

Forwards finally fire, but midfield raises concern

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh coach Jamie Day expressed his satisfaction at the quality of the two goals against Nepal on Friday but at the same time expressed concern over not just the attacking third but also other areas on the pitch in regards to the challenge of taking on Qatar in a World Cup qualifier on December 4.

While the coach lamented that his charges could not avail all their scoring chances, he was generous in his praise of goalscorers Nabib Newaz Jibon and Mahbubur Rahman Sufil.

"Very good goals actually. Saad (Uddin) did very well crossing and Jibon did a good finish. It could have been two or three after that. We worked on counter attack in training and it's nice to get the goal after a fine effort. Great run from Sufil," the coach said after the match.

Sufil was satisfied with his effort and the goal, especially as he raced past a defender before curling the ball past the keeper into the far corner of the net.

"The coach said well played and good luck. My club coach also congratulated me. So I'll have to keep working hard to be a regular



PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

in the team" the Bashundhara Kings forward told reporters yesterday.

Sufil had come on as a second-half substitute after Sumon Reza, one of the debutants, failed to make an impression while playing as a No. 9. With Bashundhara Kings' striker Matin Mia unavailable, there were only a couple of other options available in that position, namely veteran Tawhidul Alam and untested MS Bablu. Day gave Sumon the chance but was unimpressed with what he saw.

"Sumon hasn't been coached properly (at club level). He's making runs and getting tired

which he doesn't need to do," the coach said of the striker who was taken off at the end of the first half.

The one man that impressed was Jibon, who is finding his feet in his new position. Often proving to be a wasteful centre-forward previously, Jibon has been far more effective when playing behind the striker. The Abahani forward gave the credit to his club coach Mario Lemos.

"This is only the second time I played in this position in the national team, but I play there regularly for Abahani. When playing behind the striker, you get more of the ball," Jibon said.

Day, too, was of the opinion

that he can get the best out of Jibon behind the striker, but in the absence of a genuine centre-forward, he is often forced to employ the Abahani forward as a No. 9.

While the dilemma regarding the attacking third showed signs of solutions, there were question marks over the midfield, which looked increasingly tired and lacking in cohesion as the game progressed. The coach made substitutions, but things hardly changed. He is missing two key players -- Mamunul Islam, who was injured recently, and Mashuk Mia Johnny, who is recovering from a long-term injury. Atikur Rahman Fahad, another midfielder, was rusty when he made his first appearance in two years.

"We've not played for eight months and Fahad has not played for two years. He's going to be rusty, he's going take time. Some players get back to fitness quicker than other players, some players adapt into the game," the coach said when asked about the performance of his midfield.

Debutant goalkeeper Anisur Rahman and the line of defence, according to the coach, did a good job. Although they did not face too much of a challenge, they will certainly be tested a great deal when taking on Qatar in Doha next month.



'There was no social distancing'

SPORTS REPORTER



"There was no social distancing today" is what Bangladesh coach Jamie Day said when asked about the turnout of spectators for Friday's FIFA international friendly against Nepal which Bangladesh won 2-0.

The coach praised the support that his team got but did not hesitate either to imply, even on a lighter note, that the first international fixture in the country since the start of the pandemic could have been better organised as the dangers of Covid-19 still loom large all over the world.

The Bangladesh Football Federation sold 8,000 tickets for the match -- one-third of the capacity of the venue -- but there were a far greater number that watched the match from the stands.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm regarding this match and there were long queues in front of a few gates. So our security

personnel could not stop some people from entering even after all the 8,000-capacity was filled up. This happened at the Abahani and Mohammedan galleries," BFF general secretary Abu Nayem Shohag told The Daily Star.

According to the BFF spokesman, there were around 350 security personnel deployed for this match and it was ensured that the entrants were wearing masks and their hands were sanitised on entry. There were markings, too, at the galleries to ensure physical distancing, which were largely ignored.

The BFF spokesman said they would try to be more cautious regarding this issue in the next match on Tuesday.

"We only realised at the last moment about the enormous demand to watch this match, which caught us a bit off-guard," Shohag said. "But we will try to ensure more discipline in the next match by opening the gates early, installing more barricades and deploying more personnel to ensure physical distancing inside the venue."

T20 Cup from November 24

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the dates for the Bangabandhu T20 Cup yesterday, scheduling the tournament to begin on November 24 and slating the final for December 18.

Beximco Dhaka will take on Minister Group Rajshahi in the opening game, which will be a day game starting at 2:00pm, before Fortune Barishal face Gemcon Khulna in the day's second game scheduled to begin from 7:00pm under lights.

All the matches, including the final, will take at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur and will be telecast Live by T Sports.

All five teams will play two matches against each other in a round robin league and the top two sides will play a qualifier while the third and fourth-placed teams will take part in an eliminator.

The winner of the eliminator will face the losers of the first qualifier and the winner from that game will face the winner of the first qualifier in the final. Organisers have kept a reserve day for the final.

There will be a rest day in between the two matches that will be played on the same day.

The players draft took place on November 12 and saw Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad -- the two Grade A players -- join forces for Gemcon Khulna. Mushfiqur Rahim will feature for Beximco Dhaka and the Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal will lead Fortune Barishal. Mustafizur Rahman, who was also in Grade A, will be playing for Gazi Group Chattogram.

The BCB took some time to announce the schedule of the tournament as they completed the health safety measures. All the five teams will check into the same hotel and be kept in a bio-secure bubble before undergoing coronavirus testing, expected to be held on November 19.

"Public health is a priority for us. We cannot put that at risk. It is a good thing that BFF has taken the initiative. But we need to consider the next steps too. If we let people in, then the stadium might be jam-packed as everyone will get to enjoy a live cricket match after a long time. If we want, we can do it. But we need to consider if we are endangering public health by letting people in."

NIZAMUDDIN CHOWDHURY, BCB CEO



Djokovic eyes record as Nadal seeks first

AFP, LONDON



Novak Djokovic is bidding to win the ATP Finals for a record-equalling sixth time as Rafael Nadal chases the biggest title missing from his glittering resume at London's O2 Arena.

The top eight available players in the men's rankings -- with Roger Federer absent -- will compete at the end-of-season tournament, which starts on Sunday behind closed doors despite a coronavirus lockdown in England.

The two round-robin groups

have been named Tokyo 1970 and London 2020 on the 50th anniversary of the first staging of the event. World No. 1 Djokovic is in Group Tokyo alongside Daniil Medvedev, 2018 winner Alexander Zverev and Argentine debutant Diego Schwartzman.

Second-seed Nadal will compete against defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas, Dominic Thiem, and Andrey Rublev, who is appearing for the first time, in Group London.

The four best-placed players from the round-robin stage will progress to the semi-finals of the event, taking place in London for the final year before a move to Turin.

Six-time champion Federer,

recovering from knee surgery, is the most notable absentee after a global tennis season truncated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Five-time champion Djokovic, who recently equalled Pete Sampras's record of six year-end number one finishes, has lost just three matches this season, with one of those his default at the US Open.

The Serbian, who has not won the London event since 2015, said he was looking to end his season on a high at the elite eight-man event.

Nadal, who pulverised Djokovic in the French Open final to pull level with Federer on 20 Grand Slams, has qualified for the ATP Finals for a record 16 consecutive years.

Short balls no stress, says Smith

PTI, MELBOURNE



Steve Smith has dared the lethal Indian fast bowling unit to bring on the short stuff in the upcoming marquee Test series, saying he has faced a lot of it in his life.

According to the former captain, trying short-pitched bowling against him could work in Australia's favour.

"If teams are trying to get me out like that it's probably a big benefit for the team because it takes a lot out of people's bodies if you continually bowl short," Smith told News Corp.

"I've faced a lot of short bowling in my life and I haven't had too many stresses with it. I suppose we'll just wait and see."

Against New Zealand in the 2019-2020 season, Smith



was dismissed by left-arm pacer Neil Wagner four times, as the Kiwi consistently attacked the batsman with short-pitched deliveries aimed at his body.

Smith, though, still managed to average nearly 43 in the three matches and wore the bowlers down with his dogged approach in the middle, helping the others to pile on the runs.

"It's no dramas for me. I just play the game and sum up the conditions, how they're trying to get me out and being able to counter that," Smith said.



FRESH BLOW FOR LIVERPOOL

Mohamed Salah has tested positive for Covid-19, just days after he was filmed without a facemask and not socially distancing at his brother's wedding in Cairo and added to Liverpool's mounting list of absentees to give Jurgen Klopp another headache. The Egyptian FA confirmed on Friday that Salah, Liverpool's leading scorer with eight goals, had contracted Covid-19 but was asymptomatic. He has begun a period of isolation in Cairo and must remain in Egypt for the next week before he is allowed to return to England.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Brazil prepare for 'war' against Uruguay

REUTERS



Brazil and Uruguay both recorded victories in the World Cup qualifiers on Friday, setting up a meeting in Montevideo next week that Brazilian defender Marquinhos predicted would be another "war" between the old rivals.

"We know that the games against Uruguay are always a war," Marquinhos said after Brazil's hard-fought 1-0 win over Venezuela.

"We have to go there prepared because it will be a difficult game. They are a strong side, with tradition, with quality, with a great defence. We are going to work over the next few days so we can go there and play well and win points away from home."

They will face a side that is on

a high after a comfortable 3-0 win away at Colombia.

Edinson Cavani scored after five minutes, Luis Suarez doubled their lead early in the second half and Darwin Nunez rounded off the

scoring in 73 minutes.

The results leave Brazil at the top of the South American qualifying group for Qatar 2022 as the only team to have won all three of their first games. Uruguay are fourth,

with six points.

"It will be a difficult game, Uruguay had an important win today but we know what we are capable of," Brazilian midfielder Allan said.



Luis Suarez leaps in celebration after converting a second-half penalty as Uruguay beat Colombia 3-0 while Brazil forward Roberto Firmino celebrates scoring their only goal against Venezuela in their World Cup qualifier on Friday.

PHOTO: TWITTER