



Truce ends, RIVALRY RESUMES

EKUSH TAPADER *from Dubai*

From the edge of elimination, Bangladesh are set to begin their campaign in the Super Four phase of the Asia Cup today in Dubai against Sri Lanka – the very team that ensured their survival by defeating and knocking out Afghanistan.

The Sri Lanka-Afghanistan contest in Abu Dhabi on Thursday felt as much about the Tigers as it was about the two sides involved, with fans across Bangladesh eagerly following the match which did not even feature their own team.

“We were watching the game. I personally saw the last part of it, checking the score before dinner,” Bangladesh pace bowling coach Shaun Tait said, admitting the squad was just as engrossed.

Sri Lanka successfully chasing down 170 runs with six wickets in hand gave Bangladesh the joy of qualification, but also left a lingering concern – Kusal Mendis and his teammates looked in sublime form.

Back in July, Bangladesh had beaten Sri Lanka in their own backyard for the first time in a bilateral T20I series, but in their

Bangladesh only have three wins against 14 defeats to Sri Lanka in Asia Cup, across ODI and T20I iterations. Their wins came in the 2012, 2016 and 2018 editions respectively and in all three editions, the Tigers made it to the final.

group stage meeting here, the Lankans brushed them aside.

Still, for Bangladesh, escaping from the brink of elimination could act as motivation.

“The beauty of these tournaments is that the games come quickly,” Tait reflected. “It gives you a chance to forget the past and move straight on to the next one. Making the final four is a big effort, but now it’s about training tonight and the big clash tomorrow [Saturday].”

Sri Lanka’s win, however, came in the shadow of tragedy. Left-arm spin allrounder Dunith Wellalage lost his father during the game in Colombo.

Wellalage left for home after the game and it remains unclear if he will be available for the next fixture.

The combination of Bangladesh’s survival thanks to Sri Lanka and Wellalage’s loss has somewhat mellowed the usually intense rivalry. This time the contest could carry more of a sporting, even friendly, atmosphere, and not a hostile one, which often is the case in encounters between the two nations.

For Bangladesh, the fifth bowling option remains the big question. Against Afghanistan, two part-time spinners conceded more than 50 runs in just four overs, a weakness that nearly cost them.

While Tait avoided commenting on selection, signs point to an extra specialist bowler being drafted in, especially given Dubai’s spin-friendly conditions. As the Super Four begins with a clean slate, a single win could be enough to bury all the bitter memories of the group stage. For Bangladesh, surviving the brink may yet serve as the perfect spark to ignite their campaign.



Season opener highlights football’s ground realities

ATIQUE ANAM

In a repeat encounter of last season’s Challenge Cup fixture, Federation Cup winners Bashundhara Kings thrashed Bangladesh Premier League champions Mohammedan by 4-1 in the curtain-raiser of the new football season at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

However, it was not the on-field action but the appalling condition of the pitch and the substandard broadcast quality that captured most of the attention.

The match kicked off 10 minutes later than scheduled due to last-minute efforts to make the ground playable. Journalists at the venue reported that nets were still being installed on the goals when the game was supposed to begin. Despite these efforts, the pitch resembled a long-neglected neighbourhood playground at best, showing no signs of curation.

Even more astonishingly, labourers were seen cutting grass beside the pitch after the match had already begun. Rifat Masud, one of the commentators for official broadcaster T Sports, could not hide his disappointment, gushing “jaccetai” (shambolic) live on air.

As the defending league champions, Mohammedan held the responsibility to prepare the pitch for this fixture. They also share ongoing maintenance duties for the ground with Abahani, as the venue will be used by both clubs throughout the season. Although Mohammedan secured



the rights to use the ground from local administration on September 14, they reportedly made no effort to prepare it for play, leaving the local football’s governing body scrambling at the last moment.

Sudipta Ahmed Ananda, a senior journalist from Desh Rupantor, expressed his frustration while speaking to The Daily Star from the venue. “This is unacceptable for a season-opening match but this is also the sad reality of our football. A match like this demands attention from all involved. Playing on such pitches can be extremely risky for the footballers.”

Arafat Jubair, a senior journalist at Dhaka Post, added: “I would say Mohammedan should take the lion’s share of the blame for this but the federation, as the organiser of the event and guardian of football, cannot escape its responsibility.”

