



U-17S EYE RARE FEAT

PHOTO: BFF

Bangladesh U-17 women's football team will begin their AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign against hosts Jordan tonight, eyeing a rare feat. After the senior and U-20 teams booked their maiden berths in Asian Cup finals, the juniors now aim to complete the historic cycle by topping Group H, which also features Chinese Taipei.



WHAT AILS THE TIGERS?

ASHEAQ-UL-ALAM

It could be down to a lack of confidence, or perhaps too much of it. Maybe they are showing excess respect, or not enough of it. Perhaps the desire to show him up is clouding their judgement, or maybe, in their heart of hearts, they know they are just not good enough to survive him for long enough.

It's tough to pin down exactly what goes through the minds of Bangladesh batters when they see Rashid Khan hurrying into his delivery stride to let rip a ball that, odds are, is heading straight for their stumps.

Rashid, by his standards, bowled poorly in his first two overs of the second ODI against Bangladesh on Saturday.

The wrist spinner was too full on a few occasions, bowled a couple of full tosses and, overall, looked off colour in his first 12 servings to Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy and Jaker Ali.

Rashid finding his rhythm quickly was crucial for Afghanistan, as even though pacer Azmatullah Omarzai's triple strike had reduced the Tigers to 55-4, chasing an under-par target of 191, Bangladesh were still in the game.

But thanks to Hridoy, Rashid claimed his first wicket of the match before finding his length.

The ball landed in line with the stumps but was overpitched, and could've easily been worked around the leg side for a single or two.

But Hridoy, Bangladesh's in-form batter coming into the match with three half-centuries in his last three ODI outings, tried to hoick the ball with a slog, made zero connection, and lost his stumps.

Bangladesh were then down to their last recognised pair: Jaker and Nurul Hasan.

Although half the side was gone, the required rate was well below four runs per over, the fielders were all vigorously wiping the ball at every turn, a clear sign the dew was setting in, meaning batting would be getting easier as time progressed.

Hridoy's moment of madness was a lesson of what not to do for the rest of the match, especially against Rashid. Surely, no one else would do anything as foolish, right?

Alas, just a few overs later, Nurul attempted to sweep a ball across the line against Rashid, only to get beaten all ends up.

The fate of the match was just a formality from there on, as Rashid claimed three more scalps to complete a match- and series-winning five-wicket haul.

Not just against Rashid, the Bangladesh batters had a confused approach throughout the chase, starting from the top order, who were in a hurry even though there was no scoreboard pressure.

Tanzid Hasan Tamim pulled a wide ball in the first over, only to get caught for a duck. Najmul Hossain Shanto attempted a second run, which ended up being suicidal. Even the in-form Saif Hassan got out trying to hit his third successive boundary in one over.

Less than a week ago, Saif had displayed tremendous game awareness when he played out a maiden against Rashid in the third T20I to see out his quota, and then guided the team home comfortably.

But after spending some time in the Tigers' setup, his rational cricketing mind has seemingly escaped him – a trend Bangladesh fans have grown tired of seeing again and again.

The series is already gone, but Tuesday's third match will be important for Bangladesh, who are languishing at 10th in the ICC ODI rankings and have only one ODI series left to get into the top nine to secure direct entry for the next ODI World Cup. The way the Tigers are batting in ODIs at the moment, it's unclear whether they can survive the pressure of a qualifying tournament.

Cabrera praises squad's leadership depth

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera has praised the leadership depth within his squad, highlighting the presence of multiple players capable of guiding the team both on and off the pitch.

The Spaniard has rotated the captain's armband in recent matches, with veteran centre-back Topu Barman and midfielder Sohel Rana among those given the responsibility. With long-time skipper Jamal Bhuyan playing a reduced role this year and Topu not fully fit, Cabrera handed the armband to Sohel in Thursday's Asian Cup Qualifier against Hong Kong in Dhaka.

However, Sohel was substituted early in the second half after Bangladesh surrendered a 1-0 lead and fell behind 2-1. The armband then passed to Jamal, who came off the bench.

Speaking during a training session in Hong Kong on Sunday, ahead of Tuesday's return leg, Cabrera addressed the rotating captaincy and the leadership within the squad.

"We are very lucky to have captains like Jamal, Topu, Sohel. All of them are captains, and we are lucky to have Hamza (Choudhury) as one of the leaders," said the 41-year-old.

Since making his debut for Bangladesh against India in March, Leicester City midfielder Hamza has played the full 90 minutes in all four matches – three competitive and one friendly. He has already made a significant impact, scoring two goals while contributing heavily in both attack and defence.

