

Dido's dream of a difference

A Brazilian who is also Dutch - the marriage of *joga bonito* with total football is the best of all possible outcomes that Bangladesh can derive from their newly appointed football coach, Edson Silva Dido. A player who once graced the same club as the legendary Zico, Dido brings with him a wealth of experience. His start with Bangladesh has been encouraging, but improving a sport on which the sun had all but set proves to be a hefty challenge for this wiry South-American. In a candid exchange with the **Daily Star Sport's Quazi Zulquarnain Islam & Ameeruddin Zain**, Dido talks problems, solutions and the need for a holistic and coordinated approach to progress.

DSS (Daily Star Sport): The recently concluded AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers was your first big assignment as the national coach. Did the team perform according to your expectations?

Dido: Only our game against Cambodia fulfilled my expectations and made me happy. We played according to our strategy and our formation worked. We can take that game as an example on how we should play and build from that. We lost against Myanmar because we failed to repeat what we did in the first game.

DSS: What did you expect when you signed on for the job? How would you compare it to your other jobs?

Dido: Every single job is different and has diverse aspects. Which is why each should be addressed accordingly. For example, in Vietnam infrastructure is already in place. There are stadiums and a championship. Over here you don't have that. You only play football for three months, you have tournaments not championships (season-long football). And then you have the Super Cup, which took ten days. And that's that.

DSS: So would you say that is a main reason for our players' lack of fitness?

Dido: Absolutely. It's imperative that you have football for nine months a year. It conditions the players so that I don't have to invest everything into developing them physically through a two-week national camp. You have the B. League but that is still more of a tournament than a full blown out championship because of its length.

DSS: In your short stint so far, what do you think are the key problems of our players?

Dido: They certainly have a lot of bad habits, which is hard to change. But I don't like to look at problems. My players have been constantly told that they are not good and that has affected their self-confidence. But I have seen a lot of skill and ability in them and most of the issues they have are due to poor coaching than any lack of application from the player's themselves.

DSS: The trouble then is in the coaching?

Dido: Certainly. You can teach a player the basics of playing football, upto the age of 16. After that it becomes impossible. For example, recently I gathered some information about the newly started school league. It's all good and well. But my question is, who is coaching these players? You have to install professional coaches in your set-up to provide professional guidance & proper advice. The real change and the real education come in when players are young. I am not sure all the school trainers are up to the mark.

DSS: So if you were offered the chance to coach the coaches, would you take it?

Dido: No, I would not take it, I have already offered it (to BFF). Some of the coaches come to me and I help them out. Whenever I have a camp with the national team I invite the coaches to come to the ground and after practice I like to sit with them and talk football. Aside the physical conditioning, there is a lot about tactics that I can pass on from my experiences all over the world. I have watched the league here and tactically

speaking there is a huge scope for improvement and making tweaks that many may not even be aware of.

DSS: Thus as a national coach you should not be restricted to just training the national team but take on a more holistic approach towards facilitating overall development...

Dido: It's something that I can do. I have already offered to coach the age-level national sides and develop them as we go along. But for overall achievement, we need a more coordinated effort.

DSS: ...from?

Dido: The clubs, first and foremost. Mr Salahuddin is trying very hard to bring in resources for the sport but the groundwork needs to be done at the club level and not at the federation. If the clubs don't change their way of operation, then development is not possible.

DSS: So what exactly can the clubs do?

Dido: Have youth structures for a start. I came across an open



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day training held at the stadium by BFF to scout players from across the country. But these are the kind of things that a club needs to do, more than once or twice a year. They need to have a stable youth team and scout for players and incorporate them into their team. It will net in a lot of players since we don't have a system to capture them.

DSS: But we have made baby steps so far, you agree? Things are looking up...

Dido: Yes. If football does not go up under Salahuddin's wing, it will never do. Because here you have a man who is prepared to do anything to help the sport. He has a vision and has already brought in so many resources to the game and from here the direction is only upwards. But it must be noted that developing a sport is not a one man show and that equally broad minded and visionary people will be needed to assist him to bring our football to a good level.

DSS: ...and do you think we have that?

Dido: In most cases yes. But there are a few egos that come into

the picture in certain cases.

DSS: Which certain cases?

Dido: For example, when I selected my players (for the AFC Challenge Cup) and gave the list to the committee a certain person pointed out names and spoke in bangla when I know that he can speak very good English. If someone has any queries, I am open to questions and I will help them out then. There may be issues about selection but at the end if anything goes wrong, it's my neck on the line and I am completely fine with that.

DSS: And apart from that you have had autonomy?

Dido: Mostly. There are certain individuals who are not very committed to an integrated approach and might feel like I am treading on their toes. But that kind of friction is understandable. Say, I have one development agenda and the development wing has another completely different one. We should work towards finding synergies and move forward with one approach. At the end we both aim towards the same goal.

DSS: And like you said, you are never afraid to take risks?

Dido: Certainly. I picked so many unknowns for the Challenge Cup and they all stood up and performed. Players like Manik, Emon Babu, Rashed who are 18/19 year olds and are not playing anywhere. But I saw them and I knew they were good. It was a calculated risk that paid off.

DSS: Who do you think is the best player in this squad?

Dido: It's not a question I like. But I will say this. Aminul (goalkeeper & captain) is the best only because in his position he has reached a level that no other players have been able to reach in their positions. He is a very good goalkeeper and I must also say that both my second and third keepers are also very good.

DSS: ...and who is the most talented?

Dido: Manik, I would say. The young lad is so talented. He can do box-to-box, pass square, pass forward, shoot -- the whole package. But surprisingly very few coaches here rate him. It's going back to the age-old mentality of playing with a defensive mindset. That leaves such talented players out. We need players like Manik to shine in the system & style of football that I envision Bangladesh to be playing.

DSS: Given the current set of circumstances, what can Edson Silva Dido do for Bangladesh football?

Dido: I don't want to see my name on the papers, I don't need to see my picture on the billboards and I have never been like that. I just want to know that one day I will look back and say that I have made a difference for Bangladesh. Like I look back at Vietnam. Even today I get emails from them thanking me for my time there.

DSS: Don't you agree that rankings are now irrelevant? Where do you see us in ten years?

Dido: Absolutely. Time holds the key. For us to be successful we need to work very hard, play a lot of international tournaments across the world. Learn new skills. These matches will give us a platform to convert our practice into performance. A lot depends on infrastructure and the development program because that is where success in football comes from.



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani chairman Salman F Rahman (R) speaks at a press conference, organised in connection with the AFC President's Cup football tournament, at the club premises yesterday.

Abahani all ready

AFC President's Cup from May 12

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani launched the AFC (Asian Football Confederation) President's Cup football tournament, which starts on May 12 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS), at the club premises yesterday.

Abahani will be organising and hosting this tournament, which will be held under direct supervision of AFC and facilitated by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

Along with the hosts, Sri Lanka Army and Ashgabat Turkmenistan will participate in the Group B matches of this prestigious annual tournament.

On the opening day, B. League champions Abahani will take on Sri Lanka Army at 6 pm. State owned Bangladesh Television will telecast the matches live from the venue.

Abahani chairman Salman F Rahman has hailed the tournament as a great honour for his club and promised the football millions of the country an event to remember.

"It's a great honour for us to host this tournament which will be under the direct supervision of AFC. Abahani have qualified for this event as the B. League champions and although we have had to organise this event hastily we have put in our best," said Rahman.

Abahani team manager Satyajit Das Rupu said that his side would take part in this competition with full team strength. "I don't think that it will be too hard for Abahani to make a clean sweep in this tournament, but the fact is that the ball is round and it might roll to any side," told Rupu.

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FIXTURES

May 12: Abahani v Sri Lanka Army (BNS, 6pm)
May 14: Ashgabat Turkmenistan v Sri Lanka Army (BNS, 6pm)
May 16: Abahani v Ashgabat Turkmenistan (BNS, 6pm)

Becks excited by Juve clash

AFP, Rome

Former England captain David Beckham said on Friday he is excited ahead of AC Milan's visit of Juventus on Sunday.

It will be the first time that Beckham comes up against Juve since joining Milan in January.

"It's quite simply a vital match, a historical match that I've been waiting for since I came here," he told Mediaset, the television channel owned by Milan president Silvio Berlusconi.

"It's always exciting to play against Juve, I did it with Manchester United and with Real Madrid and I'm sure there will be an incredible atmosphere."

"It's also important for us to win to hold onto second place."

Second-placed Milan lead Juve by four points with four games remaining and a victory would virtually assure them of holding onto that position.

However, Milan have the tougher run-in with matches against AS Roma and Fiorentina to come and a defeat would see Juve appear as favourites to take second spot.

Schaaf set for Wolves

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf is set to quit the UEFA Cup finalists at the end of the season to train Bundesliga leaders Wolfsburg, German tabloid Bild claim Saturday.

After Wolfsburg boss Felix Magath revealed on Wednesday he will coach and manage German league rivals Schalke 04 next season, league leaders Wolfsburg have approached Schaaf to train their side next season, claim Bild.

The 48-year-old has steered Bremen to Istanbul's UEFA Cup final on May 20 and on Sunday will celebrate ten years in charge of Werder the only club he appeared for during his playing career between 1978 and 1995.

Fergie predicting a MU-Barca classic

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson is predicting a classic Champions League final between Manchester United and Barcelona after the two European giants were left standing following a week of semifinal drama.

United's semifinal victory over Arsenal on Tuesday, followed by Barcelona's dramatic injury-time equaliser at Chelsea 24 hours later, has set up a dream final that has been welcomed by neutral supporters throughout the world.

And Ferguson believes that the quality of the two sides means the May 27 final will be the kind of spectacle everyone hopes for.

"I think you have the potential for a great final," he said. "That's what the public were looking at. Both clubs are recognised for playing good football, there's a good history to both clubs and I think it'll be a great final."

"I was looking at it in different ways, on the one hand

Chelsea and on the other Barcelona, but we've got them now and that's how we are going to prepare.

"I really enjoyed their performance (in the 6-2 win) against Real Madrid. I thought they were fabulous. That (Andres) Iniesta, I don't think he ever gives the ball away. No, they're a terrific side, a terrific football side."

Ferguson, still pressing to secure the Premiership league title for United, has conceded that he has not yet turned his thoughts to his line-up for their second consecutive Champions League final, although the manager is resigned to being without suspended midfielder Darren Fletcher.

The Scot is already conscious of the numerous difficult decisions he will have to face as he finalises his line-up.

"That's the difficulty at the moment," he said. "Prior to Tuesday night's game I was having regrets about playing Ryan Giggs the whole game, for instance, at Middlesbrough - so I wrestled with that throughout the day. But at the end of the day, I think I got it right."

Another burning issue that

is already on the agenda ahead of the final concerns the selection of the referee for the most high-profile game on the club calendar.

Norway's Tom Henning Ovrebo has come in for widespread criticism for his handling of the Chelsea and Barcelona semifinal and even United's semifinal referee, Italian Roberto Rosetti, clearly made an error in dismissing Fletcher and costing him an appearance in Rome.

Diplomatically, Ferguson refused to comment on the choice of official for the final, other than to claim he has confidence in UEFA making the correct appointment.

"You're getting a European final so you expect the referee to be the top and experienced, there's no question about that."

"You can't think it'll be anyone other than the best referee and the one who deserves it most."

"It may be Mr Rosetti because the game is in Italy, for instance. Sometimes it goes that way, in recognition of where the game's actually played. I don't have any worries about that."

UEFA tells ref to keep mum

AFP, Oslo

UEFA has told Norwegian referee Tom Henning Ovrebo not to speak the media following the controversy over his performance in the Champions League semifinal between Barcelona and Chelsea, the Norwegian FA said Friday.

Ovrebo is reported to have received death threats from disgruntled Chelsea fans after he turned down four strong penalty appeals from the Premier League side in their 1-1 draw with the Catalan giants on Wednesday.

"This matter is still being investigated by UEFA and UEFA has asked Ovrebo not to comment to the media on his own decisions or on the situation which occurred after the match," Norwegian FA spokesman Roger Solheim said in a statement.

Ovrebo was also at the centre of a heated exchange with Chelsea striker Didier Drogba following the final whistle, after Barcelona's injury time equaliser had sent the London side crashing out of the competition on away goals.

Solheim said UEFA would draw its own conclusions first and that Ovrebo would not be commenting on the game "until further notice."

Van Gaal to take over at Bayern

AFP, The Hague

Louis Van Gaal, the coach of newly crowned Dutch champions AZ Alkmaar, is set to take over at Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich, according to reports on Saturday.

According to Algemeen Dagblad newspaper Van Gaal has already agreed terms with the German champions to take over as of next season and will make an official announcement in the coming days.

The report added that Andries Jonker, the current technical director of Dutch side Willem II Tilburg and who was Van Gaal's assistant at Spanish giants Barcelona from 1997 to 2000, will join Van Gaal at Bayern.

AZ president Dirk Scheringa declared last Monday the club would not allow Van Gaal to leave the club.

"Louis is under contract until 2010," Scheringa told the website of Dutch magazine sportweek.nl.

"I'm not worried about anything as Van Gaal is a man of principle who always respects his contracts. And we've not been contacted by Bayern."

Bayern's general manager Uli Hoeness had claimed Van Gaal was close to agreeing to a deal that would see him replace Jurgen Klinsmann, who sacked two weeks ago after a string of mediocre performances.

Saturday's report said representatives of both clubs are set to thrash out a compensation package that would allow Van Gaal to join Bayern, where he could be joined by AZ captain and midfielder Stijn Schaars.

AZ recently failed in their bid to have Schaars, a 25-year-old Dutch international, sign an extra year's extension on to his contract, which expires in a year.

Dutchmen Dick Advocaat and Co Adriaanse are being tipped to succeed Van Gaal at AZ.

Henry in doubt for UCL final

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona may have to do without French international striker Thierry Henry for their Champions League final showdown against holders Manchester United in Rome as he has knee ligament trouble, the club said Friday.

"His presence is more than doubtful going into (the match in) Rome - and his participation there is not guaranteed," Barca said on their website.

The club said Henry had twisted a ligament in his right knee during last weekend's 6-2 stroll away to Real Madrid, the injury forcing him to miss the midweek Champions League semifinal win on away goals at Chelsea.

Barca confirmed that Henry, who is desperate to lift the European game's top honour having lost the final with Arsenal against his current side three years ago, "will not play the Spanish Cup final" next Wednesday against Athletic Bilbao.

And he is also now set to sit out the three league games the Catalan club, on the verge of lifting the Liga title, must play ahead of their United date on May 27.

Henry is having specialist treatment in a bid to get him ready to face United, Barca added.

Iran line-up friendlies

AFP, Tehran

Iran are to prepare for their next World Cup qualifier with friendly games against Syria, Vietnam and China, the ISNA news agency reported quoted in local newspaper on Saturday.

The games against Syria will be played in Tehran on May 23 and Team Melli will face Vietnam and China in China on May 29 and June 1 respectively.

Iran's next world cup qualifier will be an away game against North Korea on June 6. Their previous match in the group, held in Tehran, ended in Team Melli winning 2-1.

Iran has sacked two national football team coach

in a month time, and has resorted to a Iranian-American Afshin Qotbi who has promised to take his side to a fourth World Cup appearance at next summer's tournament in South Africa, despite their poor qualifying form.

Iran faces an uphill struggle to secure a place at the World Cup, with two away matches in South and North Korea and a home match with the UAE to come. It is currently in fourth place in Asian qualifying group two.

Qotbi, is banking on his knowledge of Korean football to give his new charges an advantage when they take on the North in their next game.

He had a long stint assisting successive Dutch coaches Guus Hiddink, Dick Advocaat and then Pim Verbeek with the South Korean national side.

South Korea top the pool with 11 points from five games, followed by their northern neighbours on 10 points from six games, with Saudi Arabia in third, also on 10 points from six games.

Iran have six points from five games, having recorded only one win and three draws.

Asia has four automatic qualifying berths, with the third-placed teams in the two final qualifying groups playing off against each other for the right to take on Oceania zone victors New Zealand for a place in the finals.

Iran have appeared in the 1978, 1998 and 2006 World Cups. Their best result in the competition was in France 98, when they beat arch-foe the United States by two goals to one in a group match.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United players Carlos Tevez (L), Darren Fletcher (2nd from L), Wayne Rooney (R) and manager Alex Ferguson (C) pose with India's Bhatti Airtel deputy CEO Sanjay Kapoor (3rd from L) and marketing director Shireesh Joshi following a signing ceremony at Old Trafford on Friday.