

BFF Academy players up for auction

SPORTS REPORTER

As the Bangladesh Premier League outfits do not have any permanent youth development programme yet, three top-tier clubs have kept their eyes on promising players of the BFF Elite Academy for the upcoming season.

With the players' transfer window for the top-tier already on since August 1, Mohammedan, Sheikh Russel and Brothers Union have recently officially asked for four, seven and 10 players respectively to Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), mentioning their offer prices. Interestingly, seven of those 15 players are common in three clubs' demand, forcing the BFF development committee to float an open bidding process for the players.

"Brothers, Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel have placed letters, asking permission to release 15 BFF Elite Academy players for their clubs. Seven of those players are have been sought by all three clubs," BFF's vice-president and chairman of development committee, Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan Manik, told the Daily Star after a meeting of the committee yesterday.

"If the committee distributes players as per their requirement, there will be questions raised, so we decided to put the players through an opening process. The club with the highest bid will get a player on loan for a season," Manik added.

It has been learnt that the clubs wanted to buy the players for an average of Tk 6.2 lakh, but the committee may fix a floor price for each player on the basis of the clubs' desired price. If all 15 players are sold for an average of Tk 6.5 lakh, BFF will earn approximately Tk one crore.

After BFF Elite Academy started operation in 2021, the players played in the second-tier Bangladesh Championship League as a team in the last two seasons and are set to play their third season in 2023-24. In the last season, Sheikh Russel wanted a few academy players to play for them but the game's local governing body did not release the players even though it released forward Mirajul Islam in the 2021-22 season for Mohammedan for Tk 10 lakh.

It has been learnt that the BFF gave away 30 percent of the whole amount to Mirajul, however, this time it may pay 40 percent of the release price to the players.

Asked whether the academy will struggle to form its squad for the BCL if they release 15 top players, Manik said, "We have 63 players and there is little difference in quality among them as we regularly fire and hire players on basis of performance. We won't face any problem to form a good squad for BCL."

"We believe we can produce quality players for the national team within four to five years. Loaning out players to clubs will help us continue our activities," opined Manik.



Japanese players pose for a photograph before taking part in a training session in Wellington on Friday, ahead of today's Women's World Cup Round of 16 match against Norway. Having cruised through the group stages with maximum points, the 2011 champions should pose stiff challenge to the Norwegians, who won the world title back in 1995.

PHOTO: AFP

Will serious investigation follow serious accusation?

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The most crucial aspect in the situation surrounding Tamim Iqbal's injury is how things were allowed to escalate so far that led to the skipper having to step down from captaincy.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief Nazmul Hassan on Thursday attended a press conference alongside Tamim and cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus. The board president said it needs to be investigated as to why there was a discrepancy between how the matter was presented to him and what happened in reality.

Tamim had underwent multiple MRI scans in various countries but only the MRI done in Dubai recently, one which Tamim forwarded to the BCB president, had revealed a 'problem'. The issue invoked the BCB president's ire as he was struck by the fact that the matter had not been revealed to him much earlier.

Tamim, at the same press conference, also stated clearly that he himself had knowledge of the particular back injury he had suffered since November 2022.

It is a serious allegation that a national team player's injury was either downplayed or there was a negligence in dealing with the matter.

"Tamim had done MRI in Dhaka as well along with everything that was required. He went to see doctors in India, Bangkok and London by his own means, so he has done that quite a few times now. This is the first time he sent me a report from Dubai and in that report I saw that he has a problem. You can ask him [Tamim] what was the first thing I told him. I asked him to make a conference call with me, along with Debashish Chowdhury [BCB's chief physician], the three of us together. Why wasn't I told this thing (before)," Nazmul said at the press conference.

"The problem I have was revealed in November 2022. The thing is that someone informs him [Nazmul] of the matter. When I sent the report to him [BCB president] for the first time, he immediately called me and asked why this matter was not informed to him before.' We have discussed this matter a lot today. It should not happen to anyone and if we are open in most cases then these confusion or problems won't arise. We are very clear what has happened and what there was for the last six months," Tamim had clarified.

It was, however, learnt that the medical team had informed the team management of the left-hander's injury

status on a regular basis. According to BCB sources, that medical department related personnel such as physio and those who provide support with rehab have all the information regarding injuries. The coaches, cricket operations chairman are ones who the medical department pass the information to. Then the responsibility becomes theirs to communicate to the BCB president about urgent developments related to injuries.

Nazmul himself said that he relies on Jalal Yunus to keep him informed, with Khaled Mahmud now not serving as a team director. Tamim also stated that he goes by the chain of command and relays things to his immediate boss Jalal.

Whether the diagnosis is wrong, or whether the matter was not communicated properly is the question now. When The Daily Star reached out to Jalal, he said he would talk later regarding the issue while BCB medical department, too, refrained from talking about the development. It was, however, learned that the cricket operations committee had asked the medical team for Tamim's full report.

Nazmul said that the 'matter needs to be investigated'. The injury has already been 'neglected' according to the BCB boss. Tamim's career has already come under threat due to the injury but whether a serious investigation follows will determine whether or not such occurrences take place in the future as well.

'No alternative to Shakib for captaincy'

SPORTS REPORTER



Following Tamim Iqbal's decision to step down as the Bangladesh ODI captain on Thursday, there were talks regarding the Tigers' next captain in the format ahead of two major events this year – Asia Cup this month and the World Cup in October-November.

As things stand, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is willing to appoint an ODI captain on a long term basis keeping the World Cup in mind.

The name of Shakib Al Hasan, skipper of the Tigers' Test and the T20I units, has been uttered in the media as the ideal candidate for the post considering his vast experience.

