

Sabina & Co ‘are happy now’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) finally met the demand of national women's football team by bringing as many as 31 players under contract for the next sixth months, in the process revising their salary structure upwards.

During a contract signing ceremony at the BFF House yesterday, captain Sabina Khatun signed the contract papers on behalf of the players while BFF president Kazi Salahuddin signed for the federation, in front of the media.

“Congratulation Sabina, congratulation women's team. I think you all are now happy,” was the simple



WOMEN FOOTBALLERS' SIX-MONTH CONTRACT

- Top grade: Tk 50,000 (15 players)
- Second grade: Tk 30,000 (10 players)
- Third grade: Tk 20,000 (four players)
- Lowest grade: Tk 15,000 (two players)
- Total number of players: 31
- Total monthly salary: Tk 11,60,000

reaction from the BFF president after putting pen on paper.

While there was no contract between the players and the federation previously, the BFF used to provide an honorarium ranging between Tk 4,000 and Tk 20,000 to 34 women's footballers, with only Sabina getting maximum of Tk 20,000. The players had demanded a raise in salary following their historic triumph in the SAFF Women's Championship last year. They also boycotted training camp for a couple of days a few months ago before

placing a written demand to increase salary and improve other facilities last month following playing two FIFA friendly matches against Nepal.

“We have come up with everything that they demanded. But we could not meet one thing – that of Eid bonus, which has no existence in football. But we have increased their salaries, match fees, foreign trips and other facilities,” Salahuddin said following the signing ceremony.

As per the contract, 15 players will

get highest Tk 50,000 each, 10 players will receive Tk 30,000 each, four players will get Tk 20,000 each while the other two players will get Tk 15,000 each. The contract is for the next six months.

“The contracts are renewable and will be renewed on the basis of the players' performance. If the girls can improve their performance, salaries will also increase. But if they fail to do so, new players will come into the contract,” Salahuddin said. “I have made it a six-month contract because I wanted to give them benefit. If they are under a long-term contract, it will be difficult for them to play for clubs. When they will play for clubs, they will also get money and we kept this window open for the girls.”

The BFF president also informed that they would provide the money to the players from the sponsors and FIEA fund by curtailing expenditure on other programmes.

Sabina expressed her satisfaction and thanked the BFF for meeting their demands.

“First of all, I am thankful to all [for the increase of the salaries]. What the girls had demanded was a request from us and Sir [Salahuddin] fulfilled it and the girls are happy now,” said Sabina.

Abahani earn AFC Cup playoff spot

SPORTS REPORTER

A last gasp header from Brazilian centre-back Danilo Augusto powered Abahani to a 2-1 win over Maldives' Club Eagles in the Preliminary Stage 2 encounter of the AFC Cup at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday.

The victory took the six-time Bangladesh Premier League champions to a playoff tie against India's Mohun Bagan on August 22 for a place in the South Zone group stage of the tournament.

It was expected that inclement weather would affect the turf at the stadium and it did manage to hamper the natural game of both sides.

However, Abahani used this familiar situation to their advantage and on the muddy surface, the home side, with six foreign players, were ahead of the visitors from the get-go.

The Sky Blues wasted a few opportunities, with Uzbek midfielder Muzaffar Muzaffarov



denied twice by Club Eagles goalkeeper Mohamed Shafeeu, while Grenadian forward Cornelius Stewart and Nigerian Ojuku David Ifegwu both fluffed their chances in front of goal.

Cornelius finally made amends to give the Sky Blues the lead in the 21st minute with a header off a well-drilled cross from Ifegwu.

Club Eagles responded with tenacity after the restart and managed to find the Abahani net in the 61st minute but it was ruled out as off-side. However, the visitors did not take much time to level the score, with captain Ahmed Rizuvan volleying home Milovan Petrovic's free-kick in the 63rd minute.

Under the cosh from Club Eagles, Abahani had to shrug off a late scare when a header came back off their post in the 81st minute.

A minute later, Abahani defender Milad Soleimani failed to nod home from close range but their frustrations evaporated when Augusto found the net in the 89th minute off a Muzaffarov corner to seal a playoff spot.

‘Hooliganism not only a Greek problem’

REUTERS

UEFA president Alexander Ceferin urged Europe on Wednesday to help eliminate hooliganism, which he called “the cancer of football”, days after a man was killed in clashes before a match between AEK Athens and Dinamo Zagreb in Greece.

After a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens, Ceferin said that the problem was Europe-wide and cooperation was needed to avoid a repeat of such incidents.

“This is the cancer of football and those are not football fans,” Ceferin said. “We came to a position where we have to say enough... we have to stop this.”

“Violence and hooliganism are not only a Greek problem,” he said adding European countries, institutions and media had to work together to help end football violence.

More than 100 people, most of them Croatian citizens, have been charged with felony and detained pending trial over the clashes that led to 29-year-old AEK fan Michalis Katsouris being stabbed to death in Athens, Greek authorities said.

The pre-trial detentions have led to tension between Greece and Croatia on a political level.

‘Fairytale’ as England reach maiden WWC final

AFP, Sydney

An English side reached a football World Cup final for the first time in 57 years, with coach Sarina Wiegman saying she felt she was living in a “fairytale” after her team advanced to the Women's World Cup final with a 3-1 win over tournament co-hosts Australia in Sydney.

Wednesday's semifinal victory saw Wiegman become the first coach to guide two different countries to a Women's World Cup final, after she took her native Netherlands to the 2019 showpiece match, where they were defeated by the United States.

It also left reigning European champions England, who face fellow first-time finalists Spain in Sunday's title decider in Sydney, on course for a notable double.

The last time that England reached a World Cup final was when the men's team beat Eusebio's Portugal in the semifinal of the 1966 edition. That time Bobby Moore's side beat West Germany 4-2 at Wembley to win their only World Cup.

“We achieved the final!” Wiegman told the BBC. “It's unbelievable, it feels like we won (the tournament) which we didn't, we just won this game -- in an incredible stadium, an away game, the way we played -- it was a hard game, but we found a way to win again.”

The 53-year-old added: “People have been talking about ruthlessness all the time, in this team there is ruthlessness, up front or in defence. We really want to keep the ball out of the net and we want to win.”

“We stick together, we stick to the plan, and it worked again.”

“Having the chance as a coach or a player to make it to two finals is really special. I never take anything for granted, but it's like I'm living in a fairytale or something.”



England went ahead through Ella Toone's 36th minute strike into the top right corner before Australia heroine Sam Kerr, making her first start of the tournament, equalised with a long-range shot in the 63rd minute.

Lauren Hemp, however, restored England's advantage in the 71st minute after firing into the bottom far corner from Millie Bright's long ball upfield.

Alessia Russo then put the result beyond doubt when she made it 3-1 four minutes before full-time, beating Australia goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold with a well-struck low shot.

“When they (Australia) scored they got momentum, the place erupted and then Hempo's goal just flipped the momentum which was crucial so to get 3-1 you can settle a bit and see the game out,” said Russo.

The 24-year-old forward, asked about England's prospects in the final, added: “Spain are going to be even tougher.”

“Every game in this tournament has been of the highest level so we have to be ready. But we've been dreaming since we were little girls. We're excited, we'll recover and be ready.”

For 31-year-old England defender Lucy Bronze, twice a losing semi-finalist, Wednesday's win had additional significance.

“The one thing I've always wanted to do is get to a World Cup final,” said Bronze, who plays her club football with Spanish side Barcelona.

Wednesday's win sparked numerous tributes to the Lionesses, with England men's captain Harry Kane telling Sky Sports: “Massive congratulations to the Lionesses... We are all behind them and hopefully they can do it in the final.”

There was praise too from British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who tweeted: “What a performance @Lionesses. Just one more game to go... Bring on Sunday.”



“After long flights and hours of transit before reaching Sri Lanka, I got the shock of my life when I watched PCB's short clip on the history of Pakistan cricket minus the great Imran Khan... political differences apart but Imran Khan is an icon of world cricket and developed Pakistan into a strong unit in his time and gave us a pathway... PCB should delete the video and apologize.”

Former Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram On PCB excluding 1992 World Cup-winning captain Imran Khan in a tribute video. Find full story online

‘Every fan will enjoy seeing Stokes back’

AFP, London

Ben Stokes has reversed his decision to retire from one-day internationals ahead of England's defence of their 50-over men's World Cup title in India.

Test captain Stokes quit the ODI format 13 months ago due to a demanding workload as a multi-format player and amid concerns about a chronic left knee injury.

ENGLAND'S PROVISIONAL SQUAD FOR THE WORLD CUP:

Jos Buttler (captain), Moeen Ali, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, David Willey, Mark Wood, Chris Woakes.



title in India starting in October.

England are at home to New Zealand in four warm-up ODIs next month, with Stokes, 32, included Wednesday in a 15-man squad.

England men's national selector Luke Wright said: “Any series against New Zealand is closely fought and will provide us with an ideal opportunity to test ourselves against one of the best teams in the world.”

“The return of Ben Stokes only adds to that quality with his match-winning ability and leadership. I am certain that every fan will enjoy seeing him back in an England ODI shirt again.”

Dawid Malan, who made ODI hundreds in Australia, South Africa and Bangladesh during the 2022/23 English winter -- has retained his place ahead of Harry Brook, with the Yorkshire batsman appearing to be the player left out to

accommodate Stokes's return.

While the experienced Stokes's return was widely forecast, England have also included uncapped Surrey fast bowler Gus Atkinson in their squad for the New Zealand ODI series.

The 25-year-old was not even in Surrey's XI at the start of the season but has impressed across all formats, especially in The Hundred England's provisional squad for the World Cup: Jos Buttler (captain), Moeen Ali, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, David Willey, Mark Wood, Chris Woakes. where he was timed bowling at 95 mph (153 kph) for the Oval Invincibles.

With express quick Jofra Archer unlikely to be fit for the start of the World Cup as he recovers from his latest elbow injury, Atkinson will hope to prove his worth at international level against New Zealand.

England begin the series against the Black Caps in Cardiff on September 8. A separate squad for a series with Ireland later in September will be named nearer the start of that series.

Wright later confirmed the same 15 players named to take on the Kiwis is also the provisional World Cup squad.



Lionel Messi of late cannot seem to put a foot wrong as Inter Miami reached the first major final in club history by shrugging off Philadelphia Union 4-1 in a Leagues Cup semi-finals yesterday. With an outstanding long-ranger, a low strike aimed at the far post from around 33 metres, Messi's ninth goal in six outings for Miami provided them a 2-0 cushion in the 20th minute.

PHOTO: REUTERS