

Women booters sign in for camp ahead of March FIFA window

SPORTS REPORTER

Out of 31 women footballers from the national team, only 13 have so far turned up for the residential camp as of yesterday, with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) considering staging FIFA friendly matches in the March window.

The residential training camp will be supervised by local coaches, as the local governing body has yet to confirm the reappointment of British coach Peter Butler, who guided Bangladesh to triumph in the SAFF Women's Championship last year.

"Of the 31 players, 13 joined the camp so far [by 5:00 pm yesterday], and others are expected to join by night. However, some players took leave for personal reasons or illness and are expected to join by January 18," BFF general secretary Emran Hossain Tushar told reporters at the BFF House yesterday.

Asked about Butler, Emran said, "We can only confirm the coach, whether it is Peter Butler or someone new, once the deal is completed, which has not been done yet with anyone."

Real 'want to react' after Clasico thrashing

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti on Wednesday demanded a rapid reaction from his team after their capitulation against rivals Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final.

The Catalans lifted the trophy on Sunday in Saudi Arabia with an emphatic 5-2 victory and Madrid's Italian coach welcomed Thursday's Copa del Rey last 16 clash against Celta Vigo as a chance to bounce back.

"It's a great opportunity to leave behind the bad game we played, which hurt us a lot, but has not sunk us," Ancelotti told a news conference Wednesday. "We want to react, it's good this game for us against a team that plays well, the team can have a strong reaction after that bad game the other day."

"It was a step backwards, but we have to keep going forward, we're in a good position in all competitions."

Ancelotti said his team made "a heap of errors" against Barcelona but had looked for solutions in the days since ahead of Celta's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu.



SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of the Chattogram phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), news surfaced yesterday morning that Durbar Rajshahi players opted out of a scheduled training session owing to unpaid wages.

It gave rise to a crisis scenario, with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) having to call an emergency online meeting to mitigate the issue.

Before the tournament began, it was reported that none of the franchises had paid the required fifty percent of player salaries in advance, as per tournament bylaws.

Rajshahi players had also remarked during press events that they were hopeful the matter would be resolved in the coming days. But, according to sources close to the team, local players' cheques bounced recently, and the players chose

"Some payments were made, and the time by which local players were to receive payments has been pushed back by two days. Cheques did not bounce, or maybe one or two did. The owner is out of the country, and he was in Bangkok at that time, so there was an issue as he could not pick up the call."

Durbar Rajshahi team management source said under conditions of anonymity.



Amid the hubbub of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) players not receiving their due payments and Durbar Rajshahi cricketers canceling their practice yesterday over the matter, Khulna Tigers' skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz appeared to be in a pensive mood in their practice session in Chattogram yesterday. After a two-day break, the Chattogram phase of the BPL begins today with Khulna playing Chittagong Kings in the evening after Dhaka Capitals take on Fortune Barishal at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. [Bottom] Meanwhile, Barishal skipper Tamim Iqbal looked focused in practice, adamant to help his side bounce back to winning ways after they lost a heated encounter against Rangpur Riders in their last game in Sylhet.

PHOTO: BPL



not to attend yesterday's practice session scheduled for 10 am at M. A. Aziz Stadium.

"Some payments were made, and the time by which local players were to receive payments has been pushed back by two days. Cheques did not bounce, or maybe one or two did. The owner is out of the country, and he was in Bangkok at that time, so there was an issue as he could not pick up the call," a team management source said under conditions of anonymity.

BPL governing council member secretary and BCB director Najmul Abedeen Fahim could not be reached when contacted by The Daily Star.

There was no guarantee money paid by the franchises before the start of the tournament. Guarantee money ensures that players receive due payments from the BCB in case the franchises cannot pay them their dues.

Rajshahi are set to play Sylhet Strikers on Friday, and there are concerns that players would want to boycott the game.

"Yes, an emergency meeting was called to discuss the overall issue of players' payment and how to pay the due payments," a BCB source informed on the matter, adding that the majority of the clubs have not paid the players.

It could be surmised that the payments would have to come from the board. Asked whether there was a real possibility, a BCB source confirmed under conditions of anonymity that "the majority of the clubs haven't paid, and it's one hundred per cent possible BCB will have to pay from their own coffers."

With payment crisis looming over, the Chattogram phase opens today with Dhaka Capitals facing Fortune Barishal. Barishal coach Mizanur Rahman remains optimistic despite the departure of key players Shaheen Shah Afridi and Kyle Mayers, stating the team are "in good position". Dhaka, languishing at the bottom of the table, must secure strong results in their remaining five matches to keep playoff hopes alive.

In the second game, Chittagong Kings will face Khulna Tigers, with both teams eager to make an impact as the tournament heats up.

BRTC look to restore old pride

SPORTS REPORTER

While state-run organisations have turned their backs on the country's sports one after another, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) has decided to restore their old pride in football after applying for a club licence for the upcoming Bangladesh Championship League.

