

Time for a tactical shift?

ATIQUÉ ANAM



As Bangladesh woke up to the news that they were allowed qualification for the final round of the Asian Cup qualifiers, despite not meeting the previously-thought criteria following a fifth-place finish in Group E on the previous night, the pertinent question that surfaced was what they can do with this luck? Can they turn it into good fortune by stretching their ability to its limit or just accept it as a generous gift from football's Asian governing body (AFC) and be pleased with it?

The answer to this question could determine which direction the fortune of our national team will take over the next year or two.

When Bangladesh wrapped up the second round of World Cup/Asian Cup qualifiers with a 3-0 defeat against Oman on Tuesday night to finish bottom of Group E with only two points, there was a sense of resignation on everyone surrounding the team -- the players, officials and fans. With a probable tricky playoff round looming, the future had looked treacherous, reminding of what had happened following a defeat to Bhutan at that stage of previous qualifying campaign five years ago.

So it came as a surprise when AFC announced, through a media release yesterday morning, that 22 teams including Bangladesh were through to the final round of Asian Cup qualifiers.

As per the press release, a total of 24 teams will feature in the third round to compete for the final 11 slots in the Asian Cup. The 24 teams will be divided into six groups of four teams to play home-and-away round-robin matches, to be played from February to September, 2022. The group winners and the best five runner-ups across all groups, will qualify for the Asian Cup, where they will be joined by the 13 teams which qualified directly from the second round.

Coach Jamie Day, when informed about the revelation in the afternoon,



said that he was as surprised as he was pleased.

"Surprised but very pleased for the players as their hard work paid off," the 41-year-old coach said to a query by The Daily Star.

Indeed the young players worked hard over the past fortnight in Qatar although there was not much to show for their effort except for one point against Afghanistan. Judging the overall scenario -- some decisions going against them in the first-leg matches against Afghanistan

and India and then losing home advantage for the last three matches -- it would not be unfair to say that Bangladesh deserved a chance like this, however, the performances themselves did not invoke much sympathy.

In all these three matches, Bangladesh adopted a very defensive strategy and their game plan was based around defending the opposition's attacks, and, if opportunities presented themselves, trying to go for attacking moves towards the latter parts of the games.



Possession-wise, Bangladesh's best effort was hogging 28 percent of the ball against Afghanistan and worst was 21 percent against Oman. As far as shots were concerned, Bangladesh had a third of shots compared to Afghanistan, a fourth compared to India and a 10th compared to Oman. The perils of playing too defensively were all too evident as Bangladesh players had to often resort to very physical football, earning a number of cautions in every match. These statistics don't speak of a competitive

team and will not stand Bangladesh in good stead if they indeed want to qualify for the Asian Cup.

What they will need going forward is perhaps a bigger pool of players to choose from even if that means including ageing players who have better technical ability on the ball. Day himself expressed his displeasure about the habit of losing possession after the defeat against India.

It is not as if our players don't have the technical ability to keep the ball and play a few passes; they can and they have showed it in the past too. What is needed is to train the build around that philosophy.

Recovery of Nabib Newaz Jibon, Saad Uddin, Mahbubur Rahman Sufil and Bishwanath Ghosh will definitely add to the strength of the team, and with proper support, players like Motin Mia would probably not look as forlorn in the attacking third as he looked in Doha.

Day was widely praised for instilling a fighting spirit in the players and improving the fitness levels in them after he took over in 2018 and the initial results in the qualifying campaign were encouraging. However, the recent performances have started to take the gloss of those achievements and questions have started to arise regarding the approach and performance of the team.

Now that Bangladesh have another shot at making it to the Asian Cup with seven months in hand, there is probably enough time to reconsider the team's strategies and build a more competitive unit.

'India's batting depth envy of world cricket'

AFP, NEW DELHI

Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's batting depth helps them bounce back from tough situations, as they face an upbeat New Zealand in the World Test Championship tomorrow.

India have a host of batting stars in their line-up including skipper Virat Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane and dashing opener Rohit Sharma.

Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, both spinners who have six Test centuries between them while batting in the middle and lower-middle order, are also expected to take to the field in the title clash in Southampton starting Friday. "With Ashwin and Jadeja playing so well, India's batting depth is the envy of the cricketing world," Gavaskar told AFP.

