

Minhajul presents old wine in new bottle at critical crossroad

SPORTS REPORTER

In an impromptu media briefing in front of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) headquarter yesterday, BCB's chief coordinator of programmes Minhajul Abedin Nannu spoke some bitter truths about the current state of the country's cricket, which different people have regurgitated many times before without any significant change afterwards.

The former captain pointed out that having a pool of only 27-30 cricketers to represent Bangladesh across all three formats was a big issue.

"Actually, there is no way to deny that [having a limited pool of cricketers for the national team]. Our cricket is basically Dhaka-centric. We haven't been able to decentralise cricket," Minhajul told the reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

"We are confined to a pool of 27 to 30 players in all three formats. We can only select players from this group. If we can't prepare at least 45 players, we can't create a sense of competition among the players," he added.

He was also upfront about the country not having an established first-class

structure and how not having any other T20 tournament other than the BPL is holding back the Tigers in T20s.

"If you look at any other Test playing nation, they have an established first-class structure. Ours is still not established. "We are far behind in T20 cricket. If you look at our domestic calendar, we play a smaller number of matches in the T20 format. In franchise tournaments like BPL, foreign players play in crucial positions and there is a limited opportunity for the local players," Minhajul said.

The points Minhajul raised all have merit and fixing these issues would certainly improve the country's cricket.

But the million-dollar question remains – who will bell the cat?

It has been 12 years since Nazmul Hassan Papon and Co took over the reins of the richest sports body of the country. More than once, these matters have come into light and board officials had vowed to work on fixing these issues for the sake of Bangladesh cricket.

However, nothing significant ever gets done afterwards, as the country's cricket continues to stagnate.

The officials wake up from their slumber



and start talking about these problems every time after an underwhelming showing in an ICC event, much like the Tiger's performance in the ninth ICC T20 World Cup recently.

In that tournament, Bangladesh won three matches and qualified for the Super Eight and the board was seemingly

satisfied with it, even though the team showed a severe lack of intent when a golden opportunity to qualify for the semifinals presented itself.

The board had talked about decentralising cricket many times and made some ad-hoc committees for it. But since forming the committees, the board is yet to take any significant step to develop cricket at the regional level.

As the game remains Dhaka-centric, the selectors are left with a very limited pool of players to form squads. As a result, when a player fails to perform, an underperforming cricketer gets picked in his place, earning a callback without having done anything of note.

Minhajul spoke about a possible way to fix the shortage of players, "We are now thinking of increasing the number of domestic matches so that we can get some players for the T20 format. We also need to identify some players whom we can nurture, prepare for the game."

However, the question remains that if a board is still just talking about possible solutions and not implementing them after being in charge for 12 years, will anything ever get done?

Kings rope in Romanian Tita

SPORTS REPORTER

Five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings have roped in Romanian coach Valeriu Tita for the upcoming season, hoping to produce good results on both the domestic and international stages.

The 58-year-old coach brings vast coaching experience, having worked with the Syrian national football team and various clubs in notably Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq. Tita, who last worked with Al-Ain FC of Saudi Arabia in 2023, had guided Al Ittihad SC Aleppo to win the AFC Asian Cup in 2010.

Kings' decision to appoint Tita yesterday came just five days after parting ways with Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon.

"We roped in Tita for his vast knowledge of Asia and AFC competitions," Kings marketing and media manager Ahmed Shaek told The Daily Star on Tuesday, adding that Tita's experience of managing national players also worked in his favour.

Shaek further informed that Tunisian trainer Khalil Chakroun and set piece coach Dorel Stoica from Romania will form the coaching staff next season, which is expected to get underway in mid-September with the Independence Cup.



Stumbling England and Netherlands get shot at redemption

REUTERS, Dortmund

The route to the last four of Euro 2024 has been a rocky one for the Netherlands and England, and a few flashes of their best quality in their semifinal showdown might be enough for either side to make the final.

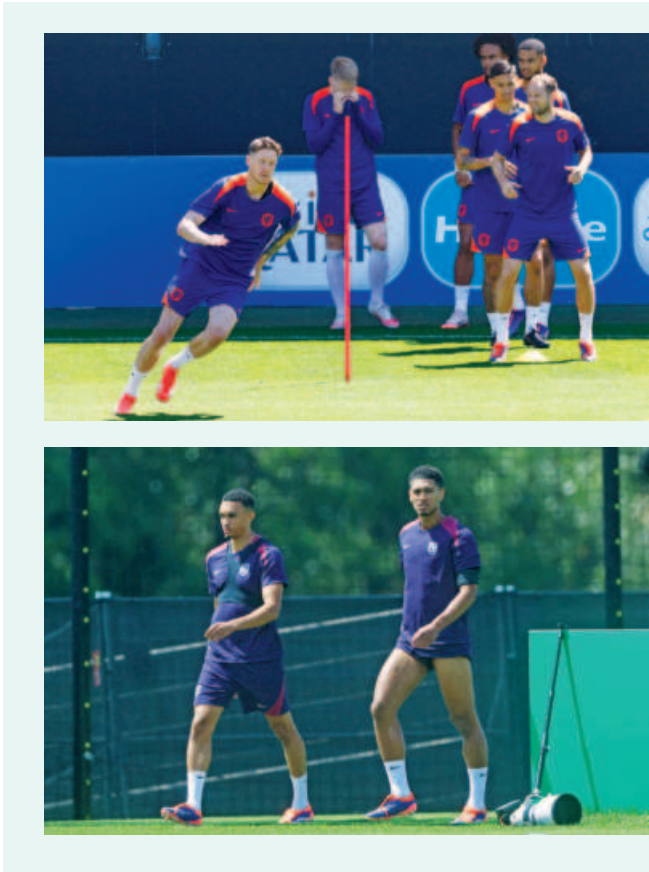
England's shootout win over Switzerland brought momentary euphoria, but it was more relief than redemption and Wednesday's date with the Dutch in Dortmund may require a transformation in attack for them to reach a third major tournament final, against France or Spain.

