

Can rivals step up the fight against Real?

AGENCIES

After a summer dominated by Spain, with La Roja storming to Euro 2024 triumph and their youngsters claiming gold at the Paris Olympics, the focus now turns to Spain once again as LaLiga kicks off on Thursday.

Athletic Club will begin proceedings by hosting Getafe tonight before Real Betis face Girona at home later on the day.

But the big guns will be back in action a bit later. Barcelona travel to Valencia for their opener on Saturday night while defending champions Real Madrid, who were scheduled to vie for a record sixth UEFA Super Cup against Atalanta in Warsaw last night, will be hosted by Mallorca in exactly 24 hours.

Real the favourites

It will be no surprise that Real, the reigning Champions League winners, are overwhelming favourites for another successful domestic run with Kylian Mbappe boosting Carlo Ancelotti's already enviable squad.

Real will be without Toni Kroos after his retirement. Luka Modric and Federico Valverde are in the squad to plug gaps but don't provide the ability to spread passes and read the game as well as the German midfielder did.

While Real might have a few problems in midfield, the long-awaited arrival of Mbappe to form a deadly forward line alongside established stars like Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo. To add to the firepower, Real will have Brazilian teenage sensation Endrick who will put Real ahead of most teams in the league.

They will also have first-choice goalkeeper Thibaut



Courtois and defender Eder Militao, who had missed almost the entirety of the previous season, available from the beginning.

German era at Barca

In a major change at Barcelona, Hansi Flick has taken over the role of head coach from club legend Xavi.

Flick recently had a rough spell as Germany manager and is hoping for a more positive experience as he returns to club football. He had spoken of emulating Pep Guardiola and Johan Cruyff's style but the fact that they lost 3-0 to Monaco in the Joan Gamper Trophy shows the tough task ahead.

Barca have brought in one of Spain's Euro 2024 heroes Dani Olmo from RB Leipzig but the club have not been able to register their €46m signing with LaLiga owing to their financial constraints.

Moreover, Barcelona also have injury issues going into the season. Ronald Araujo, Pedri, Gavi, and Frenkie de Jong are all nursing injuries, meaning Flick will have his work cut out if he plans to overthrow Real from the throne in his debut season for which he might need to depend on 17-year-old Spanish sensation Lamine Yamal to continue his stellar form.

Atletico rebuild to end Real-Barca dominance

After winning the title in 2020-21, Atletico Madrid have finished third, third, and fourth last season -- being pipped by Girona.

But Diego Simeone's men will hope to rectify that and give Real and Barcelona a run for their money as they have made some significant changes in personnel for the season. The headline signing has been the one of Argentine World Cup winner Julian Alvarez from Manchester City in a reported deal worth approximately \$104 million.

Upfront with Alvarez, Alexander Sorloth will play a key role after arriving from Villarreal fresh from scoring 23 goals in last league campaign.

They have also bolstered their backline by signing Robin Le Normand from Real Sociedad.

Who could cause a surprise?

Girona did that job last season. Real Betis may do it this time, but maybe not to the extent that Michel's side did. Managed by Manuel Pellegrini, playmakers Isco and Nabil Fekir can help Betis beat anyone on their day.



Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan hits one at the nets of the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore during Bangladesh's first practice session in Pakistan yesterday. Shakib flew from Canada to join the team, which started their preparation for the first Test against the hosts, scheduled to be held in Rawalpindi from August 21 to 25.

PHOTO: AFP

Is the current BCB board legitimate?

AL-AMIN

The board of directors of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) might face a legitimacy crisis as they were elected under the 2017-amended BCB constitution, which entitled six top-flight Dhaka clubs to nominate two councillors each to vote, instead of the previous one-entity-one-vote system.

This preferential treatment of the clubs could be interpreted to be illegal under the country's constitution, an article which states that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

The current 25-member board of directors led by BCB President Nazmul Hassan Papon was elected on October 6, 2021 polls for a four-year term.

Papon was elected as one of the 12 directors from the Club Category, where six clubs -- Abahani, Prime Bank, Prime Doleshwar, Gazi Group, Sheikh Jamal and Mohammedan -- were granted two councillors each in accordance with the 2017 (amended) BCB constitution.

In Section 9, titled 'Formation of General Council', it was stated that the six clubs that make it to the Super League in the Dhaka Premier League will have two councillors each. The aforementioned six clubs had finished among the top six in the Dhaka Premier League in the season that had preceded the October elections.

The allocation of two councillors in the general council was an exception considering other national boards' constitutions,



including that of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), it is categorically said that one full member shall have one vote.

Contacted on Tuesday, longstanding BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury acknowledged the exception.

He said he was not aware of the option of such multiple voting in any other national cricket association.

The BCB scrapped the multiple councillors' option in the constitution after the 2021 election in an annual general meeting in 2022.

