

Training week ends with players wanting more

MAZHAR UDDIN

Although yesterday was supposed to be the last day of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's individual training schedule as part of their attempt to resume cricket, Mushfiqur Rahim characteristically expressed his wish to practise for two more days at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The BCB had allowed players to use their facilities and grounds across the country and also prepared a roster through which each cricketer trained individually under the safety measure provided by the board from July 19 to 26.

It was a major step for the BCB towards resumption of cricket amid discussion about the logistics of resumption after all sport came to a halt in mid-March in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the coronavirus situation in Bangladesh is still alarming and



Young spinner Nayeem Hasan, who is the only cricketer from Chattogram using the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) facilities after the board allowed individual training, bowls at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

the board is in a dilemma over resuming full-fledged activities or even starting a tournament. Organising individual training sessions was easier than arranging matches or even group practice.

"Mushfiqur will practise for two more days. So far, we have not faced any trouble arranging practice sessions as far as health measures are concerned. We dealt with a small number of players, so the job was pretty easy. But the challenge will be [greater] when we will have a larger number of people. Training and tournaments are two different things to manage," said BCB's chief physician Debashish Chowdhury.

"In training we are having one-on-one sessions, which is the easiest way. But when we involve teams, the scenario will be totally different. It will involve lodging, food, transport and other logistics. The exposure increases as the number of people involved increases and it becomes difficult to ensure the measurements."

Fast bowler Taskin Ahmed, who was among the few cricketers who had resumed training at Mirpur, is looking forward to continuing training if the BCB allows the use

of facilities after Eid.

"I had my last practice session before Eid today [Sunday] at the BCB facilities. If the arrangement is in place, I would like to attend sessions after Eid too. It was a totally different experience and you are not as enthusiastic as when you do it with the team. I was having my own sessions at home and when BCB arranged this, I thought to avail it. We are still dealing with the pandemic. I hope we recover from this soon and get back to the ground playing cricket," said Taskin.

Like Taskin, there are domestic cricketers who are also eager to resume training after Eid and have expressed their desire to the BCB. The board is still waiting for government's guidelines about the next step towards resumption as a lot will depend on the improvement of the coronavirus situation.

"The work is still in progress when it comes to our plans after Eid and obviously, we have our plans. The game development committee had already chalked out plans with the High-Performance team. As far as the national team is concerned, much will depend on

the confirmation of the upcoming Sri Lanka series," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said.

"There are domestic cricketers who expressed their desire to avail the training facilities after Eid. The board is willing to provide facilities to as many cricketers as possible, but we also have to follow safety measures and maximise the venues so that safety and social distancing can be followed accordingly."

Meanwhile, the long gap of over three months away has taken a toll on the fitness of cricketers and BCB's trainer Ifikharul Islam urged those cricketers who are still at home to focus more on fitness work on the ground.

"Look, you need to have the touch and feel of the ground no matter how much you work on fitness at home. Those who have undergone the training lacks the game fitness, which is obvious as they were out of touch for over three months. It will take some time but there is nothing to worry about. But it won't be easy for those who are still at home and those who started early will surely be ahead of others in terms of fitness," said Ifikharul.

Tariq in alongside three new faces

Preliminary squad for WC qualifiers named

SPORTS REPORTER

Finland-born Bangladesh defender Tariq Raihan Kazi has been drafted into Bangladesh's 36-member preliminary squad for four matches of the Joint Qualifiers for the World Cup and Asian Cup in October and November.

Tariq is one of few expatriate footballers in the preliminary squad. The 20-year-old, like Jamal Bhuiyan, enrolled in Bangladesh's domestic league. Denmark-based Jamal made his way into the national team in 2012 and is now captain of the national side.

Tariq represented Finland's age-group teams in the U-17 and U-19 levels and last played for Bashundhara Kings in the 2019-20 season. He was selected in the starting eleven twice as a centre-back and came off the bench four times. However, Tariq's preferred position is at right-back.

Apart from Tariq, there were three more new faces in the squad with holding midfielder Nazmul Islam Rasel and winger SM Bablu of Bangladesh Police and Sumon Reza of Uttar Baridhara Club also named in the squad, which will start a conditioning camp from August 5 at Sarah Resorts in Gazipur.

Midfielders Mastuk Mia Jonny, Mohammad Abdullah and Atiqur Rahman Fahad, alongside striker Nabib Newaj Jibon, also returned to the squad after recovering from injuries.

Sushanta Tripura, Tutul Hossain Badsha, Pappu Hossain, Yeasin Arafat and Manjurur Rahman Manik also returned

after being excluded for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

"We are really pleased to add some new players to the squad and are so excited by them. We have a good mixture of experience and youth. So we are looking forward to working with them and hopefully it will be a good camp ahead of the games in October and November," head coach Jamie Day said in a video message released by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

Bangladesh will host Afghanistan on October 7 in Sylhet before travelling to Qatar to play against the Asian champions on October 13. The men in red and green will host India and Oman in November and complete the qualifiers.

Jamie informed that players will initially start training under local coach Masud Parvez Kaiser before foreign staff join in mid-August.

About the picking up 36 players, BFF vice president and National Teams Committee deputy chairman Tabith M Awal said: "Bangladesh will play four official matches and have the possibility to play two practice matches. So keeping in mind injury problems and illness due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have selected more players to keep as backups."

Awal informed that they would start the camp from August 5 and that head coach Jamie would trim the squad to 25 within a month and announce a final 23-member squad before the match against Afghanistan.



