



PHOTO: SAFF

BANGLADESH await Ritu spark

SPORTS REPORTER from Margao

Peter Butler has labelled Ritu Porna Chakma as one of the finest wingers in South Asia and even Asia, but Bangladesh are still waiting to see the forward at her devastating best in the ongoing SAFF Women's Championship.

As the defending champions prepare to face India in Saturday's final, much of the spotlight remains on their proven big match performer. Bangladesh remain on course for a hattrick of titles, but their attack has yet to click into top gear, with Ritu scoring just once in

three matches.

Yet the 22 year-old has repeatedly shown an ability to rise when it matters most. Her Olympic goal against Nepal in the semifinal helped Bangladesh reach another final, while she also scored the winner in the the 2024 SAFF final. Ritu was also a driving force behind Bangladesh's historic qualification for the AFC Women's Asian Cup last year. With another trophy on the line, Bangladesh will be hoping their big match player can turn the tide once again in today's all-important final.

India stand between Bangladesh and hattrick title

ANISUR RAHMAN from Margao

Bangladesh will look to carry the momentum from their spirited semifinal victory over Nepal into today's SAFF Women's Championship final against five-time champions India at the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Margao. The final kicks off at 7:00pm Bangladesh time.

The defending champions are just one win away from securing a third successive SAFF title. However, Peter Butler's side will need a significantly improved performance against an Indian team determined to reclaim regional supremacy after missing out on the trophy in the last two editions.

Bangladesh's journey to the final has been anything but smooth. They opened their campaign with a scrappy 4-2 win over Maldives before suffering a humbling 3-0 defeat to India in the group stage. The women in red and green responded strongly in the semifinals, coming from behind to beat Nepal 2-1 and book a place in their third consecutive final.

That victory has restored confidence within the Bangladesh



PHOTO: SAFF

camp.

"I think what's really important is that the girls have shown great resilience and character and I just hope to take that forward and build on what they've done because I don't think you've really seen the real Bangladesh as yet," Butler said at the pre-final press conference in Margao yesterday.

The English coach believes his side must focus on executing their own game plan rather than being

intimidated by their opponents.

"It's all about handling pressure, executing a game plan and, more importantly, imposing your style of football on the opposition rather than worrying about them. We go into it with hope and a real will to succeed," he said.

India have reached the final without conceding a goal and have scored 15 times in three matches, highlighting the challenge facing Bangladesh. Butler, however,

stressed that knockout football is about finding a way to win rather than producing perfect performances.

"We've had our ups and downs. It's been a rocky road. Sometimes it's not about playing beautiful football when you're in competition mode; it's about getting over the line. It's about dealing with the circumstances and getting the desired result," he said.

This will be only the second SAFF Women's Championship final between Bangladesh and India. The previous meeting came in 2016 when India won 2-0 in Shillong.

Despite India's convincing group-stage victory, head coach Crispin Chettri expects a different contest.

"Every game is different. Bangladesh will come with a different mindset because they know they have nothing to lose after already losing to India," he said.

Having rediscovered their fighting spirit against Nepal, Bangladesh now stand 90 minutes away from making history once again.

Brothers set for relegation; Mushy reaches 12k List A runs

SPORTS REPORTER

Agrani Bank Cricket Club secured a walkover win yesterday after Brothers Union players boycotted their Dhaka Premier League ninth-round match at BKSP over unpaid wages, while rain forced the other five fixtures into the reserve day.

Brothers, who have only two points and are already bottom of the 12-team table, will now be relegated because of the walkover, according to CCDM officials.

The day's major highlight came at PKSP Ground 2, where Mushfiqur Rahim struck a blistering century for Mohammedan Sporting Club against Gazi Group Cricketers. Mushfiqur reached his hundred off 54 balls and was dismissed for 100 off 55 deliveries, hitting eight fours and six sixes in a curtailed 42-over innings.

It was his 16th List A century and also took him to 12,000 List A runs, making him the first Bangladesh batter to reach the milestone.

Mohammedan captain Tawhid Hridoy continued his fine form with an unbeaten 101 off 66 balls, adding 173 runs with Mushfiqur. Openers Anamul Haque and Mohammad Naim also made fifties as Mohammedan posted 334 for four. Gazi Group were 41 for two in 4.3 overs when rain stopped play.

