

Bruzon sets sights on SAFF final 'I play to win, not to avoid defeat'

SPORTS REPORTER

Interim head coach Oscar Bruzon declared that he would come out of the defensive strategy deployed by British coach Jamie Day in the upcoming SAFF Championship, which gets underway on October 1 in Maldives.

The Spanish coach was introduced before the media yesterday, five days after the announcement of his appointment in place of Jamie, who left



Bangladesh yesterday morning.

The 44-year-old coach disclosed a 26-member preliminary squad with the inclusion of Nigerian-born Bangladeshi Eleta Kingsley, who is still waiting for clearance from FIFA and AFC to represent Bangladesh. Later in the day, Abahani's young defender Mohammad Hridoy was added to the squad, making it a 27-member team.

Abahani winger Jewel Rana, who was ignored by Day despite his brilliant performance in the Bangladesh Premier League, was recalled by Bruzon. Alongside Suman Raza, Rana was the top scorer among the local players in

the league.

Apart from Jewel, defender Tutul Hossain Badsha, goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana, defensive midfielders Atiqur Rahman Fahad and Manik Hossain Molla were also recalled in the preliminary squad, which will be trimmed to 23 members before national team fly out for Male on September 28.

Of the 23-member final squad that played the Three Nations Cup in Kyrgyzstan earlier this month, goalkeeper Mitul Marma, midfielders Rahbar Wahed Khan and Tahmid Islam were dropped while 20 others were picked by Bruzon, who has set his sights on reaching the final of the SAFF

Championship.

"I told my club that I am a winner and play to win, not to avoid world number one, or to play defensive, or to play scared. The reality is that all of us are thinking of the possibility of going well. I am here to play in the final of the SAFF Championship. So I am not going to hide it," Bruzon said during his presentation at the Bangladesh Football Federation headquarters.

"We are going to play with a 4-3-3 formation which is the continuation of what we played for Bashundhara Kings. All of the players know about the formation and I feel the players are going to gel as quickly as possible," Bruzon added.

"Regarding the rivals, the reality is that we are the second bottom team of the tournament and are ahead of Sri Lanka and we can win against Sri Lanka. The reality is Maldives and Nepal can beat us, draw us and we can also beat them, so we are going to do what is possible to beat them. India is a higher ranked side and let's see what happens against them," said Bruzon, who also picked all his coaching staff of Bashundhara Kings alongside the national team's fitness trainer Ivan Razlog.

Following a frenetic ascension to the head coach's role of the Bangladesh national football team on an interim basis, Oscar Bruzon met the media at the BFF House on Wednesday, speaking about challenges and expectations at the SAFF Championship as well as his football philosophy. The salient excerpts from that press conference are below:



ON HIS PHILOSOPHY: Usually when you see a game of the national team, you see a team trying not to concede goals, but we're going to change that. I am fully confident and I don't feel pressure. What we're going to do is continue the work that we're doing at the club [Bashundhara Kings]. I have the advantage of having 10 players from the Bashundhara team [in the national team] who totally understand our style and methodology.

If I am here, it's because everyone around me think that things can change. Things may work or may not but at this point, I say it is going to work. I play to win, not to avoid defeat or play defensively. I am here to play the final.

Tactically I am very calm and the players will adjust to the work I have been doing for the last 13 months at our club. We're not losers. We're not coming into the pitch to know how many goals we're going to concede. If we can play high block, we will try to play it. I am not going to be suicidal. In one week, we can't change football. I am not a magician. If we think these changes are automatically going to bring success, we are wrong. But if we think these changes are going to bring determination, confidence and something new to the national team, that is going to happen.

ON THE PLAYERS AT HIS DISPOSAL: We will go with a 4-3-3 formation to give continuity to what we have done at Bashundhara Kings. I feel that the players are going to adjust quickly because some have played against Bashundhara. We're going to challenge them through training sessions.

