



Amirul shines again as Bangladesh pip Korea

SPORTS REPORTER

Penalty corner specialist Amirul Islam scored yet another hatrick as Bangladesh came from 2-0 down to beat South Korea 5-3 in a thrilling classification match of the FIH Men's Junior Hockey World Cup on Saturday.

Amirul, the tournament's leading scorer, extended his tally with his fourth hatrick of the competition, guiding Bangladesh into the final of the Rising Stars Trophy (17th-place playoff) in their penultimate match at the Madurai International Hockey Stadium. The men in red and green will face Austria on Monday for the title.

The prolific drag-flicker has now scored 15 goals in the tournament – 14 from penalty corners – giving him a commanding six goal lead over his nearest challenger. He had also netted a hatrick when Bangladesh fought back from three goals down to draw 3-3 against the same opposition in the group stage.

On Saturday, Korea's Lee Minhyeok, who scored twice in that earlier meeting, put his team 2-0 up by the 20th minute. But Amirul responded in spectacular fashion, scoring in the 21st and 24th minutes from penalty corners, before completing his hatrick from a penalty stroke in the 35th minute to give Bangladesh the lead for the first time.

Obidul Islam Joy extended the advantage with a field goal in the 52nd minute, but Minhyeok completed his own hatrick a minute later to keep Korea in the contest. However, Rakibul Hasan sealed the victory with a field goal in the final minute, ensuring Bangladesh finished with a two-goal cushion.

'Greatest-ever World Cup' promised

AGENCIES

The path to glory at the 2026 World Cup has now been laid out after the contenders discovered their tournament fate at Friday's draw ceremony in Washington.

Hogging the event's spotlight was US president Donald Trump, who received FIFA's new peace prize on stage at the Kennedy Center prior to the draw for the first 48-team World Cup.

"It will be the greatest World Cup ever," FIFA president Gianni Infantino claimed. "This is like 104 Super Bowls in one month -- this is the magnitude of what we are organising."

For the first time, the draw was done in such a way as to ensure the four highest-ranked nations were kept apart -- Spain, Argentina, France and England cannot meet before the semi-finals, if all top their groups.

➡ Megastars Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo could meet as early as the quarterfinals.

➡ Brazil and England could also clash in the last eight, while a Brazil-Argentina blockbuster could unfold in the semifinals.

➡ France vs Germany could be one of the hottest fixtures in the round of 16.

➡ France-Spain or Germany-Spain are also possible matchups in the last four.

GROUPS

Group A: Mexico, South Africa, Korea Republic, Czechia/Denmark/North Macedonia / Ireland

Group B: Canada, Qatar, Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Italy/Northern Ireland /Wales

Group C: Brazil, Morocco, Haiti, Scotland

Group D: USA, Paraguay, Australia, Kosovo/Romania/Slovakia/Turkey

Group E: Germany, Curaçao, Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador

Group F: Netherlands, Japan, Albania/Poland/Sweden/Ukraine, Tunisia

Group G: Belgium, Egypt, Iran, New Zealand

Group H: Spain, Cabo Verde, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay

Group I: France, Senegal, Bolivia/Iraq/Suriname, Norway

Group J: Argentina, Algeria, Austria, Jordan

Group K: Portugal, Congo DR/Jamaica/New Caledonia, Uzbekistan, Colombia

Group L: England, Croatia, Ghana, Panama

*** Multiple teams for one spot mean teams would qualify through playoffs*

"We're going to give it our all and try to do what we did in the last World Cup... not give up on any ball."

Lionel Scaloni, Argentina head coach

"It could have been an easier draw, but we have a clear goal of finishing first in the group."

Carlo Ancelotti, Brazil head coach

"The fact that we are seen as favourites is a recognition of the level of Spanish football... but that praise won't weaken us."

Luis De La Fuente, Spain head coach

"It's a difficult group... Croatia were the top seeds in pot two and Ghana are a regular in the World Cups, and they have some of the best players playing in the Premier League."

Thomas Tuchel, England head coach

"It will be a great duel [between France and Norway]. Both teams have lots of other big names, but of course Kylian [Mbappe] and [Erling] Haaland will be two of the contenders to be the top scorer."

Didier Deschamps, France head coach

"It is a fantastic draw for Curacao. To play the opening match against a major football nation like Germany is of course wonderful."

Dick Advocaat, Curacao head coach



Boateng hatrick lifts Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

Last season's top scorer Samuel Boateng's hatrick helped Mohammedan thrash PWD Sports Club 4-0 to climb to fourth place in the Bangladesh Football League in Cumilla on Friday.

