



Deserving, but also a little lucky

ANISUR RAHMAN



The recent two-year contract extension of Bangladesh head coach Jamie Day is evidence of the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF's) satisfaction over the Englishman's performance with the national team.

The extension also showed that the BFF were breaking from their hiring-firing approach when it came to appointments to the hot seat of Bangladesh football.

Day is the 10th foreign coach in the last 12 years under the Kazi Salahuddin-led federation and the 40-year-old coach can perhaps be called lucky to have extended his contract by two more years despite not delivering any major successes that previous foreign coaches like Samir Shaker of Iraq, Austrian George Kottan, German Otto Pfister did during their respective tenures.

Pfister was the first foreign coach to lead Bangladesh to a four-nation trophy triumph in Myanmar in 1995. Shaker delivered the first SAF Games (now SA Games) trophy in Nepal in 1999, soon after guiding Bangladesh to a runner-up finish in the SAFF Championships in India in the same year.

Then, Kottan delivered the subcontinent's most prestigious prize by winning the SAFF Championship on home soil in 2003. But none of those coaches were rewarded. Shaker returned home from Kathmandu after delivering the gold medal

in football while Kottan left Bangladesh in slightly acrimonious circumstances.

Day is now lucky not to be under those organisers and has gotten reappointed. At the same time, he is fortunate to have experienced the kinder side of Salahuddin, who had fired foreign coaches one after another, citing failure or disagreement with the coaches. Of the nine foreign coaches from 2008 to 2018, a couple of coaches however left Bangladesh willingly, having found not much to do here.

Brazilian Edson Silva Dido (Jan-2009 to Nov-2009), Serbian Zoran Dordevic (Jan 2020 to Feb 2020), Croatian Robert Rucic (Sept 2010 to June 2011), Macedonian Nikola Ilievski (June 2011-December 2011), Dutch Lodewijk de Kruijff (Jan 2013 to Oct 2014, Jan 2015 to Sept 2015 and May 2016 to June 2016), Italian Fabio Lopez (Sept 2015 to Nov 2015), Spanish Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno (Feb 2016 to May 2016), Belgian Tom Saintfiet (June 2016 to Oct 2016) and British Andrew Ord (May 2017 to April 2018) worked with the national football team from 2008 to 2018.

It is not the first time that Salahuddin, who had once guided the national football team for an extended period from 1985 to 1988 after calling time on his playing career, has stuck with a coach. Before the show of faith in Day, Salahuddin had also pinned hope on Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruijff for three separate terms, for 30 months in total, although he had also not delivered any success for the national football team.

And while Day has not delivered any remarkable successes other than taking



LONGEST-SERVING FOREIGN COACHES

LODEWIJK DE KRUIFF	JAN-2013 TO OCT-2014; JAN-2015 TO SEPT-2015; MAY-2016 TO JUNE-2016 (30 MONTHS)
OTTO PFISTER	JAN, 1995 TO MAR, 1997 (27 MONTHS)
GEORGE KOTTAN	NOV 2000 TO JAN, 2003 (27 MONTHS)
JAMIE DAY	MAY, 2017 TO MAY 2019, NEW CONTRACT TO START IN AUGUST (24 MONTHS)
SAMIR SHAKER	JAN, 1998 TO MAY, 1999 (17 MONTHS)

Bangladesh U-23 into the second round of Asian Games for the first time, he is believed to have injected some positives into the team, which prompted the BFF to reappoint the UEFA-A licensed coach.

"Day has something different than other coaches I worked under. He has brought many positive things. We fight till the

last minute and never think of the game as lost before taking the field, and we are now fitter to play 90 minutes. Besides, Day is really friendly with everyone and even takes care of our individual problems, which was rare in previous coaches. More importantly, he strategises according to the players' strengths" said national centre-back Tapu Barman who worked with many foreign coaches since 2012.

Day guided the Bangladesh senior team to victories in eight out of 19 matches, of which three wins came against Laos, two each came against Bhutan and Sri Lanka, one against Pakistan. There were also two draws against India and Laos against nine defeats in total.