England have limped into the last four with tepid performances against opponents they should on paper have beaten easily, while the Netherlands have yo-yoed through and were 20 minutes from elimination before their quarterfinal fightback against Turkey.

The Dutch dazzled in their last-eight rout of Romania but have had to scramble too, having fallen behind in three of their four scoring games. Their three wins were all in regulation time, however, compared to one for England, and the Dutch have scored nearly double their number of goals at the tournament.

The Netherlands have the edge in attack, their nine goals at Euro 2024 coming from 20 attempts on target against 15 by an England side spearheaded by the usually lethal but currently subdued Harry Kane, Phil Foden and Jude Bellingham.

England improved against the Swiss but their five expertly struck penalties



- Q This will be the fourth meeting between England and Netherlands at a major tournament. The Oranje and the Three Lions share one win each (in Euro 1988 and 1996 respectively), with the other contest (in the 1990 World Cup) ending in a draw.
- Q England won only one of their last nine matches against the Netherlands in all competitions (4L 4D), with the solitary win coming in a friendly match in 2018 in Amsterdam.
- Q This is England's fourth appearance in the semifinal of the Euros. The Three Lions were eliminated in the first two by Yugoslavia (in 1968) and Germany (in 1996) but went on to qualify for the final after beating Denmark in 2020.
- Q For the Netherlands, it will be a sixth Euro semifinal. They were eliminated from four of their five semis and the solitary win came in 1988 when they went on to lift the trophy.
- Q England have gone to extra-time in both of their knockout fixtures in this edition.
- Q Netherlands have won two matches in the ongoing edition after conceding the first goal - beating Poland 2-1 in the group stage and Turkey by the same score in the quarterfinal. Only Czech Republic, at Euro 2004, have ever won three games having conceded first a single edition of the tournament.
- Q England, under Gareth Southgate, have reached the semifinal of a major tournament on three occasions – in the 2018 World Cup, in Euro 2020 and the ongoing edition. They can become the fourth side to qualify for consecutive finals after USSR, Germany, and Spain.

rescued an attack that again looked frustrated, with Bukayo Saka's 80th-minute equaliser their first shot on target.

Netherlands do not have that problem and will bank on the tournament's joint top scorer Cody Gakpo to and trouble an

England defence that has been solid in contract with their jaded attack.

Southgate is again expected to stick to a similar lineup having been impervious to calls to shake things up or make substitutions earlier during the

tournament.

The Dutch have blown hot and cold and will need to be stronger at the back to stand any chance of reaching their first final since their 1988 Euros triumph, their only major tournament success.

Anderson's farewell dreams face Windies challenge

AGENCIES

It doesn't matter if James Anderson takes a bunch of West Indies wickets for England in the first Test at Lord's from Wednesday.

The series opener will be Anderson's 188th and last Test and he will transition into England's fast-bowling mentor.

He was pensioned off by England managing director Rob Key, coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes. They met him at a Manchester hotel in April to say he wasn't in their plans for the 2025-26 Ashes in Australia.

This was a month after Anderson returned from India, where he took 10 wickets at an average of 33.50. That series was lost 4-1 but on the last morning of the last Test in Dharamsala, Anderson became the first seamer in history to take 700 wickets.

He spoke then of being in the best shape, liking where his game was at, and being really excited for this summer, when he will turn 42 at the end of this month.

This week, he said he was surprised at how calmly he took the news from Key, McCullum and Stokes. He understood their decision, adding, "I've sort of made peace with that."

Anderson warmed up for his last Test by showing his class last week in his first English County appearance for

Lancashire. He took 7-35, the best figures in the championship.

His 21-year test career comes full circle at Lord's, where he made his Test debut in 2003 against Zimbabwe. Lord's witnessed Anderson's career-best figures of 7-42 against the West Indies in 2017.



As one era ends, another could start. Surrey seamer Gus Atkinson and wicketkeeper Jamie Smith have been handed Test debuts. Both played white-ball cricket for England last year; Atkinson went to the ODI World Cup.

Chris Woakes returns for his first Test since he was the player of the series in last year's Ashes. Stokes was back as an

allrounder, allowing for offspinner Shoaib Bashir to make his home Test debut after taking 17 wickets in India.

The West Indies play their first Test since the extraordinary eight-run victory over Australia in Brisbane in January, after a 10-wicket thrashing in Adelaide.

Allrounder and former captain Jason Holder was recalled to the squad along with fast bowler Jayden Seales. St. Kitts and Nevis opening batter Mikyle Louis and fast bowler Jeremiah Louis are the uncapped players in the 15-man squad. Louis replaced an injured Kemar Roach.

In Roach's absence, Alzarri Joseph will lead the pace attack with Jayden Seales and Shamar Joseph, whose 7-68 scuttled the Australians in Brisbane in the second innings. That earned Shamar Joseph in his second Test the player of the match and short series.

Shamar Joseph called England retiree Anderson "perfect" as a Test player to the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper but "I want to rain on his parade."

Anderson said he was trying hard not to think of his pending forced retirement.

"The big thing for me this week is wanting to play well, bowl well and get a win," he said. "I'm sure the emotions during the week will change, but right now that's what I'm trying to focus on to stop myself crying."



Colombia defender Yerry Mina and forward Miguel Borja chest-bump each other during a training drill yesterday ahead of their Copa America semifinal against Uruguay. The Colombians would want to take a step towards adding to their maiden continental triumph with a win against the 15-time champions.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM