

## Fit-again booters to boost national squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Bangladesh could not win a single match in the Asian Cup Qualifiers last June, the charges of Spanish coach Javier Cabrera showed some signs of improvement with competitive displays against highly-ranked Bahrain, Turkmenistan and Malaysia despite the absence of key players.

While the likes of Tapu Barman, Tariq Kazi Raihan, Saad Uddin, Nabib Newaj Jibon, Matin Mia, Suman Reza, Masuk Mia Jonny and Hemanta Vincent Bishwas were sidelined, the booters performed better against Bahrain and Turkmenistan through a good defensive display combined with flashes of build-up play and sporadic attacks.

They also struck a goal each against Bahrain and Turkmenistan in narrow defeats before a big loss against ultimate group champions Malaysia.

With two FIFA-sanctioned friendlies against Cambodia and Nepal in September, Bangladesh are likely to be boosted by the return of some key players that missed the Asian Cup Qualifiers when they begin a residential camp from August 26.



Six of those eight players -- Tariq, Jibon, Matin, Suman, Masuk and Hemanta -- have recovered from their ailments and returned to action in the Bangladesh Premier League, with the coaching staff, including Cabrera, monitoring their performances closely from the galleries. Meanwhile, Tapu and Saad are still rehabilitating.

Cabrera, who was scheduled to return home today [Friday], has not announced his preliminary squad for the two friendlies. Matin and Jonny are confident of returning to the national fold while defender Yeasin Arafat believes the return of those key players will increase the strength of Bangladesh squad.

"I'm now fully fit and seven matches in the league for Bashundhara Kings. So I am really confident of getting a call-up to the national squad. If I am given an opportunity, I think I can do better for the nation," said Matin Mia, who hit a goal each against Saif SC and Sheikh Jamal DC after returning to the Kings' squad.

Midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny added: "Bangladesh had to play with inexperienced and junior players in the Asian Cup Qualifiers and they have earned valuable experience from the tournament. So, if the experienced players, who sat out due to injuries, can be called to the team, the squad's depth will increase."

Matin added: "We still don't know who is going to be called to the national squad for the two friendlies but I think if players like Tariq, Matin, Suman and others come back, our strength in defence and attack will also increase," the Bashundhara Kings defender said.

Both Matin and Jonny believe Bangladesh have favourable chances against Cambodia and Nepal.

"The matches against Cambodia and Nepal are 50-50 and I am hopeful of performing well against them," Matin said.

Jonny was a little more confident, saying: "We beat Cambodia in the play-off match of the World Cup Qualifiers, so we have good opportunity to do well against them. Nepal beat us in the final of a tri-nation final, but I am confident of doing better against them because our team is stronger than before."



Shakib Al Hasan's penchant for going over the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) head is nothing new. This file photo from April shows the cricketer walking out of the BCB's Academy Ground after sorting out issues regarding his DPL contract with Legends of Rugganj, which created a lot of controversies after the cricketer had failed to inform the BCB of his decision beforehand. Just over three months have passed and Shakib was once again in breach of BCB's policy, this time involving a different type of contract with a site related to betting. PHOTO: STAR FILE

## A solution arrives but murky culture continues

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket is in turmoil once again and, unsurprisingly, that commotion stems from ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan.

The conflict involves Shakib's deal with Betwinner News, a sister concern of betting site Betwinner. The BCB remained firm on their stance regarding a zero-tolerance policy regarding involvement with betting and, after a few days akin to a standoff during which the issue festered, the star all-rounder was threatened with being left out of the Asia Cup. That finally led to Shakib relenting, with the left-hander informing the BCB in a letter yesterday that he would pull out of the commercial deal.

But, despite BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon saying there would be zero-tolerance towards such issues in the future, it remains to be seen whether BCB fails to address the larger issue of how to deal with Bangladesh's most celebrated cricketer, who also often makes headlines for the wrong reasons.

Before every other series, Shakib's availability becomes a major issue for the BCB hierarchy. Before the tour of South Africa this year, Shakib wanted to opt out of the tour but the BCB later managed to include him in the ODI series and it was announced that from now on the BCB would decide which players

would opt out of series.

Despite that, Shakib's availability for the West Indies tour was uncertain before he was eventually handed the captaincy of the Test side. Shakib opted for rest from

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and Abahani Limited but got away with a fine that could be considered a slap on the wrist. Even in his earlier years, Shakib was banned by the BCB for six months in 2014 for breaching rules.

Shakib's present deal with BCB once again became the focal point of controversy. Why would a cricketer, who had been banned once by the ICC, sign a deal with a company related to betting ventures? The situation depicts a clear picture of Bangladesh's cricket culture, which keeps getting embroiled in things outside of cricket.

While the national team is struggling in most formats and have lost an ODI series in Zimbabwe as well as the T20Is, the plans to recover have not come to the forefront of discussions. Plans for the Asia Cup had taken a hit from both injuries to key players as much as the Shakib situation.

The pipeline, the creation of which takes much nous and patience, still takes a back seat to such regular events in Bangladesh cricket. Thus, whether one accepts or not, these situations before a series and the whims and the relevant arguments lead to a chaotic atmosphere that can only be solved to a certain point but not terminated. In all certainty, it leads to a murky scenario that does cricket no good.

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## Barca's new signings in limbo ahead of La Liga opener

AGENCIES

Barcelona will kickstart their 2022/23 season this weekend when they lock horns with Rayo Vallecano at Camp Nou on Saturday in La Liga.

Having finished well behind arch-rivals Real Madrid in the past season, the Blaugrana will be aiming to make a winning start to the campaign so that they can put up a strong challenge for the title.



However, their preparations heading into the opening matchday have been far from ideal thanks to the issue of player registration. Much like last summer, Barcelona are once again finding it difficult to complete the registration of their new signings in time for the season opener.

As things stand, none of the five new arrivals -- Franck Kessie, Andreas Christensen, Raphinha, Robert Lewandowski and Jules Kounde have been registered by Barça. Ousmane Dembele and Sergi Roberto's new contracts have also not been officially registered with La Liga.

It has led to concerns whether the club can resolve the matter in time for the fixture against Rayo Vallecano on Saturday night. According to SPORT, Barcelona are optimistic that the situation will be resolved by the morning of the first matchday.

As per reports, the Catalan heavyweights have sent in all the required documentation to La Liga to process the player registration and are in constant talks with the league to ensure that there are no issues. However, La Liga authorities have found some discrepancies in Barca's accounts, meaning that the issue may continue to fester for a while longer.



Real Madrid players celebrate with the UEFA Super Cup trophy after goals from David Alaba and Karim Benzema gave them a 2-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday. It was a particularly memorable evening for veteran French striker Benzema whose goal took him to 324 for the Spanish side, one more than Raul Gonzalez. Only Cristiano Ronaldo, who scored 450, has more Real goals than Benzema. "Now he's in line for the Ballon d'Or. Is there any doubt? For me, no," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti. PHOTO: TWITTER

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