

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 3

ICC U-19s World Cup
Super League Quarterfinal-4
Pakistan v Afghanistan
Live from 2:00pm

SONY SIX

Australian Open
Live from 10:00am and 2:30pm

STAR SPORTS 1

New Zealand v India
Fourth T20I
Live from 1:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Cricket League
Four-day Match, Day 1
North Zone v South Zone
Venue: ZACS, Chattogram
Central Zone v East Zone
Venue: SBNS, Dhaka

REDUCING FOREIGN PLAYERS NOT THE ONLY SOLUTION

Weekend WINDOW

ANISUR RAHMAN

After failing to shine in the recent Bangabandhu Gold Cup at home, the national team forwards' inability to cash in on opportunities has once again come to the fore and Bangladesh head coach Jamie Day reiterated that changes in domestic football structure as well as reduction in the foreign players' quota in top-flight football would pave the way for local forwards.

The Red and Greens failed to score against a strong Palestine before firing three past lowly Sri Lanka goals, but the inability to convert opportunities against Burundi was evidence of a lack of cutting edge and eventually saw the hosts exit the tournament at the semifinal stage for a third consecutive time.

At the same time, Burundi striker Nshimirimana Jospin dominated headlines with his calmness in attaching third and his goal-scoring ability, netting seven times -- including two hatricks in four matches. All that despite the 18-year-old marksman, who was groomed at the Eagles Football Academy in Burundi, have only two seasons of top-flight football experience in Burundi.

It is far from the first time that the Bangladesh forwards were underwhelming. It has been a recurring theme for the national team.

Allowing four to five foreign players for each club is often blamed for the crisis as clubs depend heavily on foreign strikers and thereby overlook local forwards in domestic matches.

Is the reduction of the foreign players in the domestic circuit the solution to overcoming the goal-scoring crisis at international level? The country's top coaches, club officials, former strikers and current players have delivered their sentiments on how to overcome the goal-scoring problems.

SOME STATISTICS OF THE NATIONAL TEAM

From late 2008 to January 23, 2020, Bangladesh have played 88 matches, winning 21, drawing 22 and losing 45. They have scored only 71 goals at an average of 0.80 goals per game. At the same time, they conceded 141 goals at an average of 1.60 goals per match.

Strikers account for 37 of the 71 goals (52.11 percent) followed by the midfielders' 22 strikes (30.98 percent) and the defenders' 12 goals (16.90 percent).

Although strikers have always been spearheading the goal-scoring tally, they have been largely blamed for the failure to notch up deserved victories after wasting a lot of scoring chances.

Although this could be attributed to a lack of playing time in the domestic circuit, the reference of former national strikers can be made. Those former strikers fought for spots with foreign teammates and secured place in the starting eleven at club level before shining for the national team.

PAST & PRESENT SITUATIONS AT CLUB LEVEL

In the glory days of Bangladesh football, only title contenders such Abahani, Mohammedan and Brothers Union could afford to rope in two or three foreign players to accommodate the foreign players' quota, with the rest of the clubs banking on local players. However, the situation changed drastically once the professional football league was introduced in 2007 as all participating clubs signed up foreign players to fill up four to five spots in the foreign players' quota. It is also said that the lack of quality players in country prompted the Bangladesh Football Federation

to increase the foreign players' quota in the face of clubs' demand.

"When we played the top-flight football, only big clubs fielded foreign players and small clubs relied on local strikers. We fought against those foreign recruits to secure our place in the starting eleven at the club level. But, to be honest, we played for big clubs at that time after maturing by playing at smaller clubs. Rokonuzzaman Kanchan, Saiful Islam Moni and Amin Rana came up through smaller clubs before representing big clubs," former national striker-cum-coach Alfaz

before and the players went to top-flight football after playing pioneer, third, second and first division leagues but there is no chain at the moment and players step straight into the top-flight without playing lower-level competition. So, the players are not mature enough to play at the top level or the national team."

THOUGHTS OF THE COACHES

The country's lone UEFA A licensed coach Maruful Haque also believes a reduction of foreign players won't solve the problem, also opining that only a strong grassroots programme can solve the goal-scoring problem.



Ahmed said. "At the moment, the players get the opportunity to play for big clubs without maturity and they can't prove their quality against foreign players at the club level."

Agreeing with Alfaz's notion, former striker Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib said, "During our playing career, we learned many things from quality foreigners but this time around, aside from one or two foreign players, the rest hardly have any quality. I believe the current players are also less interested in learning from foreigners because they are getting huge money without labour. Our generation had the desire to pick up on good things from foreign players and play regularly for the club but the current strikers don't have that thirst," said Nakib, adding that he always followed successful striker Sheikh Mohammad Aslam to sharpen his goal-scoring ability.

