

Qatar match gets FIFA nod

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite having insufficient preparation, Bangladesh are finally playing their Asian Cup and World Cup Qualifying fixture against Qatar next month as FIFA approved Qatar's proposal to host Bangladesh on December 4 outside of the FIFA calendar.

"Qatar and Bangladesh will play the first fixture of the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 in over a year, with their Group E clash rescheduled for December 4, 2020," read a statement on the AFC website yesterday.

"Clubs will not be obligated to release their players for the December 4 fixture, which will be staged outside of FIFA's international match calendar, however, both national teams are overwhelmingly comprised of players based in their respective domestic leagues."

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) general secretary Abu Nayem Shohag said they haven't received the official letter from Qatar but his Qatar counterpart verbally ensured the confirmation of FIFA's approval.

Amid Bangladesh's preparation for two Nepal friendlies on Friday and Tuesday, Qatar proposed Bangladesh to play outside the FIFA window as the World Cup Qualifiers were deferred on August 12 to the next year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The local game's governing body also gave their nod to play, subject to meeting some conditions and FIFA/AFC approval. "The national team are supposed to leave the country on November 19 for Qatar. The boys are also scheduled to play two practice matches on November 25 and 28," said Shohag.



Teammates converge on Biplu Ahmed to celebrate the forward's birthday during the national team's training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

First friendly to be a test of booters' prep

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With a day to go before the first friendly against Nepal tomorrow, the Bangladesh footballers -- who started training less

than three weeks ago -- seem happy with their fitness, but Australian fitness trainer Ivan Razlog believes it will still take some time to become fully fit.

"We had started training with the friendly matches of November 13 and 17 in mind. We are more or less 90 to 100 percent ready to play the first match. The fitness levels of the players have improved significantly, along with the mentality. So, we are expecting a good result tomorrow," said centre-back Tapu Barman after a two-hour training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

"Whatever deficiency we have at the moment, we can overcome it if all the players can give their 100 percent on the ground, and I believe the 10 percent gap will have no impact," said the long-serving Tapu.

The charges of Jamie Day started training on September 24 under local coaches before the British coach took charge on November 1, while the Australian fitness trainer has been working for just four days since joining the team on November 7.

"The players have been positive during training and they have been training well and positively. We can say after the friendly game how they are, and it will take time. They are very good in training and have been very positive in the short time since I have been here," said Razlog when asked about the players' current level of fitness.

Razlog may want to be noncommittal on the players' fitness after just four days, but the booters at the camp seemed to be very energetic in their short run, passing and positioning drills after a half-hour stretching session. It was also seen that coaching staff used fitness monitors to gather key information about the players ahead of tomorrow's match.

"Our fitness level is much better than when we had started. It was possible because of the training schedules the coaches set and which

we followed at home during the coronavirus [shutdown]. That training is now helping us to regain our fitness in the national camp. So, we are hopeful of doing well in the match," said left-back Rahmat Mia.

Head coach Jamie was also seen working with a set of players in a bid to settle on his playing eleven, which feature one or two new faces, but the 41-year-old coach generally wants to continue with proven players for the rest of the eleven.

"After dividing the players into two groups, Jamie has worked technically and tactically with us. So, I think he has a playing eleven in mind and he also worked on it today," said Tapu.

Rahmat said, "All the players in the squad are good and anyone can secure places in the starting eleven because the calculation of old or new won't work here; instead, the performance of the players in practice will be play the key role when picking the eleven."

Tapu and Rahmat both believed that the lack of a practice match has been the only shortcoming in preparation, but were happy that they improved physically and mentally for the matches against Nepal.

Five in Grade A for draft

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The players' draft of the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 Cup will take place at a hotel in the capital today as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to crank the cricket's resuming process up a notch after the coronavirus-induced break.

The board did, however, arrange the BCB President's Cup -- a three-team 50-over competition -- as the first step towards resuming cricket in the country last month and it managed to successfully complete that ensuring health safety through creating a bio-bubble. But the tournament was more of a test-case from the BCB's point of view before resuming domestic cricket, involving more players.

Fortune Barishal, Beximco Dhaka, Minister Group Rajshahi, Gemcon Khulna and Gazi Group Chattogram are the five teams that will be participating in the T20 tournament.

The BCB is yet to announce the schedule of the tournament that is expected to begin later this month.

The month-long tournament will be played in a double-round system with each team playing against each other twice before the top two teams play the final.

Players in the draft are divided into four grades -- A, B, C and D. Shakib Al

Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman are in Grade A and will receive Taka 15 lakh each.

Although the Tigers' T20 skipper Mahmudullah has tested Covid-19 positive, the all-rounder is expected to complete his 14-day quarantine by the time the tournament begins. Meanwhile, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who pulled his hamstring last month during practice, will also be available from the first week of December.

A total of 157 cricketers are included in the draft. Aside from the aforementioned five Grade A players, 20 Grade B players will receive Tk 10 lakh each, 25 Grade C players will receive Tk six lakh each while 108 Grade D players will get Tk four lakh each. Each team can have a maximum of sixteen cricketers in the squad in an open draft with teams calling through a lottery system.

All the teams will stay at the same hotel in order to create an effective bio-bubble. The drafted cricketers, except for the ones in the national team, High Performance unit and Under-19 side, have already undergone a mandatory fitness test.

Although the benchmark for the beep test was set at 11, players who are worthy and have scored close to 11 in the beep test have also been included in the draft. The BCB has already invited an Expression of interest (EOI) for the live broadcasting as all the matches will be telecast live.