"I had once praised Day for bringing an attitude change among players but honestly I can't praise him again when you ask me to evaluate his two-year performance," said former national footballer and AFC A-license coach Julfiker Mahmud Mintu. "Bangladesh U-23 side qualified for the second round of the Asian Games and they also played well against India, but you can't set sporadic successes as examples.

"It was being said we played well against Qatar who had some problems while playing on a muddy pitch in Dhaka but we were exposed against Oman. We also could not deliver any gold results in SA Games and Bangabandhu Gold Cup. We went to Nepal to retain the title but what saw in the important match against Nepal was that Jamie fielded six defenders when we needed an outright win to ensure the gold.

"I worked under many foreign coaches during my national and club career but I don't see any outstanding quality in Jamie, who could not produce any tactical players and instil consistency in the national team's performance," said Mintu, adding that a coach will get complacent if the game's governing body does not set any big targets to keep the coach and the team on their toes.



Inter Milan striker Lautaro Martinez takes off his shirt to show his Father's Day wish after scoring against Sampdoria on Sunday. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Reborn' Atalanta lift devastated Bergamo

AFP, Milan



Atalanta, inspired by the message "I will be reborn, you will be reborn", brought Serie A football back to Bergamo in style on Sunday following the coronavirus lockdown with a 4-1 victory over Sassuolo as Inter Milan enjoyed a 2-1 victory against Sampdoria.

Bergamo was badly hit by the virus, with the city, situated in the northern Lombardy region of which Milan is the capital, at the epicentre of Italy's COVID-19 crisis. Gian Piero Gasperini's side hosted rivals Sassuolo behind closed doors in their Gewiss Stadium in a match played in memory of the city's thousands of virus victims.

Duvan Zapata scored a brace with Berat Djimsiti also on target as Sassuolo's Mehdi Bourabia turned into his own net, before pulling a goal back deep into injury time.

The province of Bergamo suffered 6,000 more deaths than usual during the COVID-19 outbreak, including 670 in Bergamo city which has a population of around 122,000.

During a minute's silence before the game, players formed a circle, with the backdrop of the music "Rinascono, Rinascerai" (I will be reborn, you will be reborn), a song composed during lockdown by Roby Facchinetti, an Italian musician from Bergamo.

The club also broadcast on social media a video accompanying the song, in which Atalanta players, Gasperini and doctors and nurses held up the same message: "Rinascono, Rinascerai."

Before the match, a few supporters gathered around the stadium to welcome the players as they arrived in the team coach.

"We came to support the team, even if we know we can't get in," fan Giorgio Arboldi, 50, told AFP TV. "The passion is so strong."

Some fans remained opposed to the restart, holding up a banner which read: "Football without tifosi (fans) is not football."

On the pitch, Atalanta consolidated their hold on the fourth and final Champions League spot, moving six points ahead of fifth-placed Roma.

"It's a very important victory, when you resume after a long time it is inevitable there will be doubts, but we put them to one side by playing an excellent match that led to a great success which was also important for our position in the table," said Gasperini.

Atalanta are six points behind Inter Milan who beat Sampdoria in the San Siro, with goals from Romelu Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez, to close to within six points of leaders Juventus.

Irfan confirms he's alive

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Irfan had to confirm that rumours of his death spreading on social media were "fake news" on Sunday.

The 38-year-old, known for being the tallest person to play first-class cricket at 7ft 1in (2.16 m), said false reports saying he had been in a car accident were "baseless".

"Some social media outlets have been spreading a baseless fake news about my death in a car accident," Irfan wrote on Twitter.

"This has disturbed my family & friends beyond words, and I have been receiving endless calls on this. Please refrain from such things. There was no accident and we are well."

Irfan last played for Pakistan in a T20 international against Australia last November.

There may have been confusion after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced the death of deaf cricketer Mohammad Irfan after a stomach infection.

