



Coach Jamie Day (L) shows a thing or two to his charges during a practice session at the Qatar University Ground in Doha yesterday as Bangladesh build up for Monday's World Cup qualifying fixture against India. PHOTO: BFF

Resolve strengthened by defensive solidity

ASHFAQ UL MUSHFIQ

After an 84th minute equaliser earned Bangladesh a draw against Afghanistan in the World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers on Thursday, the men in red and green's compact defence and their desire to chase the game till the final whistle were widely appreciated by coaches and football lovers all over the country.

Despite Tapu Barman's leveler being the biggest talking point of the match, the discipline of Bangladesh's defence did not go unnoticed.

In the absence of some key players, the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha saw debuts handed to bright prospects like Finland-born defender Tariq Raihan Kazi, Chittagong Abahani's Manik Hossain Molla and Rimon Hossain of Bashundhara Kings. All three impressed by exceeding expectations.

Former national footballer and experienced coach Saiful Bari Titu expressed contentment about the team's performance.

"Bangladesh defended really well throughout the match. We didn't concede any goals in the first half

despite Afghanistan dominating in the attacking third. We maintained a solid defensive line and didn't let the opposition cause much damage," he said.

"Although the team looked a bit messy after conceding the goal, [Bangladesh coach] Jamie [Day] made some smart changes by introducing Manik Molla, Rimon Hossain and the others who helped to wrest back control of the game."

Manik Hossain Molla was introduced nine minutes after Bangladesh conceded and Titu acknowledged the midfielder's performance in defensive midfield, a position similar to the one Titu played.

"Manik Molla has been playing really well in the league. He has tremendous ball control and knows where to play the ball. He has a great ability to intercept balls and can snatch it back from the opposition. That was evident during the match as well."

Debutant Tariq Kazi also had a decent performance, making seven clearances including a couple of crucial headers against the towering Afghan strikers.

Tariq and Manik Molla also took

bookings for the team, but it was a collective effort by the defence that thwarted over 15 attacks from Afghanistan.

Titu emphasised that the play when in transition will be equally as important as a compact defence against India, whom Bangladesh face tomorrow.

"India have a stronger defence than Afghanistan. To do well against them, we need to keep possession well during transitions. We failed to do that against Afghanistan, but it can cost us against India."

The local coach sounded optimistic ahead of the match, saying: "India and Afghanistan are the closest to ours in terms of quality in this group. Anything can happen in the match. But similar to our match against Afghanistan, we have to go with the confidence that we can come back from a difficult situation."

Bangladesh Defender Rahmat Mia also shone a spotlight on defensive duties ahead of the next match, saying: "Usually the defensive challenge is very stern against big teams. We have to concentrate on not making silly mistakes or we may end up conceding goals. We have to stay compact throughout."

Abahani continue winning streak

SPORTS REPORTER

Yet another set of rain-affected curtailed matches was witnessed on the third round of the ongoing Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League T20 competition at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Yesterday's second game between Abahani Limited and Brothers Union, shortened to mere 11-overs, saw Mushfiqur Rahim lead from the front once again to carry on the winning streak for his side.

The first innings saw Brothers post 101 for 5, courtesy of Alauddin Babu and

balls to spare. Naim remained not out on 37 off 26 balls while Mushfiqur was not out on 37 off just 21 balls which included six fours.

With three wins on the trot, Abahani sits pretty at the top of the points table while Brothers are struggling with one win in three matches.

Earlier in the day, the first game between Partex Sporting and Club and Old DOHS Cricket Club was reduced to 15 overs due to heavy rain but there was hardly any competitiveness in the game.

The Partex batters, after being sent to bat, lacked intent as they added just 28 runs in the first seven overs, and ended up with a small total of 77 for 5. Opener Abbas Musa faced 21 balls for his 17, skipper Tasamul

BCB set to resolve major issues

SPORTS REPORTER

With the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) elections slated later this year, the board officials are all set for an immediate meeting to finalise the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and resolve a few other major issues.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan's term is set to end in September this year and according to the constitution, the board must arrange the election within the next 45 days.

Among the major agendas-- finalising the still unannounced central contract of the cricketers as well as discussing the recent performance of the national team, will be on the table. It was learned that the board may also discuss the appointment of a new batting and a spin bowling coach for the national team.

"With the upcoming election in mind, we will discuss the probable date for the AGM along with a few routine approvals, and the budget as well. Obviously, we will settle the central contract of the cricketers and discuss the Tigers' recent performances, in between proceedings," BCB director and chairman of the media committee Jalal Yunus told The Daily Star yesterday.

Currently, a total of 17 cricketers are under the national central contract in both red and white-ball formats. Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is expected to return to the new central contract, having had served his ban by the ICC.

According to the existing five categories, cricketers approximately get, a monthly salary of \$5000, \$3750, \$2500, \$1875 and \$1250 for A+, A, B, C and D respectively.



Prime Bank's Mustafizur Rahman returned figures of 5 for 22 but his effort was not enough for his side to avoid a 27-run defeat against Mohammedan in the day's last match of the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League T20 competition in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Zahiduzzaman's fiery unbeaten twenties in tandem in the end, despite following a series of hiccups, where they lost 5 wickets in a span of 13 runs. Zahiduzzaman's 25 off ten balls saw two sixes and two fours while Babu's 10-ball 24 had three sixes and a four.

Abahani had the fitting reply, with openers Mohammad Naim and Munim Shahriar adding 38 for the opening stand, setting things in motion. Shahriar was dismissed on 25 off 12 balls but Naim along with skipper Mushfiqur made sure Abahani see off the target easily with seven

Haque played 25 balls for his 18 and Nazmul Hossain scored 17 off 23 balls, in a sluggish batting display.

DOHS in reply, smoothly rode on the unbeaten opening stand of Anisul Islam Emon and Rakin Ahmed to reach the target in 11.3 overs and sealed off a comprehensive ten wicket win.

Rakin's 43 off 36 balls and Anisul's run-a-ball 33 registered the first win for DOHS in three games while Partex remains at the bottom of the table, having lost all the three games so far.

Dias wins player of season award

REUTERS

Manchester City defender Ruben Dias was named the Premier League Player of the Season on Saturday, becoming the second Portuguese to receive the honour after former Manchester United forward Cristiano Ronaldo.

City boss Pep Guardiola was named Manager of the Season for a third time.

Centre back Dias was named England's Footballer of the Year in the annual vote of the Football Writers' Association last month following a superb debut campaign after his move from Benfica last year.



Dias played a key role in delivering City's third Premier League title in four years as well as the League Cup, and helped his side the Champions League final.

The 24-year-old was also named in the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) Team of the Year.

Dias is the fourth defender to be voted Player of the Season by the public, the captains of the 20 Premier League clubs and a panel of experts after Manchester United's Nemanja Vidic, former City captain Vincent Kompany and Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk.

Burns rescues stuttering England



New Zealand fast bowler Tim Southee celebrates after taking the wicket of James Bracey during the fourth day of the first Test against England at Lord's yesterday. PHOTO: TWITTER

AGENCIES



Rory Burns hit 132 as England managed 275 runs in their first innings on the fourth day of the first Test against England at Lord's yesterday.

Burns played an innings that will satisfy him no end as he batted right through the innings, had phases where things weren't at all going well for both England or him, took some body blows and still came out of all of that with a century.

And finally he dragged the deficit down to 103, and that is surely that means safety for England at the very least. Tim Southee finished with six for 43 while Kyle Jamieson took three wickets.

English wickets tumbled early on day four leaving the home side on 164-6 at lunch, 214 runs behind New Zealand after fast bowlers Tim Southee and Kyle Jamieson tore through their middle order.

England had resumed their first innings on 111-2 after rain washed out day three, and Jamieson gave New Zealand the perfect start when he dismissed Joe Root with the first delivery of the day.

He forced the England skipper into a defensive shot, and the ball flew off a thick outside edge into the hands of Ross Taylor in the slips.



Djokovic marches into fourth round

REUTERS



World number one Novak Djokovic booked his spot in the second week of the French Open with a dominant 6-1, 6-4, 6-1 third-round win over 93rd-ranked Lithuanian Ricardas Berankis on Saturday.

The 34-year-old Serbian came into the match with a 3-0 head-to-head record against Berankis, who had never won a set in their previous meetings, and put in a clinical show on Philippe Chatrier court to stay on course for a 19th Grand Slam title.

Djokovic broke his opponent's serve six times in the match and such was his domination that he did not face a single breakpoint on his own on the way to the fourth round at Roland Garros for the 12th consecutive year.

The 2016 champion, who hit 30 winners against 18 unforced errors, is yet to lose a set in his three matches and will next face teenager Lorenzo Musetti, who defeated fellow Italian Marco Cecchinato 3-6, 6-4 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

Meanwhile, Italian prospect Jannik Sinner charged into the French Open fourth round with a 6-1 7-5 6-3 victory over Sweden's Mikael Ymer on Saturday to set up a potential clash with claycourt king Rafael Nadal.

Sinner, seeded 18th, had too much poise and power for Ymer as he joined fellow Italian teenager Lorenzo Musetti in the last 16.



Juventus and Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo had a frustrating night on his first game in Madrid since leaving Real in 2018 as he came close to scoring twice during a goalless draw against Spain in a friendly warm up for the European Championships on Friday. Ronaldo's every move and touch was also booed and whistled by the spectators. Alvaro Morata also missed two clear chances and hit the bar in stoppage time. PHOTO: REUTERS



Brazil star Neymar (R) celebrates with teammate Lucas Paqueta after scoring a penalty during a 2-0 win against Ecuador in a World Cup qualifying match. Neymar, who has so far 10 goals and 12 assists in 17 World Cup Qualifiers games, led the way with his one goal and one assist to Richarlison to maintain their perfect record and stay top of the South American qualifying group. PHOTO: TWITTER