

## 'Never say never'

While the Bangladesh national team has moved on from Chandika Hathurusingha, its most successful coach, when the Sri Lankan left in late 2017, many still fondly remember the Tigers' successes under him. Following a somewhat controversial stint as Sri Lanka's head coach, Hathurusingha went back to coaching New South Wales Blues earlier this year. The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin caught up with the 51-year-old and asked some unanswered questions which he answered candidly. Following are excerpts of the exclusive interview:

**The Daily Star [TDS]:** Bangladesh got a lot of major successes under your coaching, such as reaching the quarterfinal of the 2015 World Cup, the semifinal of the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017 and winning Tests at home against Australia and England with a new approach. Which one of those successes do you most cherish?

**CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA [CH]:** All of those you mentioned are fun memories and great to be part of but without the effort from players and my support staff, we couldn't have achieved anything. Credit must go to the senior players for agreeing with those approaches, especially at home in Test cricket. **TDS:** There are many, including Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who believe that you have been the most successful and impactful head coach and they credit you for taking Bangladesh to the next level. How do you evaluate yourself as the Tigers' head coach?

**CH:** I think I was lucky to inherit a good core of senior players who wanted a bit of support and direction and with the help of a talented younger group, we managed to enjoy some success. **TDS:** Where did you want to see Bangladesh in world cricket when you took up the job? What are the areas you think Bangladesh need to focus on to be among the top teams in the world?

**TDS:** After resigning during the South Africa tour in 2017, according to BCB President Nazmul Hassan, you cited the players' attitude and unprofessional behaviour as the reason behind stepping down. In the meantime, you were appointed head coach of Sri Lanka. Can you



elaborate what actually happened? **CH:** My resignation had nothing to do with players or the BCB board officials. It was a personal reason. **TDS:** It was reported that most Bangladeshi cricketers were actually scared of you and saw you more like a strict teacher. But a majority of the cricketers also give you credit for cultivating the attacking mindset. Your take?

**CH:** I don't agree with your statement here. I know I challenged them to get better in every area of their game, attitude if that hindered their performance and the team's. And I supported them every time when they gave hundred percent to the team. **TDS:** There was a sense of the Tigers having a point to prove in the first few exchanges against Sri Lanka, then your new team, after you left. Have you noticed it?

**CH:** I actually did not notice

If they play as team and don't worry about failure, Bangladesh can be a strong team in world cricket.

CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

officials tried to convince you to reconsider.

**CH:** Yes, I got full support from BCB, especially the board president, vice-presidents and CEO. Later on, selectors were very supportive. Even the ground staff, including Gamini de Silva. They made sure we got the best facilities to train.

**TDS:** There was talk that you had a bitter relation with Shakib Al Hasan and you were behind Mashrafe's decision to retire from the T20s. There were also reports that Mominul Haque was not happy after he was typecast as a Test batsman during your stint. Would you like to respond?

**CH:** I had or have any personal agenda with anyone? For me, the Bangladesh national team is the most important! Whoever makes that team better, I supported.

**TDS:** Can we expect Chandika Hathurusingha to return to Bangladesh as the head coach in future?

**CH:** Never say never! I have a very special place in my heart for Bangladesh people and the cricket team! So I'll keep a keen eye on Bangladesh's progress on the world stage.



## El Clasico date slated, but will Messi be there?

AGENCIES



Barcelona began their training under new coach Ronald Koeman. Real Madrid under the guidance of Zinedine Zidane also started training with a mission to retain the title they won in July.

Barcelona will play Real Madrid in the first Clasico of the season at Camp Nou on October 25, after the La Liga fixtures were announced on Monday. Barca and Madrid will then meet at the Santiago Bernabeu on April 11. The new La Liga season kicks off on Sept. 13.

The one big question that remains is whether Lionel Messi will be at Camp Nou. The Argentinian superstar is currently refusing to train as he tries to

force his way out of the club.

Messi has played 41 Clasicos in his career with Barcelona, with 26 goals. He has scored the highest number of goals in El Clasico history and has delivered the most assists as well (14).

Barcelona are scheduled to start at home to Elche and Madrid at home to Getafe but both games will be rearranged to allow more rest for teams involved in last season's European competitions, which ended in August.

Atletico Madrid's opener at home to Sevilla will therefore also be postponed.

All matches will continue to be staged behind closed doors and according to strict regulations aimed at reducing the impact of the pandemic.

## 'I know pressure is a privilege'

REUTERS, New York

**us open** Novak Djokovic showed a bit more passion than might have been expected in his first-round win over Damir Dzumhur on Monday but the world No. 1 brushed aside any question that he was feeling the pressure as overwhelming US Open favourite.

The Serbian lost his way a bit in the second set but rallied for a straightforward victory on Arthur Ashe Stadium that extended his extraordinary winning streak to 24 matches this year. The absence of fans because of the coronavirus pandemic perhaps exaggerated his testy exchange with the umpire, the angry roar he emitted after sealing the second set, and a bit of back-and-forth with his box.

For Djokovic, though, it was just all part of his make-up as a 17-times Grand Slam champion.