"Yes, there could be the odd bad-innings like Adelaide, Australia, but this team is like a wonderful rubber ball, always bouncing back and keep on bouncing."

Mohammedan triumph after first Super Over

SPORTS REPORTER



The Dhaka Premier League T20 treated spectators to its first Super Over this season in the tenth round of the tournament as Mohammedan registered a nerve-racking victory over Khelaghar SKS yesterday.

Chasing an 89-run target in the curtailed 10-over-per-side affair, Khelaghar had gotten close and needed 13 runs off the last two overs with six wickets in hand before Shuvagata Hom and national pacer Abu Jayed stepped in with the ball brilliantly to take the game into the Super Over.

However, although he managed to keep the game tied by giving away just six runs in the final over of the inning, Jayed conceded 13 runs in the Super Over, during which Khelaghar's Masum Khan scored ten off four balls.

With 14 needed to win, Mohammedan's Irfan Shukkur started off with a six to pacer Khaled Ahmed and took a single the next ball. Abul Mazid then scored a double and hit a boundary before being dismissed by the penultimate delivery of the game. But Irfan Shukkur ensured Mohammedan's win with a single of the last ball.

Earlier, Mohammedan posted 88 for 9. Opener Abdul Mazid struck a blistering 30-ball 57 while Irfan Hossain bagged four wickets for the bowling side.

Meanwhile, Mohammedan's

archivals Abahani succumbed to their third defeat of the league, losing to by 28 runs to Prime Doleshwar.

Despite restricting Doleshwar to a small total of 132 for nine courtesy of Saif Hasan's fifty, Abahani failed to chase down the target and were eventually



AbDUL Mazid....57

bowled out for 104 in 19.5 overs.

Afif Hossain top-scored for Abahani with 26 while pacer Kamrul Islam picked up four wickets for Doleshwar, who jumped to second in the points table with 15 points. Abahani slipped to

third with 14 points.

Prime Bank Cricket Club remain on top of the table after registering a comfortable six-wicket win over Brothers Union. After being asked to bat in the 12-over-per-side match, Brothers posted 74 for three, which Prime Bank chased down for the loss of four wickets and with two balls to spare. Tamim Iqbal top scored with 29 and Mohammad Mithun added 28 to secure Prime Bank's eighth win from 10 games.

Despite Anisul Islam's impressive five-wicket haul in his two overs, Old DOHS faced a 16-run defeat to Sheikh Jamal DC. Anisul ended with figures of five for 23 from two overs to restrict Jamal to 120 for eight in a 13-over game.

But in reply, DOHS ended up on 104 for 7. Mahmudul Hasan and Rayan Rahman scored thirties but some tight bowling from pacers Ebadot Hossain, Salauddin Sakil and Ziaur Rahman, who bagged two wickets, helped Jamal to a win.

However, things off the pitch took an ugly turn as Legends of Rupganj player Sabbir Rahman allegedly directed racist slurs and threw a stone towards Sheikh Jamal's Elias Sunny. A complaint has been filed with Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) over the incident.

Partex SC continued their losing streak, falling to their tenth consecutive defeat in as many games this time by 21 runs against Legends of Rupganj. Partex are one of the three teams who have already confirmed their place for the relegation stage



PHOTO: TWITTER

Brazil look to maintain winning run

AGENCIES



Brazil will look to continue their perfect start to the 2021 Copa America on Friday, when they take on Peru tomorrow at 6am (Bangladesh Time) in Rio de Janeiro in a replay of the 2019 final.

The hosts began their defence of the trophy with a dominant 3-0 victory over

Venezuela, while their opponents will take on the pre-tournament favourites in their first game of this year's edition of the continental competition, as they look to defy the odds and start with a win.

Brazil have a 14-3 advantage with three draws from 20 previous matches against Peru.

Neymar has been in good form lately, scoring six goals in his last four matches for the Brazilians.

Archers aim to secure Olympic places in France

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's archery contingent is all set to leave for France this morning, where they will take part in two tournaments -- the Final Qualification tournament for Tokyo Olympic and the Archery World Cup Stage-3 -- with hopes of securing Olympic quotas ahead of Tokyo Olympics in July-August in Japan.