I feel we're already in the competition

period. Physically there's nothing else to work on. Let's see what happens in 50-50 games when we play team ranked higher than us. We're initially going to try a middle block to minimize the risks. For the players, it's about performance.

WHAT HE BRINGS TO THE TABLE AND WHAT IS REQUIRED OF PLAYERS: From my side, it's about continuity but that needs to be understood by the players. I have the help of my coaching staff and the manager. From the very first moment the players are going to enjoy. We are going to do lot of exercises with the ball and try to increase the speed of the circulation of the ball because I am a coach who tries to control the game by controlling the ball. Then we can think about working on positioning and other tactical details. But before that we need to settle many things like intensity of the game, circulation of the ball, finishing.

I don't know if Eleta [Kingsley] is going to start, but he's going to be the reference of the team [as a No. 9]. I already have a backup plan of maybe playing with two strikers. I have heard that Bangladesh players can't hold the ball, can't pass and can't play attacking football but that is absolutely false.

HIS TRIBUTE TO JAMIE DAY: I want to start by praising the work done by Jamie Day. He was a colleague and was in touch with me for the past three years, monitoring our players and doing a good job. He ran into some troubles in recent months and maybe results were not as desired. I'm sure he did a good job and tried his best. So for me it's sad to replace a colleague but I totally understood the situation and stepped forward to take responsibility.

MSC ready to defend title

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Mohammedan SC finally wrapped up their players' registration formalities by signing a group of national players on the penultimate day of the five-day transfer window of the Dhaka Premier Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Penalty-corner specialist Ashraful Islam, experienced forward Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, midfielder Sarwar Hossain, Mainul Islam Koushik, Ashim Ghope, promising prospects Sarwar Murshed Shawon, Prince Lal Samanta, Taher Ali, Ajit Kumar Gosh and Razib Das were among the remarkable signings after the Black and Whites arrived to drums beats and chanting from a few hundred supporters.

"Our squad will fight to defend the title. After retaining the service of senior players, we also



Bangladesh ended their Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign with a 5-0 defeat to Iran in Tashkent yesterday, repeating the scoreline from their opening defeat to Jordan on Sunday. For the women in red and green, playing their first competitive matches in two-and-a-half years, it proved to be a learning experience.

PHOTO: BFF



'Black and proud'

AFP, Rome

AC Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan on Tuesday blasted those who racially abused him before his team's 1-1 draw at Juventus at the weekend and the football authorities' attempts at tackling the problem, saying that he was "black and proud".

Juventus confirmed to AFP that they had launched an investigation into the abuse, caught on a video which spread quickly on social media.

It showed an off-camera fan launch a stream of racist insults at the France international while he warmed up ahead of Sunday's match at Juve's Allianz Stadium.

In an Instagram post, the 26-year-old Maignan said that "as long as these events are treated as 'isolated incidents' and no comprehensive action is taken, history is bound to repeat itself over and over and over again".

"Do the people who make decisions know what it feels like to hear insults and chants reducing us to animals? Do they know what it does to our families, to our loved ones who see it and who do not understand why it's still happening in 2021?" he continued. "I am not a 'victim' of racism. I'm Mike, upright, black and proud."

A Juve spokeswoman told AFP that they were working to identify the person who insulted Maignan. Italian media report that the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) is also considering opening its own investigation into the incident.

This is the second incident of racism in a Serie A stadium since football grounds were re-opened to the public at 50 percent capacity at the start of this season.

On Friday the FIGC opened an investigation into alleged racist chants by Lazio fans towards Milan midfielder Tiemoue Bakayoko earlier this month.



roped in some new ones, who will give their best on the turf, we believe," said Mohammedan coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo.

"We've signed better players compared to last season. With players for every position, the squad is balanced and the inclusion of foreign players will only strengthen us," Shubho added.

Manager Ariful Haque Prince informed that they would bring three Indian players who were part of Mohammedan during last season and they are also in communication with players from Malaysia, Pakistan and some European countries.