BRTC Sports Club once played in the country's top flight alongside giants like Mohammadan and Abahani and produced talented players like defender Ranjit, forward Prasenjit, midfielders Shamsuddin, Latu and Hare Krishna and forward Rizvi Karim Rumi in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, the club disappeared from the scene in 2014 after being relegated from the third division.

After a 10-year gap, the club is planning to come back to football through the second-tier, Bangladesh Championship League, and then plan to graduate to the top-tier football, a level where they last played in 2005.



Encouraged by BRTC chairman Md Tazul Islam, the club's president Dr. Anupam Saha is trying to give shape to their dream to restore the club's old pride.

"BRTC has reached a new high after overcoming financial issues. The financial condition of BRTC is now solid," Anupam told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are going to revive BRTC for two reasons -- one is to install passion among our sports-loving employees. The second is that we want to restore our old pride because BRTC once played against Mohammadan, Abahani, Brothers Union," said Anupam, also a director of BRTC (finance and operations).

The BRTC director also added that they would try to form their team within their capacity in a bid to qualify for the Bangladesh Premier League and will try to find potential players from among their 5000 employees.

The club's president also informed that they have already prepared a practice ground and dormitory for the players in Gazipur.

However, the participation of the club in the BCL depends on the BFF professional league management committee, which will finalise the number of teams from among 14 clubs that have applied for club licencing.

Out of the 14 clubs, five clubs -- PWD, Wari Club, NoFeL SC, Farashganj SC, Uttara FC as well as BFF Elite Academy participated in the last edition. The eight other clubs are: City Club, Dhaka Rangers, Little Friends Club, Samaj Kalyan Sangstha, BRTC, Victoria SC, Arambagh KS and Uttar Baridhara Club. The last two clubs were once punished for online betting.

BFF's professional league manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansar informed that they are working on club licencing to declare the number of participants as soon as possible, adding that the BFF plans to start the league in February.

Record-setting Djokovic trumps Federer

Novak Djokovic on Wednesday surpassed Roger Federer for the most Grand Slam singles matches played on his way into the Australian Open third round. The 37-year-old faced stiff resistance from fearless Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria before winning 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena to set up a clash with Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac. It was Djokovic's 430th Slam contest to claim sole ownership of most singles matches played, men or women, in the Open era ahead of Federer (429) and Serena Williams (423), with none playing 400 or more. "Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record," said Djokovic, who is into the third round in Melbourne for a 17th straight year.



PHOTO: REUTERS

'Outstanding' Liverpool deserved more: Slot

AFP, Nottingham

Arne Slot insisted Liverpool deserved to beat Nottingham Forest after the "outstanding" Premier League leaders needed Diogo Jota's equaliser to rescue a 1-1 draw against their title rivals.

Slot's side were rocked by Chris Wood's eighth-minute opener at the raucous City Ground.

But Jota came off the bench to head in fellow substitute Kostas Tsimikas' corner just 20 seconds after Slot sent on the pair in the 66th minute.

Although Liverpool had struggled to cope with Forest's intensity and rock-solid defending until Jota's leveller, they laid siege to the Forest goal in the closing stages.

It took a series of superb saves from Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels and a goal-line clearance from Ola Aina to ensure Nuno Espirito Santo's team held on.

"Their goalkeeper had to make a few incredible saves but their defenders also made some good blocks with quite a few chances. They blocked almost every shot," Slot said.

"I could not have asked for more. Second half was outstanding. There are not many

teams that can create so many chances against an opponent so defensively strong. Unfortunately, we couldn't get a second."

It was a pulsating clash that recalled the golden era when Liverpool and Forest won five European Cups between them from 1977 to 1981.

They were also both English champions during that period and, while Forest are unlikely to ever emulate the Brian Clough era, this tenacious display indicated a title challenge is not beyond them.

Forest had already beaten Liverpool 1-0 at Anfield in September -- the leaders' only



defeat in 20 league games -- and Slot needed no reminding of their qualities.

"To win games in the second half of the season is more difficult than in the first. Teams get used to playing you and they improve, they can even bring in new players or a new manager, and they fight for every point," Slot said.

Meanwhile, reigning champions Manchester City's resurgence came undone in a late collapse in west London as Brentford struck twice in the final 10 minutes for a 2-2 draw.

Phil Foden's double had City on course for a fourth consecutive win after a run of just one victory in 13 games.

However, the English champions' defending was not convincing all night and they were punished as Yoane Wissa and Christian Norgaard netted for the Bees.

Pep Guardiola will reflect on a missed opportunity to make up ground on the top four as City remain down in sixth, 12 points off the top.

Meanwhile, fourth-placed Chelsea's miserable run extended to five league games without a win after they salvaged a point in a 2-2 draw at home to Bournemouth.