

SPORT



Can execution match homework?

SPORTS REPORTER



With things changing dramatically around the globe since the Covid-19 pandemic began last year, New Zealand Cricket initiated a new well-being policy that enabled coaches to seek breaks from the game as players sometimes do.

The winds of change mean that Glenn Pocknall will now oversee the Kiwis in Bangladesh while head coach Gary Stead is in New Zealand, passing along instructions for the upcoming five-match T20I series starting September 1.

It will be a huge challenge for the Wellington coach, especially after his side witnessed how Australia struggled against the hosts prior to their tour on slow and low pitches in Mirpur.

"We managed to see quite a lot on Youtube. Bangladesh were also in New Zealand and although the conditions were different, we certainly have enough information to arm ourselves with the knowledge of how they think they will play against us," Pocknall told media yesterday.

Although the onus will be on spinners considering the Mirpur surface, one cannot

leave left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, who was incredible against the Aussies in Bangladesh's historic 4-1 series win earlier this month, out of the equation.

Pocknall believes the Fizz will pose a significant threat to the visitors. However, he warned that they had done their homework and would try to put him under pressure.

"He [Mustafizur] bowled outstandingly well. It was pretty special to watch how well he executed his deliveries. I think he is a threat as much as the other Bangladeshi players. We have had a good look at him and discussed how we feel we can target him. But it comes down to how we can execute it in the games. Trying to put him under pressure and do something different is the aim against him.

The Kiwis also had the ability to analyse the Tigers by watching footage on Youtube, but the hosts face a trickier prospect, going up against a rather unknown set of New Zealand players who have hardly any footage on the web.

"I think we can expect New Zealand to analyse and plan well, using the recent Australia series to learn. They are a streetwise team that plan meticulously against every batsman, bowler and pitch. They will use every bit of information to help them," said Bangladesh batting coach Ashwell Prince.

A challenge fit for a Prince

SPORTS REPORTER



One of Bangladesh's biggest weaknesses over the years has been a lack of adaptability when faced with unfamiliar conditions, especially in the shortest format of the game from the batters' point of view.

Although the Tigers had a successful outing in Zimbabwe with the bat, things were almost the opposite against Australia at home, with difficult batting surfaces testing batsmen to the fullest.

With Ashwell Prince being appointed as the Tigers' long-term batting coach until the 2022 T20 World Cup, it will be interesting to see how the South African works on that aspect to prepare Bangladesh as a better batting unit in the coming days.

Prince was not present during

the historic 4-1 win at home over Australia, but the 44-year-old is expecting similarly slow and low conditions against the Kiwis, which means adaptability will be key for batsmen.

"I think one of the biggest differences between the Zimbabwe and Australia series was the difference in batting conditions. Adaptability is a very important aspect of batting. I think the team adjusted well to the bouncy conditions in Zimbabwe. We were victorious in that series. Then coming home to Bangladeshi conditions where bounce and scoring rate are a lot lower," Prince said in a video message relayed by the BCB yesterday.

"I am expecting similar conditions against New Zealand. The batsmen from the Australia series had a nice discussion yesterday, sharing with guys like Liton Das and Mushfiqur [Rahim]

who didn't play in that series. These are experienced guys but they shared what worked and what we would like to improve upon from the Australia series to take into the New Zealand series."

There has been plenty of discussion regarding Bangladesh's opening slots, with the position of Soumya Sarkar being questioned after the left-hander made just 28 runs across the five games against Australia. His best score was an 18-ball 16 that came in the final game after he was demoted to number four in the batting order.

"Personally I am not really concerned about the opening batsmen. I think we had one or two good partnerships in Zimbabwe but conditions were tough against Australia. It is not easy to score boundaries as frequently as you would on pitches where the ball is coming on. Adapting to conditions

is important. I think we have a strong competition in the opening position. I am sure Liton Das will get an opportunity in this position as well," he said.

Prince also opined that Mushfiqur and Liton's return to the squad would help the team find a better blend of youth and experience.

"What really excites me about this Bangladesh team is that we have a good mix of experienced players and young players. Not just in the batting department, but also in the bowling department. We have some Under-19 World Cup winners, so they are bringing youth and the experience of being successful in a big tournament. It really feels as though there's a good connection between experience and youth. There's a good quality in every department -- fast bowling, spin bowling, and batting," Prince added.



Ferguson convinced Ronaldo for United return!

AGENCIES

Premier League Cristiano Ronaldo was reportedly convinced to make a stunning return to Old Trafford after a late intervention from Sir Alex Ferguson.

The former Manchester United boss snatched him out of the hands of cross-town rivals Manchester City in a £480,000-a-week deal after an emotional conversation with him on Friday morning.

Portuguese teammate Bruno Fernandes had already called him the night before to try and talk him into joining him back at Old Trafford.

The combination of the two convinced him to end negotiations with Etihad chiefs as United played a dramatic late hand to trump City.

United legend Rio Ferdinand confirmed: "Sir Alex -- massive part. Cristiano Ronaldo and Sir Alex have got a bond that very players get to have in their career with a manager."

"There was no way Cristiano Ronaldo would be coming to Man United without speaking to Sir Alex Ferguson. Simple as that."

"Sir Alex Ferguson would have been exactly the same," explained Ferdinand.

"He would have hated to see Cristiano in a Man City shirt. Just like any other person that's been connected for a long time at this football club."

Executive Vice-Chairman Ed Woodward and his right-hand man Matt Judge did the incredible deal with Juventus and Ronaldo's agent Jorge Mendes.

