

Zico axed but Morsalin, Tariq return to bolster Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera unveiled a 26-member squad yesterday for the upcoming FIFA World Cup Qualifiers against Australia and Lebanon, notably excluding seasoned goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico.

The men in red and green, languishing at the bottom of Group I in the World Cup qualifiers with just one point from four matches, are slated to face Australia on June 6 at Dhaka's Bashundhara Kings Arena before journeying to Qatar for a showdown with Lebanon on June 11.

Zico, a stalwart since his debut in 2020, was on the receiving end of disciplinary actions taken by his club, Bashundhara Kings, following an incident involving him, Tapu Barman, and Sheikh Morsalin carrying liquor from Maldives after an AFC Cup match last year. Despite a subsequent return to the national squad, Zico found himself benched in favour of Mitul Marma during the Palestine ties.

Cabrera also fielded teenage sensation Mehedi Hasan Srabon over Zico in the Palestine encounter and eventually dropped the latter.

"We are confident and hopeful of achieving something important in the two matches against Australia and Lebanon," Cabrera said yesterday, via a BFF audio release.

"The first game against Australia will be a very, very challenging one, but we are positive that we can show a very good performance and give something to our supporters.

"In the second game against Lebanon, we had a positive experience playing at home... but we hope to finish the group [matches] with positive result," he added.

It was not possible to reach Cabrera to know the reason behind the exclusion of Zico, which, however, paved the entry for Mohammedan Sporting Club's goalkeeper Sujun Hossain.

Several other players, including Faisal Ahmed Fahim, sidelined due to abdomen injury, were also omitted from the squad that faced Palestine. However, bolstering Bangladesh will be the return of Tariq Raihan Kazi and Sheikh Morsalin from injury, accompanied by the comeback of defenders Sushanta Tripura, Rimon Hossain, and Mehedi Hasan, along with forward Mohammad Abdullah. Notably, suspended players Bishwanath Ghosh and Mojibur Rahman Jonny retained their spots.

The charges of Cabrera are set to gear up for a training camp commencing on June 2.



Bangladesh Women's football team skipper Sabina Khatun trains with teammate Matsushima Sumaya yesterday at the Kings Arena in Bashundhara, on the eve of their international friendly fixture against Chinese Taipei today. The women in red and green, ranked 140, will play another friendly against the same opposition, who are 100 places ahead in the world rankings, on June 3 at the same venue.

PHOTO: BFF

Variety aplenty, execution in question

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are heading into the forthcoming ICC T20 World Cup with their most varied bowling attack in recent memory as their arsenal ticks almost all the boxes but questions remain on how the resources will be used in the USA and the Caribbean.

In the 15-man squad for the T20 World Cup, there are four outright fast-bowling options, two right-arm pacers in Taskin Ahmed and Tanzim Sakib, and two left-armers – Mustafizur Rahman and Shoriful Islam.

Vice-captain Taskin, who is on his way to full recovery from a side strain, is the leader of the pack. He uses his height and pace to hit the deck hard and can be depended upon with the new ball and the old one.

Tanzim, on the other hand, doesn't have Taskin's height but utilises his lower trajectory to skid the ball off the pitch is quicker than he seems.

"As a fast bowler, I'm not six feet tall. That's why I needed to have a different set of skills. I try to get the ball to skid, to make it difficult for the batters to face me. As I don't have a height advantage, I try to skid and cut the ball," Tanzim said in a video posted by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on social media yesterday.

Mustafizur will be Bangladesh's X-factor with the ball, with his bag of tricks and cutters, which could prove lethal in the Caribbean and USA pitches.

Shoriful is the ideal left-arm seamer, who can nip the ball back into the right-hander with the new ball and



PHOTO: STAR

away from the left-hander and has the happy knack of taking wickets in the Powerplay.

In the spin bowling department, the Tigers once again have no shortage in finger spinners, with Shakib Al Hasan leading the charge followed by fellow left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam and off-spin bowling all-rounder Mahedi Hasan.

The one missing link in Bangladesh's attack over the years has also been filled

this time with the inclusion of Rishad Hossain, a front-line leg-spinner.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto also has some handy part-time options in Mahmudullah Riyad as an off-spinner and Soumya Sarkar as a medium pacer.

Options may be aplenty for Bangladesh, but that's not enough to ensure good results, proved by what transpired in the first match of the recently concluded T20I series against the USA, which the Tigers lost 2-1.

In that match, Bangladesh had the USA cornered with the hosts needing 54 off the final four overs.

Mustafizur, Bangladesh's go-to death over bowler, and Shoriful then bowled the next three overs. Mustafizur conceded 17 and 15 runs in the 17th and 19th over respectively while Shoriful leaked 14 runs in the 18th and eventually, USA won the match by five wickets and three balls to spare.

Their failure to keep Harmmeet Singh and an out-of-his-prime Corey Anderson quiet in those overs showed that ticking the boxes in terms of variety is not enough. For the bowling attack to do well in the T20 World Cup, the captain's intentions and the bowlers' execution have to be in sync. Otherwise, more such embarrassments may be lurking in the future.

BANGABANDHU KABADDI Bangladesh into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bangladesh stormed into the semifinals of Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi, beating Poland 79-28 in the second match of the day at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Mirpur on Thursday.

The hosts, with four straight wins in as many matches, have eight points and top the Group A. They will face Nepal in their last encounter on Friday, with the winner of the tie progressing as group champions.

