



Bangladesh opener Soumya Sarker (R) underwent a fitness drill at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur with women's team star all-rounder Jahanara Alam waiting for her session.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## National camp after SL tour is finalised

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board is gearing up towards a proper resumption of cricket and is looking to start the training camp of the national team keeping the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka in mind.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said the two boards are still in discussion about the tour. Sri Lanka Cricket have proposed a three-match T20I series alongside the originally scheduled three-Test series during the tour now expected to take place in late September.

"We are in constant touch with

the Sri Lankan Cricket Board and according to our primary discussion, we were scheduled to play three Tests during the tour. In addition to that they have also proposed that we play a three-match T20I series. We will discuss the matter amongst ourselves and communicate our final decision. We have not finalised the tour schedule yet. We will do that once we have decided what formats we are going to play," Nizamuddin told the media over a video message on Monday.

Meanwhile, cricketers have already started individual practice sessions at the BCB facilities under a special arrangement. The number of cricketers turning up is increasing day by day with the inclusion of women's team players across different venues in

the country.

Cricket has remained suspended in the country since mid-March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The BCB, despite discouraging individual training, did provide facilities to cricketers for individual practice sessions. But the board is still waiting to start group training through a national camp, which will be finalised only after the schedule for the Sri Lanka tour is confirmed.

"We will be able to decide on the national camp only after having confirmed the schedule for the Sri Lanka tour. As per the plan at the moment, we will have a national conditioning camp before we leave for Sri Lanka in September," he said.

There has been talk about whether the BCB should also arrange coronavirus tests for

cricketers who are training individually. Nizamuddin said the board have been monitoring the cricketers through a health app and the proper protocol will be followed including Covid-19 tests and isolation protocols, if required.

"Once we decide on the schedule of the camp, we will have the cricketers isolated and have them undergo Covid-19 tests. The cricketers will join the camp only after completing the initial part of the protocol," explained Nizamuddin.

The CEO added that the board was looking at other countries, like England, who have successfully restarted cricket and the protocols they have in place so that they can learn from the example and apply it to the Bangladeshi context.

## Booters keeping fingers crossed

SPORTS REPORTER



The management of the national football team will be hoping to receive as few Covid-19 positive cases as possible for a smooth start to the team's preparation camp for upcoming World Cup qualifiers as 26 footballers yesterday underwent tests twice at Sarah Resorts in Gazipur.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) decided to test all 26 players and six members of the coaching and support staff twice in a single day after 18 out of 29 available players and one coach had tested positive on Wednesday and Thursday.

Praava Health and ICDDR,B collected the samples and are supposed to deliver the results today and tomorrow respectively.

The unexpected number of infections put the game's local governing body in trouble, especially after 15 players and one coach tested positives in the second tests despite returning negative results in initial tests before reporting to the BFF.

Ahead of Bangladesh's match against Afghanistan on October 8 in Sylhet, BFF announced a 36-member preliminary squad, with only 31 players available to join. Three Bashundhara Kings players were not released by the club while captain Jamal Bhuiyan and newly-called Tariq Raihan Kazi -- are currently in Denmark and Finland and are not expected to join very soon.

Not only the team management, all footballers will have their fingers crossed as majority of them had tested positive at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, only three to four days after returning negative results in their initial tests

which were carried out at different private and government hospitals.

"Two institutes collected samples," team manager Satyajit Das Rupu said over phone from Gazipur. "During the sample collection, our doctor also checked all the players and no one complained about any sickness. Everyone is physically fine."

Rupu informed that the players are a bit demoralised but confident about being negative again.

"The players are a bit demoralised after being tested positive just one or two days after they had tested negative. They strongly believe that they will be negative in today's tests and will be able to join the others soon," Rupu said.

He also informed that four more players, who tested positive and are currently in Dhaka, were also supposed to give away samples.

After being tested negative, defender Tapu Barman on Sunday said that they would have gym, swimming and other training sessions separately, adding that players with positives test results are also doing core training in their respective rooms.

"If we sit idle, it will hamper us. So we want to continue training individually like we did at home," Tapu said. "I had tested four times and the results came out negative every time. The players are a bit frustrated with positive results as none of them have any symptom such as breathing problem, fever or sore throat."

