girls to discuss which system they prefer and how they can do better."

This is hardly the rhetoric of a disruptive presence.

Tactically, Butler has brought a different blueprint – high-line defence, quick offensive

transitions, more width. But such shifts shouldn't necessarily mean total abandonment of what had worked – as demonstrated in the 2022 SAFF Championship under Golam Rabbani Choton, where team chemistry and the ability to dictate game's tempo had caught attention.

The 2024 SAFF opener against Pakistan showed the cost of transition without planning. Bangladesh looked out of sorts.

A 1-1 draw raised early questions. Soon after, the rumours of the rift surfaced. However, the indomitable group recalibrated to stay on course, nevertheless, bringing home the silverware again.

Following the rebellion, coach Butler had labelled the protestors a toxic influence, even referring to some as "ringleaders".

So why are only some back now? Is Butler slowly separating the so-called "ringleaders" from those he can comfortably work with? Or is he adamant on giving more exposure to the stars in the making?

At the heart of the current issue lies a broader question: What kind

of culture does BFF want to foster?

Ignoring indiscipline or keeping veterans based on sentiment alone is short-sighted, but so is excluding them without a path to redemption or reconciliation.

Besides, young players need role models, but more than that, they need a healthy and competitive environment to flourish. Replacing senior players abruptly is certainly counterproductive in this regard.

What is also evident is that the reaction to this saga has been muted. One wonders whether the public and media response would have been different had it involved the men's team or a male captain with an enviable track record like Sabina's.

The women's football team, with two major trophies, stands apart as Bangladesh's most successful sporting outfit – given the only SAFF title for Bangladesh men's team coming over two decades ago and, and the 2018 Asia Cup triumph being the one major trophy in the country's most popular sport, cricket; and that too, was brought by the women.

There is still time. There is still opportunity. If Bangladesh football wants to build on what has been achieved, it must prioritise unity over divisions – reach an "amicable" solution as the board president Tabitha Awal had hoped.

Tickets for Hamza's home debut available from May 24

International football is set to return to the National Stadium in Dhaka after nearly four years, with Bangladesh hosting Singapore in an AFC Asian Cup qualifier on June 10. Tickets for the fixture will be available online from May 24, starting at 12:00pm, and fans can purchase tickets through the website tickify.live using their national ID cards. The return of international matches to the capital marks a significant moment for local football fans, who are expected to fill the stands for a game that is supposed to see Hamza Choudhury make his home debut and Shamit Shome play his first game for Bangladesh.

TICKET PRICES

Hospitality & Corporate Box: Tk. 5,000
VIP-1: Tk. 4,000
Sky View: Tk. 3,000
VIP-2 & VIP-3: Tk. 2,500
Club House-1: Tk. 2,500
Club House-2: Tk. 2,000
General Gallery: Tk. 400

SHORT CORNER

Djokovic to carry on without a coach

Novak Djokovic said he would carry on without a coach for now after parting ways with Andy Murray last week, as the Serbian prepares for his latest bid to win a record-extending 25th Grand Slam title at the French Open. The high-profile partnership with three-time Grand Slam champion Murray lasted only six months but Djokovic said his respect for the Scot had only grown in that time.

Bangladesh 'A' top-order puts on a better show

Bangladesh 'A' put on a far more composed batting display against New Zealand 'A' on the opening day of the second four-day match in Mirpur with openers Mohammad Naim and Anamul Haque Bijoy leading the charge with a 130-run stand. Rain brought an early end to the day's play with Bangladesh 'A' well-placed at 225 for 4, with Amite Hasan and Mahidul Islam unbeaten at the crease.

U-19s set to begin training in Sylhet

The Bangladesh U-19 men's cricket team will kick off a training camp in Sylhet on Thursday as part of their preparations for the upcoming tours of South Africa and Zimbabwe. A 25-member squad departed Dhaka for the first phase of the camp, which will focus on fitness and skill development and continue until June 3.

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CITY'S TRIBUTE TO KDB

Manchester City ensured Kevin De Bruyne left with a victory in his final appearance at the Etihad Stadium, as Omar Marmoush scored a stunner in a 3-1 Premier League win over Bournemouth on Tuesday. The result saw the club climb to third in the table and stay in pole position for a Champions League spot. Even after a dominating win, the night was all about De Bruyne, who will be leaving the club at the end of the season after an illustrious 10-year stay. "It's a sad day. He will be missed," City coach Pep Guardiola said. "On the other side, I think it was a lovely day for him to make again a contribution to achieve that victory that is of massive importance."

PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY