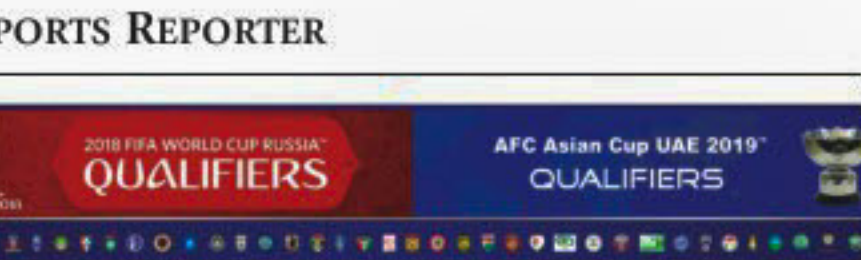


11 join training

Socceroos' coaches coming for reconnaissance



Keeping an eye on the two home matches of the Joint Qualifiers for the World Cup and Asian Cup in June, the Bangladesh national team started its camp with an hour's light training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Only 11 players joined the camp on the opening day and had light practice under goalkeeping coach Christian Schweichler and trainer Masud Parvez Kaisar in absence of head coach Lodewijk de Kruijf, who is scheduled to take charge after arriving here on May 20. Ten players of Sheikh Jamal DC - except for Nasiruddin Chowdhury, Yeasin Khan, Shahidul Alam and Jamal Bhuiyan -- and Team BJMC goalkeeper Mohammad Nayeem were part of the session as members of the other teams returned to their respective club camps after reporting in the morning due to the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League.

The other players are supposed to join the camp after their respective last matches of first leg of the league while Germany-based attacking midfielder Reasat Khaton is supposed to join the camp after May 24.

Even though two home matches of qualifiers are the main concern, the booters are at the moment thinking of the two warm-up matches against Singapore (May 30) and Afghanistan (June 2).

"The two practice matches are very important for us because we can understand what the level we are at the moment," said captain Mamunul Islam, who is nursing a hamstring injury sus-

tained during a league match.

With the inclusion of in-form strikers Enamul Haque and Towhidul Alam Sabuz, Mamunul believes the strength of the attack line has been increased and that the coach will get more options to choose from. Enamul has scored 12 goals so far this season while Sabuz has netted six.

"Everyone is in action and has been playing consistently. We want to produce good results in the warm-up matches before facing Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," said Abahani right-back Nasirul Islam before going back to his club tent.

Generally the starting eleven of Bangladesh squad consists of seven to eight players of Sheikh Jamal. But most of the players of the club are suffering from physical and mental fatigue due to continuous football since December.

"We are a bit tired due to hectic schedule (King's Cup, Bangabandhu Gold Cup, Federation Cup and Bangladesh Premier League) and need a few more days to recover. Hopefully we will be fit again before the warm-up and qualifying matches," said young midfielder Sohel Rana.

Trainer Kaiser informed that they have been conducting recovery training sessions at the moment and the tactical aspects will start once de Kruijf takes charge.

Meanwhile, three coaches involved with Australian Football Federation - Josh McCloughan, Sean Douglas and Carl Veart - will visit Bangladesh next month to watch Bangladesh's matches against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The Socceroos are one of the four Group B opponents of Bangladesh in the Joint Qualifiers. They will host the Red and Green Shirts in Perth on September 03.



Barcelona players celebrate after securing their 23rd La Liga title at the end their match against Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

From near disaster to glory

GOAL.COM

 Congratulations to Barcelona. They are the best side in Spain for the fifth time in the last seven seasons and their victory is all the more impressive given that their campaign was teetering on the brink of disaster just five months ago.

Post-Christmas break, Lionel Messi returned to the camp late and was promptly dropped to the bench by Luis Enrique. Barca subsequently lost 1-0 to Real Sociedad and Real Madrid simultaneously moved into pole position to clinch the title. Meetings were held and Luis Enrique's position was discussed, not only because of the poor form but because he had alienated Lionel Messi, a thoroughly dangerous stance to take.

All the more risky given this came on the back of a series of less-than-stellar results. A surprising home defeat to Celta Vigo, a miserable 0-0 draw in Getafe and a Clasico loss that could have been much worse than the final 3-1 score - these results did nothing to ingratiate the coach to the Catalan support.

Amid the multitude of embarrassments suffered by the club in the 12 months previous - President Sandro Rosell's resignation, the Neymar transfer scandal and the confirmation of the transfer ban imposed by FIFA - yet more upheaval merely added to Luis Enrique's woes. Andoni Zubizarreta was sacked from his post as sporting director, followed quickly by his assistant Carles Puyol, who stated that he

hoped to see things 'from another perspective'. The latter's departure, a figure synonymous with the club's recent return to greatness, suggested that key players were keen to extricate themselves from the chaotic situation.

Credit, then, to Luis Enrique for reversing fortunes to such a degree that this Barca side are being considered among the very best of the modern era. He still may not be the favourite of a section of the support and there will be some that will point to the incredible form of Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar as making his job straightforward. But from that night in the Basque country, he's worked as hard as anyone towards reparation.

Firstly, he massaged the ego of Messi, who, like any genius, tends to need reminding of his importance on a regular basis.

"Of course life is easier with Messi," he told the media. "He does all sorts of things. We see that every day. He is from another planet." It was one of the many occasions in 2015 he has gone on the charm offensive and while his relationship with the Argentine isn't unbreakable, it is certainly manageable.

