



Mere days after Bangladesh coach Jamie Day balked at the lack of social distancing among the crowd, a fan decided to invade the pitch for a selfie with Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan during the second FIFA-sanctioned international friendly against Nepal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Jamal was shell-shocked and while security eventually intervened, the incident certainly raised questions about Bangladesh Football Federation's security measures.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Revamped Nepal hold Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER



Nepal put up a vastly improved performance to deny Bangladesh a clean sweep in the Mujib Borsho international friendly series, holding the hosts to a goalless draw in the second and final match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

On the back of a 2-0 win in the first match, Bangladesh came into the match harbouring hopes of another victory over the Himalayan nation but the hosts -- without head coach Jamie Day, who had tested positive Covid-19 twice -- were unimpressive, especially throughout the second half.

However, Bangladesh left the field with big smiles after winning the series 1-0, bolstered by the fact that the results over a higher ranked side would help them to climb up the FIFA rankings.

The Bangladesh Football Federation marked the final match with fireworks which gave the large crowd a taste of festivities. However, a spectator hopping the fence and running onto the pitch to take a selfie with Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan raised questions over the security management by the BFF, which now risks punishment from FIFA.

Nepal made five changes to the side that lost 2-0 in the first match and came out strongly, enjoying the lion share of possession throughout the match. However, they could not manage to break through as Bangladesh recorded another clean sheet.

The hosts made two changes to the

team, drafting in goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana and centre-back Yeasin Khan, and were menacing from the word go.

Saad Uddin threatened the opponents in the very first minute from the right, which was an area where the hosts saw a number of good moves as the front three of Saad, Nabib Newaj Jibon and Suman Reza combined effectively. However, they also failed to make inroads.

Rana did not face much of a challenge, barring one big chance for the Nepal forwards, who had good service from their midfield. Rana was beaten by a glancing header from substitute Nawayug Shrestha in stoppage time of the second half, but the woodwork came to Bangladesh's rescue.

Nepal grew in confidence as the match progressed and looked eager to break the deadlock as the second half resumed. The visitors applied huge pressure in the first 10 minutes after the break and exposed the Bangladesh defence, but failed to cash in on those opportunities.

Bangladesh stuck to their counter-attacking philosophy and Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, who netted in the first game, was brought on to replace Sumon. However, the speedy striker hardly found the room to cause damage.

Assistant coach Stuart Watkiss replaced Manik Molla and Mohammad Ibrahim with Biplu Ahmed and Sohel Rana in order to gain more control over the midfield and Bangladesh sporadically launched ultimately unproductive attacks. But Nepal's grip on the match was strong till the final minute and they left the match with the solace that they had at least secured a draw.

'Have to be at our best to compete against Qatar'

SPORTS REPORTER



As Bangladesh laboured to a goalless draw against Nepal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium last night, their next match's hosts, Qatar, were fighting against one of Asia's best, South Korea, in a FIFA friendly in Austria.

The 2022 World Cup hosts had already played out a 1-1 draw against Costa Rica on Friday as they look to host Bangladesh in a World Cup qualifier in Doha on December 4.

The gulf of difference between the challenge posed by Nepal and the one presented by Qatar can

hardly be over-emphasised.

Qatar sit atop their five-team group with 13 points from five matches while Bangladesh are at the bottom with a single point from four matches.

Bangladesh's stand-in coach Stuart Watkiss, who guided the side in absence of Covid-positive Jamie Day, conceded that it would be a tough assignment in his post-match reaction.

"When we play against Qatar, we have to be aware that we will play against the Asian champions. So we will have to be at our best to even be competitive," the 54-year-old coach said.

Bangladesh, though, were far from their best yesterday. While

the men in red and green looked hungry for goals in the first match -- especially in the first half of that game -- they hardly threatened in the entire match yesterday.

Watkiss said Nepal played "very well" and that the draw was a "fair result".

"We passed the ball quite well and had good little spells, but unfortunately we didn't create the amount of chances that we would have liked. It was a close game and a very fair result."

With just over two weeks remaining until the Qatar game, Bangladesh will have no time to cool down as they are scheduled to board a Doha-bound flight tomorrow without their head

coach.

Following the completion of a three-day quarantine period, during which time the players can avail gym and swimming facilities, the players will have about 10 days to prepare for the Qatar match, with two practice matches against local clubs as part of preparations.

The match against Qatar will be a reverse fixture of last year's qualifying match which Bangladesh lost 2-0 in Dhaka despite fighting equally against the Middle East side.

The pitch in Doha should be a lot more conducive for fast-paced football, contrary to the slow-paced game that Bangladesh rely on.



Bangladesh lifted the trophy of the Mujib Borsho FIFA international friendly series despite a goalless draw against Nepal in the second match as the hosts had won the first match 2-0.

