

SPORT

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Nigerian-born Eleta Kingsley, Bangladesh national football team's latest inclusion, shares a laugh with team's fitness coach Javier Sanchez Flores during the opening day's training at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday as Oscar Bruzon, the newly appointed head coach of Bangladesh for the upcoming SAFF Championship, looks on.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

New-look booters finally get on the field

SPORTS REPORTER

The national football team finally had its first practice session for the upcoming SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, with interim head coach Oscar Bruzon focusing on speed and distribution of the ball.

The Spaniard trained all 27 players for nearly two hours after dividing them into groups and handing out tasks, including passing in tight areas, shooting on target and working on attacking build-up.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan looked happy to train under a new coach

but refrained from commenting about Jamie Day, who has been relieved of his duties for two months.

"Today, Bruzon disclosed his plans about how to play and what he wants from us. We all will try to adjust to his philosophy because we have all been together for a long time and know each other very well, so we are a good group," Jamal said after training.

"Bruzon explained his system to the players who are not with Bashundhara Kings. He wants to play in a new formation and we think we can all adapt to it quickly. We focused on the speed of the ball, passing the ball and holding the ball."

During his introduction on

Wednesday, Bruzon said he would continue with his patented 4-3-3 in the national team and Jamal appreciated the attacking formation.

"We initially used to play a 4-3-3 formation under Jamie Day and I personally like either a 4-3-3 or 4-1-4-1. In the last two or three matches, the national team played a 3-4-3, which no club in the Bangladesh Premier League used. But most teams play a 4-3-3 or 4-5-1 in the league, so it won't be a problem for us to cope with the formation Bruzon wants to use."

It was also a momentous day for Nigeria-born Bangladeshi Eleta Kingsley, who donned the red and green for the first time although FIFA has still not given him

clearance to represent the national team.

"It is a different feeling altogether than representing a club side. Putting on the national jersey is really something. That is why I am so nervous today. This is for the first time for me and I feel so strange. Emotions also factor in when putting on this jersey," Eleta said, before looking to the future.

"The job is to make the different national team altogether. All the work done in the past is appreciated but at present, we want change. We want to have a different national team. We want to have a national team that gives joy through football and that's what we are working for," said Eleta.

'Aim is to remove limitations and become more versatile'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI



Mushfiqur Rahim has been Bangladesh's main man in the T20I format for a long time and it is his sheer ability to score runs all over the wicket along with the innate skill of catching the tempo of a match that sets him apart from his peers.

But upon coming back into the side for the series against New Zealand after missing a few series, he struggled to play according to his merits. Far from getting bogged down, however, Mushfiqur found the ammunition to improve his game further and the right-hander went to work with Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a long-time mentor to the wicketkeeper-batsman and many national team cricketers.

At BKSP, Mushfiqur found the solace of what he calls home and, in his mentor, the perfect guide to edge him towards the right mindset following a disappointing series at home.

Asked whether the 34-year-old was working through his struggles in the last series, Fahim told The Daily Star that it was not about working on problems, but about enhancing Mushfiqur's T20 capabilities: "Yes, but there are two things. Wickets had fallen before he came into bat or wickets fell at the other end while he was batting. Also, the conditions were a factor. There were fewer opportunities to bat aggressively. Even then, his game was quite timid. I feel that the work we are going to do for three days will allow him to get out of that zone and feel free; just as one needs to feel in T20s. Hopefully, when he plays the practice matches, we will get to understand the condition he is in."

Mushfiqur's work at BKSP currently is to hone his overall ability for the format. "Finding a new avenue is his aim. In T20s, there is the matter of playing 360 degrees but not everyone is able to do that. So, try to remove those limitations and hopefully he will become more versatile in T20s."

A scoop, a lofted cover drive or the big hits over mid-wicket, Mushfiqur is adept at playing them all. One of the

hardest workers in the Bangladesh side, Mushfiqur's confidence was perhaps dented from playing the last series at home on low turning wickets. "Maybe there was some shortage of confidence after that. I don't know if that happened but when you play five or six matches like that, it's natural for anyone to feel like that."



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Mushy had been keen to get the right connections to his power shots since returning to net practice after the series against the Kiwis. Fahim drew a comparison with boxing in terms of the challenge Bangladesh batters face in T20Is.

"If I give an example, Test cricket is like boxing. When you fight one-on-one, there is focus on that one person in front of you but if you have two in front of you, your whole equation changes regarding going left or right and so does your state of readiness. T20 is such that your state of readiness has to be different. I discussed that with him and we felt that there was an opportunity to increase his range of shots."