However, lawyers said, for fairness the anomalies in the 2017 BCB constitution could still be relevant and the legitimacy of an election under it could still be questioned.

According to Supreme Court lawyer Shishir Manir, two votes for one entity is a discrimination and

can be challenged in any competent court of the country.

"For the same footing, for the same purpose and in the same breadth, if an entity enjoys more than one vote, it is a discrimination under Article 27 and 28 of the constitution," said Manir.

Article 27 of the constitution, under the headline "Equality before law", states that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

The Daily Star tried to communicate Papon for his comment. However, his phone was switched off and he has not showed up at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur ever since the student-led mass upsurge toppled the Awami League government on August 5.

Papon was a lawmaker from the ruling AL and also the Minister for Youth and Sports in former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's cabinet.

FIFA rules out BPL transfer window extension

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) outfits must complete their players' registration formalities by the existing deadline of August 19, as FIFA did not agree to extend the transfer window.

Following the resignation of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the premises of a few clubs like Abahani, Sheikh Jamal DC, and Fortis FC were vandalised by miscreants.

Clubs such as Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Russel KC, Rahmatganj MFS, and Brothers Union verbally requested Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to extend the players' registration window, citing possible changes to their respective executive committees as well as difficulties in contacting their donors.

BFF thus officially requested the relevant department of FIFA to extend the transfer window but got a negative response.

"They told us that it is not possible to extend the deadline for player transfers once the window has been opened. We have already informed all participating clubs verbally about FIFA's decision," said BFF competition manager Zaber Bin Taher.

The players' registration window for BPL opened on June 1, with only Abahani having officially completed the registration of 14 players as of Wednesday.



Shaheens batter Bangladesh 'A'

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan Shaheens' batters made merry against Bangladesh 'A' bowlers on the second day of the opening four-day match as they were 367-4 at stumps at the Islamabad Club Ground on Wednesday.

Umar Amin struck a valiant 177 off 211 balls while skipper Saud Shakeel made 76 off 132 balls as the hosts a first-innings lead of 245 runs after bowling Bangladesh 'A' out for just 122 runs on the opening day.

Saad Khan and Kamran Gulam remained not out on 31 and 20 runs respectively for the hosts, who resumed the day at two for none.

The Bangladeshi side made a bright start as pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib dismissed opener Saim Ayub for 11 before Mohammad Huraiera and Umar shared a 96-run stand for the second wicket.

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan then broke the partnership by sending Huraiera (39) back but Umar continued to frustrate the Bangladeshi bowlers by adding a 195-run partnership with Saud for the third wicket.

Left-arm spinner Hasan Murad (2-49) removed both batters in quick succession but an unbeaten partnership of 45 runs by Saad and Kamran took their lead close to the 250-run mark.

U-20s eye elusive SAFF trophy

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have kept their sights on the elusive trophy of the SAFF U-20 Championship, despite having less than a two-week preparation under the guidance of coach Maruful Haque, with the team departing for Nepal on Friday.

Six teams, split into two groups, will take part in the regional youth football extravaganza -- which has been held five times before, involving U-18, U-19, and U-20 age groups -- from August 18 to 28 in Kathmandu.

In previous five editions, Bangladesh had to be content with finishing second three times -- in 2017, 2019, and 2022 -- behind India. In 2023 the boys in red and green exited the race at the group stage after losing to India and Bhutan.

The charges of Maruful will compete against hosts Nepal and Sri Lanka in Group A, beginning their campaign by taking on the hosts on August 20 at the Dasharath Stadium, while Group B comprises India, the Maldives,



and Bhutan. The top two teams from each group will progress to the semi-finals, scheduled for August 25 and 26, before the tournament's curtain closes on August 28.

"Though I initially aimed to reach the final, after observing their dedication and focus during nearly two weeks of preparation, I see the hunger in the boys, and I think they will fight for the championship," said UEFA-licensed coach Maruful at an

official press conference at the BFF house yesterday, where team leader Khandokar Rakibul Islam and players Shakil Ahmed Topu and Mirajul Islam also spoke on the occasion.

Maruful began training with around 35 footballers on July 31 at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur before moving the camp to the Bashundhara Kings Arena, as the Army made the former a temporary camp due to the

country's deteriorating situation at the time.

After yesterday's training session, Maruful was expected to select a 23-member squad from the trimmed list of 27 players, most of whom have featured in Bangladesh Premier League. Of the 27 players, only five came from the Bangladesh Championship League, and two from the BFF Elite Academy.

Maruful informed, "As the Bangladesh Premier League ended two months ago, most of the players have been idle. It was challenging to bring the players up to fitness. We had two sessions of fitness and tactical training in the first 10 days, and the remaining days comprised single training sessions.

"I believe the players, most of whom played in the Bangladesh Premier League, are experienced and talented in the context of Bangladesh. The dedication, effort, and energy they have shown in training are positive signs, and I believe we can aim for the championship."



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