

SPORT

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
PSL
Islamabad vs
Rawalpindi
Live from 8:00 pm
STAR SPORTS 1, 2
IPLDelhi vs Mumbai
Live from 4:00 pm
Gujarat vs
Rajasthan
Live from 8:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 1
FA CupMan City vs
Liverpool
Live from 5:45 pm
Chelsea vs
Portvale
Live from 10:15
pm

Bangladesh break India jinx to lift SAFF U-20 title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finally broke the jinx against India in finals to clinch the title of the SAFF Under-20 Championship with a 4-3 win in the penalty shootout after the regulation time ended in a goalless draw at the National Stadium in Male, Maldives yesterday.

US-based forward Ronan Sullivan delivered the winning penalty, applying the famous Panenka technique to deceive the Indian goalkeeper Suraj Singh, who leapt to his right only to see Ronan gently chipping the ball into the net, followed by wild celebrations of Bangladeshi players and the expatriate fans.

Interestingly, the score line was almost a repeat of the final of the 2025 edition where India beat Bangladesh 4-3 in the shootout after the regulation time produced a 1-1 draw. But this time, Ronan and Co turned the tables.

"I had been waiting for this title for the last four years and



"It was an incredible feeling after stopping the first shot because I thought I protected the dream of 20 crore people of the country."

Bangladesh goalkeeper Ismail Hossain Mahin

we finally got it," said captain Mithu Chowdhury, thanking the expatriate spectators for their tremendous support throughout the championship.

Before Ronan made the final his own with a penalty kick that will go down as an iconic moment in the country's football history, it was Bangladesh goalkeeper Ismail Hossain Mahin who set the tone of the shootout by diving to his right to stop India's

first shot taken by Rishi Singh.

"It was an incredible feeling after stopping the first shot because I thought I protected the dream of 20 crore people of the country," said Mahin in a video message sent by BFF.

Bangladesh's first three takers Murshed Ali, Chandon Roy and Abdul Riyad Fahim converted from the spot but Samuel Raksam, following a break in flow caused by Indian

goalkeeper's sudden cramp injury, hit the crossbar, leaving the shootout locked at 3-3.

India, however, failed to grasp the opportunity as Omang Dodum, named the most valuable player of the tournament, drove the ball miles of the target, setting the stage for Ronan, who made history.

Friday's final was keenly contested with both sides neck-on-neck throughout the 90 minutes, though India had the edge in terms of creating chances.

Bangladesh coach Mark Cox, who stood at the dugout in the final after his semifinal suspension, made one change to the starting XI that beat Nepal 1-0 in the semifinal by drafting defender Abdul Riyad Fahim in place of Sani Das.

Both sides started cautiously, however, it was India who launched the first attack when Md Arbash headed wide a well-judged cross from Rohen Singh in the fourth minute.

Bangladesh also came close

to breaking the deadlock but captain Mithu narrowly missed the far post with a header off a Ronan free kick in the 14th minute.

Four minutes later, Murshed released a nice low cross for Ronan but the forward was a bit late to the ball.

The ball was mostly confined to the midfield in the first half with both sides busy on clearances instead of keeping the ball on the ground.

After resumption, India put a lot of pressure on the Bangladesh backline, which held strong. India twice came close to scoring the winning goal in the final minutes, but both efforts went wide.

After regulation time, the match went down to a shootout, where Bangladesh regained their title.

Previously, Bangladesh, who lifted their maiden trophy in 2024 beating Nepal in the final, had failed to beat India in the regional youth championship finals in 2019, 2022 and 2025.

Gattuso resigns as Italy coach after WC flop

AFP, Rome

Gennaro Gattuso quit as Italy coach on Friday as the Azzurri failing to reach a third straight World Cup continued to send shockwaves through Italian football.

A World Cup winner in 2006, Gattuso leaves after less than a year in charge of Italy, a team which has fallen far behind historic rivals like France and Spain in the last two decades.

Defeat on penalties to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Tuesday's qualification playoff final ended up costing Gattuso his job, as Gabriele Gravina, the man who hired him, also stepped down as president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

Gabriele Gravina had asked Gattuso to stay on immediately after elimination in Zenica but his departure, and that of national team general manager Gianluigi Buffon, paved the way for the 48-year-old to resign.

Gattuso took charge of Italy in June last year following the sacking of Luciano Spalletti, himself a victim of a dismal title defence at Euro 2024 and a 3-0 hammering at the hands of Erling Haaland's Norway in their first World Cup qualifier.

His record, however, is impressive on paper, with six wins, one defeat, and one draw in eight matches with 22 goals scored and 10 conceded.

Selectors juggle choices in hunt for stability

SPORTS REPORTER

The new national selection panel led by former captain Habibur Bashar have been entrusted to build a team for the 2027 ICC ODI World Cup, and one of the first challenges they will have to tackle to make it happen is to create a solid batting order.

To do that, the selectors will have to nurture a batting unit that has all its bases covered, has fixed starters and ideal backups waiting in the dressing room.

But in the Bangladesh batting line-up, especially in the ODI format, stability has been in short supply for a while now.

A big indicator of the lack of solidity is the fact that Bangladesh have used 22 different opening pairs in ODIs in the last five years. And the biggest victim of this constant chopping and changing has been Soumya Sarkar.

