

DORIVAL JR the answer to Brazil's woes?

SABBIR HOSSAIN

Following a string of disappointing performances after a quarterfinal exit from the 2022 World Cup, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) on Wednesday confirmed the appointment of Dorival Junior as the new head coach.

Though officially confirmed on Wednesday, the news of Dorival's appointment had already circulated for three days, with his former club, Sao Paulo, making the announcement early in the week.

With the immense burden of restoring Brazil's dominance, 61-year-old Dorival takes the helm of the five-time world champions. Now the question looms – can his 22 years of experience in the Brazilian domestic circuit, honed at clubs like Santos, Atletico Mineiro, Fluminense, Palmeiras, and Flamengo, offer a glimmer of hope for a nation craving their first world triumph since 2002?

Dorival wasn't the first priority of Brazil. Ednaldo Rodrigues, president of the CBF, initially desired Carlo Ancelotti for the role, but those hopes were dashed when the Italian manager extended his contract with Real Madrid.

That led to Dorival replacing Fernando Diniz, who had been serving as a caretaker manager of Brazil since July last year. However, a first ever three successive defeats in the 2026 World Cup



➤ **Dorival never won a league title as a manager but has one Copa Libertadores and three Brazilian Cups to his name.**

➤ **In the 596 matches he has managed so far, Dorival has won 279, giving him a win percentage of 47 percent. He has drawn 143 and lost 174. 439 of those career games have come in the top flight of Brazilian football.**

qualifiers ultimately sealed Diniz's exit.

Prior to Diniz, Ramon Menezes also failed during his temporary tenure as the Brazil coach. In fact, since the departure of Tite in December 2022, the five-time world champions have struggled heavily, claiming only three victories in nine matches.

Dorival's tenure with the Selecao promises a start of reformation that Brazil have been longing for.

"I think the CBF got it right," said former Internacional vice-president Luis Anapio Gomes. "He (Dorival) has no marketing and doesn't even insist on having a risky playing style for the sake of personal vanity, like his predecessor (Diniz), but he harmonises the team on the field according to the players' potential."

After proving his mettle with struggling teams, Dorival has risen to become one of Brazil's most celebrated coaches in recent years. He capped his impressive run with Flamengo by claiming the Copa Libertadores and Brazilian Cup titles in 2022.

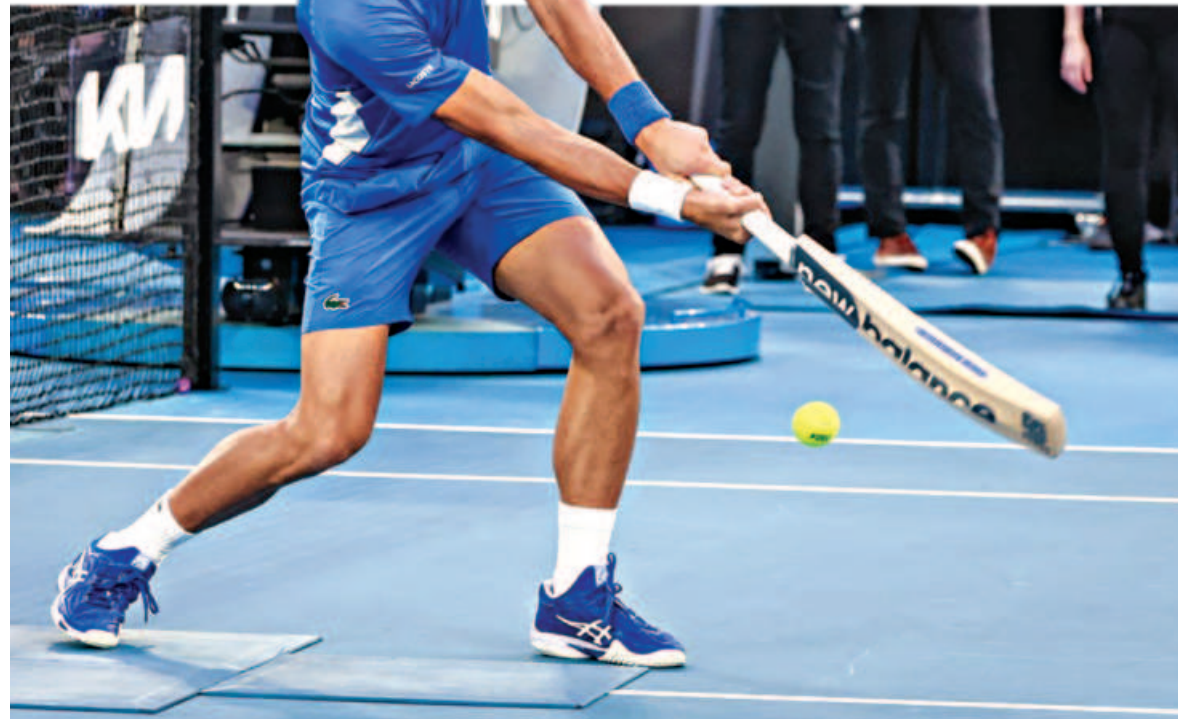
Dorival's strength does not lie in rigid tactics but in his ability to dynamically adapt. He keenly assesses his players' potential and builds the team around their unique strengths.