THOUGHTS OF THE CLUB OFFICIALS

Club officials of big and small teams are against the reduction of the foreign players' quota and believe it is not the solution to overcoming the national team's problems.

Saif SC managing director Nasiruddin Chowdhury said that they gave opportunities to local strikers in the No. 9 position in last season and this season's Federation Cup but they could not score despite getting numerous chances.

"I don't want to blame local strikers for their failure. I would rather point to the faulty football education at the primary stage. The players are maturing in the Bangladesh Premier League and it is not possible to remedy their goal-scoring problem as long as basic errors persist," said Chowdhury. "I have seen that none of the players even discuss football or their performances in their leisure time at Saif SC. They are more celebrities than footballers because they are very busy with social media, fans and followers."

Brothers Union manager Amer Khan said: "Once we played with two foreign players but the local strikers could not shine in the domestic circuit. As per AFC Cup rules, four foreign players are eligible for each club and we follow it. If we cut the quota of foreign players and suffer defeats in the AFC Cup, then it is also a loss for the country."

Former national player Amer Khan said: "There was a chain of leagues

"To be honest, our footballers have no base. They are learning the things at the age of 17 or 18 instead of learning at the age of 10 to 12 under a qualified coach. So, there is no alternative but to have a strong grassroots programme to overcome this problem," said Maruful, adding that reducing foreign players in the domestic league is not a solution.

"A national team will be strong when it will have strong grassroots and a youth program with proper training being conducted by good coaches. Local players will play foreign leagues and top-flight leagues have to be competitive. Under these criteria, a national team can be strong. Does our country meet any of them?" questioned Maruful.

"When we are in a tough match, we cannot perform. That means the players don't have mental preparation. You can say this problem prevails because of the fixed-match in domestic competitions and bias refereeing," said Maruful, urging to start the grassroots and youth programmes immediately to get a permanent solution.

However, AFC A licensed coach Alfaz is in favour of banning foreign strikers in order to pave the way for local strikers, who, according to Alfaz, are worried about playing in the No. 9 position at club level.

"If we want to increase local strikers for the sake of the national team, we should ban foreign strikers for five to 10 years. Foreign players can play other positions," opined Alfaz. "There is a lack of quality players at the moment and if the new generation is assured that they will get chances to play upfront in future, then many will grow interest in playing football."

Nakib also wants to play only two foreign players for a certain period for the sake of producing the local strikers.

THOUGHTS OF A CURRENT PLAYER

Centre-back Tapu Barman believes the reduction of foreign players in domestic football would help local players, who showed their worth in a season when only three foreign players were eligible to play per match.

"The forwards from big clubs are getting calls to the national team but those players, barring Matin Mia and Nabib Newaj Jibon, also get less opportunities to play at the club level. So, when they come to play international matches, they can't perform consistently. It is not possible to cover the goal-scoring problem at international level with only two or three players who are playing for their clubs regularly," said Tapu, adding that central defenders were also facing problems because most clubs field foreign defenders.

"I think we should have special training with extra strikers from big clubs and small clubs, so that they can learn the techniques of scoring goals in training," said Tapu, who sometime rescues the national team with his prolific header from set-pieces.

He (Federer) started well at the beginning and I was pretty nervous. It was very important for me to win that first set. Mentally I relaxed after that.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC
SERBIAN TENNIS STAR



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after beating Switzerland's Roger Federer in the Australian Open men's singles semifinal in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Djokovic downs Federer

AFP, Melbourne

Novak Djokovic shattered the hopes of ailing rival Roger Federer yesterday to sweep into a record eighth Australian Open final and move closer to his 17th Grand Slam crown.

In the 50th instalment of one of sport's greatest rivalries, the Serb shrugged off a tentative start to reinforce his recent dominance, showing no mercy to the Swiss maestro in a 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 6-3 win.

He will play either fifth seed Dominic Thiem or seventh-ranked German Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final, but it will take a monumental effort to prize another title from the 32-year-old.

Of the seven Melbourne finals Djokovic has made, he has won them

all.

If any extra motivation was needed, winning on Sunday will see the Serb reclaim the number one ranking after Rafael Nadal was sent packing in the last eight.

"Respect to Roger for coming out tonight when he was obviously hurt and not even close to his best in terms of movement," said defending champion Djokovic, who is into his 26th Grand Slam final.

"He started well at the beginning and I was pretty nervous. It was very important for me to win that first set. Mentally I relaxed after that."

It was the fourth time Djokovic had beaten Federer at the semi-final stage in Melbourne after doing the same in 2008, 2011 and 2016.

Federer, the 2018 champion, came into the match carrying a groin injury that he picked up in his five-set,

come-from-behind quarter-final win against Tennys Sandgren.