Soumya has featured in four separate opening pairs during this period, symptomatic of his own lack of traction in the setup since debuting in 2014.

Despite a match-winning 91 off 86 balls against the West Indies at home in October last year, he did not get a game in the Pakistan series last month.

Saif Hassan and Tanzid Hasan Tamim opened in all three matches. Although Saif did not score many runs, as Bangladesh won the series 2-1 and there is always an aversion to breaking a winning combination, Soumya's chances in the upcoming series against New Zealand



don't look too great.

Chances have come and gone for the 33-year-old in the national team, akin to a game of musical chairs. There was a time when he was even tried out at No.7.

However, a member of the selection panel feels that Soumya too needs to make his chances count.

"Soumya is such a good player, he should have been the main batter. Considering the calibre he had as a player, the thought of forming the team without

him should not even arise. But he couldn't hold onto it," one of the four members of the selection panel rued.

But playing someone so grossly out of position like Soumya at seven suggests a deeper problem in Bangladesh cricket.

"What were they thinking when playing an opening batter at No.7... I think it absolutely effects players. If you want to destroy a career, you can easily do it like this. But he [Soumya] should have had the guts to say he won't be a No. 7," a team official said on conditions of anonymity.

The 'Tigers' dearth of middle-order options is also apparent after veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah stepped aside.

After the struggles of Jaker Ali, Mahidul Islam and Shamim Hossain, as there are no new, exciting batters sitting in the reserves, the management has no choice but to bring back tried and discarded names.

Ahif Hossain made a comeback in ODIs in the Pakistan ODIs and ahead of the New Zealand series, Mosaddek Hossain, who has not played for Bangladesh in any format since 2022, was asked to join the national team camp recently on head coach Phil Simmons' request.

The selectors are also keeping an eye on the 30-year-old.

"I have asked him to get in shape to be able to play well till 2027 and he looks good so far," a member of the selection panel said.

68 DAYS TO GO



Seven editions, nine regulars

From 1998 to 2022, the World Cup featured 32 teams in each edition. Across those seven tournaments, a total of 68 different nations took part. Among them, nine teams appeared in every single edition: Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Spain.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Gazza's tears: A 'child's' dream spilled on the grass of Turin**

'Never thought of losing to Sri Lanka'

SPORTS REPORTER

Seeing Bangladesh's hockey team slump to a shocking 3-2 defeat against Sri Lanka in a Pool B match of the Men's Asian Games Qualifiers in Bangkok yesterday must have felt like cruel déjà vu for head coach Mohammad Ashiqzaman.

The loss marked Bangladesh's first defeat to Sri Lanka in 20 years. Incidentally, Ashiqzaman himself had been part of the side that suffered a 2-0 loss in the bronze-deciding match of the South Asian Games hockey event in Colombo in 2006.

"We never thought of losing to Sri Lanka," Ashiqzaman told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"We simply could not play well. We had problems in the left-side midfield and in man-marking in deep defence, while the hot and humid weather [above 40 degrees] might have been one of the reasons for the poor performance," he added.

Ashiqzaman also felt the absence of midfielder Shohanur



Rahman Sabuj -- who was withdrawn from the camp by his service team on disciplinary grounds -- might have affected the outcome. However, the Bangladesh coach vowed to bounce back with a win over Uzbekistan in their final Pool B match on Monday, which would secure a place in the semifinals and confirm their berth in September's Asian Games.

"All the players and I are confident that we will bounce back against Uzbekistan to qualify for the semifinals and compete for the trophy," he said.

With one win from two matches, Bangladesh currently sit third in the group, behind table-toppers Sri Lanka and second-placed Uzbekistan. While Bangladesh must beat the Uzbeks in their final

group game to ensure a semifinal spot, the men in red and green only need to finish among the top three in the group, as the top six teams from the two groups in the qualifiers will make it to the Asian Games.

Regardless of the permutations, the defeat to Sri Lanka has prompted reflection on the issues plaguing the sport in Bangladesh.

"You know well that Bangladesh have had no domestic competitions for a long time, and the boys came here to play the qualifiers without any warm-up matches," Ashiqzaman explained. "Meanwhile, Sri Lanka introduced a franchise-based hockey league alongside their premier league, and they also played a tri-nation tournament in Hong Kong before arriving in Thailand four days ahead of the competition."

Ashiqzaman also mentioned that luck did not favour his side. Despite earning more circle penetrations and penalty corners, Bangladesh failed to capitalise, while the Sri Lankan goalkeeper denied them on several occasions.



CITY HOST LIVERPOOL IN FA CUP QUARTERS

Manchester City welcome Liverpool to the Etihad in Saturday's high-voltage FA Cup quarterfinal, aiming for a swift Wembley return after their Carabao Cup triumph, where the Citizens beat Arsenal 2-0. Despite trailing the Gunners by nine points in the league, Pep Guardiola's side have momentum and are chasing a record 18th straight home FA Cup win. In Guardiola's 10th season, City have reached at least this stage in all but one campaign and are targeting an eighth successive semifinal, with their run of seven straight semifinals already a competition record. Liverpool have a reputation in this stage as they progressed from 17 of their last 19 quarterfinals. City, however, have already beaten the Reds twice in the Premier League this season.