However, the smooth conduct of the camp will depend on the latest test results, which will also define whether the game's local governing body takes further steps such as calling up new players or request FIFA and AFC to defer Bangladesh's matches.



PHOTO: BFF



Neymar yesterday uploaded this picture on his social media accounts of himself with his PSG teammate Kylian Mbappe as the Parisiens prepare for the Champions League quarterfinal against Atalanta on Wednesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Sigh of relief for Atletico

AFP, MADRID

Atletico Madrid breathed a sigh of relief on Monday after further coronavirus tests on their players and staff turned up negative, allowing the team to travel to Portugal on Tuesday for their Champions League quarterfinal against Leipzig.

Tests at the weekend had revealed two coronavirus cases at the club, which Atletico confirmed on Monday to be players Angel Correa and Sime Vrsaljko.

Both players are asymptomatic and will remain isolated at home while the rest of the squad will return to training in the Spanish capital on Monday afternoon, before flying to Lisbon on Tuesday for Thursday's game against Leipzig. "The first team and members of the coaching staff underwent new PCR tests yesterday, the result of which has been negative in all of them, after the appearance of two positive cases in the tests carried out on Saturday," Atletico announced on Monday.

"As a result, 21 first-team footballers plus academy players Alex Dos Santos, Manu Sanchez, Riquelme and Toni Moya will travel to the Portuguese capital tomorrow to gather for the Champions League quarter-final."

The club said the case of Vrsaljko "is considered resolved by the health authorities as he generated antibodies several months ago".

## 'Never say no in football'

Left foot or right, there have been few as lethal as Liverpool's legendary striker Ian Rush. Five Premier League titles and two European Cups under his belt, the Welshman was part of the last Liverpool side to win the league before a long 30-year drought set in, one ended by Jurgen Klopp's incredible side this season. Rush spoke about the current Liverpool side, his friendship with Diego Maradona and that long wait to see Liverpool lift the trophy again during an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi arranged as part of a promotional campaign by the club's commercial partners Standard Chartered Bank.

"Never expected the wait to be so long. If anyone had told me that Liverpool won't win the title in 30 years, I wouldn't have believed it. I would have had a laugh," Rush said with the kind of humility befitting his energy and legendary status as one of the game's greats.

Even when European success came in 2005, the league continued to be elusive for the Reds.

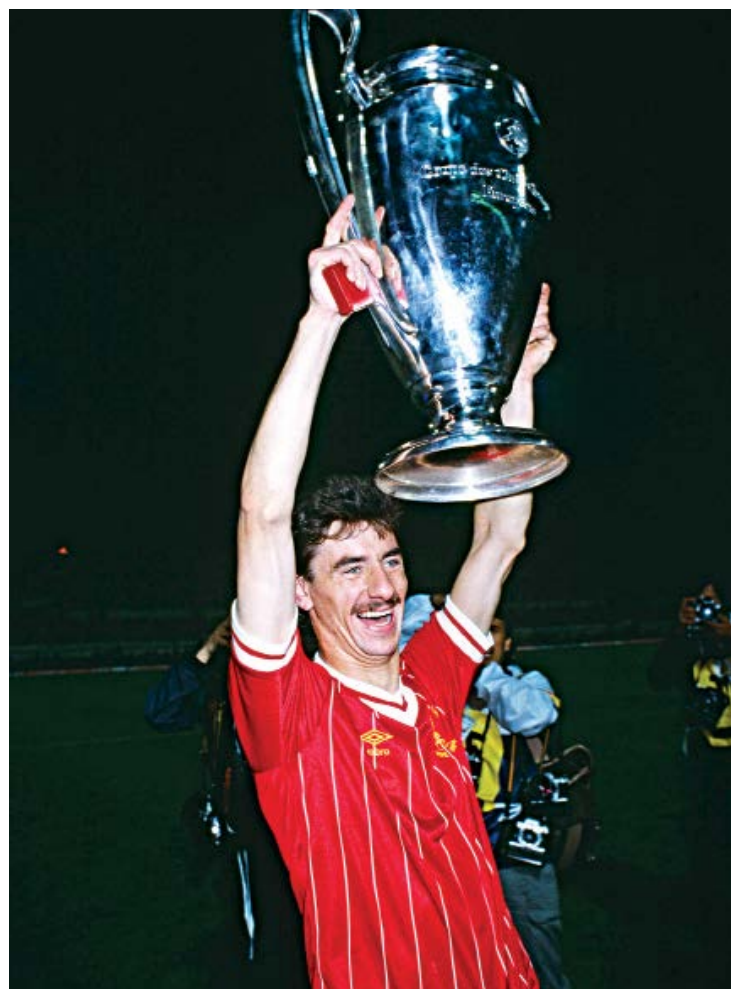
"Liverpool have had so many great players like [John] Barnes and [Steve] McManaman in the 90s, and great coaches like Gerard Houllier and Rafa Benitez and others who couldn't manage to win the league. It was a matter of great sense of pride after the win."

