

'Extremely disappointed with AFC'

Jamie Day weighs in on naturalisation of foreign players

SPORTS REPORTER



Expressing "extreme disappointment" at losing home advantage, Bangladesh coach Jamie Day has implied that his focus is firmly on June's World Cup qualifiers and he wants to use the tri-nation tournament in Nepal as an opportunity for experiment.

The 40-year-old said the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) should have been stronger in forcing Afghanistan to play in Bangladesh and the decision of taking all the games to a centralised venue has made Bangladesh's job much harder.

Bangladesh will have to play their three remaining home games



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The Bangladesh coach explained where he thought AFC went wrong in dealing with the situation regarding their now-postponed March 25 match against Afghanistan in Sylhet.

"Do I think AFC could have done a lot more? Yes I do. I think they haven't been strong enough in their decision and have tried to allow Afghanistan and Bangladesh to come to an agreement which was never going to happen. So, in my opinion, AFC should have been stronger in their approach," Day said, adding that the new scheduling of June matches benefited all the teams in the group except for Bangladesh.

As the chance of hosting Afghanistan was gone, Bangladesh found an opportunity to play competitive matches in the tri-nation tournament, also involving hosts Nepal and Kyrgyzstan Olympic team.

The English coach wants to use this opportunity to fine-tune his new-look squad, without focusing

on results. He categorically said that his plan is to test all the players who have been included in the 24-member squad.

"We're not going there to lose. We are going there to win but the focus is not on winning; the focus is on giving everyone a chance," Day said. "Everyone will play there regardless of if we win the first and we have to win the second. We'll still change the team. It is a chance for me to see in training and in a game if they are around international level for June."

Day, who has been in charge of the Bangladesh team for close to three years now, said he would not only experiment with the players but may also alter the style of play the team is used to.

"We want to change our play a little bit. Hope they fit into that. We'll be working on that over the next seven days to try and put it into the games in Nepal," Day said.

The team will leave Dhaka on March 18 and the tournament will be held from March 23 to 29.

Meanwhile, the coach has weighed in on the issue of naturalisation of foreign players to bolster the forward line after a Nigerian player, playing in the domestic circuit for close to a decade, recently acquired Bangladeshi citizenship to become eligible to represent the Red and Greens.

"If he has a Bangladesh passport, then he can play for Bangladesh. No problem," Day said when asked about 31-year-old Eleta Kingsley's chances of representing Bangladesh.

"You can look at it two ways. If we give citizenship to foreign players, [in a] short time, we are going to get better results. But in longer term, it's going to stop the progress of the local players... If we use foreign players, it will improve the squad. But also we need to give the local players the opportunity to play for the national team. So we need to make sure everyone gets the opportunity to do that," the coach opined.

Fans barred from Olympics torch relay

AFP, Tokyo

Spectators will be barred from the start of the Tokyo Olympics torch relay, organisers said Monday, announcing a pared-back launch as the countdown to the postponed Games begins in earnest.

Fans were told to stay away from next week's "simplified" starting ceremony and first leg of the nationwide relay, which was put on hold a year ago when the Olympics were delayed over the coronavirus.

"The grand start ceremony and the first section of the Fukushima torch relay... will not be open to the public," organisers said in a statement, adding that the festivities would be broadcast live online.

The announcement comes ahead of a decision on whether fans from overseas will be allowed to enter Japan for the coronavirus-delayed Games, which is expected to be taken before the torch relay begins on March 25.

Reports last week suggested the Japanese government is set to ban fans from abroad over fears of a rise in infections.

The torch relay will begin in Fukushima prefecture, which last week marked the 10th anniversary of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that left 18,500 dead or missing.

But the torch, headed for the Olympics opening ceremony on July 23, will get a more muted send-off than originally planned.

Tigers face race to full fitness

First match scenario training in NZ today

SPORTS REPORTER



The new normal in the Covid-19 era has made life more difficult than ever for cricketers in terms of adapting to quarantine protocols and keeping fitness standards high.