Bangladesh have already secured a quota place in Tokyo Olympics, with country's ace archer Ruman Sana qualifying to the individual recurve event.

With 128 archers -- 64 women and as many men -- eligible for five events at the Tokyo Olympics, the final qualification tournament in Paris will offer three quotas each for the men's and women's recurve team as well as some individual spots depending on the outcomes of men's and women's team events.

"We had a good result in the mixed event in the Archery World Cup in Switzerland. The women's team had also played well for the first time but we have to go forward step by step," German coach Martin Fredrick said at a press conference yesterday. 39 nations will be competing for the top three spots in men's recurve team while 28 countries will compete for the top three spots in the women's recurve team in the Final Qualification tournament, which gets underway tomorrow.

Bangladesh's Ruman Sana, Ram Krishna Shaha, Hakim Ahmed Rubel and Abdur Rahman Alif will compete in individual and team events while Diya Siddique, Beauty Roy, Mehnaz Akhter Monira and Nasrin Akter will be participating in women's individual and team events. All archers will also take part in Archery World Cup Stage-3, beginning from June 21 at the same venue.

EURO 2020 HIGHLIGHTS



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo jumps in the air to celebrate his second goal against Hungary during a 3-0 win. The deafening roar at the Puskas Arena in Budapest will have been music to the ears of football fans around the world, as a full house of 67,000 fans watched Portugal take on Hungary in their European Championship opener. Empty or only partly full stadiums have become the norm during the Covid-19 pandemic, often creating a sterile atmosphere for players and viewers alike. But the Hungarian government has bucked the trend, allowing a full-capacity crowd at the newly built arena, at the behest of football-mad Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Doubts over Ronaldo dispelled

REUTERS

Some people doubted whether, after a long and arduous season, 36-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo could still produce the goods for his country, but after Portugal's 3-0 win over Hungary in their Euro 2020 opener on Tuesday, the doubters have their answer.

Portugal, the champions in 2016, came into the rearranged tournament as one of the favourites given the attacking talent at coach Fernando Santos' disposal.

After Portugal's fortunate opener six minutes from time, it was all about Ronaldo, who added a coolly taken third 177 seconds after firing home from the penalty spot.

The way in which he remained calm before rounding the goalkeeper for his second of the night proved that even when not at his best, his potency in front of goal, when it matters, remains as lethal as ever.

That is now 106 international goals for the veteran, three off the all-time record set by Iran's Ali Daei.

➤ Ronaldo has represented his country at every Euros since Portugal hosted the tournament in 2004 and has now played five Euros - a feat no player has matched so far.

➤ Ronaldo has scored in every Euro he has taken part in and when he scored a penalty against Hungary, he became the only player to score in five different Euros.

➤ Juventus superstar netted twice against Hungary to move beyond France's Michel Platini as the record goalscorer at European Championship finals, taking his tally to 11.

➤ At 36 years, 130 days, Ronaldo became oldest player to score for Portugal at a major tournament, breaking the record set by Pepe at World Cup 2018 (35 years, 124 days).

The desire for more goals and records remains stronger than ever. After this imposing start to the tournament, few would bet against Ronaldo surpassing Daei and adding one more accolade to his ever-growing list before Euro 2020 is out.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Hummels misery in a mocking twist of fate

One cannot help but feel for the German centre-back Mats Hummels as he looked upward at the Munich sky in anguish right after deflecting Lucas Hernandez's cross off his shin into his own net as Germany lost 1-0 to France in their opening Group F game at Euro 2020.

And even though Hummels somewhat redeemed himself with a perfectly-timed lunged tackle at the 78-minute which denied Kylian Mbappe from taking Les Bleus 2-0 up, the first-half own goal will still be deemed as the decider in times to come.

Flashback to the 2014 World Cup that was won by Germany, it was Dortmund defender's brilliant header



at 12 minutes into the first-half against France that created headlines at quarter-finals.

And that too, was the solitary goal of the match. If there is anyone who feels like he has seen both sides of the cruel coin of sporting fate, it is Mats Hummels.



Russia's Aleksei Miranchuk celebrates after scoring the all-important goal against Finland in a Group B European Championship match yesterday. The Russians, who remain unbeaten against the Finns since their first meeting in 1912, made amends for their opening loss to Belgium as the group remains wide open.

PHOTO: REUTERS