



PHOTO: STAR

Newly appointed Muktiyoddha Sangsad coach Maruful Haque briefs his charges in his first practice session with the club at the Army Stadium in Banani yesterday.

Fallen giants look to rise

Football
SPORTS REPORTER

They have emerged champions twice in the now defunct Premier Division football league but have little to show for in their first three seasons in the professional league. This season however, this traditional giant of the game is gearing up for a shot at the Bangladesh League title well before the start of the fourth edition of league and even before the start of the players transfer.

Muktiyoddha Sangsad, might be veritable giants in the football scene but they started practice yesterday at the Army Stadium in Banani aiming for a maiden Bangladesh League triumph.

And under the supervision of successful coach Maruful Haque who joined the freedom fighters' side this season from popular Mohammedan SC, they cannot be discounted.

Muktiyoddha's record in the professional league makes for unhappy reading. The freedom fighters got off to a fine start in the inaugural edition finishing third. But things have all been downhill from then on.

Escaping relegation somehow salvaged a miserable second season and although their fortunes have improved

slightly since then, the one-time giants managed only a mid-table finish in the third edition of the Bangladesh League.

However, there is renewed hope of a title push this season as Muktiyoddha have pushed for a revamp of the entire playing squad, roping in some 19 players, many of them top stars from giants Abahani and Mohammedan.

The transfer window will not open until September 1 but Muktiyoddha have all but confirmed their team for this season after signing goalkeeper Biplab, defenders Firoz Mahmud Titu, Obaidur Rahman, Yeamin Munna midfielders Motiur Munna, Enamul Haq Sharif, Arman Aziz, Azmal Hossain Biddut, Alamgir Kabir Rana, strikers Rokonzuzaman Kanchan and Mithun Chowdhury.

All of them took part in the first day of training yesterday.

The players will be training for three weeks before the Eid vacation and play two practice matches, one against BKSP (August 19) and other against Navy, informed coach Maruful after the training session.

"The management of Muktiyoddha has set their sights on the league title and rationally we have started the training early to achieve our target," said Maruful, who guided Mohammedan to win the Federation Cup twice and Super Cup once. Muktiyoddha have confirmed the

maximum ten players from Mohammedan this season and Maruful believes it will make his job easy as these players are already used to his training methods.

The AFC A-license coach said he would basically work to develop the players' skill, fitness, formation, individual and group attacking as well as defending during the three-week camp.

Maruful has also plans to run another three-week conditioning camp outside the capital if the Bangladesh Football Federation can follow its schedules properly.

Some eight foreign players from Brazil, Rwanda, Senegal and Nigeria have also sent their CVs along with video footage to be considered for the All Red outfit, informed Maruful.

As far as his competitors are concerned, newcomers Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club have confirmed the most number of players from the national fold.

Three-time Bangladesh League champions Abahani have also regrouped to build a good side but are not as strong as last season.

Considering the playing staff of the other teams, Maruful was confident that his charges would be better than the others in terms of effectively transferring his philosophy on the pitch.

Reina gifts

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He has convinced the likes of Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres to stay at Anfield while former Chelsea midfielder Cole has also helped strengthen the squad.

Torres was only on the bench as he recovers from a thigh strain picked up in the World Cup final while for Arsenal, Wenger opted to give 18-year-old Jack Wilshere a start in midfield and summer signings Chamakh and Koscielny also made their Premier League debuts.

Early on, Dirk Kuyt and Glen Johnson co-operated effectively down the right wing to cause problems while Cole also did his best to get behind the Arsenal backline but Liverpool could not keep possession long enough to cause real harm.

Arsenal's Gael Clichy resorted to shooting from 30 metres to try and break the deadlock.

The first real chance of the opening period occurred when Milan Jovanovic beat Arsenal's offside trap and chased down a Carragher ball but he slammed it into the crowd rather than the back of the net.

As half-time approached Johnson's left-foot effort appeared to be dipping in but Almunia get a crucial touch to tip it over the bar and Ngog had a header from the resulting corner cleared off the line by Clichy.

But just as Liverpool looked like ending the first half as the stronger side, Cole then received his marching orders after diving in near the corner flag.

Cole's dismissal clearly galvanised Liverpool and they scored just a minute after the restart thanks to Ngog.

He seemed to be going nowhere as he ran into the box but then thrashed the ball past Almunia to give Liverpool the lead.

Hodgson threw Torres on with just less than 20 minutes to go and as the end approached, Reina saved brilliantly from a Theo Walcott free-kick that seemed certain to go in.

Liverpool's resistance finally broke and Reina cruelly dropped the ball over his own goal-line for an entertaining ending.

Gay resurgence does not bother Bolt

Athletics

APP, Kingston

Double sprint world record-holder Usain Bolt says his loss to American rival Tyson Gay will not play on his mind.

Bolt, who cut his 2010 season short after losing his first 100m race in two seasons to Gay in Stockholm earlier this month, returned home last week saying he looks forward to defending his world titles next year in South Korea.

Gay ran a meet-record 9.84sec to win in Sweden while Bolt finished second in 9.97sec. Bolt insisted his defeat was not a shock, having said this would be a restful year compared to world championship or Olympic years.

"No, I'm not surprised [I lost a race]," Bolt said. "This is just one loss and I did say earlier

that if anyone is to be at me it would be this season."

Bolt said the loss could have been a result of him not being in top shape.

"I always said 2010 would be an easy season for me, so if anyone is to beat me it would be this season."

The Olympic double sprint champion also sent out a warning that come the 2011 season, anyone who comes up against him, had better be on top of their game.

"The hard training starts in October," Bolt said. "Then first Monday of October I will be out there working hard as there will be the world championships to look forward to."

Just days after his loss to Gay, Bolt's management team announced that he would miss the last two meets of the season, a relay in Zurich and the Diamond League finale at Brussels.

Bolt said he is not injured but was shutting down his season early to prevent an injury after a feeling of tightness in his lower back.

Isinbayeva to be back

Athletics

REUTERS, Singapore

Olympic pole vault champion and world record holder Yelena Isinbayeva will end her "boring" break from the sport in February.

Isinbayeva will return at the Pole Vault Stars competition promoted by her role model and legendary vaulter Sergey Bubka in the Ukrainian city of Donetsk, nearly a year after she said she was taking an indefinite break.

"I know that I will start from February," a cheery and enthusiastic Isinbayeva told Reuters on the sidelines of the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore.

"For sure it is going to be the Pole Vault Stars in Donetsk that Sergey (Bubka) provides every year. And (then) it will be a European Championship I think, Indoor championships... then we will decide what other competitions we (are) going (to) do."

"The most important goal of course is the London Olympic Games 2012... but still we have world championships in 2011 and my last championships will be Moscow 2013."

Isinbayeva has not competed since April after failing to win a medal at the world indoor and outdoor championships but the 28-year-old is keen to return after watching from the sidelines.

"I find it very boring. To live normal life. (When I competed) I used to wake up every morning and I knew what I was going to do for the day. Training, rest, eat."

"But all these three months when I had break, I woke up and I was wondering, 'What (am) I going to do today?'," said the Russian, who

won gold medals at the Athens and Beijing Olympics.

"I thought that I (would) miss some normal women's life but now I recognise that my life is much more interesting, colourful."

Despite having long days to fill, Isinbayeva said she was pleased the rest had helped rediscover her passion for the sport.

"Maybe before when I achieved everything I didn't pay such a high value as I have to pay. For me, it was the usual 'yeah I won' nothing special. 'But it is special and now I understand what it means to be the best all over the world, so I am really hungry for the competition and I am looking forward to the new season as I want to prove who I am again from zero.'"

The break has allowed the Russian to devote her time an ambassadorial role at the inaugural Youth Olympic in the southeast Asian city-state, a position International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge asked her to fulfil.

"We have a big problem around the world with kids, because they are getting fat, everywhere," she added.

"They are not interested in sports because there is no reason to do sports."

"They do sports through computers, and this is really bad. I think these first youth Olympic games will push them to go in the stadium, to go in the swimming pool, to go somewhere just to do something."

The role, which will see Isinbayeva hold a question and answer session with young athletes, is something that has appealed to the Russian as a future career when she retires.

"I would like to give something back to sport because everything I have now is because of sport. I wouldn't be sitting here if I was a normal girl."

YOUTH OLYMPICS Japan claims first gold

AFP, Singapore

Japan's Yuka Sato wrote her name in the history books on Sunday by becoming the inaugural Youth Olympic Games triathlete when she won the triathlon.

The 18-year-old triumphed in Singapore with a commanding display ahead of Australia's Ellie Salthouse and Kelly Whitley of the United States.

Sato was one of the favourites as the only triathlete in the field to clock a top-10 finish at last year's World Junior Championships.

She lived up to expectations in the 750-metre swim, 20-kilometre bike ride and 5-kilometre run discipline, eventually winning in 1 hour 49.69 seconds.

While Sato was celebrating, South Korea's Kim Hee-Sun was under observation in hospital after a nasty crash in the cycling leg.

Kim collided with Puerto Rico's Cristina Luizet Betancourt de Leon on a sharp bend and after being carried from the track on a stretcher was taken to hospital, where her condition was described as stable.

Betancourt de Leon was unable to complete the race after sustaining injuries to her forehead, right hand and leg.

The Youth Olympics, which run from August 14 to 26, are being held for the first time and feature 3,600 athletes aged 14 to 18 competing in the 26 Olympic sports.

The event is designed as a stepping stone for youngsters striving to compete at an Olympics proper, with some of the competitors expected to feature at London in 2012.

As well as the competition, they also benefit from a simultaneous cultural and education programme that plans to teach them about Olympic values, global issues and how to deal with the pressures of being a top athlete.

Addressing the competitors at the glitzy official opening ceremony on Saturday, International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge said the Games would help them "learn the difference between winning and being a champion".

For Singapore, the event is more invaluable exposure in its drive to prove it can compete on the global stage, despite budgets reportedly tripling to 387 million dollars (284 million US).

CCDM

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"We have requested the board to allow us to stage at least the semifinals and final of the T20 competition besides the opening ceremony. Everything would depend on whether we get this stadium or not," said Aynul.

Due to the World Cup, CCDM has hardly any chance to get the major venues in the city and that's why they are planning to hold an estimated number of matches outside Dhaka. They are focusing on the venues in Rajshahi, Bogra, Mymensingh and Sylhet.

Meanwhile, the cricket operations committee has already prepared a 22-member pool from where every team will be eligible to rope in a maximum of three players.

Kim stuns Maria

Tennis

AFP, Cincinnati

Belgian fourth seed Kim Clijsters saved three match points just before a 74-minute rain break and rallied to beat Russia's Maria Sharapova 2-6, 7-6, 6-2 in the WTA Cincinnati Open final.

Clijsters won her third crown of the year at the same two million-dollar hardcourt event where last year she ended a two-year layoff to have a family on her way to winning the US Open title for her second Grand Slam crown.

The victory gave Clijsters her 38th career singles title, having already taken crowns in 2010 at Brisbane and Miami.

Clijsters, 27, denied the 15th-ranked Russian her 23rd career title and third of the year after prior titles at Memphis and Strasburg.

Sharapova, 23, squandered three match-point chances with Clijsters serving at 3-5 in the second set just before rain stopped the match, adding to the tension and drama of the moment.

"When the rain started falling, I was like, 'Oh, no,'" Clijsters said. "I was feeling like I could hold here and get a chance for a break."

"I didn't feel like I was really in trouble. Before the break, I thought the match could go either way."

"I felt comfortable playing my groundstrokes. That was good, because my serve was nowhere to be found. When we came back out, I knew I had to battle throughout, because you're not starting 0-0. You have to be ready to go."

Clijsters held serve once play resumed, then quickly grabbed two break points on Sharapova's serve. The Russian



PHOTO: AFP

Kim Clijsters of Belgium waves to the crowd after winning a topsy-turvy final of the Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open over Maria Sharapova in Cincinnati on Sunday.

saved both but Clijsters forced a third and Sharapova then issued her fifth double fault, falling level at 5-5.

Sharapova said the earlier break allowed Clijsters to regroup after all seemed lost.

"I think it certainly gave her time to relax," Sharapova said. "More than the conditions themselves, I think it was about just maybe her going in and having a chance to think about what she needs to do differently."

"She came out and started playing really good tennis."

Sharapova said she began feeling pain in her left heel late in the second set, but was uncertain if it would keep her from next week's event in Montreal.

"It's just kind of flared up out of nowhere, so we'll see how it

is," said Sharapova.

In the tie-breaker, a second-serve ace -- Sharapova's seventh ace of the match -- put the Russian ahead 2-0 on the way to a 3-0 edge.

But Clijsters again fought back, pulling level at 3-3 on Sharapova's sixth double fault on her way to a 5-3 lead and Sharapova issued another double fault on the penultimate point before Clijsters forced a third set.

Sharapova's ninth double fault handed Clijsters a break for a 2-1 lead in the third and the Belgian broke again in the fifth game on the way to a 5-1 lead.

Sharapova held serve, then denied Clijsters on two match points before Clijsters withstood a break point and finally closed out matters on her third match point after two hours and 30 minutes.

Rossi-Ducati deal

AFP, Brno



Seven-time world MotoGP champion

Valentino Rossi on Sunday signed a two-year deal to race with Ducati, the team announced.

Yamaha rider Rossi will replace Australia's former world champion Casey Stoner, who will race for Honda next season after four years with the Italian team.

Rossi said he was looking ahead to a new challenge after seven years with the Japanese manufacturers.

"The time has come for me to find new challenges; my work with Yamaha is now finished," he said.

"Sadly, even the most beautiful love stories come to an end, but they leave marvellous memories."

Rossi, 31, finished fifth in Sunday's Czech Grand Prix, but his chances of retaining his world title had already been compromised when he missed six weeks of the season after breaking his leg at Mugello.

"We are delighted to announce that Valentino Rossi will be with us from 2011," said Ducati president Gabriele Del Torchio.

"He is a paragon of excellence in the world of motorcycling."

Lin Jarvis, managing director of Yamaha Motor Racing, said Rossi had played a crucial

role in the team's fortunes.

"Valentino joined Yamaha in 2004 at a moment when Yamaha was struggling in road racing after eleven seasons without a championship victory," said Jarvis.

"Valentino's victory at his first GP race for Yamaha in South Africa in 2004 was an incredible moment and was just the first of many more race wins that have thrilled MotoGP fans and Yamahafans around the world."

"His unsurpassed skills as a racer and a development rider enabled him to win four MotoGP world titles to date with us and helped Yamaha develop the YZR-M1 into the 'bike of reference' for the MotoGP class."

"Whilst we regret Vale's decision to move on, at the same time we fully respect his decision to search for a new challenge and we wish him the very best for 2011 and beyond."



VALENTINO ROSSI

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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