

Suman looking to strike on debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Suman Reza is likely to debut and pair with Nabib Newaj Jibon up front in the first of two FIFA international friendlies against Nepal at Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

British coach Jamie Day yesterday announced the final 23-member squad, which also saw recalls for fit-again striker Jibon and holding midfielder Atiqur Rahman Fahad, who had been out of the squad after picking up an injury during Asian Games in Indonesia 2018.

Day had included four new faces -- Finland-born Tariq Raihan Kazi, Nazmul Islam Rasel, MS Bablu and Suman Reza -- in a preliminary 36-member squad, with Bablu and Suman making the final cut.

The significant exclusions were goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana and Raihan Hasan, who had both been part of Day's starting eleven in the past few international matches.

The 41-year-old is thinking of playing a 4-4-2 or 4-3-3 against Nepal in order to get his players ready for their tough assignment against Qatar in December.

It was also learned that he may make three to four changes to the eleven that started against Burundi in January during the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, with Suman, Manik Molla and Bishwanath set for starts while Anisur Rahman Zico and Shahidul Alam Sohel are competing for a place between the posts.

"The main target was to regain fitness during the camp. If I can start in the eleven, then my dream will come true and I want to make my debut memorable by scoring goals," Suman told The Daily Star.

Explaining Rana's exclusion, Day said: "I know what Rana can do, so I want to see how someone else does in a national team situation. That's the point of friendlies."



Head coach Jamie Day got in on the act to get his charges pepped up yesterday, the eve of the first FIFA friendly between Bangladesh and Nepal.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Focus on performance, not result

SPORTS REPORTER



While Bangladesh and visiting Nepal are eagerly anticipating their first taste of the new normal through the first of two FIFA-sanctioned friendlies today, both sides are also nurturing hopes of a triumphant return to action.

The match will get underway at 5:00pm BST with state-owned Bangladesh Television and private channel T-Sports telecasting the match from the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The coronavirus pandemic had halted sporting activities all over the world, but European nations have already come out of their Covid-19-induced slumber and are holding domestic and international matches.

Asian nations have also stepped up and adapted to the new normal, with Bangladesh and Nepal availing the opportunity afforded by FIFA's November friendly window to renew their rivalry as well as get back into competitive action after a break of almost eight months.

Bangladesh and Nepal had



The most important thing about playing the Nepal friendly is to get match-fit because we did not play in last eight months. I want to contribute maximum in the match. Revenge has been in my mind because we lost to them in last three matches and I want to win the match.

JAMAL BHUIYAN, BANGLADESH CAPTAIN



We are really excited to play the friendlies against Bangladesh as there was no football for a long time. The match is obviously going to be very exciting and competitive though we got short time to get prepared. We are excited and ready to fight together.

KIRAN CHEMJONG, NEPAL CAPTAIN

little time to prepare for the match and, given the circumstances, are focused on their performance rather than thinking about the outcome. "We are looking forward to getting football back in Bangladesh. I think providing the players with match time is the first thing and it is obviously going to be a tough game because we lost to them in an U-23 game and in

the SAFF championship. The boys worked as hard as they could. It is their first game in eight months so they may make mistakes, but we have to ensure they are prepared and injury-free," head coach Jamie Day told a crowded press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

Despite Bangladesh having more time to prepare than

Nepal, whose preparations were hampered by eight of their players testing positive for Covid-19, Day was not interested in

"This time I'm not worried about favourites. I'm not worried about winning the match. I want to get the team ready and give players game time before the Qatar match. If you ask about a win, I want to win every match for Bangladesh. If you see the whole picture of Nepal, they are around 170 in the FIFA rankings and they beat us twice previously. We had three weeks of training and will assess the performance of the players through tomorrow's match. I don't think the match is about who is stronger, who is sharper or who had more training."

On the other hand, captain Jamal Bhuiyan was hungry to avenge the two losses against Nepal.

Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan echoed Day's sentiments, saying: "I am not looking for a win. I want to measure the team and individuals' improvement as we lacked preparation and lost almost four players of the starting eleven due to Covid-19. So it is going to be a problem, but I believe in my boys."

Shakib boost for Khulna

SPORTS REPORTER



A lot of curiosity was generated among cricketers as the players' draft of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup, which will mark the return of competitive cricket in the country following a lengthy break due to the Covid-19 pandemic, took place at a city

hotel yesterday.

The draft took place behind closed doors and many cricketers remained in constant touch with the journalists keeping a close eye on proceedings.

Through a lottery, the five teams got opportunities to pick players, who were divided into four grades -- A, B, C and D. Beximco Dhaka got the first call and picked wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim from Grade A.

Dhaka also roped in experienced pacer Rubel Hossain, and balanced that by picking up and comers like young left-handed opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Under-19 World Cup-winning skipper Akbar Ali.

Gemcon Khulna was the second team to call and they wasted no time in drafting in Shakib Al Hasan, who will be making his return to cricket in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup after completing a one-year ban. Khulna also picked another experienced cricketer in Mahmudullah Riyad, also from Grade A, but he is currently in self-isolation after testing positive for coronavirus and is expected to join the squad after he tests negative. It will however be interesting to see who will lead Khulna as two experienced campaigners Shakib and Mahmudullah -- both having led Bangladesh in the shortest format -- are in the team.

Fortune Barishal picked Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal and has already announced that the left-hander will captain the side this season. They also boast bright performers from last month's BCB President's Cup like Taskin Ahmed, Afif Hossain, Irfan Shukkur, Sumon Khan and Towhid Hridoy.

Gazi Group Chattogram picked Mustafizur Rahman from Grade A and generally banked on experience when forming their squad. Tigers' Test skipper Mominul Haque, Liton Das, Mohammad Mithun, Soumya Sarkar, Mosaddek Hossain and Taijul Islam will add loads of experience as they are all international players. Chattogram also have a few youngsters like pacer Shoriful Islam and Mahmudul Hasan Joy, both of whom have impressed in recent times.

Minister Group Rajshahi picked all-rounder Saifuddin from Grade B as their first call and they also have roped in former Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraf, who was in Grade D. Each team can have a maximum of 16 players in the squad and in terms of expenditure, Khulna topped the list as they spent Tk 1.14 crore in the players' draft.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is yet to announce the schedule of the tournament, it was learned that the competition is set to begin from the third week of November. All the matches of the tournament are expected to take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.



Pucovski, Green rewarded

AFP, Sydney

Highly-rated young prospects Will Pucovski and Cameron Green were Thursday included in an expanded 17-man Test squad to face India as Australia looks to the future.

Opener Pucovski, 22, and all-rounder Green, 21, have been hammering on the door this season, impressing in the domestic Sheffield Shield with a host of former Australian greats urging their inclusion.

The selectors -- coach Justin Langer, Trevor Hohns and George Bailey -- heeded the calls, but not at the expense of the out-of-form Joe Burns, who retains his spot alongside regular opener David Warner. Rookie spinner Mitchell Swepson and seamer Sean Abbott, along with fast bowler Michael Neser, who has long been on the fringes, also made the grade and are in line for debuts.

"It is such a positive sign for Australian cricket to have so many good young players stepping into contention," said Hohns. "Two of those many standout players were of course Cameron Green and Will Pucovski."

"Their undeniable form demanded selection and we are very pleased to have these young men in the squad for what will be a tremendous Test series against an extremely formidable opponent." World number one Australia play four Tests against Virat Kohli's second-ranked India starting with a day-night fixture in Adelaide on December 17.

They then move to the traditional Boxing Day Test in Melbourne before heading to Sydney and Brisbane, with Kohli set to miss the final three games to return home for the birth of his first child.

Ramos equals record, Ronaldo gets closer

AGENCIES



Finland spoiled Marcus Thuram's party on Wednesday after beating France 2-0 on the day the Borussia Moenchengladbach attacker emulated his father Lilian Thuram by making his debut for Les Bleus.

