

Evolved PSG plot Arsenal finish in Paris

AGENCIES

In a sport sometimes defined by individual brilliance and star power, PSG manager Luis Enrique is quietly reshaping the narrative as his side gear up for their Champions League semifinal return leg against Arsenal.

The Spaniard has introduced a distinct philosophy in the French capital, one where no individual rises above the collective.

The results have been telling. PSG find themselves on the verge of a place in the Champions League final, with a decisive clash against Arsenal at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday after prevailing 1-0, thanks to an Ousmane Dembele strike at the Emirates stadium last week following an impressive display of collective discipline.

Enrique arrived at PSG last season with a simple but firm mantra - No one head sticking out.

At a club historically synonymous with star players -- from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Neymar to Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe -- his refusal to build a side around individual talent raised eyebrows,



Ousmane Dembele's eight Champions League goals this season is only bettered by Zlatan Ibrahimovic in a single campaign for PSG (10 in 2013-14).

Arsenal could win five straight games away from home in major European competition for the first time in their history.

Arsenal have never progressed when losing the first leg of a European tie at home. PSG, however, have only been eliminated once when winning the opening meeting of a two-legged tie.

particularly as the team struggled in the early stages of their Champions League campaign.

"You cannot understand," he quipped

as an interviewer asked about his tactics during the league phase.

A string of unconvincing performances in the opening phase had indeed led

critics to question whether Luis Enrique's philosophy could succeed at a club where star power has so often overshadowed tactical cohesion.

Yet, months later, his approach appears vindicated. PSG have evolved into one of the most cohesive and tactically disciplined sides in Europe this season.

Central to their resurgence has been an emphasis on pressing as a unit and maintaining balance between attack and defence. The transformation is most evident in the midfield, once seen as a relative weakness, now operating with precision and control against some of the continent's elite.

PSG have already eliminated Premier League champions Liverpool in the last 16 and Aston Villa in the quarterfinals, after beating Manchester City in the group phase.

Arsenal, who have never won the Champions League, are on the brink of becoming PSG's latest English scalp this season. Their preparations for the second leg in Paris couldn't have gone much worse as they slumped to a 2-1 home defeat against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Saturday.

FIFA clears Shamit's Bangladesh switch

SPORTS REPORTER

Canada-based footballer Shamit Shome has been cleared to represent Bangladesh by FIFA yesterday, around a day after Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) sought the clearance.

The 27-year midfielder, who currently plays in Canada's Cavalry FC, is now available to play for Bangladesh in the upcoming Asian Cup qualifying match against Singapore at Dhaka on June 10. He is set to be Bangladesh's second high-profile foreign-based footballer after Hamza Choudhury.

"We have applied to FIFA for his clearance yesterday evening and got the nod from FIFA tonight (Tuesday)," BFF vice-president Fahad Karim told The Daily Star yesterday.

"It is also surprising to get FIFA approval within 24 hours. It has been possible because Shamit played two matches for Canada outside the FIFA window, so those two matches were not counted. Also, as his parents are Bangladeshi, it made things easy for FIFA."

"And, lastly, BFF president Tabith Awal kept in touch with the concerned department of FIFA," said Karim, adding that Shamit will leave for Bangladesh after playing his club's league fixture on June 1.

Shamit, who showed interest to play for Bangladesh in early April, had already acquired his Bangladeshi NID. He later applied for a Bangladesh passport, which is still being processed.

SHORT CORNER

Ronaldo's son called up by Portugal Under-15s

Cristiano dos Santos, the eldest son of five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo, was called up to the Portugal Under-15 squad for the first time on Tuesday. The 14-year-old, who, like his father, plays for Al-Nassr in Saudi Arabia, has also had spells with Ronaldo's former clubs Manchester United and Juventus.

Tunncliffe's 89 spoils emerging women's fightback in Chattogram

Faye Tunnicliffe's composed 89 spoilt Bangladesh emerging women's hopes of a winning start as their South African counterparts recovered from early trouble to claim a five-wicket victory in the first of three one-dayers in Chattogram on Tuesday. Despite reducing the visitors to 84-5 in the 26th over after having posted a subpar 179 all out in 47.5 overs, Tunnicliffe (89 off 118 balls) and Eliz Mari Marx (50 not out) shared an unbroken stand of 96 runs to steer the visitors past the finish line with 25 balls to spare. The two teams next meet tomorrow.