It seems as if Shakib Al Hasan just cannot stay away from the spotlight. While he had often grabbed headlines for negative reasons in the past, the ace all-rounder had nothing to do with yesterday's incident. In fact it was a case of miscommunication on the part of BCB fitness trainer Tushar Kanti Howlader, who announced that Shakib had scored 'something above 13' points in the beep test -- taken by a group of cricketers as a prerequisite for the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 Cup. Soon, rumours were doing the rounds that Shakib, who returned to cricket after a year-long ban, had top-scored in the beep test with 13.7 points and that, understandably, created a massive hype among fans and media. But hours later BCB clarified that the all-rounder scored just close to the benchmark score of 11.

PHOTO: BCB



'Rohit should be India's T20 captain'

REUTERS, New Delhi

India should embrace split-captaincy and put Rohit Sharma in charge of their T20 squad, several former cricketers said after the opener led Mumbai Indians to a fifth Indian Premier League (IPL) title on Tuesday.

Virat Kohli leads India across formats, while Rohit usually deputises for him in limited-overs cricket.

Rohit topscored with a fluent 68 as Mumbai crushed Delhi Capitals in the final to cement their position as the IPL's most successful team. Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore, who are yet to win an IPL title in 13 seasons, were eliminated in the playoffs.

"If Rohit Sharma doesn't become India captain, it's their loss, not Rohit's," former test opener Gautam Gambhir told the

ESPNcricinfo website.

"Rohit has won five IPL titles, he is the most successful captain in the history of the tournament. "It would be a shame if he is not made the white-ball captain after this. Because there's nothing more Rohit Sharma can do." Gambhir, who led Kolkata Knight Riders to two IPL titles, said Rohit was a significantly better captain than Kohli in these formats.

"Why can't you have split captaincy? It's not a bad idea." "I'm not suggesting Kohli is a terribly bad captain but both got the same platform and you can judge who's better. For me, Rohit Sharma stands out as leader."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan felt delegating T20 captaincy to Rohit would help reduce Kohli's workload.

"I honestly believe that the Indian team will be better off in Twenty20 cricket being led by Rohit Sharma," Vaughan told Cricbuzz website.

Brazil, Argentina grapple with injuries

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



Brazil must confront a growing injury list that includes star forward Neymar as they resume World Cup qualifying this week, while Argentina are out to extend their perfect start at home to neighbours Paraguay.

Brazil host Venezuela in Sao Paulo on Friday (Saturday morning in Bangladesh) chasing a third win in as many matches after launching their Qatar 2022 campaign with victories over Bolivia and Peru.

However, Brazil coach Tite will be without Neymar after the world's most expensive player injured his thigh while on Champions League duty. Neymar, 28, bagged a hat-trick in a 4-2 win in Lima last time out to surpass Ronaldo as Brazil's second leading scorer in history. His tally of 64

goals leaves him 13 shy of Pele's record.

Despite his latest setback Neymar will still travel with the squad amid hopes that he may recover in time for the trip to Uruguay on November 17.

However, national team coordinator Juninho Paulista said Tite told PSG sporting director Leonardo that he "would never risk a player's health". Defender Thiago Silva has tightened up the Chelsea defence since his arrival in England, but the 36-year-old has warned the crowded global fixture list is taking its toll on players.

"You have to keep endlessly reinventing yourself. We're losing players infected by Covid-19, or others who get hurt because we're playing too many matches. We're not machines," he said.

"We saw recent studies showing it's more than likely you get injured after four or five matches come one after another (every three days). It's very

worrying for us."

While goalkeeper Alisson Becker and forward Gabriel Jesus return after injury, Brazil will also be without Casemiro, Philippe Coutinho and Fabinho.

Argentina, who began qualifying with narrow wins over Ecuador and Bolivia, are hoping Lionel Messi will be fit for both their games against Paraguay (On Friday, Bangladesh time) and Peru.

The Barcelona forward is said to be nursing a sore ankle, leaving Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni considering his options if his captain is unavailable.

Paulo Dybala is again missing from the squad along with Sergio Aguero, although Angel Di Maria has been recalled for the first time in over a year. Lautaro Martinez will likely start up front while super-sub Joaquin Correa could be rewarded for his winning goal in the altitude of La Paz.

Lucas Alario has also forced his

way into contention after scoring seven goals for Bayer Leverkusen in his past four Bundesliga appearances. Uruguay meet Colombia in Barranquilla on Friday (Saturday in Bangladesh) attempting to bounce back from last month's 4-2 loss in Ecuador.

Luis Suarez is the joint leading scorer in qualifying with three goals, all of them penalties, carrying over his form from club level with Atletico Madrid.

Real Madrid midfielder Fede Valverde is out with a fractured shin and Maxi Gomez is absent due to a knee problem for Uruguay.

Last year's Copa America runners-up Peru on Friday (Saturday in Bangladesh) play Chile -- the country that won the tournament in 2015 and 2016.

Both nations are looking to breathe life into their qualifying bids in Santiago after collecting just a point from the opening two rounds.



Although Argentina and Brazil players seemed joyful during their training sessions, both South American giants are struggling with a number of injuries. Brazil are without the likes of Neymar, Casemiro and Philippe Coutinho as they host Venezuela in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday morning (Bangladesh Time) while Argentina will have to make do without Paulo Dybala and Sergio Aguero when they take on Paraguay on Friday (Bangladesh Time).

PHOTO: TWITTER