Fitness has always played a major role in the success for any team in world cricket and the current scenario, where players have had to quarantine and isolate themselves in a room for days, makes it harder for players to work up to full fitness in time for international matches.

Despite landing in New Zealand on February 24, the visiting Bangladesh team will have their first game scenario practice at the John Davies Oval in Queenstown today -- 19 days after arrival. The Tigers had to follow a strict 14-day mandatory quarantine protocol before eventually starting group training in Queenstown on March 10 for the five-day training camp.

According to the Tigers' strength and conditioning coach Nicholas Lee, the cricketers have realised the importance of being fit and the need to gain full fitness in a short span in between travelling and quarantine protocols. "I think it was difficult for some people to start with, because of the jet lag and the time difference. There is quite a substantial time difference between here and Bangladesh. So, for the first week or so, quite a lot of people were getting over the jet lag and adjusting their sleep patterns."

"But I think once they got out to the training field after day seven or eight and were able to use the gym and doing a bit of activity, they started to find it a bit easier to sleep and things got a bit more normal. So, I think now going into the matches they have got enough time to adjust and get themselves ready from a skill and physical point of view," Lee told the BCB through a video message after the gym session in Queenstown yesterday.

The cricketers will be divided into two teams, Tamim XI and Nazmul XI, and five local Kiwi cricketers will also participate in the 50-over game. Mosaddek Hossain is the only member in the Bangladesh squad who will not feature in the warm-up game today after the all-rounder hurt his knee during fielding practice on the first day.

Following the camp in Queenstown, the Tigers will travel to Dunedin for the first of three ODIs scheduled for March 20. The second and third ODIs will take place on March 23 and 26 in Christchurch and Wellington respectively.

The ODI series will be followed by three T20s to be played on March 28, 30, and April 1 in Hamilton, Napier, and Auckland respectively. Bangladesh is yet to register a win in New Zealand despite playing 26 games across three formats and the Tigers are desperate to change that this time around.



against Afghanistan, India and Oman in Qatar in June this year.

"We are extremely disappointed that we are not playing in Bangladesh. We now lose all home advantage of getting points in World Cup group to qualify for the Asian Cup. That was the target we tried to aim for. That now has become very difficult," Day said after conducting his first training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16

Real get Ramos boost for Atalanta

AGENCIES



Real Madrid will be looking to book their spot in the quarter-finals of the Champions League when they welcome Atalanta BC for the second leg of their last-16 tie tonight.

Los Blancos hold a slight advantage heading into the clash in Madrid, having recorded a 1-0 victory when the two teams met in the first leg on February 24, with Ferland Mendy netting late on for the Spanish club.

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane has said he is at a loss to explain forward Eden Hazard's latest injury setback. The Belgian international joined Real in a 150 million euro (\$178.83 million) deal in 2019 but has been blighted by injuries, making 25 La Liga appearances since signing. After returning from a muscle problem for the final 15 minutes in Saturday's last-gasp 2-1 win over Elche, Zidane said Hazard will miss Tuesday's Champions League home

leg. Sergio Ramos returned on Saturday but the bigger question is whether he is back for good. After two months out with a knee injury, Ramos played an hour in Madrid's win over Elche, with the plan to blow away the cobwebs ready for a start against Atalanta in the second leg of the Champions League on Tuesday.

His availability should be a significant boost for Madrid, who have a 1-0 advantage from last month's first leg in Italy and will be confident of being Spain's first, and perhaps only, survivor in the tournament's quarter-finals.



City eager to extend good run of form

AGENCIES

Manchester City will be aiming to book their spot in the Champions League quarter-finals when they take on Borussia Monchengladbach in the second leg of their last-16 tie at the Puskas Arena in Budapest. Goals from Bernardo Silva and Gabriel Jesus saw the Premier League leaders ease to a 2-0 win in the first leg, and Monchengladbach head into the match in the midst of an abysmal run of form.

Two seasons ago as Manchester City won the first ever domestic treble of trophies in England, Pep Guardiola branded the possibility of ever doing a quadruple "almost impossible".