Throughout his extensive managerial career, Dorival has heavily favoured two formations – the 4-3-1-2 and the 4-2-3-1. His tactical flexibility bodes well for the gifted Brazilian players in his arsenal, including Neymar, Vinicius Junior, Rodrigo, Gabriel Jesus, Gabriel Martinelli, Bruno Guimaraes, Lucas Paqueta, and Casemiro.

Brazil's preferred choices of coaches – Ancelotti and Dorival, both of whom boast over 20 years of managerial experience – clearly indicate that they are seeking stability. And it is only logical, given in 2024, a packed schedule, featuring at least 12 games, awaits Brazil. This includes friendly clashes against top European sides, crucial World Cup qualifiers, and the prestigious Copa America, to be held in the United States.

Adding to the challenge, Brazil has so far been off-colour in their World Cup qualifying campaign. Languishing sixth in the standings with only two wins from six games, Dorival inherits a team in need of urgent improvement. His experience, leadership, and playing style may be the crucial ingredients to turn things around.

The CBF's track record suggests it won't tolerate underperformance. Past decisions show a swiftness to replace underachieving coaches. Therefore, while Dorival's appointment ushers a new chapter for Brazilian football, it also comes with expectations and pressure for immediate results.



Novak Djokovic is slated to begin his bid for an 11th Australian Open crown next week but the Serbian did not shy away from having a go at cricket, swinging the willow instead of the tennis racket, or challenging one of the best batters, Australia's Steven Smith, with his bowling during a charity event on Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne yesterday. Smith and Djokovic also had a bout of tennis, with the 24 Grand Slam title holder taken aback by Smith's tennis skills.

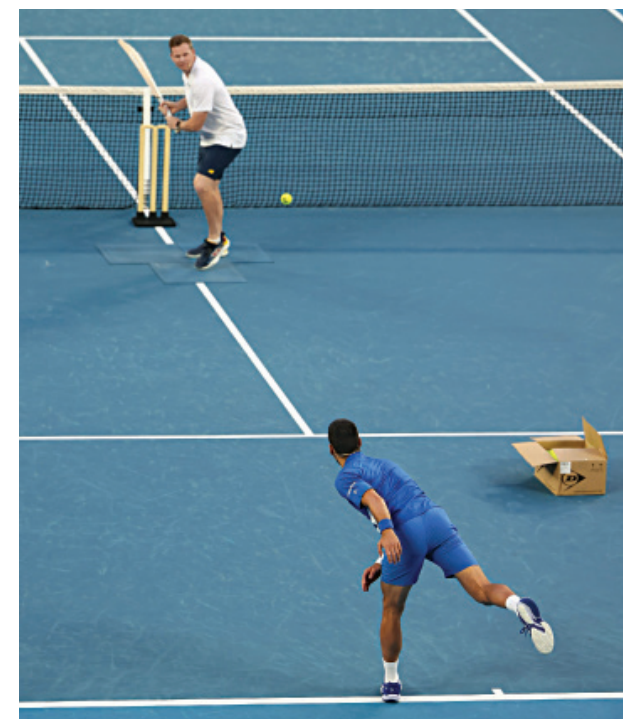


PHOTO: AFP/X

SA, WI scapegoats in 'death' of Tests?