China celebrates Zhao's world snooker breakthrough

Zhao Xintong's stunning World Snooker Championship triumph went viral back home on Tuesday with trailblazer Ding Junhui leading the tributes to China's latest sporting superstar. The 28-year-old Zhao became the first Asian to win the prestigious title with an 18-12 victory over Mark Williams in the final at the Crucible in Sheffield on Monday. On Chinese social media platform Weibo the hash tag "Zhao Xintong wins world championship" had 120 million views as of Tuesday morning and was among the top-trending stories.

Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.

BCB hopeful about Taskin for SL tour

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is hopeful of getting experienced pacer Taskin Ahmed's services during the tour of Sri Lanka as the pacer is expected to regain match fitness by early June.

Taskin recently consulted with a team of medical specialists in London regarding his ongoing Achilles tendon issue, which ruled him out of the recent home Test series against Zimbabwe.

The pacer also wasn't considered for Bangladesh's upcoming T20I series against UAE and Pakistan due to the same issue.

Following a detailed evaluation by an ankle surgeon, a sports physician and a sports physiotherapist, the collective medical opinion has recommended non-surgical management of the condition at this stage.

"The specialists believe that a conservative, non-surgical approach is the best course of action for Taskin at this time. The rehabilitation programme is tailored to gradually restore his fitness and manage the tendon condition effectively. We are optimistic about his progress," BCB's senior physician Dr Debasish Chowdhury, who accompanied Taskin to London, was quoted in a media release.

"Taskin is expected to regain match fitness by early June, pending successful completion of his rehabilitation," the media release added Debasish as saying.

A comprehensive rehabilitation plan has been formulated and will be implemented under the supervision of the Bangladesh national team support staff, the press release said.

Bangladesh are set to tour Sri Lanka for a full-fledged series comprising two Tests, three ODIs and three T20Is in June, with the first match being a Test in Galle from June 17.

'A' team BCB's way to replenish pipeline

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh 'A' team are currently playing a series against New Zealand 'A', and the squad bears a strong resemblance to the national side, with many regular names featuring in the lineup.

Although the 'A' team is typically used to create a feeder system for the national team, many of the players involved have already been playing international cricket for a while and have been included for upcoming assignments, such as the T20Is against the UAE and Pakistan.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has been trying to implement a system where players struggling at the international level can get valuable game time and work on their deficiencies. However, inclusion of the likes of Anamul Haque Bijoy, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mosaddeq Hossain, or Nayeem Hasan may raise eyebrows -- with some arguing these players should already be established national team players.

Bijoy and Mosaddeq debuted in international cricket in 2012 and 2016, respectively. Whether they still merit places in the 'A' team is debatable, but their consistent performances in domestic cricket have kept them in the system.

In recent years, the 'A' team and High Performance (HP) unit assignments, along with their integration into the Bangladesh Tigers programme, have gained importance. Last year's tour

of Pakistan also saw many national team players feature in the 'A' team to prepare for the Rawalpindi Tests.

BCB officials have confirmed that the 'A' team and HP unit will play at least two series each year -- one at home and one away -- with plans finalised for the next three years. As the 'A' team is currently playing at home, the next assignment this year is scheduled to be a tour of Australia.

"There is an 'A' team tour of Australia in August, with two teams going there for four day matches and T20s in Darwin. The series is arranged to better prepare for the national team's tour of Australia in 2026. The plan is for the 'A' team to supply players directly to the national team," a BCB official said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Tigers programme will conduct training camps with selected players from the 'A' team and HP throughout the year.

'A' team head coach Mizanur Rahman Babul spoke yesterday in Sylhet about the importance of 'A' team matches in replenishing the pipeline.

"If you don't have matches for the 'A' team, who will fill those places [vacancies in the national team]? Every 'A' team player needs to be ready so that when a batter or bowler underperforms in the national team, those players will know there are others behind them ready to step up. The more 'A' team matches there are, the better it will help replenish the pipeline," Babul said.

It remains to be seen how much the 'A' team, or even the HP unit, can support the national team's cause, especially with many veterans having stepped away. However, it is high time to develop this current batch for international cricket as the BCB continues to seek consistency.



Stand fans to the rescue of table tennis tournament

NSC seeks Tk 12 crore for AC overhaul at Paltan indoor stadium

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) has reversed its decision to postpone the President's Cup Table Tennis tournament after players insisted on competing despite the non-functioning air-conditioning at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan.

Originally slated for May 15-19, the ranking and prize-money tournament will now take place from May 22 to May 25. To cope with the heat, BTTF plans to use stand fans as a substitute for air-conditioning at the venue, which was hastily constructed in 2009 ahead of the 2010 SA Games at a cost of nearly Tk 8 crore.

The Chinese air-conditioning system, installed for around Tk 2 crore at the time, has deteriorated significantly over 16 years. In contrast, the American-made system at Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur -- built before the 1993 SAFF Games -- continues to function smoothly after 32 years,

thanks to regular maintenance by a private company.

Unfortunately, no such maintenance arrangement was ever put in place for the Paltan indoor stadium.

"We have no alternative but to find a solution, even though it may be a complicated and lengthy process," National Sports Council (NSC) secretary Md Aminul Islam told The Daily Star.

"Our engineers have assessed the situation and concluded that a new air-conditioning system is needed, which would cost approximately Tk 12 crore," he informed further, adding that they are initiating the process of

presenting a strong investment case to the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Finance.

NSC planning and development director Azmul Haque said the air-conditioning issue was first identified in 2022. "We are seriously considering replacing the air-conditioning and plan to submit the final proposal by tomorrow [Wednesday], although securing funds this late in the fiscal year will be challenging," he said.

Haque expressed his optimism of installing new air-conditioning by next October if the proposal is approved by June.

BTTF general secretary Captain AM Maqsood Ahmed said, "The NSC is trying to repair the air-conditioning, though they once told us that the system was not recoverable. If they can't repair the air-conditioning, we will hold the tournament at the same venue using stand fans, as the players are very keen to play the tournament."

He informed that they are also considering starting the national camp at the same venue with stand fans if no alternative, such as Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium -- currently in use by other federations -- becomes available.

Meanwhile, an NSC engineer, seeking anonymity, informed The Daily Star that experts from four companies have already inspected the system and unanimously advised installing a new one, warning that repairs would only extend its life by a few months.

He also noted that NSC last repaired the system in June 2023, spending Tk 15 lakh to make 30 of 60 compressors operational by installing 16 new units.



Sinner 'happy to be back'

AFP, Milan

Jannik Sinner is the star of the show at the upcoming Rome Open, with the men's round beginning today, as the world number one and Italian tennis hero gears up for his return to the courts after a contested doping ban.

Away from the game since agreeing a suspension with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in February, Sinner was welcomed back to action on Monday by thousands of fans who watched his first training session at the tournament on centre court at the Foro Italico.

Such is the interest in Sinner, who has become a national hero in Italy since rising to the top of the men's game, that Sky Sport broadcast the practice match with world number 38 Jiri Lehecka live on television.

All eyes will be on the 23 year old as he hasn't swung a racket since retaining his Australian Open title in January, a victory which took his Grand Slam tally to three.

"I'm very happy, happy to be back here. It has been a very long, long three months," Sinner told reporters in a packed conference room inside the centre court.

Fans in Rome have waited two years to see Sinner play their clay court tournament after he missed last year's edition, won by Alexander Zverev, with injury.

It is on a surface which is not his favourite and his rustiness was clear to see on Monday.

However, he does have some time before he finally takes to the court, his status as the top-ranked player on the men's tour allowing him a bye into the second round that starts on Friday.

Sinner has been fortunate that none of his rivals took advantage of his enforced pause, with second-ranked Zverev still almost 2,000 points behind the man who beat him in the Australian Open final.

Meanwhile, Carlos Alcaraz is yet to arrive in Rome after withdrawing from the Madrid Open while Novak Djokovic will have to wait a bit longer for his 100th ATP title after deciding to sit out a tournament he has won six times.

Sinner is eyeing a run at the French Open, the second Slam of the season which follows the Rome tournament.

"My objective is Roland Garros, I'm here to see what level I'm at," said Sinner.