They have paid £12.85million up front to the Serie A giants with £6.85million in add-ons based on appearances and

success.

The 36-year-old has signed a two-year deal worth around £480,000 a week.

The deal was triggered after Ronaldo told Juventus boss Max Allegri that he no longer wanted to play for the club and was therefore taken out of the squad for today's home game with Empoli.

He then flew to Lisbon to have his medical ahead of joining up with his Portuguese teammates on international duty.

Ronaldo posted on Instagram: "I gave my heart and soul for Juventus and I'll always love the city of Turin until my final days."

"We can all look back and realise we achieved great things, not all that we wanted, but still, we wrote a pretty beautiful story together."

Earlier in the day at 1:15pm, manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer made it public that they wanted Ronaldo back saying: "I didn't think Cristiano was going to leave Juventus."

"But if ever he is going to move away from Juventus he knows we are here."

"We've always had a good communication, Bruno has been talking to him as well."

"He knows how we feel about him. He is a legend of this club, the greatest players of all time if you ask me."

Then just before 5pm United announced that the deal had been done and that:

"Everyone at the club looks forward to welcoming Cristiano back to Manchester."

The deal is subject to personal terms, a visa and medical, but Ronaldo could make his second United debut in the Premier League against Newcastle at Old Trafford on September 11.

Is expats' inclusion the right process?

ANISUR RAHMAN



Surprising call-ups of France-based midfielder Tahmid Islam and Canada-based forward Rahbar Wahed Khan in Kyrgyzstan-bound Bangladesh football squad has apparently been leading the discussion of whether the dearth of quality local players has prompted the Bangladesh Football Federation to lean on expatriate footballers.

Bangladesh, who had once fought for the supremacy for SAFF Championship, were crushed out from the group stage in the last four editions of the regional football competition under the leadership of legendary footballer Kazi Salahuddin, who is apparently desperate to achieve success in the regional competition as well as improve FIFA ranking of struggling Bangladesh.

There might have been instruction from the game's governing body to scout for more expatriate footballers to strengthen the squad as Sweden-based Jamal Bhuiyan has been captaining the national side while Finland-born Tariq Raihan Kazi also wore the red and green jersey after impressing British coach Jamie Day through domestic league performances.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of

expatriate footballers is bound to improve the depth of the squad and may induce success but is it the right process to evolve country's football?

Head coach Jamie Day believes this to be just another ploy to develop the national squad, albeit not the ideal way.

"The right method is having a 10-year plan of coaching youth by providing them appropriate facilities to create international players for the future but that takes a lot of investment and time, so looking abroad to find quality players, like many other countries do, can be an option if possible," Jamie told The Daily Star.

"Unfortunately, in football, people want a quick solution but that's not possible without building a foundation first."

The British coach still wants to prioritise the local booters playing regularly in the domestic league.

"I believe in the importance of the local players; they will always have priority. We know the best 40 local players, so it's my job to search for better players outside of Bangladesh for the betterment of the national side."

Country's lone UEFA A license coach Maruful Haque has a balanced perspective on the matter.

"We first have to see the philosophy of the national head

coach. In my opinion, the coach is not pleased with the performance of the local players. That's why he is searching for foreign-based players who are assumed to be technically superior to the local players and because they can implement those techniques on field better," Maruful told The Daily Star while adding that the inclusion of those players won't improve the standard of Bangladesh significantly.

"I think there will hardly be any differences in the performance of the national football team with the inclusion of those expatriate players as they don't play in the higher-level leagues abroad. If they are quality ones, then they must have played in higher divisions and we would know them. I believe there will not be a big difference between the expatriate players and the local players, so the results will remain the same for the national team," opined the former national coach.

"Without giving attention to the grassroots and youth development, country's football will be stuck with the same scenario for years," added Maruful, who however believes that expatriate booters may trigger temporary positive change in Bangladesh football but unless quality local players are groomed up, the change won't be sustainable.



The members of the Bangladesh national football team pose for a group photograph in front of the Manas International Airport in Bishkek after reaching the Kyrgyz capital yesterday afternoon. The team will start practice sessions from today ahead of their first match of the tour against Palestine on September 5.

PHOTO: BFF

Zidan Miah steps in La Liga

SPORTS REPORTER

Zidan Miah, by signing for Rayo Vallecano, became the first player of Bangladeshi origin to feature for a La Liga side.

"I'm very proud to announce that I have signed with Rayo Vallecano FC for the 2021/2022 season. I would like to thank the club for giving me this opportunity and for believing in me. To my coaches and mentors, current and over the years, a very big thank you for all your support, time and love," Zidan Miah wrote over a Facebook post.

"Lastly I would like to thank those who have followed my journey through social media, especially those in my country of origin, Bangladesh. Your support doesn't go unnoticed, thank you for all the love you have shown me," he added.

Genova Soccer confirmed the



signing on their Instagram page yesterday.

"We are excited to announce la liga's 1st ever Bangladeshi International player @zidanmiah 21yrs signed with @rayovallecano. Zidane Joined our Madrid Resident Academy for 2 months before being selected to join this amazing la liga club all thanks to our director @moris.pagniello," the post stated.

Zidan, born in London, is a Moulvibazar native who started his footballing journey in the David Beckham Academy. He also previously played for English Club Bromley FC U23 team.

Zidan, however, will not feature in La Liga right away for his new club. It was learned that Zidan will play in Rayo's B team for a while before earning a first-team call-up.

Zidan had previously conveyed his willingness to don the Red and Green jersey of Bangladesh one day.