

Monju's total axing on the cards

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Following allegations of favouritism and willfulness from some senior players, Manjurul Islam Monju, who already lost his place as the team manager, is set to be removed from the chief selector's post of the national women's cricket team.

According to close sources within the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), the former national cricketer will no longer hold any position in the women's team.



Chairman of the BCB women's wing, Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel, told The Daily Star yesterday that they intend to operate "as a team, with freedom" as the BCB is eager to move away from the one-member selection panel with two new faces in the selection committee.

Moreover, it was learned that the board is planning to appoint a foreign bowling coach in time while former Sri Lanka skipper Hashan Tillakaratne continues as the head coach of the national team.



Abahani and Mohammedan players train at the Shaheed Dhirendra Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday on the eve of Federation Cup final, in what could be a clash for the ages since after almost a decade-and-a-half, the Dhaka Derby is back on the rightful stage to remind the country's new generation of football fans of the supreme craze that once existed in the '80s and '90s surrounding our very own 'Clasico'.

PHOTO: BFF

BCB keen on Asia Cup 'whatever the model'

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While the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had been unwilling to play the Asia Cup in Dubai given the heat, Bangladesh will have to forego any reservations regarding the model, hybrid or otherwise, and the country the matches will be played in once the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) arrives at a decision regarding where and how the tournament will be played.

The Asia Cup has been thrown into doubt, especially since PTI reported that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) would not support the Pakistan Cricket Board's hybrid model, which would see a few matches played in Pakistan while India's matches and the final would be held at neutral venues.

"We are interested to play the Asia Cup. Whatever model the tournament is held in, we are interested. If the ACC decides that the tournament will be played in Dubai and the other members agree, we will have to play there," BCB's cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media yesterday.

The BCB had previously cited injury concerns as a reason for not playing in Dubai. "Of course there is some [discomfort]," he said when asked if Bangladesh would abide by ACC's decision to play in Dubai. "There is discomfort since we are focused on the World Cup. We are thinking of preparations and that's why we didn't want to play in Dubai. We are waiting on ACC's decision," he added.



DJOKOVIC 'motivated to stay'

REUTERS, PARIS

Novak Djokovic started his bid for a men's record 23rd Grand Slam singles title with a straight-sets victory over Aleksandar Kovacevic in the French Open first round on Monday, as Carlos Alcaraz waited to open his tournament.

Two-time Roland Garros champion Djokovic held off a late rally from his American opponent on Court Philippe Chatrier to clinch a 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) victory.

He has still not lost in his opening match of a major since the 2006 Australian Open.

"I'm very motivated to stay in this tournament for a long time, it's just the start now," said Djokovic after kicking off his 19th consecutive French Open campaign.

"I'm happy. I've started well and hope I can improve further for the next match."

The 36-year-old will face Hungarian Marton Fucsovics, who he has beaten four times in as many meetings, in the second round.

Djokovic is only seeded third at Roland Garros this year despite the absence of his great rival and 14-time winner Rafael Nadal through injury, behind world number one Alcaraz and Daniil Medvedev.

Cumilla reaching fever pitch ahead of grand final

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For over a decade, numerous clashes between Mohammedan and Abahani, which once attracted thousands and brought out the best of a fierce rivalry, have been held almost silently in front of nearly deserted stands. But today's Federation Cup final between the country's most crowd-pulling outfits has suddenly turned up the heat in the country's football fraternity.

The final is scheduled to get underway at 3:15pm at Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in



The final between Mohammedan and Abahani is going to be held amid huge enthusiasm, which the country's football loving people have been missing for a long time. I think the players are also really excited to show something in front of the spectators.

Mohammedan coach ALFAZ AHMED

Mohammedan, there is always more pressure and tension because they are old rivals. Of course, a Federation Cup final between two sides for the first time in 14 years is going to be special.

Abahani coach MARIO LEMOS

rivalry, and football lovers from both camps are expected to head to Cumilla to enjoy the flavour of a Mohammedan-Abahani final.

While Abahani fans have been restricted from entering the club premises and watching training sessions due to construction work, Mohammedan supporters flocked to the club for the past few days to reminisce about those heady days.

"The news coming to us is that the stadium may not accommodate all the spectators because the silent supporters of Mohammedan have woken up and are interested to watch the match in Cumilla. Apart from the supporters, my friends who have not turned up to watch a Mohammedan-Abahani match in Dhaka since my retirement are all set to watch Mohammedan-Abahani match in Cumilla," said Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed.

Abahani assistant coach Pranotosh Kumar Das said: "Apart from the Abahani supporters' group, Abahani fans from Old Dhaka, Narayanganj and Khulna are expected to head to Cumilla." Given the huge enthusiasm among fans, the final is expected to be a mouth-watering affair. The two fierce rivals played out a 1-1 draw in Friday's Bangladesh Premier League meeting, which was a dress rehearsal for today's final.

