



Bangladesh national hockey team players appear in a jolly mood as they walk off the athletics track at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday following a yo-yo fitness test. Even though they have been preparing for the Asia Cup for which they had originally failed to qualify, it was only yesterday that the confirmation came that Bangladesh will be playing in the continental competition instead of Pakistan, who have pulled out over security concerns.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Batters strive to add metres without changing basics

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batting effort in T20Is have lagged behind global standards over the years and the lack of power-hitting skills has often been talked about as the biggest reason.

In recent T20I series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan, both of which the Tigers won, batting efforts in Powerplay showed signs of improvement but middle and death overs remained a concern.

To deal with this issue, the Tigers have roped in power-hitting coach Julian Wood ahead of the Asia Cup.

The team has been undergoing a skill camp since August 15 and batter Jaker Ali Anik informed that Woods is trying to make changes within their game to help them add a bit more distance to their big shots.

"He is not trying to make us do anything different. Everyone is trying to get a grip on things from within their own pattern," Jaker said at the press conference.

"Those who are dependent on their timing, he has tried to improve that aspect. He didn't tell those reliant on timing to become power-hitters. It's about adding five to six metres of distance to the shots for players who are timing the deliveries. If that happens, then instead of getting out, those shots would go for six," he added.

Wood has often talked about bat swing, head position and hitting base as key areas of his work. But the end game is to get more power, which he had suggested was possible.

In his drills he uses the ProVelocity Bat, a specialised bat which forces batters to generate greater hand speed and helps with sequencing and mechanics when playing shots.

This unconventional bat has a barrel at the middle of it, which slides to the end when a shot is played, generating a click sound. The goal is to generate a double click sound, which indicates that the bat speed and other mechanics was up to the mark, while a single click indicates there is improvement to be made.

"It's a good feeling when you can get the sound [double click] that he is telling you to achieve. But it takes a lot of force to acquire that sound," Jaker said when asked about the ProVelocity bat.

Wood will next travel with the team for the Sylhet Camp beginning on August 20.



## Flooded field, lost smiles

SAHIDUL ISLAM, Jamalpur

Once alive with children's laughter and football matches, the lone playground of Chargolabari Government Primary School in Jorkhali union of Jamalpur's Madarganj upazila now resembles a stagnant pool.

According to locals and school authorities, this vital space remains waterlogged for nearly four months every year. Consequently, students are deprived of sports and physical activities, while residents who visit the Union Parishad office beside the field also face immense difficulties.

The importance of the field is undeniable, yet it still lacks a proper drainage system. As a result, even a brief spell of rain leaves it unusable for days. The situation is particularly disheartening because in 2023 Chargolabari Government Primary School became the champions of the National Gold Cup Football Tournament.

"We come to school, but the field is under water. Football practice has stopped," sighed Raihan, a fifth grader.

Parents watch with equal worry. With sports gone, Babul Sarkar noted, children now spend entire days on their phones. "If only there was drainage," he said, "they would return to play."

For Headmaster Shahinur Islam, the sight is especially bitter. "We were champions, yet today our children cannot even step onto their own field," he reminded.



address the waterlogging using funds from the union parishad and the district council. But the required amount exceeds our budget. It would be more effective if the project is undertaken by the Department of Primary Education Engineering."

For now, however, the children who once lifted a national trophy are left stranded – dreams of football glory drowned in the very field that once nurtured them.

AFH MEN'S ASIA CUP HOCKEY

## Bangladesh 'eager to cash in' after late lifeline

SPORTS REPORTER

Initially ineligible for the 2025 AFH Men's Asia Cup after finishing third in April's AFH Cup in Indonesia, the Bangladesh men's hockey team suddenly found themselves on the tournament roster. Pakistan's withdrawal just ten days before the August 28 start in Bihar, India opened the door for the red and green.

Despite the late call-up, the team's determination was already evident. At the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday, shadows stretched across the blue turf as a few floodlights from the National Stadium flickered on, yet the players pressed on, practising penalty corner conversions with utmost focus.

Anticipating the possibility of such an opportunity, the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) had already organised a 12-day fitness camp in July. The second phase of training began on August 10, blending preparation for the Asia Cup with the upcoming SA Games, ensuring the team could make the most of this unexpected chance.

