



Bangladesh players cool themselves with a sip of coconut water after a grueling training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, the eve of their second FIFA friendly against Nepal.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Teams seek to step it up in final friendly

SPORTS REPORTER



Head coach Jamie Day, having tested positive for Covid-19 a second time yesterday, will

be absent when Bangladesh bid to end the Mujib Borsho FIFA International Series with a second consecutive win against Nepal in the second match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

State-owned Bangladesh Television and private sports channel T-Sports will be telecasting the match live from 5:00pm.

While the two-match series was seen as a way to get back into the swing of things after a long, pandemic-induced break, today's match has become a matter of prestige for both sides after the hosts beat the Himalayan nation 2-0 on Friday.

In the first game, both teams were off the boil in terms of fitness, speed and ball distribution and there were a series of misfires up front, especially from Bangladeshi forwards. Three days later, the teams are expected to be in

relatively good shape, having played a 90-minute match after a gap of more than eight months, so the final game is expected to be more competitive than the first.

Bangladesh will certainly be hoping to go into December's World Cup qualifier against Qatar with the knowledge that they are on an upward graph, having beaten Nepal, who are 17 places ahead in the rankings, in back-to-back games. Nepal, on the other

hand, will be hoping to return home with a share of the spoils by levelling the series, despite being a depleted side due to the absence of some key players.

"I am sure tomorrow's game will be difficult. I think the opposition will be an improved and better side. Hopefully we will also be a better team. So, I am looking forward to an improved performance from Bangladesh and expecting a strong performance from Nepal as well,"



Tomorrow's [Tuesday's] match is very important and is like a final match. We will hopefully play better and have better ball possession than the first match. I think Nepal will also come out strongly to attack more on us and we will also get more opportunities to attack on the break.

BANGLADESH CAPTAIN JAMAL BHUIYAN



I think it is going to be a very tough match for both Nepal and Bangladesh as both teams got some more time to be prepared for the second and final match. However, we will play to win because we lost the first one. We are ready for tomorrow's [Tuesday's] match.

NEPAL CAPTAIN KIRAN CHEMJONG

said assistant coach Stuart Watkiss in an online pre-match conference, helming the side in the absence of Jamie Day, who will be absent from the dugout for the first time since taking charge in 2018.

"I have prepared the plan the best way we can. We looked back at the last game including the things we need to improve on."

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan believed Day's absence will have no impact. "I think it will be the same tactic and game plan and us players have to carry out the game plan as the coach will tell us," said Jamal.

Saying Bangladesh may face a bit of problem in Day's absence, Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan said, "We have gained the knowledge from the last match and prepared ourselves accordingly in the last three days because our focus is on putting up a good performance. We are ready for tomorrow's match and I hope Nepal will perform well as a team and individually."

Bangladesh is likely to bring a couple of changes to the playing eleven, with goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana and centre-back Yeasin Khan entering in place of Anisur Rahman Zico and Riyadul Hasan Rafi.

## Get well soon, Jamie Day

ATIQUE ANAM

When watching Italy take on Poland in a crucial Nations League fixture on Sunday night, it was hard not to draw a few parallels between the four-time world champions and Bangladesh, one of the lowest-ranked footballing nations in the world.

This very assertion might sound preposterous to many but there, indeed, are quite a few similarities between the two teams, and more specifically their coaches, which are hard to ignore.

Roberto Mancini and Jamie Day took of

the teams only three days apart at a time when both teams were at the lowest points in their footballing history. Mancini was given the reign of Italy, who had missed out on their first World Cup qualification in 56 years -- the darkest episode in that proud footballing nation's history. Day, on the other hand, was appointed by Bangladesh, who were desperate to emerge from the gloom that had engulfed them for the previous two years since a fateful defeat against Bhutan in October, 2016.

Mancini, a fine forward in his day and perhaps an even finer manager, lifted the Azzurri from the depths where his predecessor, Giampiero Ventura, had left them at the end of his two-year tenure. The 55-year-old has built such a strong group of players that the Azzurri are rightly being considered one of the favourites for the title

Queiroz hits out over 'COVAR'

AFP, Bogota

Colombia coach Carlos Queiroz on Sunday likened the use of VAR technology in football to a disease and claimed it should be rebranded as 'COVAR'.

The Portuguese saw his team lose 3-0 to Uruguay in a World Cup qualifier on Friday and was angry at a series of decisions in the match.

"We are facing a disease, 'COVAR', which no one understands, neither the coaches nor the players," Queiroz said in a video conference on Sunday, in a pun linking the acronym of VAR with the Covid-19.

## India through Waugh's lens

AFP, Sydney

Australian great Steve Waugh has long held a deep affection for India, first touring the country in 1986. But his experiences were all too often fleeting glimpses, before he got the chance to return and photograph everyday cricket in the sport's powerhouse.

Travelling from one ground to the next as a player, and function to as Australia's captain, Waugh felt he never got to properly see and feel the melting pot of life in the teeming, South Asian nation.

But those small peeks into backstreets and alleyways from Kolkata to Jodhpur never left his mind.

Waugh, one of most successful skippers in cricket history, recalls being overwhelmed by "the absolute and complete bombardment of my senses", and vowed to one day go back when his star was shining a little less brightly.

"It's something that's always been in the back of my mind, I was always fascinated by what I saw out of the bus window, everyday life, the spirit of the people," Australia's most capped player told AFP in an interview.