Former national team captain Aminul Haque recently suggested that Hamza should be named captain, citing his influence on the field. The same sentiment has gained traction among fans on social media.

When asked about the possibility of Hamza taking on the captaincy, Cabrera responded diplomatically.

"As I always said, Hamza, for us, is one of the captains," he said. "He is a leader on the pitch and off the pitch – a player that is guiding his teammates from the beginning."



Vacherot makes ATP history

AFP, Shanghai

World number 204 Valentin Vacherot on Sunday beat his cousin Arthur Rinderknech to win the Shanghai Masters 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 and become the lowest-ranked champion in the history of ATP 1000 events.

The all-family final between the 54th-ranked Frenchman Rinderknech and 204th-ranked Vacherot, from Monaco, is one of the tournament's unlikeliest endings to date – the latter's coach and half-brother, Benjamin Balleret, described it as a "fairytale".

It was just the third ATP Masters 1000 final in history to feature two unseeded players.

"I want to thank someone without whom I wouldn't be here – that person is obviously Arthur," said Vacherot as he

accepted his trophy.

"It's completely mad, I can't believe it," he added in French.

"It would have been better to have two winners, but a whole family won today.

"What we did this week, it's completely crazy, no one can take it from us."

The two sat side-by-side, Rinderknech putting his arm around Vacherot's shoulder at one point, as they waited for the prize ceremony to begin.

Both claimed some impressive wins on their path to the final.

Rinderknech took out world number three

Alexander Zverev and Daniil Medvedev, while Vacherot ended Novak Djokovic's chance at a fifth title.

According to the ATP website, the Monegasque should rocket from 204 to 40 in the rankings.



Tigresses aim for turnaround against Proteas

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batting display against New Zealand in their latest ICC Women's World Cup fixture may have dented confidence after the positives shown against Pakistan and England. The Tigresses now face a tough challenge against high-flying South Africa in Vizag today, aware that their opponents have already beaten both New Zealand and India.

"No team come here to lose and in the next game we have to improve," left-arm spinner Nahida Akter said during yesterday's press conference.

The team management understands the quality that New Zealand bowlers possessed but are taking heart from recent batting performances against Sri Lanka – which took place during the warm-up fixture – and Pakistan in their tournament opener. The idea would be to survive with wickets in hand to capitalise in the latter part of the innings.

Asked about what steps were taken to solve the batting crisis, Nahida replied, "Yes, we collapsed with the bat, and the batting coach and the players have talked about it. We have worked on areas where we are deficient.

"We are going for the same approach. Just if we bat long, I think it's going to be a good match."

Bangladesh will be hoping skipper Nigar Sultana Joty finds runs in the crucial fixture. With one win in three games so far, the Tigresses are sitting sixth on the table, and beating South Africa will keep them in the hunt to advance in the eight-team tournament before facing Australia, Sri Lanka and India in the remaining group matches.

Meanwhile, South Africa medium-pacer Tumi Sekhukhune said her side are wary of Bangladesh's spin-heavy attack.

"We are excited. It's going to be a very tough game for us with Bangladesh. We know that they're going to come with much more slow bowlers, typically the spinners," she said.



PHOTO: BCB

RANGPUR RETAIN NCL T20 TITLE

Rangpur Division successfully defended their NCL T20 title with a commanding eight-wicket win over Khulna in the final at Sylhet International Stadium yesterday. Sent in to bat, Khulna could only manage 136 for 8, despite skipper Mohammad Mithun's 44, as Rangpur's bowlers maintained a tight grip throughout. Experienced campaigner Nasir Hossain continued his fine form, striking 46 off 31 balls to set up the chase. Naeem Islam (40*) and captain Akbar Ali (19*) completed the job comfortably with three overs to spare. The tournament, however, failed to generate the spark of its inaugural edition, with several players missing due to national duties and high-scoring thrillers proving rare.

It was an emotional night for Portugal midfielder Ruben Neves, whose 91st-minute header sealed a 1-0 win over Ireland in a World Cup Qualifier at home on Saturday. Neves's goal -- his first in 60 appearances for Portugal -- carried deep emotion as he dedicated the strike to close friend Diogo Jota, who died in a car crash in July. Wearing Jota's No. 21 jersey in Portugal's first home game since the striker's passing, Neves kissed the shirt and rolled down his socks to reveal a tattoo of the two.

PHOTOS: FACEBOOK

