

# SPORT

## Does de Kruif have time?

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu



Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruif cut a forlorn figure at the team hotel yesterday morning. He was sitting in the lobby with his goalkeeping coach Kees Kalk, perhaps contemplating his next plan of action with the Bangladesh team.

There was no media frenzy around the Dutchman, who has become used to it ever since taking up the position, and has successfully lived up to the challenge, albeit often with haughty replies. But since the first defeat against Nepal, his replies have mellowed down considerably. De Kruif knows well enough that the job of a football coach is one of the most ephemeral ones in the world.

When Bangladesh Football Federation employed the coach and his deputy Rene Koster just over two months ago, they had one short-term target which was to reach the final of the SAFF Championship, apart from a long-term vision of teaching the national team a Dutch style of football, which would start from the youth level. A good showing in the AFC Challenge Cup in March -- when de Kruif was in charge temporarily -- wooed the BFF to pen a two-year deal with the coaches. De Kruif then asked for a trainer and a specialist goalkeeping coach and his wishes



National football coach Lodewijk de Kruif (L) and goalkeeping coach Kees Kalk sit idle at the lobby of the Hotel Everest in Kathmandu on Friday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

were duly fulfilled.

Two months later and after a rigorous time of practice and a number of practice matches at home and abroad, de Kruif's charges made a humiliating exit from the SAFF Championship, with only one point in their bag.

There were signs in the last two matches that Bangladesh have made progress, especially in keeping the ball in possession and the passing, but the haphazard defence and the inability of attackers to create scoring chances have showed that the team have not yet adapted to the teachings of the coach so far. Team

manager Iqbal Hossain, who was a dependable midfielder of the national side for a long time, admits that the progress has been very limited in the last two months.

"The passing has improved but the bridge between the midfield and attack was not there. The defence too was bad," said Iqbal yesterday morning. "Two months is a good enough time to build up a side, you can take a side from zero to 70 per cent in two months, but it did not happen."

Where did it all go wrong then? The coach has sometimes laid the blame on the referees and other

times on his own players for the shambolic performance, saying that some of the players were not mentally 100 per cent to perform. One or two of his players, on the other hand, claimed that they could not recover in time from a rigorous training camp where they had to practise two sessions with a break of only two hours, especially right after completing a grinding season.

Midfielder Jamal Bhuiyan though feels it was the players themselves who were to blame. "It's not the coach's fault because the players have to play the game, they have to deliver, they have to do the right tactical things," he said.

But it is true that there was perhaps a lack of discipline and motivation on both sides. When all the coaching staff miss their flight to Kathmandu, just because they had a long night, who else is there to blame? Then again, when a player hides his injury from coaches to be part of the side or one underperforms because he does not like the position that the coach plays him at, who is there to blame?

De Kruif has hinted that he would go for an overhauling of the squad, 'finishing' some of the players who did not perform and building up a side around some young players who have performed well.

But after such a flop show questions have already been raised: Will de Kruif be given that time?



Members of Bangladesh national football team exit from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday after taking part in the SAFF Championship in Nepal.

PHOTO: STAR

## Premier clubs call for BCB-PCB negotiation

SPORTS REPORTER



Representatives of a section of the clubs participating in this year's Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League have expressed their dismay over the possible non-participation of the Pakistani players in the competition.

First-class players from Pakistan, who have been a regular feature in the competition, are reportedly not being given no-objection certificates from the Pakistan Cricket Board. The PCB's view is that the Bangladesh Cricket Board needs to 'formally communicate' with them in order to get the players released.

Speaking to The Daily Star over phone PCB's media director Nadeem Sarwar said, "The matter is simple. We cannot provide any sort of NOC without any communication between the two boards."

"Some of our players have been contacted, but the BCB never contacted us and therefore there is nothing we can do about it," he added.

Clubs, who tried to cut deals with Pakistani players, asked the BCB to send formal letters to PCB to bring their respective players which the board reportedly refused to do.