According to Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, prominent coach and mentor to many Bangladesh players including Shakib, there are no alternative to the champion all-rounder for this post if Bangladesh want to do well in the coming days.

"If it is just about naming a captain then you can make anyone the captain. But if the reason is to put someone who can manage the team well and can bring the best possible result for the team then there is no alternative to Shakib. He is the best choice and I think there is no room for comparison with anyone. If we want to get good results, we have no other alternative other than handing the captaincy to Shakib," Fahim told the media yesterday.

It is, however, still not confirmed whether Shakib would agree to take up ODI captaincy. And in that case, Liton Das, who led Bangladesh during the home series against India last year and also in the recently concluded series against Afghanistan, could be another candidate.

Fahim informed that even if Shakib does not agree to assume the role of the captain, the board should try to convince him for the betterment of the team.

"If Shakib does not agree then we can think about other options but I think attempts should be made so that he agrees to take the captaincy," he added.

Pep keeps Arsenal ahead for Community Shield

REUTERS

Arsenal hold an advantage heading into the Community Shield over Manchester City due to the treble winner's packed schedule during the final stretch of the last season, manager Pep Guardiola said on Friday.

City faced a gruelling schedule season thanks to their successful runs in the Champions League and FA Cup, while Arsenal had a less busy campaign and were chasing Guardiola's side for the Premier League title.

City, who won their first Champions League title in June, will kick off their 2023-24 season against runners-up Arsenal on Sunday in the traditional curtain-raiser to the Premier League season.

"The situation that we are in, we finished (last season) two weeks later than Arsenal and we start (this season) two weeks later. So, we are not in the best way," the Spaniard told reporters. "We struggle to restart every season. Hopefully our mentality can help us to be there and compete."

Liverpool, not Barca, started playing high-pressing: Ian Rush

Liverpool legend Ian Rush hung up his boots in 2000 after 356 goals to his name, of which 346 came with the Merseyside club – making him the all-time highest goal scorer for The Reds, a record that still stands. It was at Anfield where he won two Champions Leagues, five Premierships, and three FA Cups. In an interview with Shabab Chowdhury of The Daily Star, the 61-year-old Welshman discussed all things Merseyside yesterday.

The Daily Star (DS): How did a boyhood Everton fan sign for Merseyside rivals Liverpool?

Ian Rush (IR): When I was a kid, when I was 17 and playing for Chester City, Everton manager Gordon Lee came to watch me. I'll never forget it because it was in the newspapers. It was on a Monday, he said that Ian Rush wasn't good enough to play for Everton. I was really gutted.

If Everton said they wanted to sign me, I would've signed for Everton. But they said no and I signed for their rivals and made them pay.

DS: Who influenced your decisions when it came to moving to different clubs?

IR: When I went to Liverpool for a world record fee of 300,000 pounds

at the time, it was myself; it wasn't my dad or anyone. Bob Paisley helped but Alan Oakes, the manager of Chester, helped me as well. He said that you can go to Liverpool but you'll hate the first year, which I did. He said if you don't like it, you can always come back to Chester. So, that's why I decided to give it a go. He wasn't wrong because the first year, I did hate it, it was difficult. Luckily enough, I just kept on at it.

DS: What defines a modern-day striker?

IR: For me, confidence. I think the most important part for me with strikers is the mental toughness. If you know that, you won't be scared to miss. You get in there, again and again.

DS: You've played in great Liverpool teams. Where do you place Klopp's legacy at the club?

IR: For me, he [Klopp] is a modern-day Bill Shankly. He's excited and all that. Bob Paisley didn't do that, Joe Fagan

didn't do that. The crowd loves Klopp when he goes and punches his arms after a game. If you just sit back as a manager, especially in today's world, the crowd would have a go at you.

The difference between when we played and now is that we were pressing down from the front in the '80s. We started that. People say Barcelona but we started it. It's okay if you do that for 45 minutes but with Jurgen, if you don't press for 90 minutes, you will not be playing.

DS: Whose has been your favourite striker in the modern era?

IR: For me, one of the best ones in the Premier League was [Sergio] Aguero but the one I would have to say is Harry Kane. You've got [Erling] Haaland who was the player of the last season, without a doubt. He was unbelievable but he's got to do it again this season.

I can't say someone from Liverpool because we haven't really got a proper

number nine yet. You're looking at [Darwin] Nunez to do that. If he took his chances last year, he could be like Haaland.

DS: Who did you enjoy playing with the most?

IR: It has to be Kenny Dalglish. For me, he is the best player Liverpool have ever had. Kenny never put the ball at my feet and would always put it in front of me. The first time he did that, I didn't run. The face he gave me then, the look in those eyes, and I knew that I've got it now.

DS: Who would you love to play alongside the current pool of Liverpool players?

IR: Previously, it obviously would've been [Steven] Gerrard. If you look at Mohamed Salah, especially if he plays down the middle, we would've gotten in the way of each other but with him on the wing, definitely him.

DS: Can Liverpool make another title bid for the upcoming season?

IR: Hopefully, but I think the main objective would be to get into the top four. If we can get a good cup run, I'd love to see us do well in the Europa League.



PHOTO: AL NASSR

Sadio Mane's much-anticipated Al Nassr debut on Thursday could have been marred had it not been for yet another trademark towering header from Cristiano Ronaldo that saw the Saudi Pro League club salvage a 1-1 draw against Egyptian giants Zamalek, ensuring their spot in the knockout stages of the Arab Club Champions Cup (ACCC) in the process.