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Going by the collective outcry of the cricket fraternity around the world, led by former Australia captain Steve Waugh, it seems that the people running the game in South Africa have just landed the final blow in the gruesome murder of Test cricket.

"Is this a defining moment in the death of Test cricket," Waugh asked in the caption of an Instagram post where he shared the picture containing the list of players the Proteas have selected for their forthcoming two-Test series in New Zealand in February.

To be fair to Waugh, his shock was somewhat justified as half of that 14-man squad are uncapped, including Neil Brand, the captain for the series.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) had to name an understrength side as 77 of its players are under contract in their franchise Twenty20 league, SA20, which began its second season on Wednesday and will run till February 10.

While many have joined Waugh in shaming the South African board, the people involved with the country's cricket, interestingly, have supported the decision to prioritise SA20.

"Everybody understands the SA20 has to happen ... because it is the lifeblood of South African cricket. If it doesn't happen, we are not going to have Test cricket anyway," said South Africa's Test team coach Shukri Conrad.

This support comes out of the collective realisation that CSA is fighting for survival.

The South African board reported a loss of almost USD 6.4 million last year, which was actually an improvement from the near USD 10.65 million loss in 2022.

To save themselves from impending doom, South Africa placed all eggs in one basket, the SA20, with hopes that the league – where all six teams are owned by Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises – would bring in the funds they desperately need.

This is why South Africa allotted a big window for SA20. Ironically, Graeme Smith, under whom the Proteas

went undefeated in away Test series for nine years, is now the chairman of the league that is pushing Tests way down the pecking order in the country's cricket.

While admonishing South Africa, Waugh also urged ICC and other top cricket boards to allot an equal match fee for all Test players to preserve the "purest form" of the sport.

But his calls are almost certain to fall on deaf ears. After failing to get the much-debated 'Big Three' model passed in 2017, the Indian board in June last year has successfully established what some are calling the 'Big One' model.

India, the financial powerhouse of world cricket, is set to bag 38.5 percent of the ICC revenues in the 2024-27 cycle, more than eight times of what South Africa will receive.

This disparity gets reflected in the remuneration the contracted players of the top teams receive compared to other nations.

Had the big three teams not bumped up the pay for their top Test cricketers, they would have also lost their best players to leagues, something the recently retired David Warner and his opening partner Usman Khawaja openly admitted.

Amid the uproar around the South African team, West Indies named a squad for a Test series in Australia with seven uncapped players.

This, however, did not make as big a splash as the cricketing world has grown used to seeing West Indies sending understrength teams while their best players are plying their trade in other leagues.

The only way South Africa can avoid suffering the same fate as West Indies is to offer their players bigger pay cheques. To do that, they must improve their financial state, which they are hoping to achieve through SA20.

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Plans in place to create quality umpires

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Umpiring has been an overlooked area in the country's cricket despite the fact that Bangladesh is one of International Cricket Council's full members.

No grading system has been in place to evaluate umpires, something that has been a long-standing issue here, and the BCB umpires' committee are taking steps to begin an evaluation process which would structurally help enact a grading system to categorise umpires. The program will come into action from next season but the process begins from March this year.

Umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat is set to officiate in the bilateral series between Australia and West Indies later this month as a neutral umpire, which is a big step for Bangladesh. Umpires Masudur Rahman Mukul and Gazi Sohel are also set to officiate in ICC U-19 World Cup, which has seen the status of Bangladesh umpires rise. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wants



to ensure they have 10-12 quality umpires, such as those mentioned above, in the top level of the country's umpiring scene.

