



# Booters start training on Friday

SPORTS REPORTER

Having rested for nearly three weeks following the completion of a long domestic season, the national footballers are all set to return to action as the preparation camp of the national team for joint qualifiers of Qatar World Cup and China Asian Cup will get underway on Friday in Dhaka.

Bangladesh will play their first match of the qualifiers against Afghanistan on September 10 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Head coach Jamie Day, who returned to Dhaka yesterday after spending more than two months in England, will however have to start the camp without seven Abahani players, who are with the club for AFC Cup's inter-zone semifinal playoffs on August 21 and 28.

The 39-year-old coach will get his full squad from the second-phase training camp to be held in Dushanbe with the players leaving for Tajikistan on September 1. In Dushanbe, the squad will have intensive training and play two practice matches against Tajikistan Premier League clubs on September 3 and 5.

The plan was disclosed yesterday after National Teams Committee chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed and others met with Day and his assistant coach.

"The national football team will start training in Dhaka from August 23 before they leave here for Tajikistan on September 1 as part of their preparation for the match against Afghanistan," Nabil said. "As Afghanistan chose Tajikistan as their home venue, we have decided to send the national team to Tajikistan for their preparation to acclimatise

them with the weather, altitude and the astro-turf for a good result against Afghanistan."

Replying to a query, Nabil said that the national team would get maximum practice facilities in Tajikistan and would play two practice matches against local clubs. He added that if needed they would pay to get astro-turf for training as the Afghanistan-Bangladesh match will take place on astro-turf at the Central Republican Stadium in Dushanbe.

Day will get more than two weeks to prepare his charges, and the English coach believes the break for the players is more important than them for a long time.

"Time is more than enough. If you look at the Abahani players, they have no rest as they are still in action while the rest of the players are getting some rest. In any team around the world, the players need at least five to six weeks' rest following the completion of domestic season but we did not have such opportunity due to the commitments. The players need physical and mental break. I think the players are coming to action exactly 20 days after the completion of the premier league.

"For me, I did not need to start early. I think our players will be ready for the first match, I have 100 percent faith on them as they have been given the programme of how to maintain their fitness," said Day.

About the Afghanistan match, Day said, "It's a tough group and we are the lowest ranked side in the group, but we want to go to every game with the belief that we want to try to win. We don't want to be negative. We have done very well this year. We are positive before going to play against Afghanistan. It's a tough game, but we will try our best to get a positive result."



Atletico Madrid striker Alvaro Morata (C) heads in the all-important goal against Getafe during their La Liga encounter at the Wanda Metropolitan Stadium on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

## Women's hockey team take on Indian side

SPORTS REPORTER

The women's hockey team of Sports Authority of India arrived here yesterday to play six practice matches against Bangladesh under-21 women's team as part of the home side's preparation for next month's Women's Junior AHF Cup in Singapore.

The first match between the two sides will be held today at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium while the rest of the matches will take place on August 22, 23, 25, 26 and 28 respectively.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) formed the women's team recently and decided to send them to an international competition for the first time. As part of preparation and earning experience, the game's local governing body has also arranged the six-match preparation series.

"The visiting Indian side have been in training round-the-year and they have recently played against their Kenyan counterparts. So we have to emphasise on gathering experience rather than thinking of win or defeat against the experienced Indian side," Bangladesh Hockey's advisory coach Ajay Kumar Bansal told reporters at press conference yesterday. He was accompanied by assistant coach Hedayetullah Razib and Shahidullah Titu.

## Fiorentina chase Ribery

AFP, Milan

Italian club Fiorentina have targeted French winger Franck Ribery, the Tuscany club's sporting director Daniele Prade confirmed on Sunday.

The 36-year-old former French international left Bayern Munich as a free agent at the end of last season after 12 seasons with the German giants.

"Ribery? We like him a lot, but like all the great players he is considering his options," Prade said after Fiorentina's 3-1 Coppa Italia third round win over Monza.

"We want him and would like to have him, but we cannot give tens of millions like the Arab or Russian teams."

## Medvedev wins Cincinnati title

AFP, Cincinnati



Daniil Medvedev, coming off back-to-back ATP finals defeats, held off David Goffin 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 Sunday to win the ATP Cincinnati Masters.

The ninth-seeded Russian finished with an ace after saving break points in the final game, lifting a first Masters 1000 trophy after settling for runner-up finishes to Nick Kyrgios in Washington and Rafael Nadal in Montreal last weekend.

"These have been the best three weeks of my life," Medvedev said. "My mentality

"I don't check the rankings every two minutes, but I do look after I do well at a tournament," he said. "If I had lost I'd be seventh, now I'm fifth."

Medvedev followed up his semifinal upset of defending champion Novak Djokovic as he controlled feisty Belgian Goffin to win an ATP leading 31st hardcourt match.

He has the most match wins on any surface this year with 43.

Spanish superstar Nadal, who did not play this week -- is second with 41, followed by Roger Federer on 39.

Medvedev stamped himself a contender for the US Open, the final Grand Slam of



PHOTO: AFP

Daniil Medvedev celebrates with the Cincinnati Masters trophy after defeating David Goffin in the final at the Lindner Family Tennis Center in Mason, Ohio on Sunday.

was the best, my serve was the best, and my tennis has been really consistent.

"I didn't have one bad match, I hope to continue this way for next few weeks."

After his full-on post-Wimbledon schedule, the winner admitted: "I'm so exhausted, I almost can't talk now."

He also revealed that he was starting to cramp in the final game, when he tossed his racquet in anger before saving break points.

"I think my Montreal final against Rafa was important," he said of hanging on. "I was maybe able to use that experience that I had and David did not."

Medvedev, who only recently gained the ATP Top 10, now will find himself ranked fifth as a result of his three-week run of form.

the season that starts in Flushing Meadows in a week.

Goffin was competing in his second final of 2019 after losing to Federer in Halle.

"Congratulations to your team," he told Medvedev, "Once again, an unbelievable week for you, fantastic."

"I think you are ready for New York."

Medvedev powered to a 4-1 lead in the opening set but had to win it in a tiebreaker as Goffin, coached by 2002 Australian open winner Thomas Johansson, fought back.

But Medvedev's break in the opening game of the second set was all he needed as he avenged a loss to Goffin at Wimbledon this year.

## Morata fires new-look Atletico

AFP, Madrid



Alvaro Morata headed in a sumptuous Kieran Trippier cross to ensure a new-look Atletico Madrid beat Getafe 1-0 on Sunday and made a winning start in La Liga.

Trippier looked right at home at the Wanda Metropolitano when his bending ball was nodded in by Morata before two red cards in four minutes, one for each team, made it 10 against 10 before half-time.

Getafe striker Jorge Molina and Atletico left-back Renan Lodi were the players sent off and then Morata missed a penalty, earned after a mesmeric run from Joao Felix, Atletico's 126 million euro signing from Benfica.

It was enough for Felix to depart to a standing ovation and Atletico held on, even if this was perhaps not the statement opening to the season that Diego Simeone might have hoped for.

After losing Antoine Griezmann to Barcelona, Atletico have spent close to 250 million euros this summer, just over half of that on Felix, whose electric run lit up an otherwise rather disjointed contest.

The 19-year-old is supposed to be the heartbeat not only of a new team but a different style too, one that is more attractive to watch and that could even pip Barcelona and Real

Madrid to the title.

But Getafe were stubborn opponents, showing again why they finished fifth last season, only narrowly missing out on a place in the Champions League to Valencia on the final day.

Felix aside, Atletico's other debutants impressed, including Lodi, before he was sent off, and Trippier, the first Englishman to play for Atletico since the Spanish Civil War and 20th in the history of the Spanish top flight.

The former Tottenham defender's pin-point cross was the highlight of a confident performance that earned regular praise from the home fans.

The early signs were encouraging as Trippier and Lodi pushed high and wide, like wingers, and the former almost played Koke in with a superb first-time pass.

Felix showed some nice touches and his team-mates were quick to protest on his behalf after Leandro Cabrera barged him over.

Trippier was the team's best outlet and Atletico might have scored had he managed to pick out either Felix or Morata in the middle after a brilliant pass from Saul Niguez.

