

## No point shying away from reality

BISHWAJIT ROY



"I believe my product (football) will be good in future," legendary footballer Kazi Salahuddin commented during an

exclusive interview with The Daily Star two months after he was elected for his first term as president of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) in 2008. He added he was treating the high expectations like an extra challenge rather than a burden.

12 years on, how good is his product? Forget the lofty vision that the former national captain and arguably the country's greatest striker had set after taking charge for his second term, when he said: "Our vision is the 2022 World Cup. From now, we are working to reach our target. We can only ask if his product is charming football lovers?"

Pass, move, run, recover possession and don't use your hands; millions of children in the country love to play the beautiful game with such a simple idea. This is not a new-found passion borne out of the explosion of popularity of European leagues; Bangladesh's glorious footballing past drives football-loving people to be engaged in the beautiful game.

Cricket may be the dominant sport in the country now, but nothing quite stirs passion among fans as football does. But alas, only when it comes to international football. Because only playing the game with finesse, agility, strength, speed, intelligence, foresight and style can attract fans.

Nobody knows what qualities are required better than one of the finest footballers the country has produced, but top-flight football in Bangladesh is lagging behind and only a good foundation can help breed those qualities among players. To build that foundation, the country needs good organisers, but questions have been raised whether our beloved footballer is prudent enough in this capacity?

A good foundation and proper planning; therein lies the problem in Bangladesh.

Experts, former players and journalists have written numerous articles regarding what the game's local governing body needs to do to pull the sport out of dire straits. Here, we cannot say much.

Still, The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman spoke to different stakeholders of the game recently, asking them their thoughts on Salahuddin's 12-year tenure, problem behind the doldrums and the future of the game in the country ahead of the elections on October 3 - when Salahuddin is set to contest a fourth term.

Former national team captain Jewel Rana, renowned organiser Manzoor Hossain Malu, country's lone UEFA A license coach AKM Maruful Haque and football fan Soyeb Hossain Shamim echoed one sentiment: organisational failure is the main reason behind the sorry state of affairs of the game that had dominated Bangladesh's sporting



scene for nearly 30 years from mid-1970s to early 2000s.

They all believe Salahuddin has failed to bring any change to football in 12 years at the helm and did little to stop its decline.

We had earlier discussed how Panama's qualification to the 2018 World Cup had been discussed widely in the footballing fraternity of Bangladesh. In 1995, Panama were behind Bangladesh in the FIFA ranking, at 150th whereas Bangladesh were 138th.

However, the standards of domestic football and Bangladesh's current FIFA ranking of 187 with a national team composed of players that Salahuddin claimed were 'all my products' reflect reality. We have been giving examples of neighbouring countries in order to make people at the helm understand their duties but it has all fallen on deaf ears.

Was football fan Shamim being too much of a pessimist when he said that he did not expect football's

good days to return in his lifetime?

Out of 10, Salahuddin got four from one interviewee, while another stated he could not "give more than minus". Meanwhile, Salahuddin gave himself 7.5 during an interview with The Daily Star.

It sounded fantastic when he said: "A foundation has been set. With this foundation, now is the time to build a 30-storey building. That's why I want to continue and complete that building."

However, many can argue the part where he said: "There is a difference between dreams and reality."

Maybe this is where the danger for Bangladesh football lies. When responsible people at the helm deny reality, it hinders progress and complicates problems further.

There is no doubt that anybody who recalls the glory days will speak fondly about this stalwart of Bangladesh football, but will they say it with as much affection when it comes to 'organiser Kazi Salahuddin'?

## England, France scrape to victories

Portugal turn on the style

AFP, Paris



European heavyweights England, world champions France, holders Portugal and Belgium all enjoyed winning starts to their UEFA Nations League campaigns on Saturday even if there were signs of rust following the coronavirus shutdown.

England needed a stoppage-time penalty to beat Iceland 1-0 while France saw off Sweden by the same scoreline.

Portugal shrugged off the absence of Cristiano Ronaldo to thrash Croatia 4-1 with top-ranked Belgium coming away from Denmark with a 2-0 win.

In Reykjavik, Raheem Sterling's last minute penalty salvaged England from another embarrassing result against Iceland. Gareth Southgate's men also survived going down to 10 men and seeing Birkir Bjarnason miss a late spot-kick.

Meanwhile, Kylian Mbappe scored with France's only shot on goal in Solna for a 1-0 victory over Sweden.

Mbappe picked up the ball wide of the goal in the 41st minute, squeezed past two defenders, waited for goalkeeper Robin Olsen to go down and then clipped the ball just inside the post.



"It was a committed match, not a great match," said France manager Didier Deschamps. "It was a good back-to-school game, considering the fitness levels."

In Porto, Cristiano Ronaldo was missing with an infected toe -- caused by a bee sting according to Italian media -- but Portugal were still too good for Croatia.

Joao Cancelo, Diogo Jota, with his first international goal, Joao Felix and Andre Silva were all on target for Portugal who also hit the woodwork three times.

"It has been a long time since we all got together and some players came straight from their vacation, but the team responded well," said Felix.



