

Flick wants better against England

AFP, Berlin

Germany's coach Hansi Flick said on Monday that his team would need to improve against England's 'extraordinary players' in a Nations League clash in Munich on Tuesday.

Flick praised the English Premier League at his pre-match press conference saying "the quality is very high".

"They have six or seven clubs of almost equal level," said Flick, a former Bayern Munich coach.

Flick said German players who move to the Premier League "take a step up".

Flick's squad contains four players who played for English clubs last season, including three under German coach Thomas Tuchel at Chelsea.

Flick singled out Kai Havertz "who grew up under the influence of Thomas Tuchel."

Midfielder Ilkay



Gundogan, who scored twice on the final day of the Premier League season to seal the title for Manchester City, praised England's strength in depth.

"They could form three national teams," he said.

Flick said he was disappointed with a 1-1 draw with Italy in Bologna on Saturday, on the same evening that England lost their goup opener 1-0 in Hungary.

"They have extraordinary players and their game is very physical. (Harry) Kane is a world-class striker, he has a huge quality," Flick said.

"It will be a big game for us and it will be important to implement our plan well," said Flick, still undefeated after ten games as Germany coach.

Gundogan, who has been at City since 2016, insisted the historic rivalry between England and Germany was "no longer an issue."

"The respect is there, and in the end it is about sport," he said.



Shoriful enjoying THE BIG SHIFT

Pace bowler Shoriful Islam, still recovering from a fractured hand, is set to travel to the West Indies to take part in the limited-overs formats for the Tigers. The 21-year-old has established himself as a vital component for the Tigers across the formats since making his international debut last year and will be hoping to impress further in the coming days. The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin caught up with the young seamer, speaking to him about his bowling alongside a few other topics during an exclusive interview. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): How is your hand?
Shoriful Islam (SI): It's much better now. I feel a lot better. Hopefully the plaster will be removed by May 9 and then let's see what happens. I will start rehabilitation and will be a part of the Bangladesh Tigers camp. Since this is my non-bowling arm, I think there won't be much of issue with bowling once I return to training.

DS: As a fast bowler, how do you adjust as a cross format cricketer who plays all the three formats?
SI: It requires a lot of hard work and determination. I try to give my best during the training sessions. I think it's also about mentality. When you think about your game constantly, it helps you adjust to different situations and conditions. It is not easy at all but this is why I started playing cricket, to represent my country and represent it in all the three formats.

DS: What are the differences from when you made your international debut from the Under-19 level compared to now?
SI: Nowadays I don't require much time to adjust compared to my early days in international cricket. Since making the

shift from the U-19 level to international cricket, there was a matter of adjustment. There were no experienced bowlers during my U-19 days because we were all the same age but now I am getting a lot of support and guidance from seniors like Taskin (Taskin) and Fizz (Mustafizur Rahman). They constantly share their experience in the dressing room and it actually helps me a lot.

DS: Did you get a chance to talk to Mustafizur Rahman recently?
SI: Yes, I had a chat with Mustafizur bhai yesterday (Sunday). I always want to know how he adapts during pressure situations. He shares his knowledge and his recent experience in the IPL. The last two days, I worked with Taskin bhai. I am a huge fan of his work ethic and dedication. He puts in a lot of effort in the gym and off the field, which is why he is getting success.

DS: How are things going with pace-bowling coach Allan Donald?
SI: The best thing about Donald is the way he provides confidence to players, which boosts morale. Since he was a legend of the game, I try to learn the most from him. He is working with my wrist work

but we didn't get enough time to practice because we were busy with matches. I am looking forward to working with him in the coming days.

DS: You will be touring West Indies for the first time and will feature in the white-ball formats. What are your plans for the tour?
SI: I have never been to the West Indies but I heard pacers gets a lot of assistance in those conditions. Recently, I witnessed spinners also get some purchase from the pitch so I think it will be a sporting wicket. If we can bowl in the right areas, we can do better as a pace-bowling unit.