"The match will be a 50-50 affair. Although Abahani are ahead of Mohammedan in every aspect, it is a tournament final so it will have a high tempo. And sometimes, formidable sides also fall apart. As there is a historic and fierce rivalry, it will impact the match irrespective of the strength of the squads," Alfaz added.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos said: "Mohammedan have become a better side after the inclusion of players like Emmanuel [Sunday] and the change of coach. They are a counter-attacking side that breaks very quickly. Last time we drew 1-1. So we have to be very organised and disciplined in the backline. But we want to dominate with possession and not allow them to attack. We respect Mohammedan and want to play balanced football."

Defending champions: Abahani
Most titles: Abahani (12)
Federation Cup Titles: Abahani 12, Mohammedan 10
Last meeting in Fed Cup final: 2009, Mohammedan beat Abahani (4-1) in tiebreaker
Last meeting in any cup final: 2011, Super Cup, Abahani beat Mohammedan (3-2) in tiebreaker
Latest meeting between the two teams: 26 May, 2023 in BPL, ended in a 1-1 draw

Cumilla and will be the first time in 14 years that the Black and Whites and Sky Blues will meet in the Federation Cup final.

Although defending champions Abahani have managed to stay on the right track and keep their pride intact by winning domestic trophies, Mohammedan have been out of the scene since winning the Super Cup in 2013.

The final has already drawn the attention of football fans, especially those who remember the golden days of the Mohammedan-Abahani



'Trial' WSL to start from June 10

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Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin informed that the proposed Women's Super League (WSL) will start on June 10, but it will be a trial project and its success will decide the future of the venture.

After being deferred from its first proposed start date of May 15, the franchise football league will feature four teams and will see 13 matches over 12 match days, Salahuddin told reporters following an emergency meeting of the BFF executive committee yesterday.

"The league will be held during that specific time while there is a FIFA Window, which will allow foreign players to participate.

"We have given K Sports (league organisers) a one-year permission on a trial basis. If the event becomes successful and acceptable to players and people, then we would have a fresh contract for five to 10 years," the BFF boss said, adding that BFF will act only as an intermediary and will distribute the Tk 20 lakh it will get from the agreement among the under-17 women's team for their recent SAFF U-17 Women's Championship success.

The BFF boss, however, did not hide his scepticism about WSL's success, saying, "I don't know much about it as India is the only country where a franchise league is held. They (K-Sports) have told us that they have the preparation [for completing everything including bringing foreign players] within this time."

Salahuddin, meanwhile, informed that he received an official resignation letter from women's team head coach Golam Rabbani Choton and that a decision over the issue would be taken after the next executive committee meeting.

Mahmudullah's absence setting the tone for younger leaders

SPORTS REPORTER

As players of both the red-ball and white-ball formats attended the first official camp for the Afghanistan series, Mahmudullah Riyad was conspicuously absent. The likes of Liton Das, Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy were in attendance and if the above picture is suggestive, they are the ones leading a younger batch for the upcoming quests, with the World Cup being the most important.

The team management had drawn up a preliminary squad of up to 26 players, but Mahmudullah had already sought time off to perform Hajj. Team manager Nafees Iqbal informed reporters of Mahmudullah not being in the camp yesterday. "No, otherwise you would have seen him," Nafees told reporters when asked if Mahmudullah was in attendance.

Mahmudullah had applied for a vacation from June 22nd till July 5, cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media yesterday. "He will join the camp after Hajj," Jalal informed. Given the circumstances,

that possibility remains unlikely.

Afghanistan will arrive for the second phase of their two-part tour on July 1 to play the ODI and T20 series. Since the ODI series begins on July 5, Mahmudullah will miss the preparation camp for the only format in which he remains available, namely the 50-over format. Thus, even before the squad announcement, the veteran looks to be out of the upcoming ODI series against Afghanistan.

The cricketer may have already been informed of his chances beforehand. "He had applied for vacation beforehand since he will perform Hajj. As you know, you have to take Hajj preparations early. There is no chance of him not knowing that the series is coming since the schedule had been drawn some time ago. His application has been granted," a source close to the team management told The Daily Star yesterday.

Although team management sources often talk up the 'experience' working in Mahmudullah's favour, dropping him for the last few series has already set a tone. The likes of Hridoy have answered to team's



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

call for a more attack-minded approach. Afif Hossain, Yasir Ali and Mosaddek Hossain are also in the team management's plans while Mushfiqur Rahim has been a revelation at number six, a position he has

played at earlier in his career. At 37, Mahmudullah's own recent knocks have lacked the instinct he showed in his prime. Dropped after the England series despite some vital knocks against

India and England, the emphasis the team management has put on the required approach in ODIs has overcome the need for the experience factor. His contribution in terms of fielding and his usage as a bowler has also come under the scanner and did not hold him in good stead.

Given that the camp has started on an official basis, barring any unforeseen events in team selection, which is still somewhat regular in Bangladesh cricket, the curtain appears to have been drawn on Mahmudullah's international career.

When the Test team will be announced, the team will begin practising separately for white-ball and red-ball formats. The training session is currently being overseen by Nic Pothas at Mirpur until head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's arrival on June 3.

Bangladesh have been looking to play to a different gear in all the formats and the younger troupes are forming a big part of the core of the side. With Chandika at the helm, more responsibility on young guns and a keener focus on approach appears to be the order of the day.