The state of umpiring was recently thrown into question after the National Cricket League (NCL), where Sylhet Division coach alleged that matches were being lost to poor umpiring.

A fact-finding committee reviewed the on-field decisions and a few umpires were sidelined for the BCL, and assessments are continuing on what improvements are needed. Even the BCB president Nazmul Hassan has instructed to clean up the image of umpiring in the domestic circuit.

Umpires such as Saikat, Mukul and Gazi have come through the ICC Level 1, 2 and 3 umpire accreditation programme, done in collaboration with Cricket Australia (CA) back in 2007, 2008 and 2009. As many as 108 umpires went through level 1 and 2 while 15 umpires, who currently are in top-tier among BCB umpires, undertook level 3 courses during that period.

This time BCB are planning to undertake a huge programme of creating a base of 600 umpires. In the initial batch, the umpires' committee will have 100-150 umpires who will sit down for ICC's umpiring foundation course online.

The foundation course will have one-hour exams and BCB are planning to ready at least 40 umpires who can move on to ICC Level 1 and 2 umpiring courses. The process is being handled by David Moore, BCB's Head of Programs, who is communicating with ICC and others.

"We are beginning from zero. We will be taking ICC's help with the ICC foundation course. Right now, there is a panel-based system which starts with training level, then comes district and regional level and so on, after that top level. With the evaluation process starting from March we would bring the grading system. There is no umpires' enlistment now and with this we will start," BCB umpires' committee chairman Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu told The Daily Star yesterday.

All umpires officiating in domestic tournaments will now have to reaccredit via ICC accreditation process that will allow a standardised approach to training, development and benchmark competence, so that each umpire can be ranked or graded. Approved umpires are to be nominated for ICC Level 1 and 2 accreditation courses. The level 1 and 2 ICC courses will see umpires' on-field decisions also evaluated, likely in June-July, said a BCB official.

However, umpires' remuneration in Bangladesh is still far behind other countries. BCB officials have said that raising the remuneration can go a long way to raising standards.

SHORT CORNER

Early exit on cards for BCB boss Papon



First, these are unrelated (regarding Papon staying on as BCB president after being appointed as a minister of Youth and Sports). We previously had a few ministers who were BCB presidents. This is not an issue. My desire was to end it (BCB presidency) this term, which expires next year. I will try to end it this year. Also, I am in quite a few ICC committees; I am even chairman (of a committee). The ICC has a lot of rules and regulations and they don't change those rules. They don't just allow someone new to go there. You've seen it happen with Sri Lanka.

NAZMUL HASSAN PAPON, BCB president

Son set to light up Asian Cup

AFP, DOHA

The Asian Cup begins on Friday with defending champions Qatar the hosts, Japan favourites and Son Heung-min's South Korea vowing to win the title for the first time in 64 years.

In Tottenham Hotspur attacker Son, South Korea have the best player in Asia and a world-class performer who is enjoying his football again under Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou.

The 24 teams spanning Australia to Palestine will battle for regional glory over the next four weeks, culminating in the final at the 88,000-capacity Lusail Stadium

on February 10.

It will take something special to beat the last big game at Lusail – the World Cup final 13 months ago when an Argentina side inspired by Lionel Messi defeated France on penalties.

The 18th edition of the Asian Cup was supposed to have been held last summer in China but was moved to World Cup host Qatar because of China's Covid-19 rules.

➤ **Defending champions: Qatar**

➤ **There are six groups of four, the top two from each reaching the last 16, along with the four best third-placed teams.**



REAL WIN EIGHT-GOAL THRILLER

In a vicious last-gasp counter-attack, Real Madrid substitute Brahim Diaz sprinted past retreating Atletico Madrid goalkeeper Jan Oblak before placing the ball into an empty net from midfield as Los Blancos completed a 5-3 comeback win over their city rivals in the Spanish Super Cup semifinal in Riyadh on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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