

SPORT

Cricketers' skill camp starts today

BCB awaits SLC reply; will look for McMillan's alternative

SPORTS REPORTER

Following negative results of cricketers in the second phase of Covid-19 tests, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced a 27-member skill camp, to begin at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

According to BCB, the squad's training and movement will be regulated through the creation of a bio-secure bubble, keeping in mind the restrictions and safety measures for Covid-19.

Following the completion of individual training, the skill camp will see group training as BCB awaits a positive response from their Sri Lankan counterparts regarding a revised health protocol ahead of the scheduled three-Test series in the island nation.

According to BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury, the SLC officials had informed BCB that they had a fruitful meeting with the concerned government authority and that the BCB was hoping to receive a feedback within the next couple of days.

"We have already discussed quite a few issues with the Sri Lankan board and we have also given a statement regarding the health protocols as the tour is approaching soon. As per our knowledge, the SLC officials had tabled the issues to the health authorities and it was a fruitful meeting. We are hoping to get a revised health protocol within the next few days, so it won't be right to comment



All-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin gives a thumbs up after providing his sample for Covid-19 test in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: BCB

on the matter at the moment," Nizamuddin told reporters yesterday.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan had earlier informed that it would not be possible for Bangladesh to follow the 'historically unique' health protocol sent by the SLC, especially the mandatory 14-day quarantine for the visitors.

Hassan had also announced that the board would look to start domestic cricket and it was

learned that the cricketers were told that the board might start domestic league through a corporate tournament during a meeting of the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh recently.

Meanwhile, former Kiwi batsman Craig McMillan informed the BCB that he would be unable to take up his role as Bangladesh batting consultant for the Sri Lanka tour due to a loss in his family.

The 44-year-old was appointed last month for the Sri Lanka tour following the resignation of Neil McKenzie. BCB had asked McMillan and spin bowling consultant Daniel Vettori to come to Dhaka first and then travel with the team to Sri Lanka together.

"He (McMillan) has informed us that it would not be possible for him to take up the role in such mental state. It will be too early to come to a decision. We have to look for an alternative and it will be better for us to appoint a batting consultant for the national team," said Nizam.

SQUAD FOR SKILL CAMP: Mominul Haque, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmud Ullah, Shadman Islam, Liton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Mohammad Mithun, Soumya Sarkar, Taijul Islam, Al Amin Hossain, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Imrul Kayes, Taskin Ahmed, Nurul Hossain Sohan, Shafiqul Islam, Yasir Ali Rabbi, Nayeem Hasan, Abu Jayed Rahi, Ebadot Hossain, Khaled Ahmed, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mosaddek Hossain, Hasan Mahmud, Shaif Uddin, Saif Hassan



A tranquility that belies the chaos

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

It has been a bit too quiet at Real Madrid for the past few weeks. Even as they thrashed Getafe 6-0 in their only preseason game this season, there was no footage, nor much hype around that game, treated as only a 'training session' so to speak. Neither has there been the arrival of any big-name signings at the Bernabeu this season as they go into their defence of the La Liga title away to La Real on Sunday. While the noise from Catalunya has been deafening, the defending champions have kept it scrupulously quiet but that is the very trend that Zinedine Zidane strives for and indeed specializes in as he looks to become the first Real Madrid manager in 30 years to win back-to-back La Liga titles. Consistency is the key and Zidane is all for it and the La Liga has been an especially difficult challenge for the man who already won the Champions League three-peat -- a feat no other team has achieved in the modern history of the Champions League.

That is however all in the past now. Those titles were all won with a different team but also with a kind of football that Madrid dream of repeating. The likes of Cristiano Ronaldo have moved on and last season's title win against a dismally mismanaged Barca did not erase questions that Zidane's Madrid found themselves in a lucky spot during a pandemic where everyone suffered. But that is also the trademark of Zidane's genius. He takes things as they come -- much like his gifted first-touch as a player -- and more than a tactician he has the man-management nous that a football degree will not just provide. There is an aura about Madrid even without the noise of big signings and

Zidane's cool supplements it.

Ever since Lionel Messi's appearance at Barca, Madrid have found La Liga extremely hard and Zidane will be aware of that challenge but his main goal will be to make this Madrid side show its potential in the week-in-week-out grind of La Liga, one that they have found strenuous even during Zidane's most successful era.

Instead of big names coming in, there have been moves away for Gareth Bale, James Rodriguez, Achraf Hakimi, Oscar Rodriguez, Brahim Diaz, Sergio Reguilon, Dani Ceballos and Kubo. Luka Jovic too might leave and yet Madrid are pretty much built like a tank and is where their quiet confidence comes from.

In a season where Barca will have to deal with a new manager while keeping an Lionel Messi motivated, Madrid could still be the team with all the foundations for the future. Even as star man Hazard, who scored just once last season and returned for preseason five kilos overweight, is yet to fire, there have been glimpses of that connection he has developed with Karim Benzema as the duo enjoyed each other's plays. That, along with the uprising of Vinicius Jr, Fede Valverde and Ferland Mendy, was good enough to see Madrid clinch title last season with a ten-game unbeaten run.