Rush himself is a legend among legends and one of the greatest strikers the world has ever seen. For him, past greats would have no problem adjusting to today's game.

"Today's players are fitter. The game is so much quicker now and it's because the balls and boots are lighter and the pitches are so perfect now. But no matter in what era, great players even from the 50s or 60s would adapt. It's about mental toughness, that sets great players apart."

Kenny Dalglish was his favourite Liverpool player but there was a special place for Diego Maradona however, and a friendship he developed after his move to Juventus. "When I played in Italy, I played with Michel Platini and Maradona. They were special players. Maradona turned an average Napoli side into a championship-winning side."

"Individually, he was fantastic.



It was great to play on the same pitch as him." Rush spoke fervently. "I remember when Juventus won in Turin and I scored and then in Naples, they beat us 3-1. Maradona scored that game and then came up to me to say 'It's my turn in Napoli

as it was your turn in Turin'. I'm still great friends with Maradona now."

What about his favourite players in the modern era?

"[Robert] Lewandowski is a great goalscorer this era, but I think it's hard to get past [Lionel

Messi or [Cristiano] Ronaldo, they have taken it to a new level," he remarked. When pointed out that Lewandowski is often called the 'Polish Ian Rush', he joked: "Obviously I would be happy with so many goals but you get a challenge from getting a moustachio going like me back in the day, then we will see."

For him, the current side is already up there with some of the best, if not already the greatest Liverpool side.

"They won the Champions League [last season], and the league this year. It's time to start comparing them to the greatest Liverpool sides. They broke so many records this season. It's amazing but winning the league is easy, retaining is hard. And if they manage it, they will be right up there, if they aren't already." "The team spirit is like what we had in the 80s and that comes from the manager," he said of Klopp.

Rush lived the atmosphere of many great stadiums but said: "There is something different about Anfield. The crowd becomes the 12th man. Many incredible occasions in European nights. In the evening games, the supporters would come home from work, get changed, go to a game and they are all excited. The

big difference is that the crowd is very close to the players, different from stadiums in Italy or Spain. At Anfield, the crowd is virtually on the players."

Not many teams suffered a heavier consequence than the current Barcelona side. "The crowd was getting the ball boy going, the ball boy got Trent [Alexander-Arnold] going and he then got [Divock] Origi going. That sums it up for me. That was the greatest comeback I've ever seen at Anfield," Rush explained with a glint in his eyes.

That Anfield factor and the 'look in the eyes of the fans' when he kept notching incredible numbers every season was what he says drove him. "I always wanted to improve no matter my age. I wanted to do that again and again," said the legend with 346 goals for Liverpool.

Asked about suggestions to young strikers in Bangladesh, he remarked: "What I would say to young players not only in Bangladesh but worldwide is that never be scared to miss a goal. I played in games where I missed four goals but then scored the fifth chance. It's about that mental toughness and no one will remember misses when you score."

Having coached in various countries, would he work here in Bangladesh? "Never say no in football. My job is to pass on my knowledge and if I can pass on my experience, then that's what it's all about," he reiterated and it is that kind of attitude that now drives the current Liverpool side.

The team spirit is like what we had in the 80s and that comes from the manager.  
Rush said of Klopp.