

Star SPORT

DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 29, 2011, E-MAIL: sports@thecitizen.com

Altintop goes under knife



Real Madrid's Turkish international Hamit Altintop successfully underwent surgery to correct a disc problem in his back on Monday in Germany, the

Spanish club said. "Altintop will remain in hospital until Saturday morning," the club said in a statement posted on its website after the operation was "successfully performed" at a Munich hospital. Real signed the 28-year-old midfielder in May from Bayern Munich on a four-year deal. - AFP



Bangladesh football players do some stretching during practice at the BUET Ground yesterday, ahead of today's World Cup Pre-Qualifier first leg match against Pakistan.

PHOTO: STAR

Skill squad to be trimmed

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The national selection committee will reduce the size of the skill training squad for the upcoming tour of Zimbabwe.

"It will be a 22 to 23-member squad because practically it's not possible to accommodate so many players for the skill training," informed chief selector Akram Khan yesterday.

The selectors had earlier announced a 32-member squad for the pre-conditioning camp, which will end tomorrow. The national cricketers will return to the capital tomorrow from Cox's Bazar after their last bout of the fitness training which is being conducted by trainer Grant Luden.

The batting, bowling and fielding practice will be overseen by local coach Sarwar Imran as it is yet not confirmed when the newly appointed head coach Stuart Law will join the team.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is likely to announce the 15-member final squad within the first week of July for the tour of Zimbabwe where the Tigers will play a Test and five one-day internationals.

Apart from the 18 BCB-contracted cricketers, the new selection panel had included domestic performers as well as those who have done well for the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy when they picked the squad for the pre-conditioning camp.

But there is hardly any chance that any domestic performer will get the nod when the selectors pick the final squad, as the new committee is not in favour of making any major changes in the team which has been playing for the last two years.

It will however not be an easy task for the Akram Khan-led committee to decide on the number four and seven batting positions, which were the most vulnerable over the last few years. The selection or non-selection of former skipper

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Bangladesh's World Cup at BNS today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will go into their most high-profile game for some time looking to keep up their unbeaten record of the last five meetings against rivals Pakistan, when the sides meet today in the first-leg of the World Cup Pre-Qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The World Cup in Brazil in 2014 is still about three years and a few hundred qualifying matches away but for Bangladesh that tournament could well be on another planet as the reality of their World Cup is here and now in the dull and damp Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The record bodes well for the home side as Bangladesh have never fallen prey to Pakistan at home in the four matches that they have played since 1985 and overall they are unbeaten in their last five meetings, ever since Bangladesh won 1-0 in the Asia Cup qualifiers in 2005. The overall record though, is almost exactly even; both sides have won five of their encounters with two draws in the twelve meetings.

But records alone don't win matches and there are plenty of headaches for the home side following only a three-day preparation camp for the match.

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which was preceded by much drama about a change of first team coaches.

It was perhaps this reason that saw neither new coach Nikola Ilievski, nor captain-cum-goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee make too many positive statements about maintaining their record over Pakistan.

"To be honest, I only know about 20 per cent of my players' capabilities after having trained them for two days. The only thing I could work on is the formation but unless we play competitive matches it will be difficult. I told the players to invoke the spirit of playing for their country," said Ilievski at a pre-match briefing at the BFF House yesterday.

Skipper Biplob also looked to be suffering from a crisis in confidence and seemed confined to ifs and buts during the briefing.

"If we can put up our best performance on the pitch, we can beat Pakistan," said Biplob, who will guide the national team for the first time after goalkeeper Aminul Haque called time on his international career a week ago.

Biplob, however, believes that the lack of preparation would not affect them much as the players, picked up for the national team, have been playing together for long time and know each other inside out.

"The Pakistani players might be physically superior to us but we are the better in terms of skill and we will try to

maintain our good record at home," said the veteran goalkeeper.

Coach Ilievski revealed his playing eleven while hinting that he might choose a formation of 4-4-2 or 4-2-3-1. If he goes with the latter, Zahid Hasan Emily will hoof it as the lone striker with a five man midfield. In case of a 4-4-2, Emily and Mithun Chowdhury will make up the front pairing with Raju, Mamunul, Zahid and Shakil in midfield and Nasir, Arif, Reza and Mishu making up the defence.

But Pakistan will be no pushovers and they are determined to break their jinx on the Dhaka ground despite increasing worries about the condition of the patchy pitch of the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) following incessant rain in the lead up to the game.

"We are concerned about the weather and hope that it does not rain further in Dhaka as we have practiced training on the dry fields, which are different here because of rains," Pakistan coach Tariq Lutfi said.

"Your players are used to playing in such pitches and amidst rain. But I am confident we can overcome it as we had played in the rain in Malaysia."

Lutfi also warned that his squad had a good composure with a mixture of youth and experience. Four of his players are foreign-based and eight to ten players have come from the Olympic Squad.

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Ross's centre of excellence

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY and MOHAMMAD ISAM

The vision of creating a "learning centre" that will work as a full reservoir for primed cricketers is what Ross Turner has visualised for the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy.

After joining as the head coach back in May, Turner has been given 24 players who are projected as hugely talented and potentially of Bangladesh A or national standards.

"Ultimately, the goal for me with these players would be to see them as leaders with the bat and ball in different high-level competitions and see how their physical performance and skill levels develop after they get out," said Turner during a recess.

During the long conversation, he outlined his views on the make-up and impact of the Academy. It is projected as a centre of learning the game so that the cricketers can be prepared properly for major challenges like international cricket after a few years of experience in the first-class structure.

But it is evident that there is a huge gap between learning (Academy) and giving the ultimate test (national team). The players will not face the level of competition that they are equipped to face and as it happens, they slack off and go back to square one when they are included in the national setup.

But programmes such as the Academy are primarily important so that they don't have to be taught how to bowl, bat, field and behave when they are an international player. It has happened as recently as Jamie Siddons's final months as coach of the Tigers. It is highly necessary to have players

ROSS TURNER



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