

'Heartbreak no more'

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh women's team appear trapped in a familiar cycle: showing promise only to unravel at the finish, their struggles with composure and match awareness mirroring those of their male counterparts.

After letting it slip while defending against England and South Africa earlier in the ICC Women's World Cup, Nigar Sultana Joty & Co once again found themselves on the brink of victory in Navi Mumbai on Monday, only to lose by seven runs to Sri Lanka and, with it, go out of the semis race.

Having restricted Sri Lanka to 202, Bangladesh appeared to have cracked the code in their chase. Yet, despite 12 runs needed off 12 balls and six wickets in hand, with Joty still set in the middle, the scoreboard froze; the dugout sank.

Bangladesh's game plan has traditionally centred on putting runs on the board and defending with spin. When forced to chase, they tend to take matches deep; often to their detriment.

"It's not heartbreak anymore; it's a complete failure," a team official told The Daily Star, lamenting how the batters "dragged the game till the 50th over".

The pattern has become an all-too-familiar one. In the 2022 World Cup in Dunedin, Bangladesh needed 43 off 30 balls against South Africa, but still lost four wickets for 10 runs to fall



“It was a new experience for us, the first-ever Super Over. I think it was not an easy surface to bat on. Rishad [Hossain] is doing very good at this moment. All batsmen were struggling but he was confident and batted really well. In the Super Over, we needed 10 [11] and one boundary could have changed things.”

Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz

Rishad Hossain (C) thought he had done enough to win the game for Bangladesh with an all-round display, scoring an unbeaten 14-ball 39 before taking three wickets with the ball in hand in the second ODI in Mirpur on Tuesday. However, the West Indies showed fight, taking the game deep. Yet, Bangladesh had chances to close the game out but Nurul Hasan Sohan's (Inset) drop cost them big as the visitors won the game by a single run in Super Over.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



short by 32. Later that year in the Asia Cup, they failed to chase 41 in seven overs against Sri Lanka, ending with 37 for seven.

Former women's wing chief Habibul Bashar believes the roots of the problem lie in inadequate preparation. Before the World Cup, the team played only a handful of practice games against under-15 men's sides and intra-squad matches, with no international series after April.

"Other teams had already planned ahead," Bashar reflected. "If we'd played smaller teams like Thailand, built a winning habit, it would have helped."

Even so, he credited the side's effort. "They've played their best cricket in this World Cup, even if the results [one win in six matches] don't show it. The belief is missing as they create chances but can't cash in."

Joty's 77 -- Bangladesh's highest-ever innings in a Women's ODI World Cup -- deserved a happy ending. She admitted as much after the defeat, acknowledging the team's struggle to "calm our nerves and find ways to get runs in those moments".

As Bangladesh prepare to sign off on October 26 against India, their campaign has underlined that their biggest battle remains psychological.

Windies outspin Tigers as Mirpur witnesses history

SPORTS REPORTER

Three hours and 18 minutes of uninterrupted spin were on offer from the West Indies yesterday. If that sounds dull, it probably was for most viewers. Neither in the stands at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium nor in the press box was there much focus on cricket during Bangladesh's innings. Yet, by the end, the second ODI shattered all expectations -- even the stoic press box turned raucous after a tense Super Over saw the Windies level the series, their adaptability dismantling Bangladesh's plans.

West Indies scored 10 in the Super Over, and batting second, Bangladesh fell one run short as Saif Hassan failed to find the ropes off the final delivery. Still, Bangladesh's innings had given the match its own peculiar flavour.

When a cat wandered onto the field, it drew the loudest cheer of the innings, the crowd finding amusement amid Bangladesh's struggles against spin. Having learned from the



first ODI, West Indies quickly adapted, and though their spin potency lagged behind Bangladesh's, their batters caught up faster.

At one stage, many wondered if the home side had enough runs, given the slow surface. The only moment of excitement during Bangladesh's innings came from Rishad Hossain's 14 ball 39, which injected life into an otherwise stagnant effort.

A reinforced Windies spin attack set up their comeback, restricting Bangladesh to 213 for seven.

Known for their fearsome fast-bowling quartet in the past, West Indies cricket may have declined in recent years, but pace remains their pride. Even now, the likes of Shamar Joseph, Jayden Seales and Alzarri Joseph form the backbone of their attack. Yet, coming into the second ODI, West Indies had to abandon that identity.

For never before in men's ODI history had a team bowled all 50 overs of spin. That a side once synonymous with express pace would do so says much about the Mirpur surface.

While the visitors fielded three pacers in the first ODI, they learned their lesson and went all-in with spin for the second. Bangladesh, meanwhile, dropped Taskin Ahmed for Nasum Ahmed, with Mustafizur Rahman being the lone quick option.