He was seen around Melbourne Park before the match with tape on his upper right leg and there were even rumours that he might pull out.

But that is not in the 38-year-old's nature -- he has only ever given up four walkovers in his long career -- and the show was on.

Djokovic was clear favourite after beating the third seed in every Grand Slam meeting since Wimbledon 2012, but in their 50th career clash it was Federer who initially set Rod Laver Arena alight.

The opening game, on Federer's serve, lasted six minutes in an indication of what might be in store.

When the Swiss star was broken to go 4-2 behind in the third, there was no way back as his rival extended his winning record over him to 27-23.

Kenin crashes Barty party

To face Muguruza in final

AFP, Melbourne

Unheralded American Sofia Kenin stunned world number one Ashleigh Barty to end home hopes at the Australian Open on Thursday.

Barty had sent Australian expectations soaring of a first home-grown winner since 1978, but aggressive 14th seed Kenin saved two set points in each set to win 7-6 (8/6), 7-5 and set up a championship final against Spaniard Garbine Muguruza on Saturday.

Unseeded Muguruza fought back from behind in both sets to defeat racquet-smashing fourth seed Simona Halep.

The Spaniard, a two-time Grand Slam champion, reached her first Melbourne final with a tough 7-6 (10/8), 7-5 victory at a steamy Rod Laver Arena.

The 26-year-old is the first unseeded player to reach the women's final since Belgium's Justine Henin in 2010.



I'm just speechless, I honestly can't believe this. I've dreamed about this moment since I was five years old... I've worked so hard to get here.

SOFIA KENIN
AMERICAN TENNIS PLAYER

Moscow-born Kenin, 21, looked stunned at reaching her first Grand Slam final, at a tournament where she has often gone unnoticed.

"I'm just speechless, I honestly can't believe this. I've dreamed about this moment since I was five years old... I've worked so hard to get here," said Kenin, who was a baby when her family moved to America with just a few hundred dollars to her name.

"She came up with some really great shots. I knew she wasn't going to give it up to me -- I really had to fight out here. There's a reason she's number one."

Kenin's win came on a day when temperatures hit 38 Celsius (100.4 Fahrenheit), prompting play to be suspended on outside courts -- following earlier problems with bushfire smoke, downpours, wind and even muddy rain at the season's opening Major.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prepare long- and mid-term plans
- Have strong grassroots and youth programmes
- Quality education for coaches
- Regularise lower-division and district leagues
- Give players more time to mature

- Ignore club-level reserve-bench players for the national team
- Strengthen players' mentality
- Promote youth programme at clubs
- Appoint neutral manager for the national team
- Ban foreign strikers for a certain period

The Aga Khan Academy Dhaka is the fourth school in a global network of day and residential schools for exceptional students, offering a curriculum based on the highly regarded International Baccalaureate (IB) series of programmes. The Aga Khan Academies aim to develop future leaders with the skills and knowledge to support positive development in their societies, by recruiting talented young people from all backgrounds and providing them with the highest international standard of education. The Aga Khan Academy Dhaka's award-winning, world-class campus is situated in Bashundhara, Dhaka.

For further information please visit: agalahnacademies.org/dhaka-info

Employment Opportunities

The Aga Khan Academy Dhaka is currently inviting applications for the following positions:

HEAD OF ACADEMY

Job Description

We are recruiting the Head of Academy whose responsibilities will include:

- establishing the Dhaka Academy as the Founding Head;
- working closely with the Project Management team overseeing the phased construction until its completion;
- leading the team developing the outreach with government schools, from the Professional Development Centre (PDC);
- managing the start-up budget, in partnership with the Head of Finance and the Academies Unit;
- overseeing the admission of students;
- overseeing the recruitment of staff;
- further developing and embedding appropriate management structures;
- championing the Academy in its dealings with other schools and organisations, ensuring it is embedded in the local community and connected nationally and internationally;
- balancing the needs of a complex set of stakeholders encompassing teachers, support staff, students, parents, alumni, local community representatives, Academies Unit and AKDN staff, governments and private donors.

Requirements

The successful candidate should have considerable experience in international residential schools and is expected to demonstrate:

- Academic and Management Leadership;
- Experience of the International Baccalaureate (IB), ideally with broad understanding of the full IB continuum (PYP-MYP-DP);
- Experience of Boarding/Residential Community Life External Relations;
- Financial Management and Stewardship;
- Vision and Creativity;
- Relationship Building;
- People Skills and People Development.

The ideal candidate should have the ability to deal with a wide span of duties, and must be open minded and intellectually curious, with the ability to inspire others to push boundaries. The incumbent must be a sound decision maker, driven by a strong set of values and the need to attain 'excellence'.

Closing date: 12 February 2020

For further information and to apply, please visit www.akdn.org/careers