"I confirmed deals with Shoaib Malik, Abdul Razaq and Reza Ali. I had sent them letters from the club. After that Shoaib told

me that he needed something in writing from the board. When I approached the board they said that they would not do so," said Gazi Tank Cricketers owner Lutfur Rahman Badal.

"The current state of relationship between the two boards will have a negative impact on Bangladesh's cricket. Bangladesh is losing friends [in the cricketing world] and this can be a problem in future. None of the boards are willing to take the first step," he added.

Cricknet Coaching School (CCS) official Iqbal Yusuf Chowdhury echoed Badal's sentiment.

"The problem with Pakistan could have been handled in a much better way. Pakistani players are free and this could have benefited the clubs. Now we have to bring players from Sri Lanka and India who are actually asking for a higher amount," said Chowdhury.

Officials from CCS, reigning champions Victoria and a number of others clubs are planning to submit letters to the board this week in a bid to bring their desired cricketers.

However, going by the statements made by members of the BCB's ad-hoc committee, the action may be of no use.

"There is very little chance for the BCB to send a letter. My team [Abahani] is facing issues as well but we have to understand that it was the PCB that first denied sending players," said BCB's ad-hoc committee member IH Mallick.

## Nat'l anthem gives Jamal goose bumps

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu



Most of the players of the Bangladesh team left here for Dhaka by a morning flight yesterday, but a few stayed back until the evening as there was not enough reservation.

Jamal Bhuiyan was one of them who had to wait.

He spent the morning at the gym with fitness trainer Yamali Mohammed, when some of his teammates had gone shopping or lumbering in their beds.

"I prepared myself good but I don't know how the other players prepared themselves. You have to be mentally hundred per cent strong. When you play a national game, there is no time for pain. If you just get a kick in your feet, you don't say -- coach, take me out -- there is no time for that. You have to suffer. When I came I wanted to do my best for the team," said Jamal, who was arguably the best player for Bangladesh against Pakistan.

Jamal left for Dhaka last evening and said that he would be packing

his bags for Denmark soon to join his club Kloppenburg BV.

"I haven't got any proposal from any Bangladeshi club, but even if I do get any, I will have a lot of things to discuss before taking a decision -- apartment, money, contract conditions," said Jamal.

But the 23-year-old midfielder believes that representing the national team is the best thing that has happened to him as a football player.

"Playing for Bangladesh makes me proud. When I hear the national anthem, I get goose bumps. To play for your country is one of the biggest things that you can achieve as a football player," Jamal said, adding that he would be back for national duty whenever he is called up.

But Jamal admitted that he cannot sing the national anthem properly and his next task would be to learn it when he gets back to Denmark.

"My father saw me in the first match when the national anthem was played, and he told me after the match, 'Why can't you sing the national anthem hundred per cent? You have to learn it when you come back.'"

## The players are to be blamed: Meshu

SPORTS REPORTER



A dejected Bangladesh national football team returned home in two groups yesterday after being eliminated from the group stages of the SAFF Championship.

It was the second time in a row that they left the regional competition from the first round.

The booters looked gloomy on their way out of the VIP Lounge at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and all the players, excepting a couple of them, immediately took their seats on the reserved bus to hide from the awaiting press.

While media persons present at the airport were curious to learn about the reasons for the failure, it could be gathered that the other passengers on the flight from Kathmandu hardly showed any interest in the players. Seemingly an airport staff even questioned this reporter who they were.

Former national cricketer Hasanuzzaman Jhoru, a cabin crew of Bangladesh Biman, attended the booters on the flight and even he hardly talked to the booters. Jharu also expressed disappointment

about the performance and was unwilling to say anything about the performance.

Assistant coach Rene Koster, who came with the first batch along with 16 players, tried to separate the positives and negatives of the three matches, but striker Zahid Hasan Emily and Atiqur Rahman Meshu blamed themselves for the debacle.

"Though there were some injury problems in the team, but overall we could not perform well. We could not play as a team," said Emily who believed they needed a bit of luck which was not with them.

