

Mid-term transfers see flurry of changes

SPORTS REPORTER

Ever since the inception of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) in 2007, the competition's mid-term transfer window has seen hardly any use from participating clubs.

However, with certain teams aiming for the title while others try to avoid relegation, this time around the clubs are treating the mid-term transfer window as their highest priority in a bid to cover their weak points ahead of the league's second phase.

In what was a first for the professional football league, all 13 participating clubs utilised the mid-term transfer window to strengthen their respective squads. In the 2017-18 season, all the clubs, sans Sheikh Jamal DC, took part in the mid-term transfer window to rope in some 48 players, 14 of which were foreign the other 34 were locals.

Although the number of available footballers (41 in total) for this season is comparatively less than last season, the number of foreign recruits is greater with 11 clubs signing a total of 19.

Falling giants Mohammedan SC and Brothers Union, both of whom are in threat of relegation, made the most transfers with seven players each.

Having released Nigeria's Kingsley Chigozie and Gambia's Landing Darboe, Mohammedan signed Cameroon's Jules Ikaga and Mali's Souleymane

Diabate. Brothers Union recruited Sudan's James Moga, who was once the league's top scorer, and three others from South Korea, Egypt and Ivory Coast after releasing all four of their previous foreign players from Brazil, Iraq and Panama.

Interestingly, league leaders Bashundhara Kings also signed a new foreign player, Willis Deon Plaza of Trinidad and Tobago, to sharpen their attacking lineup, which is comprised of Brazil's Marco Vinicius and Costa Rica's Daniel Colindres as well as local forwards. Meanwhile, second-placed Abahani snapped up Brazil's Wellington Priori, who was already featuring for the side in the AFC Cup.

The third-placed Sheikh Russel and fourth-placed Saif SC were also not far behind in the race to sign new players as former champions Sheikh Russel signed up a Ukrainian player, Valerri Hrysher, while Saif SC signed up three new foreign recruits from Rwanda, Brazil and Uzbekistan.

Apart from Mohammedan SC and Brothers, the other clubs like Team BJMC and NoFel SC, who are also under threat of relegation, took part in the transfers to bolster their squads while mid-table teams like Sheikh Jamal, Chittagong Abahani, Rahmatganj MFS and Arambagh KS also brought on fresh foreign legs to ready themselves for the upcoming challenges of the second phase. The second phase was scheduled to begin today but was deferred till May 9 following the advent of cyclone Fani.

Barcelona beaten by Celta

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona rested all 11 players that started against Liverpool in the Champions League but paid the price on Saturday as they were beaten 2-0 by struggling Celta Vigo in La Liga.

Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Philippe Coutinho were all among those left out ahead of the return at Anfield on Tuesday but Barca were not unscathed, after Ousmane Dembele hobbled off early in the first half.

The club later confirmed Dembele sustained a hamstring injury and will undergo tests on Sunday but it seems unlikely the Frenchman will be fit to face Liverpool in the semi-final second leg.

"We think it's a muscle tear," said Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde. "It is not from fatigue -- he didn't play much against Liverpool -- and it is not the same leg as last time. It's just one of those things."

MI go top, Punjab get consolation

AGENCIES, Mumbai

In the final league match of the Indian Premier League, Mumbai Indians beat Kolkata Knight Riders by nine wickets to top the IPL table in Mumbai yesterday.

Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma laid the foundation with an unbeaten 48-ball 55 as the side eased past Kolkata's 133 for seven with 23 balls to spare.

Earlier in the day, KL Rahul's scintillating 36-ball-71 paved the way for a consolation six-wicket victory for Kings XI Punjab over Chennai Super Kings in Chandigarh. Rahul, Chris Gayle (28) and Nicholas Pooran (36) were the key contributors in Punjab's successful chase of 171 in 18 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF
KOLKATA: 133 for 7 in 20 overs (Lynn 41, Uthappa 40; Malinga 3-35)
MUMBAI: 134 for 1 in 16.1 overs (Sharma 55, Yadav 46; Krishna 1-22)
Result: Mumbai won by 9 wickets.

CHENNAI: 170 for 5 in 20 overs (Du Plessis 96, Raina 53; Curran 3-35)
PUNJAB: 173 for 4 in 18 overs (Rahul 71, Pooran 36; Harbhajan 3-57)
Result: Punjab won by 6 wickets.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembele limped off during their league defeat against Celta Vigo on Saturday, and later he was ruled out for the second leg of the Spanish giants' Champions League semifinal against Liverpool.

Inter held by Udinese

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan missed a chance to consolidate third position in Serie A on Saturday being held to a goalless draw by struggling Udinese for their third consecutive stalemate.

Luciano Spalletti's side have a four-point cushion on Atalanta, who are fourth and travel to Lazio on Sunday, with Roma a further point behind in fifth before their game at Genoa.

The battle for Champions League football remains tight with just three matches left this season for Inter.

Champion Juventus are assured of a berth with a 19-point lead on second-placed Napoli, who host Cagliari on Sunday, and are also positioned for top-tier European football next season.

Inter are seven points behind Napoli, who they meet in two weeks' time in Naples, with their other two games against relegated Chievo and struggling Empoli.

Spalletti's side have now been held to three draws in a row after 1-1 stalemates against both Roma and Juventus.

In Udine, Inter strike ace Mauro Icardi started on the bench with fellow Argentine Lautaro Martinz up front alongside Radja Nainggolan and Ivan Perisic.

But Udinese goalkeeper Juan Musso did well to deny the visitors, clearing a long range Nainggolan effort after 14 minutes and Martinez just after the break.

Icardi came on after an hour with Spalletti also throwing in Antonio Candreva and Keita Balde Diaio for the final fifteen minutes to no avail.

Musso held a close range Keita effort three minutes from time to earn a precious point as the north-eastern team sit five points above the relegation zone.

"I sent on three attacking players to finish the game and there was nothing more I could have done," said Spalletti.

"I expected more for them considering that the game was a little slower, with tired legs, and we did have the chances to score."

For Udinese coach Igor Tudor it was "an important point" two months after his return, having also saved the club from relegation last season.

Torino are still in the running for a first-ever Champions League qualification as they sit sixth, two points off fourth place after their 1-1 derby draw against Juventus on Friday.

Although Juventus have nothing left to play for they will have a role in who qualifies for next seasons Champions League as they play Roma and Atalanta in their next two games.

SPAL secured their top flight survival with a 4-0 hammering of Chievo.

Brazilian Dias Felipe scored in either half with Sergio Floccari and Jasmin Kurtic also on target after the break as SPAL moved up to tenth after their sixth win in eight games.



Brazilian centre-back David Luiz scored a towering header during Chelsea's crucial 3-0 win at home against Watford during their English Premier League fixture at Stamford Bridge yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Chelsea go third; MU's top-four hopes over

REUTERS, London

Quickfire headed goals from Ruben Loftus-Cheek and David Luiz, both set up by Eden Hazard early in the second half, helped Chelsea to a 3-0 home victory against spirited Watford in the Premier League on Sunday.

Argentine marksman Gonzalo Higuain added a third with a cool finish in the 75th minute to move Chelsea closer to their target of a top-four finish and Champions League qualification.

The win moved Chelsea into third place on 71 points, a point clear of Tottenham Hotspur in fourth and five ahead of Arsenal, who play Brighton and Hove Albion later on Sunday.

After a frenzied first half during which Watford had the better chances with Troy Deeney, Gerard Deulofeu and Jose Holebas all lively, Chelsea, booed off at the break, came out flying.

Loftus-Cheek found the net in the 48th minute after a Hazard short corner and one two with Pedro. Hazard lifted the ball to the far post and the tall midfielder

nodded it home.

Moments later Brazilian defender Luiz headed Chelsea's second, straight from a Hazard corner before Chelsea improved their goal difference with the third from Higuain via a Pedro assist.

Both teams have preoccupations away from the league, with Chelsea facing Eintracht Frankfurt in the second leg of their Europa

until the end."

Players and their families ran a lap of honour after their last home league game of the season, with club captain Gary Cahill, leaving Chelsea after six and a half years, leading the players out.

The former England defender won two Premier League titles, two FA Cups, a League Cup, a Champions League and a Europa

TOP SIX

TEAM	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Liverpool	37	29	7	1	87	22	94
Man City	36	30	2	4	90	22	92
Chelsea	37	21	8	8	63	39	71
Tottenham	37	23	1	13	65	37	70
Arsenal	36	20	6	10	69	49	66
Man Utd	37	19	9	9	65	52	66

League semi-final on Thursday and Watford meeting Manchester City in the FA Cup final on May 18.

"The schedule is tough, but when you have fantastic players, more than just 11, we can rotate and have the same quality," Luiz said. "We have that. It's tough but it's tough for everybody."

"We did well to get the three points but we have to still fight

points clear of United, who failed to take the race for Champions League qualification to the final day, as they trail Tottenham Hotspur in fourth by four points with just one game left.

Looking for a first win in five in all competitions, United made a fast start, and took the lead in just the eighth minute through Scott McTominay.

Huddersfield, who had managed just nine goals from open play prior to Sunday's match, grew into the contest and almost levelled through Karlan Grant, before Paul Pogba headed against the crossbar three minutes before the break.

Alexis Sanchez, making his first United start since March 2, was replaced early in the second half, before Isaac Mbenza's first-ever Premier League goal got the hosts level on the hour mark.

Pogba again hit the crossbar late on as United looked for a winner, but Huddersfield held on for just their fifth Premier League point from the last 72 available, with United having won just two of their last 11 matches in all competitions.

'Never forget what we achieved'

AFP, BERLIN

Bayern Munich veteran Franck Ribery has said he wants to leave the Bavarians celebrating a league and cup double after confirming that he will end his



Frenchman Franck Ribery, who scored in Bayern Munich's 3-1 win against Hannover on Saturday, will be leaving the English giants at the end of the season.

PHOTO: AFP

12-year spell at the Bundesliga club after this season.

In a statement on their website on Sunday, Bayern announced the Frenchman would not extend his contract beyond June 2019.

"When I came to Bayern it was a dream come true, it is amazing that I have been here for 12 years," said Ribery, 36, who joined in 2007 and has won eight Bundesliga titles and five German Cups since then.

"It won't be easy to leave, but we must never forget what we have achieved together. I hope that we can win the Bundesliga and the German Cup before I go."

Ribery said he did not yet have any plans for next season.

"I don't want to think too much about what is coming next, I just want to enjoy every day here with the team," he said. "I will play football next season of course, but I am not 100 percent sure where."

Bayern also announced they would organise a "big farewell game" for both Ribery and fellow stalwart Arjen Robben, to be held in 2020.

Robben, 35, confirmed his impending departure at the end of last year, and it was widely expected that Ribery would follow suit, as Bayern prepare for a squad overhaul ahead of next season.

The two wingers have been defining stars in a dominant decade for Bayern, winning the Champions League in 2013 as well as a host of domestic titles.

"Franck and Arjen are great players, and Bayern Munich have a lot to thank them for," said club CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

Norwich win Championship title

AFP, London

Norwich City beat Aston Villa 2-1 on Sunday to seal the English Championship title as Derby County qualified for the play-offs with a 3-1 win against West Bromwich Albion.

Norwich and Sheffield United, who drew 2-2 against Stoke, had already secured automatic promotion to the Premier League before the final round of fixtures.

Derby joined Leeds, West Brom and Aston Villa in the play-offs that will decide which of those four teams clinches the third and final promotion place.

Marcelo Bielsa's Leeds, who finished third, will play Frank Lampard's Derby in the play-offs, with West Brom facing local rivals Aston Villa.

Goals from Teemu Pukki and Mario Vrancic gave Norwich all three points at Villa Park.

They finished the season with 94 points from their 46 games and return to the Premier League for the first time since 2015/16.

The relegated sides are Rotherham, Bolton and Ipswich.