World Cup/Asian Cup Qualifier

Venue: BNS

Time: 5:00pm

Bangladesh v Tajikistan







() Made in Italy







(Top) Bangladesh skipper Mamunul Islam (R) will hope that his teammates pull their socks up when they take on Tajikistan today. (Above) The Tajiks, like their hosts, will want to rebound after a disappointing start to the Joint Qualifiers campaign.

PHOTOS: STAR

# Last chance saloon

## Bangladesh take on Tajikistan at the BNS today

SPORTS REPORTER

**OUALIFIERS** \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Ahead of the Joint Qualifiers for the World Cup and the Asian Cup, the first two home matches against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were thought to be Bangladesh's best opportunity to collect points. Kyrgyzstan were thought to be the weakest team in Group B, after Bangladesh, as they were the second-lowest ranked side only above Bangladesh when the draw for the qualifiers was held back in April.

But Bangladesh's opening fixture against Kyrgyzstan at home ended in a 1-3 reverse for the hosts, and it came as a lesson for the men in red and green that no opponent is easy at this level of football no matter what their FIFA ranking or recent results indicate.

As Bangladesh take on another Central Asian side, Tajikistan, in their second qualifying fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today, the players and the team management know that this could be their last realistic opportunity of collecting points because the remaining fixtures - two each against Australia and Jordan at home and away and two away matches against Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - will only pose greater challenges.

Bangladesh players nor the head coach Lodewijk de Kruif could sound too optimistic about their chances in this match. All they could muster, during the pre-match press briefing, was: 'will to fight, learning from mistakes, and proving worth'.

De Kruif, who will not be able to stand in the dug-out today due to his expulsion in the previous match and subsequent suspension, said this match is an opportunity to fight against a better side.

"We saw the match between

FIFA BANGLADESH 166 RANKING TAJIKISTAN 139

PLAYED: 6 TAJIKISTAN WON: 4 **BANGLADESH WON: 1** DRAW: 1

Tajikistan and Jordan. We have to say Tajikistan are a strong team in every aspect. They are physically very strong, they have experience and are technically and tactically very good. For us, it is a big challenge," said the Dutchman, referring to Tajikistan's 1-3 defeat against Jordan in their opening qualifying fixture.

The 45-year-old coach believes Bangladesh will have the home advan-However, with the Kyrgyzstan defeat tage, even if home advantage mattered

still haunting them, neither the little in the end against Kyrgyzstan.

"For us there are a few advantages. We have experience after the last game and it is also a home game for us. We hope more crowd will come in compared to the one we saw in the last game. It is a fantastic opportunity to see what better we can do this time, said de Kruif.

Though de Kruif did not reveal his strategy for this match, it is expected that the Dutchman will adopt a counter-attacking approach, with two to three changes in the starting eleven.

While Tajikistan are ranked 38 places above Kyrgyzstan, they do not have enough Europe-based players in their side like the Kyrgyz, who rode on the performance of those Europe-based players in outplaying Bangladesh. The Persian Lions have only a few players who play in the leagues of neighbouring countries, even though they were forced to exclude one Russia-based and one Kazakhstan-based player due to injuries.

The Tajikistan coach, Mukhsin Mukhamadiev, was however confident of a win so that they can make up for their defeat against Jordan.

"We have had really good preparation for this match and this is very important for us because we lost the first match at home as like Bangladesh. We will put on our best effort and we are in a good mood to win the match," said Mukhamadiev.

#### LODEWIJK DE KRUIF Bangladesh coach

We have a big challenge and we will fight for it. We have experience after the last game and this is also our home game. We hope more crowd will come to this game than we saw in the last game.

MAMUNUL ISLAM Bangladesh captain

> If we make the same mistakes again against Tajikistan like we made against Kyrgyzstan, it will be the players who will be responsible. Results will not come with individual performances.

#### **MUKHSIN MUKHAMADIEV** Tajikistan coach

We have had good preparation for this match and this is very important for us because we lost the first match at home like Bangladesh. But we are in the good mood.

**ALISHER TUYCHIEV** 

Tajikistan captain have been playing for a long time for this team and know my teammates and team's ability very well. We have come here to win. Hopefully we will do our job.

# Spain ride on Silva



A solitary first-half strike by David Silva was enough for reigning European champions Spain to win 1-0 in Belarus in Euro 2016 qualifying on Sunday in coach Vicente del

Bosque's 100th game in charge. The Manchester City star struck on the

stroke of half-time at the Borisov Arena in Barysaw to give the Euro 2008 and Euro 2012 winners a fifth win in six qualifiers in Group C as they close in on a place at next year's tournament in France. Spain remain second in the group, three

points behind leaders Slovakia, who maintained their perfect record by defeating Macedonia 2-1.

More importantly, La Roja remain three points better off than third-placed Ukraine, who were 3-0 winners at home to Luxembourg earlier in the day.

One year and one day after their infamous 5-1 defeat to

the Netherlands at the World Cup in Brazil, this was a potential banana skin of a fixture for the Spanish with the home-based players in the Belarus squad in the middle of their domestic season.

Del Bosque's players could be forgiven for feeling the effects of a long campaign as their summer holidays beckoned but they got the job done thanks to Silva's goal just before the break.

> When goalkeeper Andrei Gorbunov came for and missed a Cesc Fabregas free-kick delivery from the visitors' left, Silva controlled the ball and volleyed in his 23rd international goal to equal Alfredo di Stefano's tally for Spain.

Belarus, who have just four points so far, were never out of the contest and Maksim Volodko had an effort disallowed for offside

early in the second half before Maksim Bordachev sliced a great chance wide.

At the other end Arsenal midfielder Santi Cazorla tested Gorbunov with a stinging low strike that the 'keeper kept out with a firm left hand as the one goal proved enough.

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