Then, he had to work Luis Suarez through a difficult start. The Uruguayan scored just once in his first eight games following his World Cup ban but his revitalisation has been instrumental. Luis Enrique even admitted having to work through 'doubts' about him, but added: "The uncertainty you have when you sign a player is just that, even if he is world-class. You have to get used to a team, your teammates, the city. It can be difficult. His [Suarez's] adaptation has been meteoric."

Next, the delicate situation involving Ivan Rakitic, a player who was signed at Luis Enrique's specific request, but lost the coach's confidence and was replaced by the veteran Xavi for a short period.

Since the turn of the year he has been restored to the side in a role similar to that which allowed him to excel at Sevilla, in and around the prolific front three. Following the dismissal of Bayern in the Champions League, Rakitic heaped praised on his boss, saying: "I think every coach has different ideas, so does our coach, but right now I want to give him thanks from our team because without him this would be impossible."

Praise isn't overflowing for Luis Enrique, but it's difficult to argue with his record if the treble, which is now within tantalising reach, is realised.

It would be remiss to leave Messi's astonishing form out of the equation, however. Fifty-four goals in 54 games is almost expected from him these days, but it's the telepathic connection between him, Suarez and Neymar that has been the most exhilarating aspect of the campaign.

Suarez's intense work-rate and Neymar's evolution into a more complete player has taken the pressure from Messi; the onus isn't only on him to simultaneously be creative and clinical. He's still the devastating finisher he has always been, but now he drifts between the lines and picks out improbable through balls. He's now the best playmaker in the world, too, and seems to be issuing a threat to mere mortals that in his twilight years he'll be able to drop deep and still be better than all around him. It's ominous for Barca's challengers.

KAKA INSPIRES ORLANDO

Defending champions LA Galaxy suffered a humiliating 4-0 defeat to Major League Soccer newcomers Orlando City on Sunday, with an inspired Kaka creating a goal and scoring a penalty. Liverpool's Steven Gerrard, who will join Galaxy at the end of the English Premier League season, must be wondering what awaits him in California after the crushing loss left them seventh in the 10-team Western Conference.

"This is a perfect day for us, for the supporters who needed this joy. It is



Benfica retain Portuguese league title

AFP, Lisbon

Benfica won the Portuguese title for the 34th time on Sunday after a 0-0 draw away to Vitoria Guimaraes combined with a 1-1 draw for nearest challengers Porto at Belenenses.

The Lisbon giants, coached by Jorge Jesus, can no longer be caught by bitter rivals Porto, who are three points behind with one game remaining and crucially lose out in the head-to-head between the sides.

It is the first time that Benfica have won back-to-back titles in 31 years and the third time they have won it under Jesus.

Blanc scoops coach of the year award

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint-Germain coach Laurent Blanc on Sunday won the Ligue 1 coach of the year prize, voted for by his peers, a day after the capital club retained the French title.

It is the second time Blanc has won the award, having previously taken the honour when in charge of Bordeaux in 2008.

The 49-year-old saw his PSG side secure a third consecutive Ligue 1 crown with a game to spare on Saturday after they beat Montpellier 2-1.

PSG can win an unprecedented clean sweep of the domestic honours by beating second-tier Auxerre in the French Cup final on May 30.



Striker Enamul Haque (C) enjoys his return to the national squad with a friendly chat with fellow striker Zahid Hasan Emily (L) and forward Hemanta Vincent Biswas during the squad's reporting at BFF House yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

BFF Academy team in C'ship League

SPORTS REPORTER

The professional football league committee of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to include a team from the BFF Academy in the upcoming Bangladesh Championship League, the second-tier professional football league, in a bid to giving the young booters an opportunity to rub shoulders with the big boys.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the committee, headed by Abdus Salam Murshedy, at the BFF house yesterday. The 10 participating teams of the league will be: BFF Academy, Uttar Baridhara Club, Agrani Bank SC, Wari Club, Victoria SC, Youngmen's Fakirerpool Club, T&T Club, Basabo Tarun Sangha and Police AC.

The game's governing body started the BFF Academy in Sylhet in November, 2014 with two groups of booters of under-14 and under-18 age group.

The meeting also decided that the mid-season transfer window will run from May 30 to June 19 while the second leg of the Bangladesh Premier League will start from June 20.

Roma edge Udinese

AFP, Milan



Roma remain on course to secure automatic qualification for next season's Champions League group stage after coming from behind to beat Udinese 2-1 at the Stadio Olimpico on Sunday.

Vassilis Torosidis was the match-winner for Rudi Garcia's side, pouncing to net from close range in the 65th minute after the Udinese defence had made a hash of dealing with a harmless-looking Radja Nainggolan cross.

Earlier, Croatian youngster Stipe Perica, who is on loan from Chelsea, put the away side in front, but Nainggolan arrived unmarked to convert a flighted Francesco Totti cross from six yards and bring Roma

RESULTS	
Sassuolo 3 (Berardi 13, 31, 77) AC Milan 2 (Bonaventura 33, Alex 51)	
Atalanta 1 (Pinilla 18-pen) Genoa 4 (Pavoletti 30, Bertolacci 57, Falque 61, 73)	
Cagliari 0 Palermo 1 (Vazquez 9)	
Verona 2 (Moras 24, Sala 67) Empoli 1 (Saponara)	
Torino 2 (Lopez 51, 69) Chievo 0	

level.


Roma are second with two games remaining, one point clear of capital rivals Lazio, who were 1-0 winners away to Sampdoria on Saturday night thanks to a goal from Argentine defender Santiago Gentiletti.

Third place comes with a place in the play-offs for next season's Champions League.

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