PHOTO: STAR

President's Cup brings hockey back

SPORTS REPORTER

Hockey is set to return to competitive action after a long coronavirus-induced break as the inaugural President's Cup tournament gets underway at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today, marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hockey will roll on the blue turf for the first time since the Shaheed Smriti Hockey tournament in February where Bangladesh Navy won the title. But this time only five teams, not including Navy, are competing in the round-robin format tournament, with the top two teams of the table slated to play the final on November 30.

"Hockey activities remained halted for a long time due to the pandemic even though we arranged two camps.

We are now going to hold a tournament with five teams -- Bangladesh Air Force, Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Police, BHF Red XI and BHF Green XI, with the latter two teams comprising of players from the ongoing training camp of U-21 national team," Bangladesh Hockey Federation's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf said.

Sponsors Bangladesh Air Force Welfare Trust's CEO Syed Fakhruddin Karim expressed his satisfaction at being involved with hockey, and said that they would stay with hockey if given the opportunity.

The tournament is being held to also assess the performance of U-21 team.



Fresh outbreak leaves CA scrambling to save series

AGENCIES, Melbourne



Cricket Australia has had to scramble to get players from around the country into NSW as the coronavirus outbreak in South Australia causes logistical mayhem and threatens to disrupt the start of the international season.

And while Cricket Australia maintains the first Test against India from December 17 will remain in Adelaide, South Australian Premier Steven Marshall could not guarantee that.

"We are still hopeful that the cricket will go ahead. What we are doing in South Australia is putting all those people we think pose the biggest risk, those people that have come into contact with someone who is infectious, we have put them into quarantine as quickly as possible," Marshall said on Tuesday.

Melbourne Cricket Club chief Stuart

Fox has ruled out taking the day-night opener -- the MCG will host the second Test -- but the SCG is open to the idea if there is a late change.

In scenes reminiscent of the exodus from the winter football codes earlier this year, when players had to leave Victoria at short notice to avoid border controls, CA on Tuesday worked to get exemptions to put West Australian, South Australian, Tasmanian and Queensland players on flights as soon as possible for Sydney to ensure they can take part in the white-ball series against India, beginning November 27, and the Australia A matches against the tourists in December.

Cricket Australia is reportedly bracing for a mass airlift of players and staff into New South Wales in an attempt to save the series. According to a ESPNcricinfo report, players looking at an early arrival into Sydney once logistics of travel, including possible charter flights, and accommodation are sorted.

Balance key to Dhaka's might

The five-team Bangabandhu T20 Cup scheduled to begin from November 24 is set to be the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) big step towards proper resumption of competitive cricket in the country amid the coronavirus pandemic which saw the game halted since March. Last month, the board arranged the 50-over BCB President's Cup, but it was an intra-squad tournament to give the country's top-level cricketers some match time and a means for the board to see what was possible when operating in the new normal. The Bangabandhu T20 Cup is expected to be more competitive and on a bigger scale in terms of the participation of domestic cricketers. Fortune Barishal, Beximco Dhaka, Minister Group Rajshahi, Gemcon Khulna, and Gazi Group Chattogram are the five teams that will be participating in the tournament, having picked their squads through a players' draft -- with players being divided into Grades A, B, C and D -- on November 12 at a city hotel. In the lead-up to the tournament, The Daily Star tries to assess and analyse each of the five teams, starting with Beximco Dhaka.

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BACKGROUND: During the players draft, Beximco Dhaka got the first call and roped in experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim from Grade A. Mushfiqur was in terrific form during the BCB President's Cup and was adjudged the player of the series. The owners from Dhaka Dynamites -- the Bangladesh Premier League franchisee -- have a reputation of forming strong and balanced squads. That was reflected during the players draft where Dhaka picked a mix of youth and experience.

NATIONAL STARS:

Apart from Mushfiqur, Dhaka also have the likes of experienced pacer Rubel Hossain, off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, top-order batsman Naim Sheikh, Sabbir Rahman in the middle, and pacer Abu Hider Rony -- all of whom have represented Bangladesh at the highest level.

LOCAL PERFORMERS:

Dhaka also has a variety of local performers. The likes of left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed, batsman Yasir Ali, all-rounder Muktar Ali and batsman Robiul Islam have been consistent performers on the domestic circuit.



WHAT SETS DHAKA APART:

As the head of BCB's game development committee, Dhaka's coach and former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud Sujon also focused on utilising promising young players from the 2019 ICC Under-19 World Cup-winning side. Skipper Akbar Ali, alongside promising left-handed opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim and batsman Shahadat Hossain Dipu will surely add a lot of energy to the side. Young left-arm pacer Mehedi Hasan Rana was a revelation of sorts during last year's Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League and he will make

a comeback in Dhaka colours after recovering from injury.

KEY PLAYER:

Undoubtedly, Mushfiqur will be the key player. Arguably the best batsman in the country, he will be a trump card for Dhaka because of the form he has been in over the last few years. Dhaka is yet to announce their captain but whether or not Mushfiqur leads the side, he will definitely have a huge impact through his presence as batsman, wicketkeeper and also through his wisdom garnered over a decade and a half of top-level cricket.