

# NoFeL upset Saif

*Fairytale end to a tournament dogged with controversy*

SPORTS REPORTER



NoFeL Sporting Club scripted a perfect end to their fairytale run by clinching the title of the Walton U-18 Football Tournament following a 1-0 win over favourites Saif Sporting Club in the final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

The youth side of a club which have been relegated from the top flight at the end of last season ended the campaign by upending a well-drilled Saif SC side with a very effective defensive display, taking advantage of their opposition's mistakes in front of goal as well as in defence.

Arman Hossain Abir made the difference in the 81st minute with a poacher's finish, sliding the ball past Saif SC goalkeeper Emon Hawlader after defender Mohammad Momin miscued a cross from Mohammad Piash straight to Abir's feet in front of goal.

That was the only shot on target in the entire game from the underdogs, who were mostly busy thwarting attacks -- although they were helped by awful finishing from the Saif SC forwards.

The title in the youth event will ease some of the disappointment of the senior side going down to the Championship League, while encouraging them to have another shot at top-flight football the following season.

NoFeL SC coach Akbar Hossain Ridon, who only received his AFC B licence two months ago and debuted as head coach for the first time in his fledgling career, was looking forward to working with these players in the second-tier in the

upcoming season.

"10 of the players are from Noakhali and the others from the Chattogram region. All of them are from different local academies. So even if we had only two weeks' training before the tournament, they had footballing training in themselves. And if I'm given the opportunity to guide NoFeL SC in the league, many of these boys will be in the team," the young coach said after the match.

While this was a battle between a youth side with round-the-year training against one with two weeks' practice, it also pitted a seasoned coach against his long-time protege. The protege had the last laugh and took credit for his game reading and insight into the opposition tactics while the mentor Kamal Babu was, needless to say, none too pleased with the outcome.

"If you waste so many chances and then make such a defensive mistake, you are bound to lose," Kamal told reporters while reflecting on the defeat.

The veteran was unhappy overall with the tournament, which was marred by age controversy, with one team being expelled due to fielding overage players while the eventual champions were allowed to play the final despite having similar allegations levelled against them.

"I am not pointing fingers at anyone, but you know even a six-month gap can make a huge difference in age-group football. There are some players in this tournament whom I know to be married with kids. There are players who are playing first division or second division football for years. How can they play in an under-18 tournament," the coach questioned.

## FACT BOX

**Champions:** NoFeL SC -- Tk 3 lakh

**Runners-up:** Saif SC -- Tk 2 lakh

**Player-of-the-tournament:**  
Rashedul Islam (Bashundhara Kings)

**Top scorer:** 6 players (3 goals each)

**Fair Play trophy:** Saif SC



NoFeL SC players were over the moon after beating Saif SC 1-0 in the final of the Walton U-18 Football Tournament at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Bangladesh players (from L to R) Matin Mia, Saad Uddin, Jamal Bhuiyan, Raihan Hasan and Yeasin Khan had their eyes firmly on the ball during practice at the Kamalapur Stadium yesterday, the eve of the second FIFA friendly against Bhutan today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Booters seek ideal tune-up for Qatar and India

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh will be eager to put in a dominant performance when they take on Bhutan today in their final FIFA friendly before squaring off against Qatar in their second match of the 2022 World Cup Qualifiers on October 10.

Today's match will get underway at 7:00pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, with private satellite channel Bangla TV and state-run BTV carrying live telecasts of the game.

Although British coach Jamie Day had earlier said that the aim was to improve Bangladesh's FIFA rankings by playing the friendly against Bhutan, he would certainly have special plans with one eye on the home match against Qatar and the away match against India on October 15.

The friendly will let the 39-year-old coach gauge the players' fitness after a two-week rest following their first Qualifier against Afghanistan. It will also give him the opportunity to fine-tune the playing combination and test reserve players to keep them primed for unforeseen circumstances.

"We will make a few changes from the last game and the rest will be the same," said Day

after training at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Right-back Bishwanath Ghosh, who has a yellow card from the Afghanistan game, is likely to miss the tie against Qatar duo while centre-back Tutul Hossain Badsha is still uncertain after a motorcycle accident and the coach will be looking to identify replacements should the need arise.

"The coach is not in favour of making many changes and wants to play those players tomorrow who will play against Qatar, but there may be a couple of changes," captain Jamal Bhuiyan said.

In the first match, Bangladesh uncharacteristically dominated Bhutan on a muddy pitch to win by a big 4-1 margin. The dominance came as a bit of a surprise as Day's charges were made to toil hard in a 2-0 win, with the second goal coming in the dying moments, over the same opponents at the same venue in last year's SAFF Championship.

Nevertheless, the convincing win in the first friendly will be a boost for the hosts and Day and Jamal were focused on making it two in two against the Himalayan nation, who have had just one success against Bangladesh in 2016.

"We are hoping to put in another good performance and try and win. There are a lot

of things we can take from both games into the Qatar match," said Day, who yesterday worked intensively on set pieces.

Having praised Nabib Newaj Jibon highly, Jamal will bank on the forward in the second match to notch back-to-back wins.

"We are hoping to win the second match too. It is pleasing that a Bangladeshi striker struck two goals in a match after a long time and the team scored four goals. We are happy with the overall performance and of course we want to play much better and score more in the second match," said Jamal.

Bhutan striker Chenchu Gyeltshen also praised Jibon but claimed the muddy pitch helped Bangladeshi forwards.

"Bangladeshi forwards are young and energetic and he [Jibon] was brilliant. Our defenders tried to stop them but could not find their balance on the muddy pitch. If the weather favours us, we will play our possessive football," said Chenchu.

"It is a friendly match and we hope to win at least one match. Let see what happens tomorrow," said Bhutan coach Pema, who thought that Jamal Bhuiyan is a key player for Bangladesh as he controls the midfield and distributes to the forwards.

## A relieved father returns

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Imrul Kayes returned to cricket yesterday after a gap of almost a month and a half. For a player like Imrul, who has been in and out of the team, it is always a challenge to seal a place in the Tigers' squad.

Such an opportunity beckoned when he was considered for the one-off Test against Afghanistan in September this year. However, he had to pass on it as there was a more pressing issue in his life at the time and cricket became a trivial matter.

"Only the one who goes through this can understand the pain," Imrul said while trying to explain what he had endured for the past month and a half.

It was not possible for the 32-year-old to concentrate on cricket or anything else as his one-year-old son was suffering from dengue at that time. For a father, the utmost priority is always the well-being of his child and it was no different for Imrul, who had to forego a gilded opportunity as he was busy making regular hospital visits with his son.

Now a relieved father, who had gotten the assurance from doctors that no complication will recur for his beloved child, can start working on his dream of returning to the national side.

It was not an easy time for Kayes as none of the doctors in Bangladesh could figure out what his one-year-old was suffering from and he had to take his child to Singapore for better treatment.

"It is really difficult to stay fit [physically] if you are mentally unfit. I was out of cricket for the past one or one and a half months. I could not focus [on cricket] due to my child's sickness. Now that he is better, I will give my 100 per cent to get back to cricket," said the 32-year-old left-hander.

"I had an opportunity but I missed it unfortunately due to my son's illness. But it is not the end. Hope keeps everybody moving forward. And I also hope that I can make it to the squad for the India tour [to start in November]," he added.

## Darkness beneath the glamour

MAZHAR UDDIN



With Bangladesh gradually acquiring a measure of prominence at international level, the sport in the country has mass appeal and is considered a viable profession by parents of budding cricketers.

But there is a dark underbelly to all the glitz and glamour. This duality is reflected in the game's governing body -- the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) -- which while overseeing the growth of the game, has also contributed to the darkness, run as it is by a small group of powerful people who have manipulated matters on and off the field.

Over the past two-three years, domestic cricket in the country -- especially in the lower tiers -- has been brutally vandalised. The powerful board members have been taking ownership of clubs in order to shore up their vote banks come election time, and they have tainted cricket by drawing favours from umpires and also by discouraging root-level talent through favouritism.

With even the elite Dhaka Premier League losing most of its charm and popularity, the level of uncertainty has worsened in the lower tiers. Yesterday, the second day of a two-day players' transfer for the Dhaka First Division Cricket League 2019-20 took place quietly at the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) premises in Mirpur.

All 20 clubs participated in the players' transfer and a total of 195



Creating no major fuss, just like previous years, the players' transfers for the First Division Cricket League took place at the CCDM office in Mirpur over the past two days.

PHOTO: STAR

players took part in what is a festive occasion for the country's domestic players.

But the uncertainty was visible on Ali Hossain's face as he signed for Indira Road Krira Chakra.

Ali, who also works as an assistant coach at Mohammedan Cricket Academy and draws a small salary, had to play the second division league last season only for a better sum of money. However, he was left disappointed by his club Matuail Cricket Academy as Ali had only received half the agreed sum of Tk 3 lakh and eventually had to leave the club midway through the league.

An experienced campaigner who

has been playing club cricket for 12 years, Ali made a return to first division cricket but there are other experienced players who decided to quit the game and look for other employment opportunities.

"I am in my mid-twenties and as I have sacrificed my education to become a professional player, it is difficult for me to continue if my income does not increase. Last season, I played second division for better money and the club also had the intention to qualify for the first division initially.

"But when the club got to know just at the start of the super league stage that they are not going to

qualify for the first division league, the officials started to behave rudely with us. They were not willing to pay our remaining amount and eventually me, along with two other players, had to leave the team midway through the league," said Ali.

There is a term 'Shorkari Team' [indicating the clubs of the powerful people of the BCB], used by club-level cricketers in the recent past, that gets all the support from the organisers, be it through umpiring, which has been a regular feature in the first division league in the recent past.

The BCB however provides funding each year to all the participating clubs and this time each club got Tk 6 lakh for the upcoming season, but according to Indira Road KC team manager Abdul Mazid it is getting tougher day by day.

"Everything has changed as cricket is now becoming more of a corporate product with passionate organisers often being overshadowed. We try to hunt for players as well as organise club activities; a small area-based club like us get donations from the wealthy people of the locality," Mazid said, not willing to elaborate further.

With very little hope of drastic change in the upcoming season it will be interesting to see whether BCB president Nazmul Hassan will finally look to reform the entire domestic system or whether he will let the darkness continue to eclipse the glitz and glamour.

## Fahim returns to BKSP

SPORTS REPORTER

Less than two days after his final workday at the Bangladesh Cricket Board after earlier handing in his resignation, veteran coach and mentor to the country's top cricketers, Nazmul Abedin Fahim, returned to his previous workplace -- Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP). He joined yesterday as the advisor of cricket to the prestigious sports institution.

"I am returning to BKSP after 14 years and the biggest reason is that the top authority offered me full freedom to work. It attracted me the most as I remained unutilised at the BCB and things kept becoming narrow for me there. However, I will be there in a part-time capacity and I will remain involved in cricket through various other ways," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

It was a cause of confusion and consternation in the cricket fraternity when news broke on September 17 that Fahim had tendered his resignation to the BCB. Fahim worked for the BCB in many capacities. In his last and final assignment, he looked after the women's team as the national manager of the board's women's wing.