He had another chance moments later though and this time Trippier was more precise. A bending cross from the right allowed Morata to head in and Trippier enjoyed the celebrations, rousing the crowd on his way back

and accepting a huge roar in return.

Getafe had struggled to find a way into the match but two red cards in four minutes threatened to shift the balance.

First, referee Cuadra Fernandez turned a yellow card into a red for Molina after consulting VAR, the striker catching Thomas Partey late down the back of his heel. Then Lodi was handed a second yellow for planting his hand in the face of Damian Suarez.

Atletico dropped Saul into left back before Felix was sacrificed later in the second half, Mario Hermoso coming on for his debut where Lodi had started.

But not before Felix produced the most exhilarating moment of the match, for which an otherwise rather muted debut will be remembered.

Collecting the ball in his own half, he slid past one Getafe opponent, nutmegged another and then weaved through two more. After motoring 30 yards, he was finally brought down by Bruno for a penalty, the fans cheering as if they had seen a goal.

It should have been worth one but Morata's shot was pushed wide by David Soria and Getafe remained in touch.

Getafe kept it close and Morata should have made it two when sent through in injury-time. One was enough.

## Balotelli joins Brescia

AFP, Milan



Mario Balotelli will return to Italy with home town team Brescia after it was confirmed on Sunday he has signed for the newly-promoted club.

The Italian forward has penned a "multi-year contract" and will be officially presented on Monday, the northern team confirmed on their website.

"Mario returns home," Brescia said in a statement.

"The return to Italy, after three years, was made possible by Mario's determination and enthusiasm to return to Brescia, the city where he grew up and where, since he was a child, he stood out for his physical and technical skills," the club continued.

Balotelli, who was born in Sicily but adopted and raised just outside Brescia, has reportedly agreed a three-year deal with the Serie B champions after being released by Marseille in June.

"Finally back in MY CITY," Balotelli posted on social media along with a video collage of photos and clips of different moments of his career.

Balotelli made his debut in local team Lumezzane in Serie C as a 16-year-old, before moving to Serie A giants Inter Milan in 2007.

However, Balotelli's debut in the Brescia shirt is not imminent as the striker has to serve a four-match ban and his return could be on September 25 against Juventus.

Sky Sports Italia reported Balotelli has signed a three-year deal worth three million euros (\$3.3 million) for the first year, plus a further three million if the club remains in Serie A.

In the following two years he will receive six million euros per season if Brescia remain in Serie A, Sky reported.

The 29-year-old rejected a move to Brazilian club Flamengo as he pushes for a place in the Italian national team as Euro 2020 approaches.

Balotelli, who has 36 caps for Italy, has not featured on the international stage since last September as coach Roberto Mancini said he was not playing at a high enough standard.

Brescia have been promoted back to the top flight for the first time since being relegated in 2011.

Balotelli last played in Serie A with AC Milan on loan from Liverpool in the 2015-



2016 season.

It was his second spell at AC Milan after 2013-2014. He was part of the Inter Milan side coached by Jose Mourinho that won the Serie A, Coppa Italia and Champions League treble in 2010.

He won three Serie A titles with Inter before switching to Manchester City and helping them claim the Premier League crown in 2012.

## Fresh start for Coutinho

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's Philippe Coutinho has joined Bayern Munich on a one-year loan worth 8.5 million euros (\$9.5 million) with an option to buy, the Spanish club confirmed Monday.

"The agreement provides for an option for Bayern to buy at a 120-million-euro fee," Barcelona said.

The 27-year-old Brazilian joined Barcelona from Liverpool in January 2018 for an initial 120 million euros in a deal that included another 40 million euros in potential add-ons.

But the international midfielder's stint at Barcelona never worked out as hoped despite huge excitement around his arrival at the Camp Nou.

Initially tried in midfield Coutinho was pushed into the front three by Ernesto Valverde last season but the switch never paid off and fans rarely glimpsed the form he showed at Liverpool.

Speculation about his future had shadowed Coutinho over the summer with French champions Paris Saint-Germain mentioned as a likely destination in a deal linked to a potential Neymar return to Barcelona.