

Booters brace for domestic challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

After the gruelling international schedule over the last two months which involved three successive international tournaments, Bangladeshi national football team players are looking forward to shifting their focus to the domestic scene. All 27 footballers who were a part of the squad in the just-concluded Bangabandhu Gold Cup completed their formalities of the inter-club players' transfer, which ended on Monday.

The national booters, including those who were selected for the preliminary squads, had been engaged in training and competitions for four-and-a-half months as the game's local governing body started preparations for the Asian Games, SAFF Championship and Bangabandhu Gold Cup in early June in BKSP. Apart from training and conditioning camps, the booters played 11 international and four practice matches during this period.

Newcomers Bashundhara Kings roped in the highest number of national booters at eight, including three strikers, followed by Abahani, who signed up five players while Sheikh Russel KC and Saif Sporting Club roped in four national team players each. Meanwhile, Arambagh KS and Chittagong Abahani signed one national team player apiece for the upcoming season, which is set to get underway on October 22 through the Federation Cup with a gap of eight months between two seasons.

"For us, it was a hectic schedule but we enjoyed playing for the national team," defender Tapu Barman told The Daily Star after his training session with defending champions Abahani yesterday.

"We are now focusing on domestic commitments for our respective clubs even though there is less challenge in domestic competitions compared to the international assignments. I think the domestic matches will be easy for those who were in the training camp and played for the national team in the last four-and-a-half months," opined

Tapu, who is however determined to give his hundred per cent for the club.

"As a professional player, there is no room for taking domestic competitions lightly and I believe every player will give a similar effort for their clubs like they do for the national team," said the 24-year-old defender.

Bashundhara Kings and national team midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny also felt there is a difference between international and domestic competitions and that as professional footballers, they are ready to brace both challenges.

Even though Jonny is not worried about securing his place in the starting eleven, the lad from Sylhet is a bit worried regarding the positions of the strikers who played for the national team.

"Scoring was an area of concern for the national team in the last three tournaments but this time four foreign players have been allowed to play in a match. In such a situation, how can we hope that the local strikers will hone their skill in domestic competition?" questioned Masuk.

Jonny's clubmate Mahbubur Rahman Sufil is, however, determined to transform his national team performance to the club side despite the fact that his club has roped in three national strikers -- Sufil, Towhidul Alam Sabuj and Matin Mia.

"I always like to fight. Having three local strikers in the squad will help me perform better to secure a place in the playing eleven and I know there is no alternative to working hard if I want to avoid the reserve bench. I played for Arambagh KS and the national team regularly, so I don't want to sit on the bench for Basundhara Kings," said Sufil.

Winger Jafar Iqbal of Saif Sporting Club believes allowing four foreign players in a match reduced the chances for local players, especially the forwards as the clubs depend highly on foreign strikers.

"To be honest, the foreign strikers are ahead of the local ones in terms of physique and skill, so we can't fight against them equally but I am determined to give my best if I am given an opportunity in the starting eleven," said Jafar.



The national team players, who dedicated nearly five of the past months to their international duties, will be hoping to make an impact at the domestic level for their respective clubs.

FILE PHOTO: STAR



After 1,102 days without scoring for England, Raheem Sterling burst into life with a brace that condemned Spain to a 3-0 deficit at half-time. La Furia Roja fought back valiantly and, were it not for (Inset) Jordan Pickford getting away with a clear foul in the box, could have snatched a draw.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Brave England conquer Spain

AGENCIES, Seville



Raheem Sterling scored twice as England delivered one of their finest victories of the modern era by beating Spain 3-2 in Seville on Monday.

Away from home, and against a Spanish side in scintillating form under their new coach Luis Enrique, this was certainly England's best win under Gareth Southgate and, perhaps, their most impressive since thrashing Germany 5-1 in Munich in 2001.

Marcus Rashford was the other scorer in a breathless opening 45 minutes, which witnessed Spain conceding three on home soil for the first time in their history.

"They should be incredibly proud of their performance," England boss Gareth Southgate said. "We spoke to the forward players in particular before the game to remind them what a threat they are, and the three of them were outstanding, causing all sorts of problems all night, a tremendous threat.

Paco Alcacer, on as a substitute, headed in before the hour to spark hopes of a comeback but England were home and dry by the time Sergio Ramos scored in the 98th minute, with the last action of the match.

It means England keep alive their hopes of finishing top of Group 4 in the UEFA Nations League, the position Spain had needed only a point to all-but-guarantee would be theirs.

"We had a lot of young players out there, and for a team to play the way we did was a great reference for the future. It's important these youngsters enjoy playing for England and feel the way we want to play, and they should be able to progress from this," Southgate added.

"The quality of the performance was

great. We played with huge courage. We used the ball with courage. We knew that, to come here and defend for 90 minutes, we were unlikely to get a result, so we needed to be brave with the ball."

Sterling, who netted after an international drought that lasted 1,102 days, was relieved.

"It was a beautiful feeling to score, I put pressure on myself, it's my position to score goals," Sterling told Sky Sports. "It means a lot to me. Three years is a long time not to score!"

With Spain caught upfield, he was able to turn and find Rashford, whose quick switch set Sterling free. He finished into the top corner.

"We are staying up," sang the away support as Thiago Alcantara danced around with flicks and tricks. But to little effect.

Instead, Kane showed the value of a top-class centre forward. He outmuscled Ramos, outpaced Nacho to the loose ball and gave a superb reverse pass in

'Would be normal to kill my players'

AGENCIES, Seville

Luis Enrique hit out at his Spain side after their defeat to England, claiming it would have been normal to "kill" his players at half-time.