Notably, the Bangladesh Football Federation’s (BFF) governing body has yet to form a grounds committee – nearly a year after assuming office.

The Cumilla venue is one of five designated for the upcoming season, each to be shared by two clubs. Only the Bashundhara Kings Arena – shared by Bashundhara Kings and Fortis FC – is in proper condition. The other four venues in Gazipur, Manikganj, Munshiganj, and Cumilla remain in poor shape, with clubs and the federation now in a race against time to prepare them ahead of the Federation Cup, which begins next Tuesday, and the league, set to kick off next Friday.

The quality of the pitch was not the only issue to spark discontent. The broadcast production also left much to be desired.



Sources confirmed that T Sports, the official broadcaster, was only confirmed of their rights by the BFF a day before the match. Consequently, they were only able to deploy five cameras for the telecast, and did so without a riser (a platform used to improve camera angles) at the venue. In stark contrast, recent international matches involving Bangladesh at the Kings Arena featured as many as 21 cameras.

Several senior BFF officials have recently made bold claims in the media about making this football season a “complete package” with improved pitches and enhanced broadcast quality.

If yesterday’s match was any indication of what lies ahead, football fans across the country should brace themselves for more frustration and disappointment in weeks to come.

SHORT CORNER

Bangladesh make futsal debut today

Bangladesh are set to play their first official futsal match when they square off against 13-time champions Iran in a Group G encounter of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup Qualifiers in Kuantan, Malaysia, today. The match will kick off at 2:00 pm [Bangladesh Time] at Stadium Tertutup Sukpa.

Bulbul admits World Cup prep ‘not ideal’ for Tigresses

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Friday conceded that the women’s team’s preparations for the upcoming ICC Women’s ODI World Cup have been far from ideal. The tournament begins on September 30 in India and Sri Lanka. The Nigar Sultana Joty-led team will leave for Colombo on September 23.

Bangladesh beat India in C’wealth Beach Handball

Bangladesh came from behind to defeat India 2-1 in the sixth fixture of the ongoing Commonwealth Beach Handball Championship in Kulhudhuffushi, Maldives on Friday. After conceding the first set 28-16, the men in red and green claimed the next sets in style: 19-3 and 7-3.

Nasrin SA to play in maiden SAFF Women’s Club C’ship

Bangladesh women’s football received a significant boost as the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) confirmed it will stage the maiden Club Women’s Championship later this year, with the participation of five clubs, including defending Bangladesh Women’s Football League champions Nasrin Sports Academy. The tournament is scheduled to be held in Nepal from December 5 to 20.

Read full stories on The Daily Star’s website.



LYLES MATCHES BOLT; MELISSA CLINCHES DOUBLE

Noah Lyles matched Usain Bolt’s record of four consecutive world 200 metres titles as he scorched to victory at the world championships in Tokyo on Friday. Lyles, who won bronze in the 100m here, clocked 19.52sec for victory in what the American calls his “bread and butter” event. Bolt won his four titles from 2009 to 2015, going on to collect 11 world golds and eight Olympic titles. Meanwhile, in the women’s division, American Melissa Jefferson-Wooden became the fourth woman to complete the sprint double at the world championships with victory in the 200 metres in 21.68 seconds. The 24-year-old ran the fastest time of the year to cap a dominant season with another gold medal to add to the one she won in the 100m on Sunday.

PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS



‘NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES’

Manchester City’s prolific striker Erling Haaland bagged a record-breaking goal as Pep Guardiola’s side kicked off their Champions League campaign with a dominant 2-0 victory over 10-man Napoli on Thursday.

⚽ The 25-year-old’s second-half strike took him to a half-century of goals in the Champions League, needing just 49 games to do so -- the fastest in the competition.

⚽ Haaland surpassed Ruud van Nistelrooy, who reached the landmark in 62 matches.

⚽ The goal also moves him into the top 10 leading scorers in the history of the European Cup or Champions League, surpassing Alfredo Di Stefano on 49.

⚽ Out of the 50, Haaland scored 27 for Manchester City. He netted 15 times for Borussia Dortmund and on eight occasions for Red Bull Salzburg before moving to the Etihad.

“The numbers speak for themselves. If he can play 10 to 12 more years and maintain this progression, absolutely [he can break Cristiano Ronaldo’s all-time Champions League goals record of 140].”

Manchester City coach **Pep Guardiola**



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY