

England, Spain eye WC summit

REUTERS, Sydney

Women's football will crown a first-time champion today when the ninth Women's World Cup concludes with England and Spain, both proud footballing nations, facing off in an intriguing final in Sydney.

The highly-successful tournament in Australia and New Zealand was destined to have a fresh winner from the quarter-finals when Japan joined the United States, Germany and Norway in making a premature exit.

The tournament has showcased the development of the women's game but the finalists do present a contrast in styles – England pragmatic, ruthless, resilient and Spain displaying all the technical skill the country's football is famed for.

The finalists have had their blips – Spain thrashed 4-0 by Japan in their last group game and England taken to penalties by Nigeria in the last 16 – but both have grown into the tournament and were convincing semi-final winners.

Expectations of a tight final in front of another sellout crowd of 75,000 at Stadium Australia might not be too wide of the mark if England's 2-1 win in the European Championship quarter-final between the sides last year is any guide.

"We are ready," England coach Sarina Wiegman said yesterday. "Technically, tactically. We have watched Spain, of course, analysed them with our analysis team, and I think we're ready."

On the other camp, Spain coach Jorge Vilda said, "What we want to do tomorrow [today] is to be the best in the world."

For all the excitement that accompanied Australia's run to the semi-finals and Japan's brilliance in the early rounds, the consensus is that England and Spain are worthy first-time finalists.



With a maiden World Cup trophy in sight, England and Spain train at the Stadium Australia on the eve of the Women's World Cup final, which will end a month-long entertaining affairs that highlighted the exponential progress made by women's football.

PHOTO: AFP



Jamal's Argentina move 'is good for Bangladesh'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team's head coach Javier Cabrera has praised captain Jamal Bhuiyan's move to Argentine club football, calling it a good move for Bangladesh and the player.

Speaking at a press conference to announce Bangladesh's preliminary squad for the upcoming FIFA Friendly matches against Afghanistan, the coach said, "It's good news that Jamal is having this experience in Argentina. It's good for him and Bangladesh football. It gives good exposure to everyone. We have talent in this country to play abroad and we have to be supportive of that."

Jamal, on Friday, signed a contract with Argentina's third-tier club Sol de Mayo. According to reports, the 33-year-old midfielder will receive a monthly salary of 13,000 dollars during his one-and-a-half-year deal.

When asked when the captain will be available at the training camp for the two matches, which are scheduled to be played in Dhaka on September 4 and 7, Cabrera said, "Jamal will join when his club releases him and it's the right of the club, we have to respect that. We will welcome him whenever he will be available."

"Hopefully, he will train with us in the last full week before the first game. It's still not confirmed but we are in conversations with the club. It's being done on a positive note and with good communication. So, there's nothing negative in that," the Spaniard added.

Cabrera gauging Afghanistan with an eye on Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team's head coach Javier Cabrera said his main objective in the two FIFA Friendly matches against Afghanistan next month would be to carry the momentum from a satisfactory SAFF Championship campaign, with an aim for a positive result against Maldives in October's World Cup Pre-qualifiers.

Bangladesh will host Afghanistan for the two FIFA Friendlies on September 4 and 7 at the Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka, with 32 players called up for reporting today. The team will stay at the Regency Hotel and will start training from the following day, with Afghanistan slated to arrive on August 6 and follow the same routine as their Bangladeshi counterparts.

These will be the first international matches since Cabrera's charges reached the semifinals of the SAFF Championship in India in June-July this year.

"Our main objective is to prepare for Maldives. We are playing at home and we want to win, we will go for the win for sure," the Spaniard said during a press conference arranged to announce the preliminary squad at the BFF House yesterday.

"We want continue the good momentum we showed in SAFF. It has to be that and we cannot perform below that. That cannot

SQUAD	
Goalkeepers:	Anisur Rahman, Shahidul Alam, Mitul Marma, Pappu Hossain
Defenders:	Bishwanath Ghosh, Topu Barman, Tariq Kazi, Rimon Hossain, Saad Uddin, Rahmat Mia, Alomgir Molla, Murad Hasan, Mehedi Hasan, Isa Faysal, Atikuzzaman
Midfielders:	Sohel Rana, Sheikh Morsalin, Mohammad Ridoy, Mohammad Sohel Rana, Abu Shaied, Mojobur Rahman Joni, Robiul Hasan, Jamal Bhuiyan
Forwards:	Rakib Hossain, Matin Mia, Sumon Reza, Faysal Ahmed Fahim, Dipok Roy, Aminur Rahman Sojib, Sarwar Zaman Nipu, Jafar Iqbal, Mohammad Ibrahim

happen. But we know Afghanistan is a strong team, especially physically," Cabrera said, adding that results against Afghanistan will not be his priority, instead these matches will be preparation to get positive results against Maldives.

The men in red and green, who had beaten Maldives 3-1 in the SAFF Championship, will play against their South Asian counterparts in a doubled-legged tie for the World Cup Qualifying group stage on

October 12 and 17.

The Spaniard called up two new faces while excluding one from the SAFF Championship squad in his 32-member preliminary squad.

Sheikh Russel forward Dipok Roy and Azampur FC forward Sarwar Zaman Nipu are the two fresh faces in the preliminary squad, even though both are quite familiar faces in domestic football and have been regarded as future stars for a long time.

The only player left out from the last squad, which played in the SAFF Championship, is Fortis FC forward Rafikul Islam.