Zidane will have an ace in his pocket too as teenage sensation Martin Odegaard returns from a loan deal. The youngster enthralled last season and could very well be the missing piece. But above all, this is also a season of transition. Luka Modric is 35, Ramos is 34, Marcelo and Benzema are 32, Kroos 30. But in Zidane, Madrid have that calm head to guide them through and indeed assail Barca and Atletico once more.

Reds meet Blues in first title tussle

AGENCIES

Liverpool head for their first away game of the new Premier League campaign tonight, and come up against a Chelsea side widely expected to challenge for the title.

Jürgen Klopp and Frank Lampard have seen something of a rivalry develop between themselves since the latter's appointment as Chelsea manager last summer.

On the pitch, Liverpool and Chelsea are both seen as strong contenders for the title, with the Blues' big-spending summer forcing them back into contention.

Both sides began the campaign with a win, and whoever comes out on top in west London would give themselves a big early boost for this season.

Perhaps the biggest team news heading into this tie is that Thiago is eligible to make his Liverpool debut at Stamford Bridge, having been registered with the Premier before the weekend's cutoff.

Klopp said Lampard's side have quality all over the pitch.

"There's plenty of threats, they've signed really well and already had an unbelievably good team," Klopp said. "We had to suffer a lot against them in the games last season. There's so many good players up front, in midfield, the defensive line and the full-backs -- there's not a biggest threat, Chelsea themselves are the threat."

Lampard insist it isn't a fixture which is about making a statement to the rest of the league.

"This is not a game about making a statement," said Lampard. "It's the second game of the season, and we were probably in pre-season zone in terms of our fitness at Brighton because of quarantine and international breaks."

"Now we take on the best team in the country last season. It's a nice challenge to go head to head with them. They were the outstanding team last year, and we competed in every game against them. They will always give you a tough match, and we will have to push the limits and try and close that gap. That's the challenge in front of us."



Juventus launch their bid for a 10th successive Serie A title at home against Sampdoria tonight but their talisman Cristiano Ronaldo added another piece of silverware to his glittering cabinet even before the start of the season. Ronaldo, who said he was "happy" on social networks, bagged the IFFHS World's Best International Top Scorer Trophy for the fifth time in his illustrious career. The 36-year-old scored a total of 21 goals for Portugal during 2019, beating Harry Kane's total of 19 goals scored for England throughout the year. Raheem Sterling scored 17 with the Three Lions to finish third ahead of Robert Lewandowski, who reached 16 with Poland.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

WHAT TO WATCH

FACEBOOK LA LIGA

Betis v Real Valladolid
Live from 10:30pm
Sociedad v Real Madrid
Live from 1:00am
(Monday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1 INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Delhi v Punjab
Live from 8:00pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2 PREMIER LEAGUE

Soton v Tottenham
Live from 5:00pm
Newcastle v Brighton
Live from 7:00pm
Chelsea v Liverpool
Live from 9:30pm
Leicester v Burnley
Live from 12:00am
(Monday)

TEN 2 SERIE A

Parma v Napoli
Live from 4:30pm
Juventus v Sampdoria
Live from 12:45am
(Monday)



'This is now a benchmark'

REUTERS, Munich

Bayern Munich delivered a message to the rest of the Bundesliga that the treble winners are in superb form, coach Hansi Flick said on Friday following an 8-0 demolition of Schalke 04 in their season opener.

"We have had our first game but we need to take things slowly," Flick told reporters. "We played brilliantly but should have scored two, three, maybe four more goals in the first half."

"But it was important to show that we are on the right track this season as well. I am very satisfied with the performance. This is now a benchmark for both Gnabry and Sane and the whole team."

Bayern started their league campaign with a bang as they scored three times by the 31st minute to kill off the game with stunning pace and deadly finishing.

"It was superb from us. Before the game we wanted this to be a game that would define where we are at this stage and my players did it very well. We wanted to show that we are here again."

Yet Flick was quick to point out that it was just one game in a long and crowded season to come.

"We just had the first game. Let us go slowly here. But it was important to show we are on the right path."

It was a record win for an opening Bundesliga game and came less than a month after Bayern clinched the Champions League.

Rafa, Novak welcome back fans

AFP

World number one Novak Djokovic and defending champion Rafael Nadal welcomed the decision to allow a limited number of fans to watch the Italian Open as the top men's seeds advanced to the quarter-finals on Friday.

Italy's government have said that 1,000 spectators can be present at the Foro Italico from Sunday's semi-finals.

"If it's safe enough, fantastic," said Nadal after sweeping past Serb Dusan Lajovic 6-1, 6-3 in his third round match.

Djokovic battled past fellow Serb Filip Krajinovic 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, to remain on a collision course for a final showdown with Nadal for a second consecutive year.

"A thousand people is better than no people, for sure, because we all miss the fans," said Djokovic.

Men's fourth seed Matteo Berrettini, the only Italian remaining in the tournament, regretted he could not benefit from spectators for his quarter-final against Norway's Casper Ruud on Saturday.

"A thousand people isn't insignificant, it's a thousand motivations," said Berrettini.



Liverpool's captain Jordan Henderson and Mohamed Salah were in a jovial mood during yesterday's training session ahead of their Premier League clash with Chelsea tonight.

PHOTO: TWITTER