Experienced campaigner Rasel Mahmud Jimmy is pleased with the local collections but urges the players to deliver their top performance to defend the league title. "This squad is even more balanced than the one that emerged champions three years ago. It's our responsibility now to make Mohammedan champions again," said the national forward.

'Decision was based on thorough understanding'

SPORTS REPORTER



The temporary release of British coach Jamie Day from the national football team's duty and the subsequent brief appointment of Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon ahead of the SAFF Championship has brought Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) professionalism under heavy scrutiny, however, BFF president Kazi Salahuddin reckons that his decision was entirely focused on the betterment of the national team.

"There have been such instances in world football, at the club level at Chelsea for example who however face no financial problem, but you must understand our reality. Not unprofessional, what I've done was out of necessity for my country, for my team and for my federation," Salahuddin told The Daily Star on Monday.

"After the Tri Nations Cup in Nepal in late March, along with Nabil [Vice President Kazi Nabil Ahmed], I sat with Jamie [Jamie Day] and assistant coach Stuart Watkiss, who told us that the team is what they performed in Nepal. I told Stuart that we had beaten Nepal in Dhaka, to which his reply was that whatever you do behind the national team, you can't improve more than one percent even.

"If there's no scope for improvement of the national team, then tell me, why should I spend 25000 dollars per month behind them," said Salahuddin who watched the Tri Nations Cup in which Bangladesh lost 0-2 to Nepal in the final after playing out a draw in the group stage.

When asked why the contract was not reviewed during August after the completion of one year of a two-year contract, the BFF boss replied: "What will happen after the completion of the SAFF Championship? I can't bring any foreign coach at the moment due to the pandemic but I have to play other tournaments.

"Now because of the two-year contract, if terminated, I must pay



him [Day] whether he stays here or abroad. So I kept him to take care of the team whether they perform well or not.

"My decision was based on thorough understanding. I can now give him [Day] the U-23 national team commitment, according to the contract, and he can continue trying the youth players.

"If he [Day] refuses to take charge of the U-23 side, then it becomes a breach of contract from his side. I couldn't sack him because of our U-23 tournament commitment."

The former national striker further informed that he is not worried about the outcome under Oscar Bruzon, who will guide

the national team only in SAFF Championship.

"If Bruzon fails to bring the expected results, we can't do anything about it but right now Bruzon has been assigned for only the SAFF Championship.

"There was no discussion with Bruzon about the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers and the invitational Four-Nation tournament in Sri Lanka," said Salahuddin.

The BFF president also mentioned that he had been trying to find Day's replacement for more than a year.

"I was trying to change the head coach for about one-and-a-half years but that time I couldn't bring any foreign coach here because of the pandemic.

"That time I told my coach [Day] to watch the league matches but I must admit that the contract [with Day] wasn't done properly as he was entitled to enjoy 100 days vacations under the contract and invariably he went away [London] to enjoy it as soon as the national team's tournament engagement ended.

"And he didn't watch the domestic matches afterwards. That time, I felt things must change because he doesn't own the national team. But, the circumstances didn't allow me."

Salahuddin believes the existing group of players can shine under a capable coach.

"If someone tells me that this generation of footballers are less talented and skilful compared to previous generations, I won't agree. If we can provide the national team a good coach who can organise the boys properly, the results will come, I believe."



Jamie Day departs in silence

SPORTS REPORTER

Jamie Day, the long-term coach of the national football team, departed quietly for England yesterday following his temporary release from the position.

The 41-year-old, who took charge of the team in May 2018, left with goalkeeping coach Les Cleveley after Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon was handed the reins for the SAFF Championship.

While there is almost a year left on Day's contract, there is no indication if he will be recalled after Bruzon's assignment in Maldives. However, while talking to local media on the eve of departure, Day said things could have panned out much better than they did, adding that he was willing to discuss his future if the BFF knocked him after two months.

Cleveley, who worked with the team on assignment-basis, said football will not develop until youth development is worked upon and this sort of change will only lead from one disaster to another.