

# Hall takes Abahani challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Australian coach Nathan Hall vowed to work hard and put every ounce of energy to achieve the targets Abahani will set for the upcoming football season.

Hall, the 16th foreign coach appointed by the popular Sky Blue outfit since Irish coach William Bill Hart in 1973 and the fourth foreign coach in row in the last five seasons, arrived in the capital on Saturday night before talking to reporters at the club tent the following afternoon.

The four-time professional league champions have pinned their hopes on the 29-year old Australian following an unsuccessful season where they were crashed out in the group stages of Federation Cup, Independence Cup and Super Cup and failed to defend their league title.

Hall said he was very excited and cannot wait to get to the training ground and prepare the players for the federation Cup, which kicks off on November 3.

"I am delighted to be here in Dhaka. It is a new challenge for me. I spent the last season in India and it was a good eye-opener for me in many ways... I am coming here very eager, very open-minded and I am excited to get on the training ground as preparation time is not

long," said Hall at the Abahani club premises prior to his first meeting with the players.

"I'm happy to come to places like these and put my head down and work hard. Abahani is a club which demands success and I also demand success. I'm looking forward to making sure that at the end of the season this club achieves its targets. I guarantee one thing, we're going to work our socks off and put every ounce of our energy in making that happen," said a confident Hall, who considers Tottenham Hotspur's young coach Andre Villas Boas his idol.

Though Hall has experience of coaching in India, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia, he hardly has any success to talk about in his nine-year coaching career. However Hall said he has a good idea about the style of play in this region, which is quite direct and uses the long ball a bit too much, but he wants to introduce more attractive and on-the-ball football.

"I know that historically in this region, a lot of teams play very direct football, very route one style. I am not like that. I want to see good football and attractive football with the ball on the ground. I demand energy from my players; I expect them to be at a very very high fitness level. I want to dominate teams, I want to dictate matches and hopefully with that comes goals," said the Australian who has the top coaching certificate of the Oceania region.



Abahani's newly-recruited Australian coach Nathan Hall shakes hands with his players at the club premises on Sunday afternoon, after arriving in Bangladesh the night before.

PHOTO: STAR

## Evra labels Lizarazu 'parasite'

AFP, Paris

Controversial France and Manchester United defender Patrice Evra delivered a vicious tirade aimed at several pundits among them France's 1998 World Cup winner Bixente Lizarazu on Sunday after they criticised him over a half-time talk he gave his team-mates.

Evra was criticised for speaking his mind during half-time of the 2014 World Cup qualifier with Belarus in September in which he was only a substitute.

The French eventually won the game 4-2 ending a run of five games without a win or a goal but still ended up having to contest a play-off to see whether they reach the finals or not.

Evra, never far from controversy and who was subjected to racist abuse by Luis Suarez in the Premier League match with Liverpool two seasons ago, did not take to the criticism at all and labelled Lizarazu and three other pundits 'tramps' and 'parasites' on French TV programme 'Telefoot'.

Evra, 32, said he would have preferred that the story about his talk at half-time had stayed within the dressing room, before he lost control of himself and tore into the quartet.

"There are some pundits with whom I will soon settle my differences with them... they want to sell a lie to the French people that Evra is disliked. But that is not the case at all.

"I do not know what Lizarazu has against me. Me I was twice voted best left-back in the world, four times the best left-back in the Premier League.

"Him I don't even know if he was ever voted best left-back in the world.

"I recall my first call-up to the national side, all the others shook my hand apart from him. Thierry Henry said to him 'Oh Liza, here is the opposition'. And Lizarazu looked at me and said 'Why? Someone told you that I was already retired?'.

"People have a good impression of me, it won't be these tramps who dirty my image. They must stop lying to the French people," said the Senegal-born defender, who then classed them as parasites.

## Europe's eight await play-off fate

AFP, Paris

France manager Didier Deschamps, who captained France's 1998 World Cup-winning side, is praying the footballing gods smile on his team in Monday's eight-team European zone play-off draw.

Deschamps has publicly expressed his annoyance that France missed out on being seeded and as a result in danger of being pitted against Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal, Euro 2004 winners Greece, Croatia or Ukraine in the draw at FIFA'S Zurich headquarters.

