

# Half the venue, athletes too many

RAMIN TALUKDER

Outside the Mirpur Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium, an unusual sight unfolded. Wrestlers were training under the open sky – sometimes on bare soil, sometimes on paved concrete – sweating it out while puzzled passersby watched as if the arena itself had spilled onto the streets.

But why are national athletes forced into such hardship? The answer is simple: there is no space inside.

The stadium has only 1800 square feet of floor area, a third of which is being used as a temporary camp by the Bangladesh Army. The rest is shared by four federations – fencing, wushu, wrestling, and judo. With the South Asian (SA) Games scheduled for early 2026, each discipline has a number of athletes in camp. The numbers tell the story: fencing has 45, wushu 46, wrestling 52, and judo more than 50. Over 190 athletes are crammed into just a few hundred usable square feet. The question now looms: How can international-level preparation be possible in such conditions?

This is not the crisis of a single sport. Bangladesh has over 50 sporting disciplines, but most lack their own venues. Athletes are constantly on the move – here today, somewhere else tomorrow. While local competitions are somehow managed, arranging long-term training camps before international events often turns into a logistical



nightmare.

Inside the Mirpur indoor, four mats are laid side by side, accommodating the four federations' joint camp. Each day, over a hundred athletes train together. But the lack of space makes it nearly impossible for anyone to prepare properly, creating a chaotic and unsafe environment.

When all four federations practice at once, clashes are inevitable. Arguments break out, forcing training sessions to stop midway.

Wushu player Biplob Rudra echoed this sentiment, saying, "When we train with weapons, there's always a fear that we might accidentally hit others practicing nearby. That creates mental pressure. We can't give our hundred percent. If the space was larger, we would feel less stressed and perform better."

To avoid this, athletes try to manage by coming in at different times. But with everyone needing the same, many federations are still forced to train in overcrowded conditions.

That is why the scene outside is often so different. Wrestlers, unable to find room inside, practice on hard concrete or bare ground. Wushu players jump and spin in open spaces. Even fencing and judo athletes are forced to "borrow" space from others. Such interruptions break training rhythm and frustrate athletes.

Pointing at the ropes marking the practice area, fencer Hasan Ali explained: "When an opponent attacks, I try to block with my sword, but the rope gets in the way. It stops us from doing it properly."

Only a sigh could be heard in the voice of wushu federation coach Mejbah Uddin. "Everything else is fine, but the space is the problem. It's too small. Yes, we

trained here and won gold in 2010, but now with four federations together, the trouble has multiplied. If we had our own stadium, the results would be even better. At the very least, we need more space," Mejbah said.

A sports village could be the answer to all the problems, according to fencing coach Abu Zahid Chowdhury.

"What we need is a proper sports village. How can you expect serious preparation in this environment? Training shoulder-to-shoulder, there's no continuity. And before such a big tournament, you can't expect good results from this."

However, wrestling federation's general secretary, Mejbah Uddin Azad, was more pragmatic.

"We have to work with what we get. There's no separate venue, though it would surely help. We always share venues with other federations. Here too, many athletes just sit on the side because of the space crunch. Some are forced to train outside. We have to split into two or three groups."

While scarcity of space is a global issue, what makes the situation here more disheartening is that Bangladesh does have a number of stadiums – though most remain unusable due to lack of proper maintenance.

With this being the reality – spaces available, but not functional – athletes who should be focused on their training, remain occupied with something that is out of their hands.

Such compromised training is not just limiting athletes physically but also weighing on them mentally. Their daily struggles are slowly dimming the fire within – yet these very athletes carry the dream of raising the national flag on the international stage.



Lionel Messi trains on Tuesday ahead of his final World Cup qualifier on home soil, with world champions Argentina set to face Venezuela at the Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires on Friday morning (5:30am, Bangladesh time). Coach Lionel Scaloni recently urged fans to "enjoy him now, as much as possible," admitting that Messi's legacy is "unrepeatable." While Argentina are already through, Brazil have also sealed their ticket for next year's mega event and meet Chile under Carlo Ancelotti at Maracana on the same day (6:30am, Bangladesh time).

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

# Litton's Sylhet run SPARKS HOPE

ASHEFAQ UL ALAM

For the record book, Bangladesh captain Litton Das' fifty against the Netherlands in the dead-rubber third T20I in Sylhet yesterday holds some significance. With it, the wicketkeeper-batter overtook Shakib Al Hasan for the most fifties, 14, in the format for the Tigers.