There were also a number of senior players who returned to the squad, including Rimon Hossain, Saad Uddin, Alomgir Molla, Matin Mia and Jafar Iqbal.

However, the coach said that this squad features players from the senior side alongside some from the Asian Games, who will be with the team till the second match against Afghanistan.

Cabrera, though, will not get all of his players to start training on Monday. Only the players who have not been part of AFC competitions recently will start from Monday while the 11 Bashundhara Kings players will join on August 25 and six Abahani players will join on August 27. Captain Jamal Bhuiyan, who is in Argentina currently, is likely to join at the start of the second week of the camp.



Bangladesh's Imranur Rahman crosses the finish line in the men's 100m preliminary round during the World Athletics Championships at the National Athletics Centre in Budapest yesterday. The fastest sprinter of the country eased through to the main heats with a timing of 10.50 seconds, 0.25 seconds slower than his personal best. The heats were scheduled to be held later last night.

PHOTO: AFP

City cannot do 'whatever they want' like Chelsea: Guardiola

AFP, Manchester

Pep Guardiola has claimed Manchester City would be "killed" if they spent as much money on new signings as Chelsea have over the last 12 months.

City's spending since Sheikh Mansour's takeover in 2008 has repeatedly come under scrutiny, with the club facing 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of financial regulations.

But Guardiola is adamant their approach had always been prudent, in contrast to the wild spending by Todd Boehly's ownership group at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea have splashed out nearly \$1.2 billion since the start of last summer.

City have signed Josko Gvardiol and Mateo Kovacic in this window for a combined £100 million, yet Guardiola was quick to show irritation over the astronomical sums paid by Chelsea.

"I couldn't sit here if we spent what Chelsea spent in the last two transfer windows – you would kill me," Guardiola told reporters on Friday.

"We wanted (Harry) Maguire and didn't buy him because we didn't want to pay. We wanted (Marc) Cucurella and didn't pay. We wanted Alexis Sanchez and didn't pay."

"In the end, we will pay what is fair to do it. Otherwise, we have the academy."

Guardiola tried to insist he was not criticising Chelsea. "They can do what they want," he added. "I don't criticise Chelsea for one second. I'm saying, if we do it, we are dead, all around the world. They can do whatever they want."

Despite bemoaning Chelsea's spending, Guardiola said he was speaking to director of football Txiki Begiristain about their options in the window after star midfielder Kevin De Bruyne was ruled out for several months with a hamstring injury.

"We maybe need to add someone else," Guardiola said. "My opinion is I like a small squad. But the blow from Kevin changes the perspective. He is a very important player and it is not one or two weeks."

Backing players key to fearless cricket, says Bashar

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selector Habibul Bashar put the onus on backing players despite their poor form as he emphasized on the importance for Bangladesh to play a fearless brand of cricket, with two major tournaments upcoming.

Bashar tried to put out that the Tigers have transitioned their playing style into a more proactive approach which has been reflected in their performances of late.

"Our goal is clear about the cricket we are trying to play. You can see that our style of play has changed. Fearless cricket, we said we wanted to play, we've been playing it in the last two to three series. This you can see in our performances," Bashar told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

Despite a recent good run, one of the main concerns for the Tigers leading up to the Asia Cup is the opening slot. Opener Tamim Iqbal's absence has

provided an opportunity to newcomer Tanzid Hasan Tamim and a struggling Mohammad Naim who, despite becoming the highest run-getter in this year's Dhaka Premier League, is still yet to come to terms with international cricket.

To add to head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's headache

managed three fifties with an average of 30.1 – a stark decline from his ODI average of 52.45 in 13 outings, in 2022.

Despite the unsettled status of the opening slot, Bashar believes that Liton and Naim possess the ability to overcome their slump.

"You have to back the cricketers if you want to play fearless cricket, because

times; go through a bad patch after a prolific one.

"Naim Sheikh is an experienced cricketer. He has played before and has come back after a long time. It is important to give someone, who has come back after a gap, some time. There is no doubt about their skill. Everyone is a skillful player. I believe there is the possibility that they can play well on the big stage."

While Tanzid awaits his debut, Naim, who has played only four ODIs after making his debut in March 2020, is yet to experience the feeling of reaching double figures in an innings in the 50-over format for the Tigers. The 23-year-old played the last two ODIs against Afghanistan at home in July, after Tamim Iqbal stepped away, only to register scores of nine and nought.

However improbable, the Tigers might consider using two other options at the top of the order: Najmul Hossain Shanto has regularly opened in T20s while T20 captain Shakib Al Hasan, now at the helm in all three formats, has recently used Afif Hossain in the role as well.

is ODI vice-captain Liton Das' form across formats. The right-handed batter had a 2022 to remember as he was amongst the highest run-getters across the three formats but has failed to live up to his standards the year after.

In the 12 innings he has batted so far in ODIs in the year, the 28-year-old has

the main mantra in this type of cricket is that you play positive cricket. If you don't score runs in one or two matches, your team will back you. Giving that confidence is very important.

"Liton Das is a class cricketer, a big one. I would want and I know for sure that he will overcome this off form in due time. Cricketers go through this at

"Our goal is clear about the cricket we are trying to play. You can see that our style of play has changed. Fearless cricket, we said we wanted to play, we've been playing it in the last two to three series. This you can see in our performances."

Selector **Habibul Bashar**