Look, it's the call of the individual and if you ask me, honestly I was a bit confused and worried initially while resuming training. As you know, most of Mirpur is under the red zone. But once I started training, gradually I gained the confidence after witnessing such a neat, clean and organised environment. The others who have also done individual training will agree. Hopefully, if not the whole team, at least four-five of us can practise together in the near future.

MUSHFIQUR RAHIM

'No doubt that Messi will stay'

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu repeated on Sunday that he had "no doubt" that Lionel Messi would sign a new contract adding that he can only see Neymar returning in a player exchange due to the club's financial constraints.

"Messi has said many times that he will re-sign," Bartomeu said in an interview with Mundo Deportivo. Messi's contract expires in June 2021 and local radio station Cadena Ser reported that the Argentine had broken off talks.

Messi has had regular disagreements with the club's board. He reacted publicly when sporting director Eric Abidal appeared to blame the players for the sacking of coach Ernesto Valverde in January. He also led the fightback from the Barcelona players over a dispute with the board in March regarding pay cuts during the coronavirus pandemic.

In discussing plans for next season and financial constraints on the club, Bartomeu addressed another long-running issue: the possibility that Neymar would return.

"Now we are making decisions and the players, if they do not come as part of a player exchange players, it is very difficult for them to come," Bartomeu said.

Bartomeu said another priority was persuading German goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, whose contract expires in 2022, to sign a new deal "not only for his quality as a goalkeeper but for his personality" and added that talks with Inter Milan over Argentinian striker Lautaro Martinez were "at a standstill".



'WE'RE TALKING FANTASY FOOTBALL'

Inter Milan coach Antonio Conte on Saturday dismissed talk of a reported move by the Chinese-owned Italian club for Barcelona star Lionel Messi. "We're talking fantasy football, a situation that cannot be approached at Inter for many reasons," Conte said. "I don't think there is a madman in the world who does not want Messi, but he is really far from us and what we want to build," added the former Juventus and Chelsea coach. Inter CEO Giuseppe Marotta also brushed aside talk that the northern side wanted Messi to rival Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo. "Leo is not our goal and I don't think he wants to leave Barcelona," said Marotta.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hazard sunk due to expectations, says Capello

REUTERS, Madrid

Eden Hazard has struggled to deal with the weight of the Real Madrid shirt following his high-profile move from Chelsea, former Real manager Fabio Capello has said.

Hazard joined the Spanish club from Chelsea on a five-year contract for a reported 100 million euros ahead of the 2019-20 season. The Belgium international inspired Chelsea to two Premier League trophies but has failed to hit similar heights in Spain, with injuries limiting him to 21 appearances in all competitions this season.

"He hasn't been the player he was at Chelsea and he was injured for a long time, he hasn't adapted," Capello told Marca. "I've always thought of him as a great player but the Real shirt weighs heavily and Hazard has sunk this year. It's clear that he'll be better next season," added the Italian, who led Real to two La Liga titles.

With Hazard struggling for form, the onus was on Karim Benzema to shoulder the goal-scoring and the French striker enjoyed one of the best seasons of his career, netting 21 league goals and firing Real to a 34th La Liga crown.

"He's become a benchmark for Real. He has taken on responsibility that he didn't have when he played with Cristiano Ronaldo, he has a nose for goal and he's shown it," added former England coach Capello.

J. League game cancelled as players test positive

AGENCIES

Japan's J.League said on Sunday it was cancelling a match between Nagoya Grampus and Sanfrecce Hiroshima scheduled later in the day after players tested positive for the coronavirus.

Two players and a staff member on the Nagoya team tested positive for the virus, media reports said.

Football's top division restarted its season in early July after four months of delays due to the pandemic.

Nagoya defender Kazuya Miyahara developed a fever and headache on Friday and tested positive for the virus. The team tested 60 players and officials, with another player and a staff member testing positive.

"We had a meeting in the morning and decided to cancel this game," J-League chairman Mitsuru Murai told local media. "I think the way the team conducted itself was appropriate. But the fact that positive cases have been detected tells us that we need to continue to work on our infection prevention measures."

Major sports resumed competitions in front of a limited number of fans over the past few weeks under strict infection-prevention protocols.

Eight other first-division games on Sunday were expected to go ahead as scheduled. The J-League returned to action behind closed doors in June and began allowing fans into stadiums earlier this month.

Japan reported 809 new cases on Saturday, compared with 99 cases a month ago and 27 cases on May 26.

Abuse from spectators is a massive problem: Dier

REUTERS

Tottenham Hotspur's Eric Dier says the culture of abuse from spectators in football is a massive problem and authorities need to take stricter action against offenders.

Dier was banned for four games and fined over a confrontation with a fan after Spurs' defeat by Norwich City in the FA Cup fifth round in March. Following a penalty shootout, video showed Dier climbing over seats and confronting a supporter before being restrained by security guards and fans.

"It's a massive problem," the England international said. "It's a massive problem

in society in general because of social media, football stadiums, sports stadiums in general. It needs to be looked at much more seriously and there needs to be much more repercussions. It is being addressed, but it needs to be addressed even more.

"I have no problem with anyone criticising my footballing ability at any time, but when it's anything more than that then there is a big problem."

Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha has called on social media platforms to identify users who use racist abuse after he was targeted this month while Borussia Dortmund's new signing Jude Bellingham was also subjected to racist abuse in recent weeks.

After his heroics with the bat the day prior, Stuart Broad came out with a vengeance with the cherry in hand, scalping six wickets and sending the West Indies packing for 197 on the third day of the third and final Test at Old Trafford in Manchester yesterday. The pacer is now just three away from 500 Test wickets. England, who scored 369 in their first innings, went to lunch at 10 for no loss with a 182-run lead.

PHOTO: ECB