"I couldn't comprehend really how important cricket was to the people and how it was almost a religion."

Waugh, 55, put it off for years, until the Australian team were plunged into crisis in 2018 by the ball-tampering



scandal in South Africa.

With Australian cricket at a low point, he began planning a "feel-good" project which culminated in an 18-day journey through far-flung parts of India with his camera to capture the essence and simple joys of the game, and raise money for sick children at the same time.

"It was just a fun project. You know, 18 months or so ago people were saying that cricket had lost its soul after what happened in Cape Town," Waugh said. "I just wanted to do a feel-good project that I was passionate about."

Accompanied by a mentor in professional photographer Trent Parke, Waugh set off in January before the coronavirus pandemic changed the world.

His journey took him to the desert of Rajasthan, the foothills of the Himalayas and the teeming streets of Mumbai, stopping wherever he saw the game being played.

He met cricketing monks, a 100-year-old player, and a three-year-old Instagram batting sensation, while being inspired by blind and physically challenged players.

Old friends like Sachin Tendulkar got involved and the end product was a book -- The Spirit of Cricket -- and a documentary due to air ahead of India's limited-overs and Test tour of Australia.

Proceeds will support his work with charities in India and the Steve Waugh Foundation, which raises funds for children with rare diseases, a philanthropic role he has embraced since a meeting decades ago with the late nun and missionary Mother Teresa.

Waugh took about 17,000 photos and had to whittle them down to 220 for the book. It was a memorable trip for Waugh, who had always been interested in photography. He said he hoped the end product would help people better understand what cricket means to Indians.

**T20 Cup players, staff to get tested on Nov 20**

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) medical team is prepared to conduct coronavirus testing at the BCB Academy on November 20 for all the players of the five teams that will participate in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup as well as support and hotel staff.

Teams will check into the hotel the following day and prepare for the start of the tournament on November 24.

According to sources, players who reside outside Dhaka but test positive will be quarantined at the BCB's Academy complex. If a player whose home is in Dhaka tests positive, he will be sent to quarantine at home.

However, if there are a high number of positive cases, teams will take necessary measures. It was also learned that the BCB will allow teams to get a replacement if a player tests positive.

The cricketers will check into the Pan Pacific Sonargaon in the capital, where they will stay on two separate floors inside a bio-secure bubble. The BCB will appoint each team with a medical officer, whose job will be ensuring health safety protocols.

Sixteen players and no more than nine support staff will stay at the team hotel to ensure proper health safety.

The BCB is taking the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 Cup as the platform to prepare to host international series in the future, with the West Indies scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh in January next year.

## Belgium, Italy in pole positions

AFP, Paris



Belgium ended England's hopes of reaching the Nations League finals with a 2-0 win on Sunday while Italy edged closer to next year's title shake-up.

Belgium were just five minutes from joining world champions France at next October's finals when Iceland pulled level at 1-1 with group rivals Denmark in Copenhagen. However, a stoppage time penalty by Christian Eriksen gave the Danes a 2-1 win and kept alive their chances of pipping Belgium to top spot in Group A2.

Youri Tielemans and Dries Mertens scored the goals which gave world number one Belgium victory over Gareth Southgate's England. A second consecutive defeat leaves England down in third place, five points adrift of Belgium.

Denmark's late winner over Iceland means Belgium still need a point when

they host the Danes on Wednesday to secure their place in the final four.

In Copenhagen, Iceland, whose Euro 2020 hopes were dashed by Hungary in a 2-1 play-off defeat in midweek, suffered more agony against Denmark.

Eriksen gave the Danes the lead from the penalty spot after just 12 minutes following a foul by Ari Freyr Skulason on Daniel Wass.

Vidar Orn Kjartansson levelled for Iceland in the 85th minute but another penalty by Eriksen in the second minute of injury time after a handball by Hordur Magnusson gave the Danes the three points.

Italy brushed off the absences of several players and coronavirus-hit coach Roberto Mancini with an impressive 2-0 victory over Poland. The Azzurri took top spot in Group A1 from the Netherlands, who beat Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-1 earlier in the day.

Italy will be sure of a place in next October's finals with victory over the Bosnians in Sarajevo on Wednesday.

Chelsea midfielder Jorginho opened the

scoring in the 27th minute with a penalty awarded after Grzegorz Krychowiak had brought down Andrea Belotti.

In the 77th minute, Poland had Jacek Goralski sent off before the Italians added a second goal from Domenico Berardi. Frank de Boer won his first match as Netherlands coach after Georginio Wijnaldum scored twice in the win over Bosnia.

Liverpool midfielder Wijnaldum struck his goals early in the first half to help new coach De Boer break his duck at the fifth attempt following three draws and a defeat, with Memphis Depay scoring the other for the dominant Dutch.

"It had been five games since we'd won, so it was a good feeling to win again," said Wijnaldum. "If I'm playing more in a sitting role, I don't get in the box that often, but tonight I was playing as a No 10 so I'm expected to. I basically just did my job."

The Dutch go to Poland in their final group game on Wednesday but even a win won't be good enough should Italy prevail in Bosnia.



Belgium all but ensured their Nations League finals berth while ending England's hopes with a 2-0 win and Italy edged closer to next year's title shake-up with a dominant victory over Poland by the same scoreline on Sunday night.

PHOTO: TWITTER