

Maruful's ban lifted

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday lifted the suspension on Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club coach Maruful Haque ahead of the club's December 27 friendly against Busan I'Park.

The decision to lift the suspension came yesterday after the 45-year-old coach applied for waiver of the two remaining months of his six-month suspension.

"He (Maruful) applied to us three days ago seeking apology for his action. He felt he should, keeping his career and achievements in light, get a waiver on suspension," informed BFF general secretary Abu Nayem Shohag yesterday.

Maruful expressed his relief at the decision saying he would work harder and with more dedication towards coaching from now on.

The former Sheikh Russel coach was initially handed a one-year suspension on August 24, 2014 -- later reduced to six months on appeal -- for asking the entire professional football league committee to step down in protest of Premier League scheduling in late February this year.

The suspension only applied to football matches or tournaments under the jurisdiction of BFF. While serving the suspension, Maruful successfully guided Sheikh Jamal DC to the title of the King's Cup in Bhutan, held from November 15 to December 2.



Brazil star Neymar holds his son David Lucca during the inauguration ceremony of the Neymar Project Institute in Sao Paulo on Tuesday. The institute is a sports complex for needy children and their families.

Another Sachin on the horizon!

INTERNET, Hyderabad

The current state of any side is actually a true replica of their domestic cricket and gone are the days where people used to turn up in domestic matches just to go through the motions.

Players like Rahul Dravid and VVS Laxman are the products of a lifelong system in place and BCCI should be lauded for improving the domestic structure of cricket in the country which keeps on producing great players.

Sachin Baby is one such player from Kerala and his coming up the ranks is a true testimony of the fact that cricket is now not only played in the metro cities of the country but is spreading quicker than a duck taking to water.

Although Sachin has not scored heaps of runs in domestic cricket but there is no doubt his talent and the double-century against Hyderabad might just be the turning point of his career as he looks determined in pursuit of the Indian cap.



SACHIN BABY

Skipper Sachin Baby led from the front with an unbeaten double century as Kerala took a big first-innings lead of 177 runs in their Group C Ranji Trophy match against Hyderabad on Tuesday.

Sami wants to stay at Real

REUTERS, Madrid

Germany midfielder Sami Khedira has indicated he would be happy to extend his contract with Real Madrid beyond June 2015 if an agreement can be reached.

Khedira, whose season has been disrupted by injuries, is not a first-choice starter under coach Carlo Ancelotti, with Germany teammate Toni Kroos, Croatia international Luka Modric and Spain playmaker Isco all ahead in the pecking order.

Big shoes to fill for Louis

AFP, Manchester

Louis van Gaal has revealed he feels under pressure to succeed at Manchester United to repay the generous support of Old Trafford legend Alex Ferguson.

Ferguson has given his backing to van Gaal in recent interviews, claiming the United manager can restore the team to the lofty levels which Ferguson himself attained in his 27 years as boss.

Certainly, van Gaal's efforts in leading United into a top three position as the Premier League enters the Christmas period have been impressive and generated an air of optimism at the club not felt since Ferguson retired in 2013.

However, that backing has come at a cost, according to van Gaal.

"It's fantastic," said van Gaal on Tuesday. "When you come to Manchester United, because I know Sir Alex, you hope that he will support you."

"And when he is supporting you, he is doing that not only this week but in other conferences he gave."

"He showed a lot of confidence and belief in me and you need that as a trainer-coach, as manager of Manchester United."

"You need that belief and support of managers like Sir Alex. I am very happy

with that because then you can work more easily."

"But it's also pressure because he believes in you and that gives you that pressure that you have to get results. It's not so easy to win Premier League matches."

United, unbeaten in seven games, open their festive fixture list with a home clash against Newcastle on Friday and van Gaal insists he has already succeeded in one of his pri-



mary aims - making Old Trafford a venue where other teams fear to play.

Since losing at home to Swansea on the opening day of the season, in his first competitive match in charge, United have won seven and drawn one of their eight games.

"I have said after the first loss against Swansea that it's a pity we came back from the United States and won everything and then lost our first match in the Premier League," said van Gaal.

"We want to build a fortress at Old Trafford and we have made that already because we have won a lot."

"I'm happy with that but then we have to continue because seven (wins) is too few I think."

"So we have to continue and that's the most difficult point because it's not easy to win games in the Premier League."

Meanwhile, van Gaal has paid tribute to captain Wayne Rooney's versatility, but insists he still remains an important attacking threat.

The England forward played in a deep midfield role in last weekend's 1-1 draw at Aston Villa but van Gaal does not accept that Rooney's days as a goal threat are behind him.

"Wayne is a player who can play in different positions and I like that because I like multi-functional players, that's why I can use him as a midfielder, also as a striker and an attacking midfielder," he said.

"The last game he was more defensive midfielder. I like that he is also coming into the 18 yard box because he can score goals."

"He has the ability to run from box to box and that is also a little bit that he has to 'feel' in a match - read the match - and he can do this."

"But that's a matter of time and he can do that. I like him closer to their area than our own goal."

Ronaldinho threatened with sack

AFP, Mexico City

Two-time world footballer of the year Ronaldinho has been threatened with the sack if he doesn't return as soon as possible to his Mexican club Queretaro, the team's president said on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old Brazilian -- a member of the 2002 World Cup winning side and world player of the year in 2004 and 2005 -- has not returned as he said he would a fortnight ago for pre-season training

having been allowed to go to the United States and Brazil to put his personal affairs in order after the end of the previous campaign.

The first match is on January 11 but Queretaro began their pre-season training on December 8 and have played several friendlies without being graced by the presence of the former Paris Saint Germain, Barcelona and AC Milan star.

Saints sign Elia on loan

AFP, London

Southampton have agreed to sign Werder Bremen's Dutch international winger Eljero Elia on loan until the end of the season.

Ronald Koeman's side are short of attacking options with Jay Rodriguez's recovery from a cruciate ligament injury taking longer than expected and Senegal's Sadio Mane due to leave for the African Nations Cup next month.

Elia, who has played 28 times for Holland, is seen as the perfect man to bolster Koeman's front three.

The 27-year-old will initially join Saints on loan when the transfer window opens next month, with the option of then making his switch from the Bundesliga outfit permanent at the end of the current campaign.

"Southampton Football Club is delighted to announce that it has reached an agreement over the signing of Eljero Elia," a statement on Southampton's website confirmed.

"The winger will officially join Saints on Saturday 3rd January, initially on loan until the end of the season with a view to a permanent transfer next summer."

Koeman had admitted his interest in Elia earlier in the day, saying: "He is one of the players on our list to bring in January."

"We need at least one more player up front because we lose Sadio Mane in January for the Africa Cup. We need another player for that position and he is a good option."

Elia, who is known for his blistering pace and direct forward runs, established himself as one of the brightest young talents in Europe at FC Twente and was named Dutch Football Talent of the Year in 2009.

The 27-year-old struggled to fulfil his early promise during subsequent moves to Hamburg and Juventus but has enjoyed more stability at Bremen, where he made 33 league appearances last season.

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