A season characterised by injuries, fixture congestion, player fatigue, coronavirus infections, and for City no pre-season, should have made the feat more improbable than ever.

Yet, City remain on course to prove Guardiola's prediction wrong.

Borussia Moenchengladbach coach Marco Rose paid tribute to Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola ahead of the two sides' Champions League last 16 second leg, saying the Premier League team are almost

playing 'Total Football'. Guardiola's City are league leaders in the English top-flight, boasting a 14-point lead over second-placed and rivals Manchester United.

Guardiola, who has guided City to two Premier League titles since arriving in 2016, used the Dutch tactics of 'Total Football' at former club Barcelona after having played under Johan Cruyff, who pioneered the philosophy.

'Total Football' is centred on the idea of players being accomplished and comfortable enough on the ball to play anywhere on the field.

"When City have the ball, it's incredibly hard for any opponent," Rose said before Tuesday's Champions League last-16 second leg in Budapest.

"Their gegenpressing after losing possession is world class and they move the ball forward very quickly. Pep has them playing almost Total Football."

"He is a fantastic character. He has had a massive influence on world football over the past years. He's passionate about things beyond football too and is an incredible human being."



Measured at 50 feet high, the largest Index finger of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was exhibited on the final day of the DSCC (Dhaka South City Corporation) -introduced tournament titled 'Inter-Ward Sports Competition 2021' at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (R) Ward-4 cricketers celebrate during the prize-giving ceremony as they beat Ward-11 by two runs earlier in the day.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pele congratulates Ronaldo

AFP, Milan



Pele on Sunday congratulated Cristiano Ronaldo for 'breaking his record' of goals scored in official matches.

Portuguese star Ronaldo hit a hat-trick for Juventus in a 3-1 Serie A win over Cagliari to bring his total to 770 goals.

The 36-year-old took to Instagram to tell his 270 million followers he could now claim the record, having matched Pele's 767 on March 2.

"I'm filled with joy and pride as I acknowledge the goal that puts me

on top of the World's goalscoring list, overcoming Pele's record, something that I could never have dreamed of while growing up as a child from Madeira," Ronaldo wrote.

Brazilian great Pele, 80, wrote on Instagram to his 5.8 million followers: "Congratulations on breaking my record of goals in official matches."

"I admire you a lot, I love watching you play and this is no secret to anyone."

"My only regret is not being able to give you a hug today."

"Cristiano life is a solo flight. Each makes his own journey. And what a beautiful journey you are having!"

Pele -- the only player in history to win three World Cups -- has claimed to have scored 1,283 goals in total, including in unofficial matches.

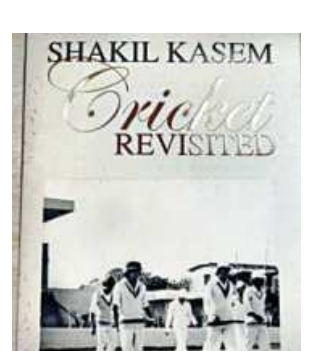
Ronaldo's goals include 668 for club sides -- five with Sporting Lisbon, 118 for Manchester United, 450 for Real Madrid and 95 for Juventus. He has also scored 120 for Portugal.

Some media however put Czech Josef Bican on 805 goals, ahead of both Ronaldo and Pele.

Former Brazilian striker Romario also claims to have scored 1,000 career goals including unofficial matches. Other sources attribute 772 to him.



'Cricket revisited' launched



SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket Revisited, a book by cricketer-turned-columnist Shakil Kasem, was launched at the Dhaka Club yesterday.

As the title entails, the book is a collection of essays that talk about memories which were created during the country's cricketing events in the past few decades.

During the launching ceremony, prominent figures in Bangladesh's cricket history such as Syed Ashrafur Islam, Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury and Yusuf Rahman Babu shared their experiences of their time at domestic cricket in Bangladesh. It seemed as if each speaker had his own stories to tell, conveying the need for compiling and publishing more of such books in the coming days.