Kylian Mbappe scored with a superb solo effort in a scrappy 1-0 win for world champions France against Sweden in the UEFA Nations League on Saturday. (Top) Joao Felix shoots to score from a distance as Portugal, playing without Cristiano Ronaldo, cruised to a 4-1 win over Croatia. PHOTO: TWITTER



Serena Williams punches her fist as she is cheered on by her husband Alexis Ohanian and daughter Alexis Olympia (bottom) following her US Open third round victory against Sloane Stephens on Saturday. PHOTO: US OPEN

## Still learning to live with 'Serena' target

REUTERS, New York

Winning a Grand Slam is hard. For Serena Williams, managing the overwhelming expectations that come with a two-decade long career in the spotlight seems even harder.

The third seed advanced into the second week of the US Open on Saturday, surviving a third-round scare from fellow American Sloane Stephens before winning 2-6, 6-2, 6-2 in her toughest test at this year's tournament so far.

Asked how she compartmentalises the day-to-day challenge of competition with the attention 23 Grand Slam titles can bring, Williams simply said: "Sometimes it's harder than others."

"Every day having 'Serena' on your back is a massive target for the tour, for press, for stress," said Williams.

"But as Billie Jean King said, pressure is a privilege. So I wouldn't want it any other way. So I just try to think about how fortunate I am to have been in this position."

In all of sport there are few records quite so stubborn as the one belonging to King's rival, Margaret Court: 24 Grand Slam titles. It is one that Williams has fought mightily to reach.

The 38-year-old six-time US Open champion has made the finals in four majors since she returned from maternity



leave in 2018, coming up just short each time.

It is a fight she has waged largely on her own.

"I haven't spoken to anyone," about chasing records, Williams told reporters. "Maybe that would have been, would have, would, could be a good idea."

Her next hurdle comes in the form of Maria Sakkari of Greece, who cut short Williams' Western & Southern Open campaign just 10 days ago in the tournament's third round.

For Williams, a relentless perfectionist, the meeting is yet another chance for self-improvement.

"I don't think it's anything tricky, especially when you lost it's good to kind of go back out there and try to do a little bit better," she said.

## 'Bad advice led to Messi U-turn'

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi was left with no choice but to reverse his decision to quit Barcelona due to bad advice from his father and agent Jorge, according to Mexico icon Hugo Sanchez.

The former Real Madrid star blamed the 33-year-old's failed exit on his representatives.

"That untimely burofax only strengthened the image of the president of Barcelona and gave him time to weaken Messi's decision," he told ESPN.

"Messi has had no choice but to stay at Barcelona due to bad advice from his father and the law firm, because they could have saved that burofax. That has caused weakness to his image within the team."

"If Messi and his father already had the decision to leave Barcelona, they should not have waited in time."

He added: "Messi's second problem was to send that burofax without certainty and guaranteeing that they had a team that would pay the €700m, which, due to the pandemic, no team in the world that can invest that amount."

## Sanitisergate now?

AFP, London

Veteran Australian seamer Mitch Claydon has been suspended by his English county Sussex after being placed under investigation for allegedly applying hand sanitiser to the ball.

A case against the 37-year-old was opened by the ECB following a match against Middlesex last month in which he took three wickets.

"Mitch Claydon is suspended pending the outcome of an ECB allegation of placing hand sanitiser on the ball in our match against Middlesex," said Sussex on their website.

## BCB to enhance safety measures as training halt extended

Players to be tested at home from today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is planning to come up with a more organised approach to the national team's training amid the reality of a pandemic.

The board is looking to divide the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (SBNS) premises into green and red zones after a few of the support staff displayed coronavirus-like symptoms, forcing the board to halt individual training for three days on Thursday.

They have now planned to extend the halt for a few more days to enhance precautionary measures.

"We are planning to take two more days to enhance measures," BCB Cricket Operations Chairman Akram Khan told The Daily Star yesterday. "We will also start the taking players'

samples from home from tomorrow [Monday]."

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star: "We are planning to make the stadium more restricted than before and divide it into green and red zones. In the green zone, which is a safe zone, cricketers will be able to roam around safely."

"The red zone is not a bad zone or a risky zone; it is to create a restricted environment and we are even planning to provide accreditation for staff and groundsman who will be at a safe distance from players."

"We are emphasising on the national team, high performance squad and the U-19 side and we have already been monitoring all the players through the Covid-19 wellbeing app. At the moment our main focus is on creating safer and uninterrupted training before sending

the national and high-performance squad on the Sri Lanka tour," he said.

The BCB CEO also said it has been difficult to organise training amid the pandemic, with new problems cropping up daily despite them being in constant touch with the England and West Indies cricket boards, who had ended the halt in international cricket with a Test series back in July.

Meanwhile, Tigers' head coach Russell Domingo along with fielding coach Ryan Cook was likely to arrive yesterday night although there have been issues over flights.

Domingo along with Cook will have to quarantine before joining the training. The selectors are expected to announce a squad within a few days, after which the Tigers will undergo a short residential camp before travelling to Sri Lanka in late September for a three-Test series.

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