



Fiery Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso probably does not need helping hands when celebrating with gusto, but the team nevertheless raised him high on Wednesday night so that he could rejoice in winning the first Coppa Italia trophy of his managerial career after Napoli edged Juventus in penalties at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Plans for U-19 champs on hold

NABID YEASIN



There is no denying what the world has endured in the past few months will leave a lasting impact. That is also true of the country's cricket, which like other sports has been halted since March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Just before the unprecedented halt in proceedings, the Akbar Ali-led Bangladesh Under-19 side had scripted the brightest achievement in the nation's cricketing history -- winning the ICC Under-19 World Cup in February. The cubs' triumph in South Africa's Potchefstroom not only indicated a bright future for Bangladesh's cricket but it also led to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) making plans to groom the young Tigers to help them carry their age-level success to the international stage.

However, the chairman of the game development committee Khaled Mahmud, who was one of the architects of the success, said even though there were plans to be made, the coronavirus pandemic prompted the BCB to delay them.

"We were supposed to make a plan for the Akbar Ali batch but the coronavirus situation has delayed everything. Actually, we had planned to keep this batch in Australia for five months or at least keep them on foreign turf for most of the year. Our plan was to keep them in foreign countries like England where they could stay for, say, 8-12 weeks and play matches there. It would have given them the idea of foreign conditions and they would also have had some match practice. It

is not possible this year, but we hope that we could arrange for such camps in the coming year after the coronavirus situation comes under control," Mahmud told The Daily Star.

After the triumph of the Under-19 side, the BCB had decided to include the champion players on a two-year contract, during which period the players would receive a monthly remuneration of Tk 1 lakh each. Mahmud mentioned that the reason behind this initiative was to try and maintain the unity, which was the ultimate mantra behind this batch's success.

The execution of all those plans to develop the young Tigers will now have to wait for at least the beginning of next year as Mahmud said it would probably not be possible for the BCB to work with the cubs anymore this year.

"I don't think we will be able to work with them anymore this year. Even if the coronavirus situation subsides, we have a lot of scheduled matches and tournaments like the DPL to be played. In this situation, it will be really difficult to arrange any camps for them. Everything is uncertain now. We actually cannot make any plans as we do not know when the situation will be normal. But if it becomes normal, we will try to make plans for them in the coming year," said Mahmud.

If not for the pandemic, the players would now probably have been honing their skills in a well-arranged foreign environment and stepped up their preparations for a transition to the next level. But the pandemic has dealt the country's cricketing future a blow in the form of the delayed development of the young Tigers.



AFP, Napoli



Gennaro Gattuso hailed the 'God of football' after he lifted his first coaching trophy as Napoli beat Juventus 4-2 on penalties to win the Italian Cup for the sixth time on Wednesday.

The final had ended 0-0 in an empty Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

Paulo Dybala and Danilo both missed their spot-kicks for record 13-times Italian Cup champions Juventus with Arkadiusz Milik slotting in the winner for Napoli past veteran keeper Gianluigi Buffon.

It is the first trophy for the southerners since 2014, and also a maiden coaching trophy for Gattuso, who took over from Carlo Ancelotti in December.

For former Italy World Cup winner Gattuso his first coaching success comes after the death of his 37-year-old sister Francesca from a rare illness.

"In life you cannot accept some things, but football has given me a lot and a great passion," said the 42-year-old former AC Milan great.

"I feel I have a great responsibility. I know I cannot give up and I have never done in my career. I saw a team tonight that wanted to win, we deserved it.



Legendary Argentine forward Diego Maradona took to social media to congratulate his former club Napoli on their Coppa Italia triumph over rivals Juventus. Maradona congratulated his former club for their success as the 59-year-old posted a picture on Instagram wearing Napoli's jersey with the caption reading, "Proud of you. Come on Napoli!!!"

Both of Napoli's Serie A titles came when Maradona played for the club (in 1986-87 and 1989-90). The 1986-87 season was the first time that the club won a double, securing the Serie A title before beating Atlanta 4-0 to win the Coppa Italia.

"There's a God of football, who makes you reap all that you've sown. 'I am proud of what my lads have done. Now we must continue with this spirit also in the championship, to recover the disadvantage.'"

Napoli have been reborn under Gattuso and are now sixth in the league table as they target the Champions League places when Serie A returns this weekend after a three-month absence due to the coronavirus.

Thousands of Napoli fans swarmed onto the streets of Naples late Wednesday to wildly celebrate their team's first trophy in six years. The match in Rome's Stadio Olimpico was played behind closed doors because of the strict post-coronavirus health protocol.

but in Naples an estimated 5,000 fans celebrated in the city's historical centre after the 4-2 penalty win after the match against the Juventus of their former coach Maurizio Sarri ended 0-0.

Parades of cars and scooters began at the final whistle and gatherings took place in different parts of the city, with flares and fireworks lit and fans brandishing scarves and banners in praise of Napoli or mocking Juventus.

Meanwhile, the defeat was a worrying sign for Maurizio Sarri's Juventus, who also lost the Italian SuperCup final last December to Lazio.