"The coach is not responsible for such results, rather it's we, the players, who are to be blamed," said Meshu, who played all three matches and scored a goal against India.

According to Meshu, the players failed to get out of the pressure they took before the Nepal match and the full-house crowd at the Dasarath Stadium was also an extra pressure for them.

He also said they felt the absence of injured captain Mamunul Islam badly in the midfield as there was no replacement for the player who is a key man to build up the game and put up the ball to two wings for the attackers.

## Tour of Bangladesh Vettori too not coming

AFP, Wellington



New Zealand named two uncapped players Friday in a 15-man Test squad for their upcoming Bangladesh tour but will be missing injured veterans Daniel Vettori and Martin Guptill.

The selectors turned to spinner Ish Sodhi and all-rounder Corey Anderson for the two-Test series after the pair showed they could handle subcontinental conditions on New Zealand A's current tour of India.

Coach Mike Hesson said their inclusion, along with specialist spinner Bruce Martin, gave New Zealand plenty of options for the Tests in Chittagong and Dhaka.

"The Bangladesh tour is a good opportunity to introduce a promising spinner, and having two specialist spinners in the squad gives us the option to utilise wickets that are likely to turn," he said.

Opening batsman Guptill was ruled out with an ankle injury, while Vettori will miss the entire season after undergoing an operation on a recurring Achilles tendon problem that threatens to end his 16-year international career.

Paceman Tim Southee was also left out after ankle surgery in July but could join the squad in Bangladesh if he recovers quickly enough.

New Zealand play Tests against Bangladesh in Chittagong from October 9-13 and Dhaka from October 21-25.



Defending champion Andy Murray of Great Britain reacts in disappointment after losing to Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland at the US Open in Flushing Meadows on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Murray mauled

AFP, New York



Defending champion Andy Murray crashed out of the US Open on Thursday as Stanislas Wawrinka pulled a shocker to reach his first Grand Slam semifinal, a matchup with world number one Novak Djokovic.

Swiss ninth seed Wawrinka stunned the Olympic and Wimbledon champion 6-4, 6-3, 6-2, to book a last-four date with Djokovic, the 2011 winner from Serbia who ousted Russian 21st seed Mikhail Youzhny 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-0.

"I feel great. I'm really happy. It's amazing for me to be in my first semi-final in a Slam," Wawrinka said. "To beat him in three sets the way I was playing is good."

For only the second time in 146 Grand Slam matches, Murray failed to manage even one break point.

"He played great. That was the hardest part about the match," Murray said.

"He just hit the ball extremely well. I didn't create a break point chance. He served well. He hit a lot of lines and was going for big shots."

Reaching his seventh US Open semifinal in a row in hopes of a fourth trip in a row to the final, Djokovic lost his first set of the fortnight but reached his 14th consecutive Grand Slam semifinal, the second-longest all-time streak.

"Definitely (I'm proud)," Djokovic said. "I've always been trying to play my best tennis at a Grand Slam and every Grand Slam offers something different."

Spanish second seed Rafael Nadal, a 12-time Grand Slam champion, and French eighth seed Richard Gasquet, whose only prior last-four Slam run came in 2007 at Wimbledon, will meet in Saturday's other semifinal.

Wawrinka is only 2-12 versus Djokovic, including fourth-round losses at last year's US Open and this year's Australian Open, but reigning Australian Open champion Djokovic says he'll forget about his 11-match win streak over the Swiss.

## SAFF SEMIFINALS It's Nepalese vs Afghans & India against the Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

The semifinal line-up of the 10th SAFF Championship was completed yesterday after Maldives emerged champions in Group B, having played out a 0-0 draw against Afghanistan in their last match at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu.

Both teams finished on equal seven points, but the Red Snappers edged out Afghanistan by virtue of superior goal difference. Nepal had earlier emerged Group A champions, with India securing the second berth from the group.

The first semifinal between Nepal and Afghanistan will take place on September 8 while Maldives will take on India in the second semifinal on the following day. Both matches will be played at the Dasarath.