However, that's not the only record Litton made with his blazing 73-run knock off 46 deliveries at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. In the same innings, he repeated a small personal milestone, something that would hardly be a footnote in his career but for Bangladesh and the batter could hold greater significance soon.

As a batter, Litton had a dream run in the just-

50 balls against Sri Lanka, but in the following series against Pakistan in the same month he could not get into double figures in three consecutive innings.

His latest innings was far from spotless. He was dropped twice: first in the fourth over by Shariz Ahmad at the deep mid-wicket boundary when he was on 37, and then by Tim Pringle in the 13th over when he was on 68.

Moreover, he missed a chance to reach the triple-figure mark, as when he got out there were still 35 balls left



## SCORES IN BRIEF

**Bangladesh:**

164/4 in 18.2 overs (Litton 73, Jaker 20\*, Sohan 22\*; Kyle Klein 3-53)

**Result:**

Match called off due to rain

**Player of the series:**

Litton Das

**Bangladesh take series 2-0**

➤ **Litton Das hit his 14th half-century in T20Is, overtaking Shakib Al Hasan as the holder of the most number of fifties in the format for Bangladesh.**

➤ **Litton hit four sixes in his 73-run knock against the Dutch, and is now the joint-highest six-hitter for Bangladesh in T20Is alongside Mahmudullah Riyad with 77 maximums.**

concluded series. The 30-year-old hit a couple of half-centuries, scored his runs at a rate exceeding 155, and made 145 runs in total, his best ever tally in a bilateral series. Moreover, as he only got out once in the series in the final game, his series average stands at a staggering 145.

But the stat arguably the most important for Bangladesh is that this is the first time in over five years that the right-hander has managed to put together two 50-plus scores in one bilateral T20I series. He has done it only once before in his career, against Zimbabwe at home back in March 2020, when he made 59 and 60 not out in back-to-back games in Mirpur.

Litton's entire career is full of incredible highs followed by a series of duds – a pattern he has seemingly inherited from other supremely talented cricketers from Bangladesh's previous generation.

In July, for instance, the 30-year-old had hit 76 off

in the innings. However, considering how the pitch had seemingly slowed down following a rain interruption, and Litton kept on trying to up the ante in spite of it, this missed opportunity can be forgiven.

Even though the opponents were far from equal to Bangladesh in terms of strength, Litton consistently scoring runs for Bangladesh, and that too with an attacking approach, should be considered a net positive for the Tigers heading into the Asia Cup, which begins on September 9 in the UAE.

Although the innings had little impact on the game, which got called off following a second rain interruption with the hosts on 164-4 in 18.2 overs, if this series could spark a consistent scoring streak for Litton heading into the Asia Cup, something special could be in the offing for the Tigers in the event.



Novak Djokovic celebrates after a hard-fought four-set win over Taylor Fritz in the US Open quarterfinals yesterday, marking the victory with a dance for his daughter's birthday. "I know my best tennis will be required, but I'll rise to the occasion," said the 38-year-old, who now faces hot-favourite Carlos Alcaraz, fresh from a commanding straight-sets victory over Jiri Lehecka, in Friday night's much-anticipated last-four affair.

PHOTO: AFP

## SHORT CORNER

### Under-23s begin Asian Cup Qualifiers with a defeat

Bangladesh's bid to qualify for the final round of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup got off to a disappointing start, as the men in red and green suffered a 2-0 defeat to hosts Vietnam in their Group C qualifier at the Viet Tri Stadium on Wednesday. A 15th-minute strike from Nguyen Ngoc My and an 83rd-minute header from substitute Le Viktor were enough to dash Bangladesh's hopes of securing a positive result against the 2018 runners-up.

### No Hamza, Shamit as booters reach Nepal after seven-hour flight delay

Bangladesh team reached Kathmandu on Wednesday night for two FIFA friendly matches against the hosts on September 6 and 9, without Hamza Choudhury and Shamit Shome as well as Fahamedul Islam and Cuba Mitchell. The flight was delayed by seven hours due to a technical failure and the team spent the whole day at a lounge inside the airport.

### There is a new No.1 ODI all-rounder

Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza has taken the top spot in the ICC Men's ODI all-rounder rankings, moving to the summit thanks to back-to-back strong performances against Sri Lanka in Harare. The effort helped Raza move past Afghan pair Mohammad Nabi (292 points) and Azmatullah Omarzai (296) to a rating of 302, with his batting performance also moving him up nine spots to 22nd in the ODI Batting Rankings.

*\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website*