"Actually, the players started the second-phase training cheerfully, by settling their minds to play the Asia Cup," head coach Moshir Rahman Biplob told The Daily Star after yesterday's training.

"They have also been giving extra effort in the training since it started last week. So, they knew that the opportunity would come. Now they are eager to take part in the tournament and want to cash in on the opportunity."

Despite this, the team enter the tournament with less preparation than usual, raising concerns over fitness. Most players are from

services teams, who focus on game skills rather than conditioning. A fitness test conducted yesterday confirmed that the squad has not yet reached the required physical standards, though the coaches are emphasising penalty corner conversions.

"If you don't have proper preparation, it is tough to survive in a big tournament. But mental readiness can help the team play with a fighting spirit," added the former national defender, who was the assistant coach during Bangladesh' AFH Cup campaign in Indonesia.

Asia Cup 2025: August 28 – September 8

Host: Rajgir, Bihar, India

Bangladesh's Asia Cup eligibility:

Received after Pakistan withdrew

Bangladesh squad: Ten U-21 players in 26-member squad

Of the 26-member preliminary squad, 10 are from the U-21 team preparing for November's FIH Junior World Cup, with four already experienced at the senior level. The 20-member final squad is expected to be announced today.

BHF general secretary Lt Col (Rtd) Riazul Hasan informed the federation expects government approval to travel to India and plans to apply for visas today, with the team set to fly to Kolkata on August 26.

For now, time is short but the stakes are high as the red and green chase glory on borrowed hours.

## Alonso promises action over words

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid manager Xabi Alonso said on Monday he wanted his team's performance on the pitch to do the talking for him as he begins his first LaLiga campaign at home against Osasuna on Tuesday.

Real, under Italian Carlo Ancelotti, finished four points behind LaLiga champions Barcelona and failed to retain their Champions League crown after a quarterfinal exit. They also lost the Copa del Rey final to bitter rivals Barca. Former Bayer Leverkusen coach Alonso has been charged with reviving a Madrid side that ended last season without a major trophy.

In the Club World Cup, which was Alonso's first competition as Real coach, they were knocked out by PSG in a 4-0 semifinal loss last month.

"I'm more about doing than talking," Alonso told reporters. "Making promises before you act doesn't usually work in football. Just saying it is not going to make it happen. We want to start down that path tomorrow."

Real will be without Antonio Ruediger (suspended) as well as injured left back Ferland Mendy, midfielders Eduardo Camavinga and Jude Bellingham plus forward Endrick. Right-back Dani Carvajal, who has come back from an ACL injury, was named in the squad.

## SHORT CORNER

Mueller's debut goal in MLS chalked off

Thomas Mueller made his Major League Soccer debut on Sunday as a second-half substitute for Vancouver Whitecaps in a 1-1 draw with Houston Dynamo that left the Germany great with "mixed feelings" after he had a goal disallowed for offside.

Lukaku to miss start of Napoli's title defence

Romelu Lukaku will miss Napoli's opening fixture of their Serie A title defence after suffering a thigh injury which could keep the Belgium striker out for months.

Neymar dejected after heavy loss

Philippe Coutinho scored two goals as Vasco da Gama secured a 6-0 victory over Santos in the Brazilian Serie A on Sunday, August 17, leaving Neymar with the worst defeat in his career.

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Team Red players celebrate a Team Green dismissal during a low-scoring opening match of the Women's Challenge Cup at BKSP-3 yesterday. Despite Nigar Sultana Joty's 78, Team Red were bowled out for 144 in 47.4 overs, while Team Green could only manage 112 in 40.1 overs in reply. The series is part of women's team's preparation for the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup, with boys' under-15 team being the other team of the series.



Vitinha celebrates with Nuno Mendes and Desire Doue after netting the winner as European champions PSG edged Nantes 1-0 in their Ligue 1 opener on Sunday night. Fresh from their UEFA Super Cup win over Tottenham Hotspur last week, Luis Enrique's side laboured early before substitutes Ousmane Dembele, Mendes, Achraf Hakimi, Doue, and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia shifted the momentum. Dembele's short corner found Mendes, whose cutback was controlled and then deflected in the 67th minute.

PHOTO: AFP