Nepal, with six points in three matches, and Indonesia, who have four points in three games, are the contenders for the remaining semifinal slots from the group.

However, it was another facile victory for Bangladesh as Poland had no answer to the raid and defence of Arduzzaman Munshi and Co.

A total of seven lonas – three in the first half and four in the second – were proof of a one-way affair. It is also the biggest point haul for the hosts in this edition. Almost 90 percent of Polish points were earned from bonus sections with no touches or catches.

Skipper Arduzzaman Munshi again led from the front, earning 25 points and the Man of the Match award for his efforts.



Olympiakos make history

REUTERS, Athens

Olympiakos beat Fiorentina 1-0 after extra time in the Europa Conference League final on Wednesday when a late winner from Ayoub El Kaabi gave the Greek club their first major European trophy.

Olympiakos became the first Greek club to lift a European trophy, with Panathinaikos coming closest in 1971 when they lost the European Cup final to Ajax Amsterdam.

With the game seemingly headed to a penalty shootout, El Kaabi got in front of his marker to head home Santiago Hezze's cross in the 116th minute but the players and fans had a long, nervous wait for VAR to check for offside before the goal was awarded.

It was the Morocco striker's 11th goal in the Conference League this season, all of them in the knockout stages, and 16th in Europe after he also scored in the Europa League qualifiers and group stage.

The trophy presentation was also a moment to treasure for Olympiakos manager Jose Luis Mendilibar, who won the Europa League with Sevilla last season and took over the Greek club only in February. "I am very happy that we achieved something that the club had not achieved before. We will celebrate, we will cheer and then we will get back to work for what comes next," Mendilibar said.

Can Terzic plot fall of indomitable REAL MADRID?

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Borussia Dortmund manager Edin Terzic will have to channel all his expertise into masterminding the game of his life to plot the downfall of Carlo Ancelotti's Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League final at Wembley on Saturday.

Terzic's strategic acumen demands appreciation in their run to the final of the competition as he has managed to get his side to adapt to contrasting styles. But he is up against Ancelotti, a behemoth figure who will be playing in a record-extending sixth Champions League final.

A master in the competition, four-time winner Ancelotti has injected the idea of polymorphism into this Real Madrid side. In Europe's most elite competition this season, Los Blancos seemed to have absorbed the idea of becoming more fluid, taking the shape of whatever is in front in order to keep flowing.

Be it being aggressive in an attempt to clinch the tie at home against Bayern in the semifinal, or architecting the lowest of blocks away at Etihad in the quarters against

defending champions Manchester City – Real have displayed polarity in terms of approach against different oppositions this season. At times, they were willing to suffer for large portions of matches, and there were moments when they were eager to be on the front foot – constantly adapting and entirely sold to the idea of doing whatever was necessary to stay alive in the competition.

"You see, there is no 'Ancelotti style' – there is no style for me because I change," Ancelotti told Times.

The hallmark of Real's attacking threats has been their willingness to create overloads on either side of the pitch, however, preferably on the left flank to spearhead attacks through Vinicius Jr who has found the net five times and provided for his teammates in as many occasions this season. The drifting of Rodrygo and Jude Bellingham with the additional support of left-back Ferland Mendy on the left side have often allowed Real to gain numerical superiority to hurt oppositions.

With not-so-pacy Julian Ryerson playing at right-back and a 35-year-old Mats Hummels also covering



that part of the defence, Los Blancos would have sights set on exploiting that flank through the sheer pace of Vinicius.

A lot will depend on how Dortmund will approach the game. One thing is for certain which is that Real would



absolutely enjoy Dortmund taking initiative and for Terzic's men to play on the front foot from the onset, as it will suit Real's strength in more of a passive approach which could see them launch fast counter-attacks after recovering possession.

Starman Toni Kroos will once again be pivotal in setting Real's tempo and the extra onus will be on the likes of Julian Brandt and Marcel Sabitzer, Dortmund's number eights, to get their triggers right when pressing the 'German Sniper'.

For Dortmund, who have recorded an average possession of below 50 percent in Europe in contrast to 57 in the Bundesliga, their wingers will hold the key.

Individual brilliance from Dortmund wingers will be on demand to make points of differences. An in-form Jadon Sancho will once again look to make the pitch into his dancefloor from the right and will have Ryerson eager to supply him. The Englishman has been smart to pick up pockets of space while linking up with the others in the final third but has also shown great dribbling ability to go past players. Being inspired by what he did against PSG's Nuno Mendes in the semifinal, Sancho will definitely fancy his chances against Mendy.

On the other side, Karim Adeyemi is expected to unsettle Dani Carvajal with pace and the Spaniard will also

have to be wary about Dortmund left-back Ian Maatsen who needs no second invitation to fly forward and join attacks.

The hold-up play of Niclas Fullkrug has been a key component in making offensive transitions work for Dortmund. The 31-year-old striker has shown great ability with his back against the goal and is often keen to play on his faster-attacking partners to create incisive opportunities. He will also have Hummels complement him utilising their aerial prowess, an aspect Dortmund will most definitely look to use, especially because of the lack of aerial threat from Real.

Terzic and Dortmund will be up against it to trump the enigma that is Real Madrid for they can win a game despite being tactically outplayed the entire duration of a game.

Terzic's side will have no room to second-guess themselves and will have to be at their absolute best, making sure to go for the kill because if they leave even the slightest of openings, Real, like they most often do, will conjure up the Boogeyman within to haunt yet another side late in the game.