Thuram was picked by Didier Deschamps for the friendly at the Stade de France over 22 years after his dad won the World Cup at the same ground, but despite a strong performance on the left wing could not stop the Finns from coming out on top.

Marcus Forss stunned the hosts when he collected the ball after a Moussa Sissoko mistake and rammed home at Steve Mandanda's near post.

France barely had any time to react before Onni Valakari doubled the away side's lead with a stunning effort after being left to stroll towards goal. Ronaldo continues goal quest Cristiano Ronaldo continued his quest to snatch the all-time record

for most international goals when he struck his 102nd Portugal goal in their in a 7-0 win over Andorra.

Former Iran striker Ali Daei holds the record on 109 goals.

France's opponents on Saturday in what could be a Nations League A, Group 3 decider strolled past

Riccardo Orsolini added a fourth also from the spot four minutes from the end to complete the rout.

Meanwhile, Frank de Boer's wait for a first win as Netherlands coach goes on after his team drew 1-1 with Spain in a friendly in Amsterdam on Wednesday.

confirmed in a statement.

All Croatia players, including Besiktas centre-back Vida, had returned negative tests on Monday and underwent another routine test on Wednesday morning ahead of the Turkey game.

The experienced Vida started



Cristiano Ronaldo got his 102nd goal for his country as Portugal thrashed Andorra 7-0 while Croatia captain Domagoj Vida was taken off at half-time against Turkey as a number of friendly matches took place across Europe on Wednesday night. Meanwhile, (bottom) Sergio Ramos made a cameo appearance, equalling Gianluigi Buffon's record of 176 international caps for an European player, during Spain's 1-1 draw against the Netherlands.

PHOTO: TWITTER/REUTERS



their weak opponents in Lisbon despite not starting a single player from the team that beat Sweden 3-0 last month.

Italy extend unbeaten run, Ramos equals record

Vincenzo Grifo scored his first senior international goal and Federico Bernardeschi put the hosts two goals ahead 13 minutes later.

Grifo stepped up and scored his second from the penalty spot when Roberto Gagliardini was tripped with 15 minutes remaining and

De Boer has now gone four matches without a victory since being appointed in September to succeed Ronald Koeman, who left to take over at Barcelona.

Sergio Ramos came on in the second half to earn his 176th cap, equalling Gianluigi Buffon's record for international appearances by a European player.

VIDA PLAYS WITH COVID-19 Croatia defender Domagoj Vida played the opening half of their 3-3 draw with Turkey on Wednesday before the team received the information that he had tested positive for COVID-19, the country's football association

the game as Croatia's captain, giving away a penalty in a combative first half.

Turkey's team management were initially informed of a potentially positive result shortly before the second half of the clash, by which time manager Zlatko Dalic had already brought on Filip Uremovic in place of Vida.

Vida, 31, was immediately isolated from the squad before a retest confirmed his positive result. Croatia said he will spend the next few days in self-isolation in Istanbul, home of his club Besiktas, while the team travel to Stockholm.

New cases raise concern

SPORTS REPORTER

Although the players' draft for the upcoming five-team Bangabandhu T20 Cup took place yesterday, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is yet to announce the schedule of the tournament.

It will be a significant challenge for the BCB to ensure safety this time around despite successfully managing to complete the three-team BCB President's Cup last month by creating a bio-secure bubble.

Players have been unexpectedly testing positive for coronavirus and Bangladesh's T20 captain Mahmudullah Riyad and Test captain Mominul Haque in self-isolation after returning positive tests.

Selector and former national captain Habibul Bashar also tested positive on Wednesday, laying bare the reality of how hard it will be for the BCB to tackle the second wave of the coronavirus in winter.

However, the board is prepared to take all preventative measures, including keeping all teams at the same hotel in a bio-secure bubble.

The BCB is reportedly planning to conduct testing for all the players just before they check into the hotel, one day before the tournament begins. Yet, the question remains: if a player tests positive at the last moment, what will be the next step from the BCB?