

Last playoff spot up for grabs

SPORTS REPORTER



The last day of the group stage in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup is set to be the decider of the fourth and final spot for the playoffs as table-toppers Gazi Group Chattogram take on Minister Rajshahi in the day game while Beximco Dhaka face Fortune Barishal in the later fixture today.

Chattogram and Dhaka have already secured a place in the top four but it will be a do or die encounter for Rajshahi and Barishal as both teams are bottom of the table with four points in seven games.

Chattogram, with six wins in seven matches, have already secured the top spot. But Dhaka, who have eight points from seven games, will look to beat Barishal to seal the second qualifier spot.

Gemcon Khulna, who finished playing all of their eight group games, are second with eight points but a win for Dhaka today will take them to third place for the eliminator spot.

For Najmul Hossain's Rajshahi, the equation is simple -- a win against Chattogram will take them to the top four spot courtesy of a superior net run-rate than Barishal.

Even if Rajshahi win, Barishal would still have a chance to make the playoffs. The Tamim Iqbal-led side would then require to win by a huge margin to better their net run-rate than Rajshahi.

But if both Rajshahi and Barishal lose then the team with a better net run-rate will qualify for the top four.

With so many ifs and buts, for Rajshahi, according to their pace



Rajshahi all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin would want to contribute in their last group-stage game of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup against Chattogram today for the remaining playoff spot. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

bowling all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, it will be important for his side to correct the small mistakes which have caused them to lose a few close encounters.

Saifuddin, who missed out on the first five matches after suffering an ankle injury, said they had been making silly mistakes in the latter part of the innings.

"I have been following all the matches and I think everyone in our team chipped in. However, we made silly mistakes which is why we lost a few close games. We made

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MOHAMMAD SAIFUDDIN
RAJSHAHI ALL-ROUNDER

mistakes especially from the 18th to 20th overs. I also bowled badly in one game so if we don't repeat our mistakes, I think it's possible for us to win the last game and qualify for the top four," Saifuddin told the media yesterday.

The pacers have been performing well in the recent past. And according to Saifuddin, it is important for the seamers to ball the right lengths regardless of the condition which has been the reason behind the pacers' success so far.

Day dismisses 'usual fake news'

SPORTS REPORTER



As the national team committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) prepares a comprehensive plan for the national football team ahead of next March's Bangabandhu Gold Cup in Dhaka, whispers that British coach Jamie Day would be terminated spread through the football fraternity on Thursday night.

Having quoted one of the BFF vice presidents, one television channel reported that Jamie was going to be terminated following Bangladesh's 0-5 drubbing in Qatar.

However, national team committee chairman and BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed ruled out any such move, saying they were satisfied with Day, whose contract was extended until 2022.

"It is just a rumour. I request everyone not to pay attention to it. Everyone was surprised by such a rumour when we are planning the future of the national team. I don't know how it spread," Nabil said. "I am satisfied with Day's performances because Qatar got four months' time before facing Bangladesh. They played domestic matches as well as international friendlies against strong opponents. But Bangladesh played on the back of only six weeks of preparation. Bangladesh, under Day, played better against Qatar in the home match and I am hopeful that the boys will perform well in next three World Cup Qualifying matches on the back of good preparation."

When contacted, Day termed it "usual fake news". "Usual fake news. I spoke to the BFF this (Thursday) morning to discuss their plans for 2021, so I would be very surprised if they sacked me," said Day, who has taken ill in England after recovering from Covid-19



in Bangladesh ahead of the Qatar tie.

The BFF is going to start the new season from December 22 through the Federation Cup before starting the Bangladesh Premier League in January. They are also mulling whether to have a one-month preparation camp in February ahead of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, which was proposed to be held from March 1 in Dhaka.

"The footballers will fully be engaged from December 22, with Day watching league matches in January to help him select players. The BFF president plans to start the national camp for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup from the first week of February," Nabil added. "The final fixture of the World Cup Qualifiers have not been disclosed yet but we can assume it will be held in March and June and we have a good possibility to secure points from all three home matches."

However, Nabil said the execution of the BFF plans will depend on approval from clubs, who are not obligated to release their players a month ahead.

League champions Bashundhara Kings did not release their players within the BFF deadline for the two international friendlies against Nepal last month. BFF also agreed to play the Qatar tie beyond the FIFA window after clubs agreed to release their players for a six-week training camp.

Kazi Salahuddin said earlier that he wants one month of national training ahead of each of World Cup Qualifying match. But Day has only asked for 10 days to prepare his charges before matches or tournaments in the past. Comfortable with that, Day said: "I don't believe it will be possible to have 30 days because clubs don't need to release the players until five days before fixture. And if you look around the world, most training camps are 10 days long."

Nicholls ton spurs NZ fightback

REUTERS, Wellington



Henry Nicholls battled to his sixth Test century and provided the backbone for a New Zealand middle order fightback as his side reached 294-6 at the end of a torrid first day of the second Test against West Indies in Wellington on Friday.

The 29-year-old left-hander was on 117 with Kyle Jamieson on one at stumps at the Basin Reserve.

Nicholls had not passed 50 in 13 Test innings since scoring 107 against Bangladesh at the same ground in March 2019 and rode his luck on a pitch that offered the West Indies bowlers' assistance all day.

He was dropped three times, twice at first slip, and took several deliveries on the body from the visitors' pace attack but shared in a 70-run partnership with Will Young (43), 55 runs with BJ Watling (30) and 83 with Daryl Mitchell (42).