Elsewhere, Legends of Rugganj made 275 against Abahani, with Mustafizur Rahman taking four for 30. Abahani were 51-1 chasing a revised 163 in 20 overs before rain returned. The matches involving Bashundhara Strikers, City Club and Prime Bank Cricket Club were also pushed to the reserve day.



(R-L) Australia's Nathan Ellis, Marnus Labuschagne and Cooper Connolly enter Hotel InterContinental in Dhaka yesterday evening after flying in from Pakistan following their ODI series, which the current world champions lost 2-1. The Aussies will play three ODIs against Bangladesh in Dhaka, starting on June 9, followed by three T20Is in Chattogram, starting on June 17.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Yamal wins LaLiga POTS award

REUTERS

One of the most exciting talents set to feature in the upcoming FIFA World Cup, Barcelona's Spanish winger Lamine Yamal has been named LaLiga Player of the season, the Spanish league announced on Friday.

The 18-year-old helped Barca retain their domestic crown, became the first player to win the league's Player of the Month award three times in one season and finished as the club's top scorer in La Liga with 16 goals and 11 assists.

Barcelona's Hansi Flick was named the Coach of the Year on Thursday.

Regarding Yamal, Barca said in a statement: "He is the proverbial headache for opponent defences, who have to make a real effort to try to stop the blaugrana's attacking threats.

"Beyond the intangibles, the young Catalan scored 16 goals and provided 11 assists, with no other LaLiga player providing that many passes leading to goals."

Yamal, who has been sidelined with groin issues multiple times this term, is expected to be fit for Spain at the World Cup starting next week in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

He missed the last six games of the season for Barcelona due to a hamstring injury.

Yamal exploded onto the scene at 16 and was an integral part of Spain's record fourth European Championship triumph in 2024.



Teen favourite meets qualifier dreamer in French Open final

Saturday's French Open women's singles final brings together two very different stories: Russian eighth seed Mirra Andreeva, the teenage prodigy and overwhelming favourite, and Poland's Maja Chwalinska, an unheralded qualifier whose remarkable run has become one of the defining stories of the tournament. On paper, it may look like a mismatch, but Chwalinska's nine-match surge in Paris has proved that appearances can be misleading.

➤ Andreeva enters the final as the clear favourite after a dominant run through the draw. The Russian has dropped only 12 games across her last three matches.

➤ Chwalinska, ranked 114th in the world before the tournament, had to win three qualifying matches just to reach the main draw.

➤ Nine victories later, the 24-year-old Pole is one win away from one of the most unlikely Grand Slam titles of the Open Era.

➤ Only one qualifier had previously reached a Grand Slam final in the Open Era: Emma Raducanu at the 2021 U.S. Open, where she went on to win the title.

➤ Chwalinska beat Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen and Elise Mertens in straight sets in the first two rounds,

winning the second set 6-0 in both matches. The only set Chwalinska has dropped during her three weeks in Paris came against Maria Sakkari in the last 32.

➤ Chwalinska's run guarantees her a rise to at least No. 21 in the WTA rankings, giving her entry into the sport's biggest events.

➤ By reaching the final, Chwalinska has already more than doubled her career prize money of \$864,030.

➤ The runner-up will receive 1.4 million euros, or around \$1.63 million, while the champion will earn 2.8 million euros, or around \$3.26 million.

➤ Since prize money is paid only after the final, Chwalinska needed support from a Polish company to fund her extended hotel stay in Paris.



Uno,

"It's going to be a new match for both of us. I don't really know her game style. We're just going to stick to the routine: practising before the match, playing talk about the match, warm-up, tape, and then go on the court."

Mirra Andreeva



"I mean, I was outside (the) top 100, and now I'm in the finals of a Grand Slam, so I feel like it's a big thing. So it's hard to process it. Let's not pretend someone expected it "

Maja Chwalinska



UPSETS BREWING AHEAD OF WORLD CUP

French-born defender Guela Doue, the older brother of France international Desire Doue, struck to cancel out France's opener before Amad Diallo's late winner handed Ivory Coast a stunning 2-1 victory in a World Cup warm-up in Nantes on Thursday. One of the leading contenders for the upcoming World Cup, France had gone ahead through Rayan Cherki on the stroke of half-time, but were rocked by a spirited comeback by the Elephants. With a largely second-string Spain held to a surprise 1-1 draw by Iraq on Thursday and the Netherlands also stunned by Algeria the day before, the results serve as a reminder that the expanded 48-team World Cup could yet spring a few surprises.

PHOTO: AFP