"The first half, atrocious, it has to be recognised. We arrived late pressing, the first goal killed us," he said. "We made so many individual errors. It's bad to say it, but it was a miracle in the break.

"The normal thing would have been to kill the players, but I reinforced them, and didn't change any of them.

"At 2-0, sitting back and coming

out on the break, England are dangerous. A group with two World Cup semifinalists is not easy.

"We forced the opposition back, and it's a shame we didn't score earlier because we would have done the 3-3 and the comeback."

However, Spain captain Sergio Ramos hoped the country could continue to believe in Enrique.

"The beauty of football is that it gives us the opportunity to turn things around. I have to thank this city, which is great to play in, and they leave you in awe so it is a shame we couldn't respond for them. I hope people can believe in this group."

behind. Rashford only had to finish.

England added a third before the interval, which was greeted by whistles from the home fans.

Ross Barkley's sumptuous ball over the top caught Ramos napping again and Kane squared for Sterling to tap in. "Are you Scotland in disguise?" came the taunt from the corner.

ENGLISH DELIGHT, SPANISH SORROW

Spain conceded three goals in a competitive home game for the first time ever.

England became the first visiting side to win a competitive match against Spain since Greece in June 2003.

Spain had been unbeaten in 38 home games since (W34 D4).

With an average age of just over 23 years old, this was the youngest side England have fielded in a competitive match since 1959.

The last England player to score away against Spain was Gary Lineker in 1987.

England's first goal against Spain last night ended a 17-pass move that involved all 11 of England's players.

Raheem Sterling scored two goals in a game for the first time for England.

Less running, possession paid off for France

REUTERS, Zurich



France let their opponents do the hard work on their way to winning the World Cup, running less than most teams and enjoying less than 50 percent possession throughout the tournament, a FIFA technical report showed on Tuesday.

The report also showed that the French scored once in every six shots on goal -- compared with once in 36 shots for Germany, who were knocked out in the first round. The two sides meet in the UEFA Nations League on Tuesday night.

As expected, the FIFA report showed that Spain enjoyed the most possession at an average of 69 percent, but the style of play that brought them great dividends from 2008 to 2012 proved their undoing in Russia as they were knocked out in the second round.

France ranked a modest 19th out of the 32 teams in terms of possession, controlling the ball an average of 49 percent of the time in their games, behind Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Peru among others.

KEY FINDINGS

The team with the most average possession, Spain (69%), failed to progress from the round of 16, while champions France were 19th in possession rankings.

Serbia were the hardest-running team at the tournament, covering an average of 113 km per game. By contrast, France were 28th at 101 km per match.

Shooting efficiency from outside the area improved: the average strike rate was a goal per 29 long-range attempts, compared to one in 42 at Brazil 2014.

They also ran an average of 101 kilometres per match -- the fifth-lowest figure at the tournament ahead of only Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and Panama.

Serbia, who covered nearly 113 kilometres per match, ran more than any other team but went out in the

group stage.

"France went out to win the matches in the most appropriate way for the talents they had," former Scotland coach Andy Roxburgh, a member of FIFA's technical study report team, told Reuters by telephone. "They didn't play high intensity pressing football, it was very much contain and counter attack."

But he said it would be very unfair to say France were dull.

"They scored four goals in the World Cup final and they were incredibly entertaining in the counter attacks. There was so much quality in the team to admire," he said.

If there were a prize for entertainment value, however, it would likely go to top scorers Belgium for their bold tactics in the 2-1 quarter-final win over Brazil.

"You are entertained if you see people take a risk, and Belgium versus Brazil was without doubt the most interesting game tactically," said Roxburgh, referring to Belgium's decision to leave three players in attack.

"I spoke to Belgium's coach [Roberto Martinez], and what they decided to do was so high risk it took them two days to persuade the players."

Jayasuriya defends his honour

AGENCIES, Colombo

Former Sri Lanka cricketer Sanath Jayasuriya stressed he has always conducted himself with integrity and transparency with matters concerning the sport after being charged of breaching the ICC anti-corruption code under two separate counts.

Jayasuriya, who was on Monday charged under articles of the ICC's code that deal with the failure to cooperate with an investigation and obstruction of an investigation, said he was not accused of "any allegations pertaining to match-fixing, pitch-fixing or any other similar corrupt activity".

"The charges allege that I have not been cooperative and not assisted their investigations," Jayasuriya said in a statement. "I have always conducted myself with integrity and transparency with matters concerning the sport and I will continue to do so."

SHORT CORNER



Having gone off the radar during the international break, Lionel Messi resurfaced as he joined a training session for Barcelona yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bolt offered contract by Maltese champions?

Sprint king Usain Bolt could be making his way to Europe after being offered a two-year professional football contract in Malta, reports said Tuesday, following his goal-scoring exploits in Australia.

Sydney's Daily Telegraph said Malta club Valetta FC had made a formal offer which includes playing in its upcoming cup final. The newspaper added that the team was recently bought by investors.

Mbappe no bighead: Deschamps

Asked if the attention had gone to French phenomenon Kylian Mbappe's head, coach Didier Deschamps dismissed the notion out of hand on the eve of a friendly international against Germany.

"Not at all, he's no big head. Even if he's in the papers or on the cover of Time and has become world famous. He's just not a big-headed person"

Law banned for two ODIs

West Indies coach Stuart Law will miss two upcoming ODIs against India after a breach of the ICC code of conduct saw him banned on Tuesday.

The Australian was found guilty of breaching the code during Sunday's play in the Hyderabad Test by making "inappropriate comments" to the umpires.

Those comments followed the dismissal of Kieran Powell, after which Law "went to the TV umpire's room and made inappropriate comments. He then walked to the fourth umpire's area and, in the presence of the players, again directed inappropriate comments at the fourth official".