"You care about winning a tennis match, obviously you're a professional," the top seed said on court after setting up a second-round meeting with Briton Kyle Edmund.

"If I didn't care, I wouldn't be here. This is how I play, I play with a lot of intensity and try to bring a lot of energy to the court."

In the absence of the two other men vying for the title of the greatest male player of the modern era, Roger Federer and Rafa



Nadal, Djokovic is an odds-on favourite to win a fourth U.S. Open crown.

That, combined with maintaining the prospect that he might go through the year unbeaten, could weigh on a player with less mental strength.

"I know pressure is a privilege, pressure is part of what we do," Djokovic added in a news conference.

"I try to embrace it. I know what I need to do and how to behave, how to make myself calm and composed and focused on what really needs to be done."

Djokovic eschewed the usual sporting trope about ignoring statistics when asked about the winning streak.

"Do I want to keep the streak going? Of course, I do," he said. "Am I thinking about it as a priority number one every single day? No. It's there, and of course it's an additional motivation for me."



After being frozen out by Zinedine Zidane and playing just 100 minutes across 12 of Real Madrid's past games, Gareth Bale continued training with Wales yesterday. The 31-year-old, who takes home about 350,000 pounds per week, will be hoping to show his talent with the national team in the UEFA Nations League. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Same old song and dance

One of the country's most famous footballers has been at the helm of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) for the past for 12 years. BFF President Kazi Salahuddin is now set to contest another term at the helm in the upcoming elections of on September 3. Achievements have been few and far between, with the 2010 SA Games gold a highlight. But a string of losses, including a first-ever to Bhutan, is seen as a certain sign of the sport's regression in the nation. The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman spoke to different stakeholders of the beautiful game, asking them their thoughts on the future of football and how the outcomes of the elections could take the sport forward. First, former national team captain Jewel Rana -- who called time at the age of only 27 in protest of a 'quota for national players' during the inter-club players' transfers in 1999 has his say.



"Since my playing days, I have been hearing the same old music," Jewel says. "BFF officials tell

footballers time and again: 'give us results [in the form of a trophy] and see where we take football'. Footballers delivered the trophy during the SAFF Games in 1999, then in the SAFF Championship in 2003 and again in the South Asian Games in 2010. What happened after those results? Has the country's football changed?" the former national captain said in a single breath from Virginia, where he went in search of fortune despite having an AFC A licensed coaching certificate.

"There is no proper planning that could develop Bangladesh football. We have been walking backwards only due to a lack of proper planning. There are no quality players at present and the team being at the bottom of the FIFA rankings is an overall reflection of our national team's performances," said Jewel, who captained the national team to glory in the 1999 SAFF Games in Nepal.

Jewel believes the current batch of footballers are playing to their potential and cannot do any better due to a lack of basic technique and knowledge.

"Why did everyone love players like Rummon Bin Sabbir, Kaiser Hamid and Monem Munna? Because they had good basics. Now, there are huge differences even among national team footballers. I don't want to blame the current batch, whose first responsibility is to play. It is the duty of policymakers to improve players. If players come through the systematic way, they must be quality ones," the 48-year-old opined.



Jewel believes grooming footballers from the grassroots level is a duty for both the national federation and clubs.

"The federation should come forward with projects for football academies based on what other sub-continent nations are doing. Each of the professional clubs must have at least four age-group teams and not just on paper. This way, many coaches will get opportunities to work with clubs and the senior teams of the clubs and the national football team will strengthen," said Jewel, who is disappointed that he feels neither proud nor regret about the country's football despite being

a former national captain.

Bringing forth the example of Bhutan, who beat Bangladesh 3-1 for the first time in their football history during the pre-qualifiers of the Asian Cup in 2016, Jewel said: "Bhutan made it possible by having an organised plan that saw them run football academies. They got the dividend some 10 to 15 years later. Considering the current context of Bangladesh football, it will not be possible to take football forward without academies being strictly supervised by the BFF."

"I won't blame only Kazi Salahuddin for the poor state of football. Many others are to be

collectively blamed for this dire situation. What have BFF officials, who were at the helm before Salahuddin, done for country's football?" questioned Jewel, who believes neither the federation nor clubs have played any role to develop football.

"It is not good enough to hold the Bangladesh Premier League regularly. Are the lower division and district league taking place regularly? The next generation of footballers is not getting an opportunity to play district leagues. How can they dream of playing in Dhaka? Although the professional football league has been held for the past 12 years, we have never been close to professionalism."

He pointed the only two positives that had seen over the 12 years.

"In the past 12 years, I see only two positives -- holding the Bangladesh Premier League regularly and the development of coaches over the past couple of years. But I believe Salahuddin bhai had many things to do because he has a good advantage of being linked with many influential people. I don't know why he could not use his relationship with others."

Asked whether the upcoming BFF elections could change the fate of Bangladesh football, Jewel said: "It is tough to predict because football is now a part of politics. The election is just a process to change the leadership, but the way BFF executives are being elected should be stopped because many delegates wait for the BFF polls and cast their votes in exchange for money. So, I want to urge those, who want to do business with the clubs and football, stay away from the elections and pave the way for those who really love football."