Real firing on all cylinders

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid will look to carry on plundering the goals and push ahead in the early stages of the La Liga title race when they host mid-table Villarreal on Saturday.

Real have picked up 16 from a possible 18 points so far and have rarely looked troubled, something which cannot be said for rivals Atletico Madrid and Barcelona.

That is in no small part due to Karim Benzema's form, with the Frenchman putting in another stellar display in Wednesday's 6-1 hammering of Mallorca as he took his league tally to eight goals and seven assists for the campaign.

"The fact he's scored so many sometimes makes you forget the work he does for the team and assists he provides. He's so complete," Real manager Carlo Ancelotti said.

Madrid have netted 21 league goals - 10 more than any other side - so far, and the Italian lavished praise on his fringe players who have stepped up when needed due to injuries.



Real Madrid forward Marco Asensio grabbed a hat-trick and Karim Benzema struck twice as Carlo Ancelotti's free-scoring side crushed Mallorca 6-1 at home in La Liga on Wednesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

"We've got a good mix between youth and experience in the squad. I'm happy that the players who have not featured much are ready to play. It's a really good sign for the squad," he said.

With six first team regulars missing, the fringe players will be called upon again for the visit of Unai Emery's Villarreal, who remain undefeated but only secured their first win of the season on Wednesday as they hammered Elche 4-1.

Atletico, who sit two points behind Real on 14, once again left it until stoppage time to secure victory as they squeezed past Getafe 2-1 on Tuesday.

Diego Simeone's side visit bottom of the table Alaves with doubts over midfielder trio Koke, Geoffrey Kondogbia and Thomas Lemar's fitness.



Kylan Mbappe and Neymar were ecstatic after Achraf Hakimi struck his second goal deep in stoppage time to earn PSG a 2-1 victory at Metz on Wednesday and maintain their perfect Ligue 1 record this season. PSG were without Lionel Messi after the Argentine forward was ruled out with a bruised knee, but Hakimi stepped up.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'Football is made up of suffering and fatigue'

REUTERS

Matthijs de Ligt's second-half strike earned Juventus their first victory of the Serie A season at the fifth attempt as a 3-2 comeback win at Spezia on Wednesday moved Massimiliano Allegri's side out of the bottom three.

The Dutch defender fired home in the 72nd minute to give Juve all three points, completing the turnaround after his side had trailed 2-1.

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri said the manner of his side's comeback victory was just what they needed in order to move forward this season.

"Luckily we won a match suffering," Allegri told DAZN. "We don't have to look at the standings.



Juventus' Matthijs de Ligt celebrates with teammates after scoring their third goal against Spezia on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

We try for the next victory at home against Sampdoria (on Sunday)."

Allegri, who was pictured storming off the pitch after Juve's draw against AC Milan at the weekend, reacted light-heartedly when asked if he was still angry following his side's performance at Spezia. "I can't beat them every day," Allegri added. "Today we won an important match. We have to get out of the comfort zone, football is made up of suffering and fatigue."

The victory moved Juve from 18th to 12th in the standings as Allegri earned his first league win since taking over as coach for the second time in the close season. Spezia stayed 16th.

Meanwhile, goals from Brahim Diaz and Theo Hernandez earned AC Milan a battling 2-0 victory over Venezia on Wednesday to move up to second in the Serie A standings.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Stag becomes BTTF sponsor

Stag International, a renowned sports brand, became the official sponsor of Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) on a four-year agreement, yesterday. BTTF vice president Hassan Munir informed that, apart from sports gears and apparels, BTTF will receive a 40-day free-of-cost training facility of four players per year at the Stag International's European training center.

BD archers eliminated

Bangladesh suffered a 5-3 defeat to their Belgian counterparts in the Men's Recurve team event of World Archery Championships at the United State of America yesterday. Bangladesh's Ruman Sana, Ram Krishna Saha and Hakim Ahmed Rubel started strong, drawing the first set and winning the second, with a 57-50 score, however, they failed to keep the momentum in the third. In the final set, Belgium beat Bangladesh narrowly by 54-53 to move to the next round while Bangladesh were eliminated.

Sayed ton saves Afghans' skin

A patient hundred from overnight batsman Bilal Sayedi and Kamran Hotak's gritty fifty down the order helped Afghanistan Under-19 recover from a precarious situation on the second day of their only four-day game against Bangladesh at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Afghanistan reached 226 for eight at stumps, leading by 64 runs, in reply to Bangladesh's 162 in 63 overs.