UNITED IN PROTEST: The Premier League returned after a 100-day break with players and officials of all four teams in Wednesday night's fixtures taking a knee, showing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. While a goal-line technology blunder allowed Aston Villa to escape with a goalless draw against Sheffield United in the first game, the final fixture of the day saw Manchester City breeze past a 10-man Arsenal with a 3-0 victory at an empty Etihad Stadium.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Let us face Napoli at Nou Camp, Satien urges

REUTERS, Barcelona



Barcelona coach Quique Setien says UEFA should allow his side to play the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie with Napoli at the Camp Nou rather than on neutral ground in Lisbon in the interest of fairness.

Barca drew 1-1 at Napoli at a full and rocking San Paolo stadium but the second leg was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the match is one of four ties that still need to be settled before the quarter-finals can begin.

UEFA announced on Wednesday that it will hold a 'final eight' tournament in Lisbon in August in order to complete its flagship competition but has yet to decide where the remaining last-16 matches will take place.

"I want to play the game in our stadium because if we don't we give an advantage to our opponents who played the first leg in their stadium and with loads of supporters

roaring them on," Setien said ahead of Barca's La Liga visit to Sevilla on Friday.

The coach also said he was against the idea of playing the ties from the last-eight onwards over one game.

"I think it's worse and not just for Barca but for everyone. With two matches you can resolve an accident, now everything will be at stake," he added.

"I'd prefer two legs but this is what UEFA has decided to do and we have to adapt."

Barca have won their first two matches since La Liga returned from its three-month hiatus due to the pandemic but Setien conceded the match at Sevilla will be their sternest test yet.

"We're playing the team that is third in the league, at their stadium and they are going to make life very difficult for us," added the coach, who also confirmed Sergi Roberto and Frenkie de Jong will miss the match due to injuries.

"We'll have to put in an excellent performance to win and if we do so it will be a huge boost for our confidence."

FACEBOOK LA LIGA

Granada v Villarreal
Live from 11:30pm
Mallorca v Leganes
Live from 11:30pm
Sevilla v Barcelona
Live from 2:00am (Saturday)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Star Sports Select 1
Norwich City v Southampton
Live from 11:00pm
Tottenham v Man United
Live from 1:15am (Saturday)

ERRATUM

In a story published on June 18, we wrote that Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur would be facing each other in the Premier League on June 18. The match will actually be held tonight. We regret the slip. -- Sports Editor

Day aims to earn points at home

SPORTS REPORTER



National football coach Jamie Day is looking forward to securing some points from the home matches of World Cup Qualifiers as the boys in red and green will resume their campaign against Afghanistan at home in October.

"We have four tough matches of the World Cup Qualifiers ahead, three are home matches and we're looking forward to getting some points from those, which however are tough games but we need to focus on them and prepare ourselves accordingly," Jamie told reporters during an online press conference from England after the 40-year-old coach signed a two-year contract with the Bangladesh Football Federation on Tuesday.

Bangladesh are at the bottom of the four-team group with one point and they are supposed to host Afghanistan on October 8 before travelling to Qatar to play the away match on October 13. The boys in red and green are then supposed to host India and Oman in November.

Asked whether it is possible to secure full points against Afghanistan and India in the home matches, Jamie said that both Afghanistan and India are tough, higher-ranked sides but Bangladesh will not take the field to lose points.

"The matches against Afghanistan and India will be tough ones because they are higher-ranked sides but we don't have the mentality that we will lose the matches, rather we will be wanting to leave the field with some points," said Jamie, whose charges lost 1-0 to Afghanistan and surrendered a lead to play out a 1-1 draw against India in away matches.

Jamie still believes the six-week preparation is good enough to prepare his charges as he has been in touch with the players virtually for the last three months to oversee their progress as well as give them necessary tips to get ready physically and mentally for upcoming national camp.

The British coach is however a bit

worried about securing the services of players from Bashundhara Kings, who will also resume the AFC Cup in late October. He said that he has already talked to Kings coach Oscar Bruzon about the release of their players.

"I really enjoyed the last two years and feel we had some really positive results and developments. The key matches for me were the Asian Games and World Cup Qualifiers' performances against India and Qatar. The slight negative was not making the final of the SA Games [with the Under-23s] in Nepal," Jamie said. "But I am really looking forward to the next two years and hopefully developing further."



Bangladesh centre-back Tapu Barman could not continue gym activities back home in Narayanganj and returned to Dhaka on Tuesday to avail the facilities of Bashundhara Kings.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

La Liga TV audiences soar 48%

REUTERS, Barcelona

Spanish football's international viewing figures have increased by over 48% since the season returned after being halted for three months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organising body La Liga said on Thursday.

Citing a study by analytics firm Nielsen Sports of the first round of matches since the campaign resumed on June 11 without fans, La Liga said its biggest audience bounce came in Africa, where it received a 73% boost in viewers.

Viewing audiences increased by 72% in Asia, where La Liga has had a free-to-air deal with Facebook in the Indian sub-continent since 2018.

In Europe, audiences swelled by over 56%, with the biggest spike (130%) coming from Belgium, which cancelled its domestic season due to the pandemic.

The league's domestic viewing figures experienced a more modest increase of 12%. The most popular match was Real Madrid's 3-1 win over Eibar, a league spokesman said, followed by Barcelona's 4-0 victory over Real Mallorca and Sevilla's 2-0 triumph over city rivals Real Betis, the first match since the season resumed.

"We feel privileged to be able to take to the field again, and we're very happy to have the opportunity to offer live sports entertainment at a time when there are few events like this around the world," said La Liga's president Javier Tebas.