West Indies captain Jason Holder had won the toss and asked New Zealand captain Tom Latham, who was standing in for Kane Williamson, to bat on a heavily-grassed wicket that had been under covers all week.

Shannon Gabriel provided a horror opening for the tourists, who need a victory to level the two-match series, by bowling too wide on a full length and conceded 21



runs in his first two overs.

Gabriel shortened his length slightly after those first 12 deliveries and got the ball to move and jump off a length to create numerous false shots.

He also hit all of the batsmen several times and captured the wickets of Tom Blundell (14), Young and Ross Taylor (nine) to finish with figures of 3-57 from 18 overs.

Debutant Chemar Holder also proved a handful for New Zealand's batsmen and finished the day with 2-65.



SOCIEDAD LEAVE IT LATE

Real Sociedad striker Willan Jose embraces his jubilant coaching staff and teammates following his 90th-minute equaliser against Napoli in their Europa League fixture in Naples on Thursday. The result saw both sides progress to the last 32 of the competition at the expense of AZ Alkmaar, who failed to qualify following a shock 2-1 defeat away to Rijeka.

PHOTO: REUTERS

LEGEND OF PAOLO ROSSI: Permanent yet fleeting

ATIQUE ANAM



"Paolo Rossi was the one who beat Zico's Brazil, Maradona's Argentina, Boniek's Poland and in the final, the Germany of Rummenigge," the Gazzetta dello Sport, Italy's top sports newspaper, wrote in its online column on Thursday following the Tuscan legend's death at the age of 64.

Not a bit of exaggeration in those words. During the two weeks of June-July of '82, Rossi had ripped to shreds the formbook, his own and that of the teams involved, and single-handedly carried a struggling Italy side to their first world title in modern times. And he did it with an outrageous sequence of six goals in the final three matches, ushering in enormous joy to a nation which was beset with political and social unrest over the previous decade.

The tournament in 1982 was also part of the early days of World Cup matches being telecast live around the globe, and 25-year-old Rossi, with his matinee-idol looks and jet-black hair in that classic blue Azzurri kit, gliding away in celebration after each of those six goals, had caught the imagination of an entire generation and made them fall in love with the beauty of football.

None of those goals were extraordinary. A downward header from inside six yards, a tap-in from close range or side-footing past the goalie from inside the box, but that was the eternal Paolo Rossi -- the predator of the box, the one for losing his marker at will and being present at the right place at the right time. What was extraordinary, though, was how those goals transformed a struggling team into the world's best and how they turned Rossi from an outcast to the darling of a nation, and under what circumstances!

It was a case of "personal redemption" for the Juventus forward.

Having missed the 1980 European Championship due to a ban from football on allegation of involvement in a betting scandal, Rossi, once the world's highest-paid player, saw his three-year ban commuted to two years, just in time for him to be considered for the touring party.

He hadn't scored for Italy in

almost 15 hours of action and had only played three games in three years, yet coach Enzo Bearzot, who was the coach in Argentina '78 too when Rossi scored three goals and made four assists, ignored the media's hullabaloo for dropping him.

The winger-turned-centre-forward looked lethargic in the three pool matches as Italy limped through the first group stage. He was even called an "ectoplasm of himself", and a "ghost aimlessly wandering over the field", but Bearzot kept his faith. The faith was to be repaid in the grandest of ways, starting with the "execution of Brazil".



Paolo Rossi leaves the Brazil players in his wake during that famous 3-2 win for Italy in Barcelona during the 1982 World Cup. PHOTO: COLLECTED

That Brazil team played with carelessness abandon, and why not, when they had the likes of Zico, Socrates and Alemao in their ranks. The team's coach Tele Santana was a proponent of Jogo Bonito, but in his vision of beautiful football he had clearly lost sight of the danger lurking in the shape of Rossi.

That "ghost aimlessly wandering" suddenly sprang to life at the Estadi de Sarria in Barcelona and executed one of the greatest Brazil sides of all time in one of the greatest ever matches in the history of the World Cup.

Two more goals against Poland in the semifinals and the opening goal against West Germany in the final washed the pain and stigma from injuries and the betting scandal, which had dogged Rossi for years.

Those performances earned

Rossi the Ballon d'Or award that year and he still remains the only player to win the World Cup, finish the top-scorer and be voted best player in the tournament, and in the world, all at the same time.

That was the pinnacle of a brief-yet-eventful career which had all the ingredients of a thrilling and loveable blockbuster movie, but Rossi the person, the elegant, languid and humane footballer, never tried to use his fame to live in the limelight.

He faded away from the collective memory as one of the more technically gifted players, the ones more pleasing to have occupied that place. Rossi was



Griezmann's Uighurs stance

AFP, Paris

Barcelona's World Cup-winning footballer Antoine Griezmann said Thursday he was ending a commercial deal with Huawei over reports the Chinese telecoms giant was involved in the surveillance of Uighur Muslims.

Frenchman Griezmann said on Instagram that following "strong suspicions that Huawei has contributed to the development of a 'Uighurs alert' through the use of facial recognition software, I am immediately ending my partnership with the company."

He called on Huawei to "not just deny these accusations but to take concrete action as quickly as possible to condemn this mass repression... and to use its influence to contribute to the respect of human rights".

US-based surveillance research firm IPVM said in a report Tuesday that Huawei had been involved in testing facial recognition software in China that could send alerts to police when it recognised Uighur minorities' faces. Huawei denied the claims.

Human Rights Watch says Uighurs in Xinjiang are being arrested after being reported by software which identifies suspicious behaviour.

China has come under intense international criticism over its policies in Xinjiang, where rights groups say as many as one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been held in internment camps.