DS: What are your strengths as a fast bowler?
SI: I think my main strength is bowling in a specific area consistently and maintaining a tight line and length. You have to be cunning and anticipate what is going in the batter's mind. At times, you need to adapt as the conditions and pitch may not suit you. So, it's important to know your strengths and work accordingly. I normally follow Mustafizur bhai and Taskin bhai and previously I used to follow Mitchell Starc during my childhood days.

More questions than answers in Shakib's appointment

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Usually, when a new Test captain is appointed, the first focus is on the direction he wants to take the team. But Bangladesh's newly instated captain is yet to speak about his plans for the team or the brand of cricket he wants to see it play.

In fact, Shakib Al Hasan left the country on Sunday night without giving any soundbite to the media after being handed the captaincy on Thursday.

His first assignment is the tour of the Windies this month. However, he will join the squad in the Caribbean on June 10, two days after the squad's first practice session on June 8.

On the very day Shakib was announced as captain, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan had to comment on the fact that the captain would be available for upcoming Tests, because Shakib had missed quite a few series in the recent past.

On the other hand, the BCB president could not comment on how long the 35-year-old Shakib's captaincy would continue.

There also seems to be no set target for the board or captain to aim towards.

Without Shakib having said anything so far and the board president saying nothing of note, the prevailing culture of unaccountability becomes even more obvious.

There has also been no announcement from the BCB about whether he has submitted any plan for the team's direction.

The BCB president had even remarked on the day of Shakib's appointment that it was hard to have an impact in Test cricket with the Test squad they currently have.

"Right now, the things we need in order to do well in Tests are difficult to accomplish with this squad. As long as they play, that effect [lacking Test mentality] will not go away ... I think two years from now, you will see lots of changes [in squad and performances]."

The above statement only points to short term solutions and makes Shakib's appointment appear like a stopgap one. Having appointed Shakib for a third time, are BCB looking for something new or the same reality that held sway during Shakib's last stint? If it is the same old, the resurgence of the pace unit under Mominul Haque will have come to a disastrous end.

During his last stint, Shakib, keen on a heavy focus on playing spinners at home, had said pacers would be used in New Zealand and there was nothing to worry about. That ignored the reality that for pacers to do well abroad, they need matches at home and on pitches that offer them the bare minimum.

Will it be different this time? Will the focus again be just on winning at home despite Bangladesh's greatest Test achievement of winning in New Zealand having been delivered by pacers?

At the moment, there are no answers.



‘Five-star’ Messi overtakes Puskas

Neymar closes in on Pele’s record

AGENCIES

Argentina striker Lionel Messi scored five goals in a 5-0 friendly win over Estonia on Sunday, a result which helped him overtake Hungary's great Ferenc Puskas among the all-time international top scorers.

The former Barcelona player got to shine once more on Spanish soil in a match played at the El Sadar stadium in the northern city of Pamplona, 430 kilometres from what for 21 years he called home.

The Argentina captain caught up and left behind the former Hungary and -- on four occasions -- Spain forward, who scored 84 goals in 89 games.

Messi is now three goals behind former Malaysia forward Mokhtar Dahari, in third. Iran's Ali Daei (109) is second, while Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo remains first with 117 goals.

The Paris St Germain forward also became the first player to have netted five times in both a single European

Cup or Champions League clash and in an international match on a senior level.

He previously found the back of the net five times 10 years ago, when Barcelona hammered Bayer Leverkusen 7-1 in the Champions League last 16 second leg at the Camp Nou.

Lionel Scaloni's side are unbeaten in 33 matches, the last loss a 2-0 defeat to Brazil in the semi-finals of the 2019 Copa America.

Meanwhile, Neymar scored a 77th-minute penalty as Brazil broke down a stubborn Japan 1-0 in Tokyo on Monday to keep their momentum building ahead of the World Cup in Qatar.

The South American heavyweights arrived in Tokyo fresh off a 5-1 thrashing of South Korea in Seoul last week, but Japan proved a tougher nut to crack in front of a full house at the Olympic stadium.

Neymar's goal took him to 74 for his country, just three short of the legendary Pele's all-time record of goals for Brazil.