Joining the French in the unseeded 'pot' are the Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired Sweden, Romania and surprise packet Iceland.

Deschamps, asked which team he wanted to avoid, said: "It's legitimate to say Portugal because they have Cristiano Ronaldo, who's a great player and a big influence.

"But playing Greece, Croatia or Ukraine, they're more based round teamwork but not easier or simpler to play."

He was speaking after France's closing victory over Finland with his side already assured of the runners-up spot in Group I behind world champions Spain.

Portugal meanwhile will be hoping to continue their success in play-offs having successfully navigated their way through the two-legged process to get to the last World Cup and Euro 2012s both at the expense of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who made no mistake this time round qualifying by right.

Manager Paulo Bento will be relieved at the return of star striker Ronaldo, who missed out on his country's final 3-0 win over Luxembourg which sealed the runners-up spot in Group F behind Russia.

Like Portugal Sweden go into Monday's draw secure in the knowledge that talismanic leader Ibrahimovic is back after being suspended for last week's 5-3 loss to Germany.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward said after that game: "I am not worried. In the play-offs we will have two completely different games.

"I liked the way the team fought. If I had been on the pitch, it would have been the same result."

"Everything is possible," said Sweden coach Erik Hamren.

"There are some good teams in the pot, but we will do all we can to realise our dream of going to the World Cup."

Croatia go into Monday's lottery with a new man at the helm after running out of steam with defeats in their final two qualifiers.

Coach Igor Stimac paid the price after offering to stand down in the wake of last week's 2-0 loss to Scotland, which came four days after a 2-1 home defeat to Group winners Belgium.

He was replaced by Niko Kovac, who skippered the side at Euro 2004 and 2008 as well as at the 2006 World Cup.

"We had to do something due to poor results and the ruining of the Croatian team's reputation," explained Davor Suker, president of the Croatian Football Federation.

Iceland, one of the revelations of the eurozone qualifiers, secured their place in their first-ever play-offs, with a closing 1-1 draw with Norway to finish as Group E runners-up behind Switzerland.

Monday's draw is at 1300 GMT.

## Wonder goal wows Wenger

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger hailed Arsenal's opener in the 4-1 win over Norwich City as one of the best goals he has ever seen at the Emirates Stadium.

England midfielder Jack Wilshere finished a fluid passing move as the Gunners swept across the half-way line and put the Canaries on the back foot in the 18th minute on Saturday.

Wilshere started and then ended the attack that involved Spaniard Santi Cazorla and a sublime one-two with France striker Olivier Giroud to lift the ball over the back four into the path of Wilshere who ghosted in and tucked home.

"It was certainly one of the best and one I enjoyed the most," said Wenger, whose side cruised to victory after Wilshere's strike thanks to Mesut Ozil's double and an Aaron Ramsey goal.

"It was the combination and speed I like to play. It was a mix of technical quality, speedy thinking and quick reaction. It was a great goal."

Norwich City coach Chris Hughton was willing to pay tribute to Arsenal's formidable opener.

"I think on the first one there aren't many teams that can score that type of goal," he said.

## Barca surrender perfect start

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona missed the chance to equal the best ever start to a Spanish league season as they dropped their first points of the campaign in a 0-0 draw at Osasuna.

With Lionel Messi starting on the bench, the visitors failed to make the most of their dominance in the first-half with Marc Bartra's wayward header their only serious effort on goal.

Neymar and Cesc Fabregas then passed up great chances to put Barca in front at the beginning of the second period before Messi was finally introduced for the final quarter.

However, even the Argentine couldn't open the door as Osasuna stood firm to prevent Barca scoring in the league for the first time since January 2012.

"With the performance of the team and the chances we had, normally it would be enough for Barcelona to win but today it wasn't to be," lamented Barca coach Gerardo Martino.

"I am very calm with the performance of the team, especially because Osasuna is a team that can cause damage in their stadium and we didn't suffer at all defensively."

Martino had decided to hand a surprise start to captain Carles Puyol after seven months out due to knee surgery, but left Messi on the bench as he returned from a thigh strain.