Zidane annoyed by talk of bias

REUTERS, San Sebastian



Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said he was disappointed that he was only asked about the referee's decisions after his side earned a 2-1 victory at Real Sociedad on Sunday to climb above Barcelona and top La Liga.

The day before the game, Zidane had been forced to defend his team against a suggestion from Barca defender Gerard Pique that decisions were going Madrid's way after their 3-0 win over Valencia, in which Rodrigo Moreno had an opening goal ruled out.

The French coach faced fresh questions about Madrid's apparent fortune after three huge decisions went their way against Sociedad.

"It annoys me that at the end of the day people are only talking about the referees as if we did nothing out on the pitch," Zidane told a virtual news conference.

"But we cannot control what people will say. We win matches on the pitch and that's what we did today. It was a deserved victory."

Sergio Ramos scored the opening goal just after the break with a penalty after a contentious foul on Vinicius Jr while Sociedad had an Adnan Januzaj strike ruled out for a positional offside against Mikel Merino.

Karim Benzema then doubled Madrid's advantage in the 70th minute after controlling a cross with the top of his arm, the goal being awarded following a VAR review.

"I didn't see the plays but I've been told the penalty decision was correct and that Benzema's goals were legal," added Zidane. "I don't get involved in controversies because that's the referee's job. I just want to think about our deserved victory."

"I would prefer to talk about football and



Karim Benzema has been in sublime form since La Liga resumed. The Frenchman scored a brace against Valencia on Friday and followed up with one more against Real Sociedad on Sunday as Real Madrid claimed pole position. PHOTO: AFP

the match, I can't say anything else about the other things."

Having won all three matches since the season re-started after the hiatus caused by the new coronavirus, Real now lead the title race due to a superior head-to-head record over

Barcelona but Zidane said there was still a long way to go.

"We haven't achieved anything yet even though we've got nine points from nine," he said with another eight rounds of Liga matches remaining this season.



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar and French striker Kylian Mbappe arrive for medical tests at the club on Monday ahead of resumption of the team's training.



PHOTO: PSG

WHAT TO WATCH

- Facebook LA LIGA
 - Levante v Atletico Madrid Live from 11:30pm
 - Real Valladolid v Getafe Live from 11:30pm
 - Barcelona v Athletic Club Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)
- ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
 - Star Sports Select 1 Leicester City v Brighton & Hove Live from 11:00pm
 - Tottenham v West Ham Live from 1:15am (Wednesday)
- SERIE A
 - Ten 2 Verona v Napoli Live from 11.30pm
 - Genoa v Parma Live from 1.45am (Wednesday)

Coric, Dimitrov test positive

REUTERS, Undated



Croatia's Borna Coric, who played in Novak Djokovic's Adria Tour exhibition tournament at the weekend, said on Monday he had tested positive for Covid-19.

Coric's positive test follows that of Grigor Dimitrov, who said on Sunday he had contracted the novel coronavirus.

Bulgarian Dimitrov also played in Djokovic's event and the final in the Croatian coastal resort of Zadar was cancelled as a result. Organisers of other sports looking to resume from the coronavirus shutdown will be watching developments with some trepidation as they try to find the safest way of getting competition back underway.

Coric, ranked No.33 in the world, revealed on Twitter that he had tested positive for Covid-19. "I want to make sure anyone who has been in contact with me during the last few days get tested," the 23-year-old said. "I am really sorry for any harm I might have caused. I'm feeling well and don't have any symptoms."

With international tennis suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic, world number one Djokovic organised the Adria



Tour as a charity event to be contested over four legs across the former Yugoslavia.

Djokovic's fitness coach Marco Panichi has also tested positive, Serbian daily Sportski Zurnal reported, quoting Croatia's health institute.

The tournament witnessed packed stands during the opening leg in Belgrade, players hugging at the net, posing for pictures together and dancing at clubs.

With both Serbia and Croatia easing lockdown measures weeks before the event, players were not obliged to observe social distancing rules in either country.

Australian Nick Kyrgios asked on Twitter if Djokovic, Austrian Dominic Thiem and German Alexander Zverev had been tested following Dimitrov's result.