Boateng, who netted 21 goals for Rahmatganj last season, scored all three of his goals in the second half -- between the 67th and 82nd minutes -- after Muzaffarov had given the defending champions a 32nd minute lead through penalty.

The win lifted the Black and Whites to fourth position with seven points, six behind runaway leaders Bashundhara Kings.

Meanwhile, Abahani were held to a frustrating goalless draw by Fortis FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena.

The dull draw left Abahani in seventh place with five points, while Fortis consolidated third position with eight points.

Rahmatganj kept the pressure on Bashundhara Kings with a 3-0 victory over Arambagh in Munshiganj, moving to 10 points, three behind Kings, while Arambagh remained rooted to the bottom with a solitary point.

Elsewhere, Bangladesh Police drew 1-1 with Fakirepool.



Emiliano Buendia shattered Arsenal's 18-match unbeaten run with a last-gasp strike that sealed Aston Villa's dramatic 2-1 win over the Premier League leaders on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Anisur, Marshall shine with tons

SPORTS REPORTER

Runs flowed at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur as Dhaka Division's Anisur Islam Emon and Marshall Ayub struck centuries, helping their side pile up 356-2 against Chattogram Division on the opening day of the final-round match of the National Cricket League (NCL) on Saturday.

Both centuries shared an unbroken 203-run fourth-wicket stand, with Anisur -- who struck his maiden first class ton -- remaining unbeaten on 183 off 227 balls, and Marshall -- who hit his 29th -- not out on 109 off 132.

In Rajshahi, Sylhet Division bowlers staged a late comeback against Barishal Division, reducing them to 269-9 at stumps.

Barishal were well placed at 188-3, courtesy of Ittakhur Hossain Ifiti (63) and Hafizur Rahman (58). But late strikes from Mohiuddin Tarek (3-34) and Abu Jayed (2-46) dented their momentum.

In Bogura, Soumya Sarkar's 56 off 55 balls and some valuable lower-order contributions took Khulna Division to 302-9 at stumps against Rangpur Division.

In Sylhet, Mymensingh Division reached 73-2 at stumps after bowling Rajshahi Division out for 219 in their first innings.

Mymensingh currently trail by 146 runs.



JUSTIN GREAVES

202* off 388
564 minutes
19 fours

A draw that feels 'like a win'

AGENCIES

Justin Greaves carved his name even deeper into West Indies folklore on Saturday, crafting a monumental unbeaten 202 that carried his side to a draw so spirited it felt like a victory.

For a seam bowling allrounder who only debuted a year earlier--one of four new caps on the 2023-24 tour of Australia-- this was another chapter in a compelling Test career.

Back then, in Brisbane's day-night Test, he contributed a vital 33 and removed Marnus Labuschagne as West Indies sealed a famous eight-run win, their first Test triumph in Australia since 1997. But this effort in Christchurch was something else entirely.

Set an impossible 531 to win -- 113 more than the highest successful chase in Test history -- the visitors instead built the second-highest fourth-innings total ever recorded, finishing at 457-6.

Greaves batted for nearly ten hours, faced 388 balls, and refused every invitation to relent. His method was unglamorous but ironclad, the steady heartbeat of a resistance that grew session by session.

Crucially, he found partners when he needed them most. First came a 196-run stand with Shai Hope, whose stylish 140 revived an innings that had slumped to 72-4.

Greaves, already known in the Caribbean for his composure under pressure thanks to that Brisbane performance, once again embraced the long haul. But the defining alliance was the unbroken 180 he forged with Kemar Roach; Roach battling to a career-best 58, surviving five chances, and shutting down New Zealand's wounded attack one dot ball at a time.

"Kemar, the senior pro, guided me all the way," Greaves said. "To be part of history is exciting, but it's one day at a time for me."

Captain Roston Chase called it "a win in every way but name," praising both men for a rearguard that echoed the spirit of their breakthrough victory in Australia.

New Zealand, by contrast, walked off as if defeated. "When you're so close to winning, it does have that feeling," Tom Latham admitted.

In the end, the final hour brought no miracle chase -- only the quiet, defiant triumph of survival.



STARC STEALS THE SHOW

Australia's Mitchell Starc defends with utmost caution during a superb 77 off 141 deliveries -- the highest score ever by a No. 9 at the Gabba -- on a scorching third day of the second Ashes Test in Brisbane yesterday. Starc's resistance, which included a 75-run stand with No. 10 Scott Boland (21) and featured the second-most balls faced in the match after England's Joe Root's 206-ball 136, lifted the series-leaders to 511 in their first innings before the left-arm pacer struck twice under lights to take eight wickets in the contest so far -- 18 for the series -- leaving the visitors on 134-6 at stumps, still needing 43 runs to avoid an innings defeat.

PHOTO: AFP