"Obviously, we were trying to win the game when Leo came on, but independent of the result, whether Barcelona were winning or losing, we always saw Leo playing 20-25 minutes," said the coach.

Barca's best chance in the first half came from a set-piece when Bartra headed over when completely unmarked from Xavi's corner in stoppage time.

Neymar was inches away from finding the breakthrough nine minutes after the break but he just couldn't reach Martin Montoya's low cross on the stretch.

Fabregas then blasted over after being played in perfectly by Xavi.

With the chances beginning to arrive, Martino summoned Messi from the bench 22 minutes from time in place of Xavi.

The Argentine fired a warning shot wide with his first opening 12 minutes from the end, but Barca failed to create another clear sight of goal and had to settle for a draw.

## Formula One Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich were likened to a Formula One car on Saturday, out-racing some of the clapped-out runabouts in the Bundesliga.

Bayern warmed-up for Wednesday's Champions League visit of Viktoria Pilsen with a 4-1 drubbing of Mainz with Germany's Mario Goetze making the difference but only after being a goal down at the break.

"We were like a 1970s VW Beetle and you can't dream of winning a race against a Formula One car," sighed Mainz coach Thomas Tuchel.

"So it's normal to be overtaken before the end."

A lacklustre first half left Bayern 1-0 down at Munich's Allianz Arena before Goezte came off the bench to play a part in three of his side's goals.

Goetze's superb pass led to Arjen Robben's 50th-minute equaliser before the pair combined to set up Thomas Mueller for the first of his two goals for the European champions.

Croatia striker Mario Mandzukic then converted Goetze's cross before Mueller netted a late penalty in the rout.

Bayern secured their place at the top of the Bundesliga table and extended their unbeaten run to 34 games, just two short of Hamburg's league record set in 1983.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Florentina striker Giuseppe Rossi (C) leaps in the air after completing an incredible hat-trick against Juventus during their Serie A clash at the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence yesterday.

## Rossi treble sinks Juve

AFP, Milan

Giuseppe Rossi scored a hat-trick for Fiorentina in a stunning come-from-behind 4-2 win over Juventus on Sunday which helped Roma maintain their five-point lead at the top of Serie A.

Roma's 2-0 defeat of Napoli on Friday opened up a five-point cushion over both Rafael Benitez's side and Juventus ahead of the latter's visit to Florence.

And despite Juventus holding a 2-0 lead at the half-time interval following a Carlos Tevez penalty and a strike from Paul Pogba, the champions crumbled during 14 second-half minutes in which 'La Viola' staged a remarkable comeback.

Roma now have a maximum 24 points from eight wins with Napoli back up to second at five points adrift with Juventus, suffering their first defeat of the season, slipping one place to third.

Florentina's win was not the only shock of the day, however, with Atalanta securing a precious 2-1 win at home to Lazio thanks to German Denis's 84th minute winner.

Early season surprise packages Verona kept their place in the top five thanks to a 3-2 win over

Parma which came courtesy of two penalties from Jorginho in the 61st and 88th minutes.

Verona, one of three promoted teams from Serie B, now sit fourth, eight points behind Roma and one ahead of Fiorentina.

Rossi's triple strike means the former Manchester United striker is now Serie A's top scorer with eight goals from eight games.

He helped spark the fightback when he beat Gianluigi Buffon from the penalty spot in the 66th minute after Ghanaian Kwadwo Asamoah was adjudged to have fouled Matias Fernandez.

Rossi levelled for the hosts when he held off the threat of Pogba on the edge of the area and sent a superbly-struck angled shot across Buffon and into the net.

Just as Arturo Vidal, who started on the bench after missing training due to a late return from Chile, was preparing to replace Claudio Marchisio for the final quarter hour Fiorentina took the lead.

Juve's defence was in disarray when Borja Valero saw Joaquin unmarked to the right of the area and the Spaniard made no mistake, beating Buffon with a precise right-foot shot at his near post to claim his first goal in Serie A.

Two minutes later Rossi grabbed his third when Fiorentina caught Juve sleeping on the counter-attack.