Bangladesh, well-acquainted with these conditions, stuck to their familiar template despite their batting woes. Nearly half of Bangladesh's runs came in boundaries, underlining their struggle for rotation.

With less sharp turn on offer in the first match, the Windies adapted smartly. Shai Hope's composed 53 under pressure anchored their chase and set up a dramatic finish.

Much has been said about these pitches, reminiscent of those used against Australia and New Zealand in 2021. After that series, Shakib Al Hasan warned that "14-15 games on such surfaces can ruin a batter's career". What this series will do to Bangladesh's batting remains to be seen, regardless of the final result.

The return of the long throw

REUTERS

'Sticking it in the mixer' is a time-honoured tactic in recreational soccer where technically-challenged Sunday morning players punt high passes or hurl long throws into opposition penalty areas.

It used to be a thing even at the top level with Wimbledon's fabled 'Crazy Gang' taking the route one approach to winning the 1988 FA Cup and more recently Stoke City's Rory Delap terrorising defences in the 2000s with his 40-metre throw-ins.

Those days, at least in the Premier League, seemed finished as Pep Guardiola's Manchester City won four successive English titles with an intricate possession-based game and others tried, and failed to, copy the blueprint.

But it appears tactics are coming full circle. On Monday, the sight of Brentford's Michael Kayode or Kevin Schade drying the ball with a towel before winding up a long throw caused palpitations among West Ham United's defenders.

Neither of Brentford's two goals came directly from long throws but the tactic unsettled West Ham's defence to such an extent that panic broke out every time a corner, free kick or long pass went anywhere near them.

When Brentford equalised after a long throw against Chelsea last month it was their seventh goal from that routine since the start of the 2024-25 season. No other team had more than two.

The tactic, still scoffed at by the purists,



is back with a vengeance. On the opening weekend of the Premier League season 11 of the 20 teams used long throws, up from four teams on the opening day of the 2024-25 campaign.

Opta analysis of the opening 50 games of the Premier League suggested route-

one tactics, including long throws, were increasingly part of a coach's armoury.

According to Opta, passing was at a 15-year low in that sample while the likes of Arsenal, Liverpool, Manchester City and Newcastle United are all getting the ball forward faster using fewer passes. Some clubs are even kicking deep into touch straight from kickoff to gain territory.

It is long throws that are the big talking point, though.

Throughout last season there were an average of 1.5 long throws (20 metres or more) per game into the penalty area. This season that has more than doubled to 3.85, according to Opta.

At least six goals have been scored as a direct result of a long throw, compared to

15 in the whole of last season.

Former Wolverhampton Wanderers and Bournemouth manager Gary O'Neil, analysing Brentford's win over West Ham for Sky Sports, said the rise of long throws is data driven.

"I've spoken to a lot of set-piece coaches and the data is so far in favour of throwing it in the opposition box, you are far more likely to score than trying to work something in from the side, because they're so hard to clear and you can get all your big defenders up," he said.

"Managers are not embarrassed now."

The rise of the high-press in recent seasons and subsequent turnovers in possession in dangerous areas may have also prompted goalkeepers and defenders to hit long balls.

From a peak of 16.7 high turnovers per game in 2023-24 that figure has dropped to 11.5 in 2025-26, the lowest in 10 seasons.

Not everyone is a fan of the new trend though, including former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher who believes there has been a reaction against the Guardiola-inspired short game.

"If the data tell you there's more chance to score a goal, you're doing it, I would do it as a manager," he told Sky Sports.

"But it bores me. We've gone back too far. Not just throw-ins, even from kickoffs, it feels like rugby and playing for territory. Graham Taylor got slaughtered 30 years ago for kicking for touch, now PSG are even doing it."

High-flying Mbappe in focus as Real host Juve

REUTERS

Real Madrid manager Xabi Alonso praised Kylian Mbappe for his stellar form this season, as the French forward tops both the LaLiga and Champions League scoring charts ahead of Wednesday's home clash with Juventus.

Mbappe, 26, has scored 10 goals in nine LaLiga matches and five in two Champions League appearances, alongside three goals for the French national team this term. His form has helped Real make a strong start under Alonso, winning 10 of their 11 games across all competitions. The Spanish side lead LaLiga with 24 points, two ahead of Barcelona, and have secured maximum points in the Champions League.

"It's not just the goals," Alonso told reporters on Tuesday. "His influence is almost as important in terms of his teammates following him with and without the ball. He's helping us. He's scored goals everywhere. The influence, as well as the goals, is what the team needs."

Real face a struggling Juve side who have not won in more than a month and sit seventh in the Serie A standings, four points behind leaders AC Milan. However, Alonso warned against taking the Italians lightly.

