



Dooley’s first test reveals both promise and problems

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh football team are returning from Europe today with a historic 2-1 victory against San Marino – their first-ever win over European opposition and on European soil. Yet if the scoreline offered encouragement, the performance itself revealed why the new coach, Thomas Dooley, appears to be treating the victory more as a starting point than a destination.

For all the celebrations surrounding Topu Barman’s match-winning brace, Dooley’s post-match assessment focused as much on the result as on the flaws that continue to hold Bangladesh back.

That perhaps should not be surprising. When he was unveiled in Dhaka two weeks ago, Dooley did not talk about grinding out results, instead, he outlined an ambitious vision built around possession, positional play and proactive football.

“The foundation of my philosophy is that we do not run after the ball. Instead, we keep possession and put pressure on our opponents,” he said.

Against San Marino, there were signs of that philosophy. Bangladesh attempted to build from the back and dominate possession whenever possible. At times, the team looked more adventurous than it has in recent years.

But the match also exposed the gap between the football Dooley wants to play and the football Bangladesh are currently capable of producing.

The most obvious issue was efficiency in attack. Bangladesh created enough chances to win more comfortably but required a set-piece goal in the 86th minute to secure victory against the world’s lowest-ranked side.

“Our main weakness is that we still need a lot of chances just to score a goal,” Dooley admitted.

The absence of Rakib Hossain undoubtedly hurt. His replacement on the right flank, Rafiqul Islam, with Faysal Ahmed Fahim at the other end, struggled to provide a consistent threat and were both substituted shortly after the hour mark. The fact that Dooley eventually turned to defender Bishwanath Ghosh in an advanced role underlined his lack of attacking options on the bench.

Yet finishing was only part of the problem. Perhaps more concerning for a coach committed to possession football was Bangladesh’s inability to consistently retain the ball. Poor first touches, misplaced passes and cheap turnovers repeatedly disrupted promising moves.

Rather than blaming tactics or personnel, Dooley went straight to fundamentals.

“Sometimes, our first touch isn’t right. That’s why I have started practising very basic and fundamental things with the team – like perfecting passing and receiving,” he said.

The encouraging part for Bangladesh is that the coach believes those shortcomings are fixable.

“We need to change our mindset, then change our training patterns, and finally, change our style of play,” he said.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque had labelled San Marino as a test case for Dooley. In that sense, the German-American coach passed. But the greater significance of the match may be that it helped him identify exactly where Bangladesh stand – and how much work remains before his footballing vision becomes a reality.



Fresh election, familiar pattern

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Eight months after the last Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) election, the country’s cricket governing body is set to hold another board of directors’ election today. Yet despite a change in administration, the overall picture appears largely unchanged, making this another largely predictable and excitement-free contest.

Of the 23 director positions, eight have already been filled unopposed due to a lack of candidates.

Voting will be held in only two sub-categories – Category-1 (Khulna and Barishal), where five candidates are contesting for three positions, and Category-3, where 16 candidates are competing for 12 club representative posts.

As things stand, former national captain Tamim Iqbal, who currently heads the BCB’s ad hoc committee, appears set to be elected president for the next four-year term.

On October 6 last year, former captain Aminul Islam Bulbul was elected BCB president following a controversy-ridden election. However,

after Bangladesh’s political landscape shifted in February, the Aminul-led board survived for barely two months.

Following the change in government, the National Sports Council (NSC) formed a five-member probe committee to investigate alleged irregularities in the election process. Based on its findings, the NSC dissolved the Aminul-led board on

representatives. The development has also renewed concerns about the growing politicisation of cricket administration despite repeated calls to keep sports free from politics.

More significantly, many observers believe the committee paid little attention to implementing key recommendations made by the probe committee, whose findings

Ahsanul also voiced reservations about the e-voting system.

Similar to previous elections, 42 voters – including 39 from the club category – will cast their ballots electronically, a process that continues to draw criticism from stakeholders.

“Personally, I do not like e-voting, but many have requested it because it is allowed in the constitution. Their reasoning is that many voters are outside the country or find it difficult to travel to Dhaka,” he said.

Meanwhile, former BCB director Ahmed Sajjadul Alam argued that politicisation is not necessarily harmful if merit remains the primary consideration.

“If it weren’t for politics and political will, we wouldn’t have achieved things like ODI or Test status or received government cooperation,” Sajjadul said.

According to him, it is the attempt to “manipulate the process in order to consolidate power that ultimately undermines the system” and raises questions about its credibility.

A significant number of BCB councillors are linked to the current political establishment, while relatives of several top political leaders are also contesting the election, fuelling perceptions that political connections, rather than cricketing credentials, played a key role in securing these positions.

Furthermore, seven members of the 11-member ad hoc committee are running for director positions, with Minhajul Abedin already elected unopposed from Chattogram Division.

For many observers, the election looks less like a fresh start and more like another BCB poll wrapped in new packaging, with many of the same old issues still unresolved.



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April 7 and appointed an 11-member ad hoc committee headed by Tamim.

Apart from overseeing regular cricket operations, the committee was tasked with conducting a fresh, free, and fair election by July 6. From the outset, it appeared committed to holding the polls and completed election-related procedures nearly a month ahead of schedule. Critics, however, argue that the most important elements of its mandate – ensuring a free and fair election – have remained largely absent.

Like the previous board, the ad hoc committee has faced allegations of influencing the councillorship process by including preferred

paved the way for its appointment. Those recommendations included separating powers within the board, strengthening independent governance, and improving the technical integrity of the electoral process.

In fact, it is the BCB constitution that paves the way for outside influence to rear its head in the electoral process.

“I believe that the entire constitution needs to be revised. It has been structured this way for a long time,” Chief Election Commissioner Ahsanul Karim told The Daily Star, suggesting that substantial reform is needed.

Zverev bids to end Grand Slam near-misses

REUTERS, Paris

Alexander Zverev’s long pursuit of a maiden Grand Slam title has led him back to the threshold at a topsy-turvy French Open, where the German’s resolve will be tested by Italian dark horse Flavio Cobolli on Sunday.

Long blocked by the golden generation of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic, and more recently by young guns Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, the 29-year-old will hope his fourth trip to a major final turns into an overdue breakthrough.

After holder Alcaraz’s withdrawal and the early departures of Sinner and Djokovic reshaped the Roland Garros draw, second seed Zverev has capitalised with a calm surge through the field to earn his second Paris final appearance in three years.

Roland Garros has long held promise for Zverev, but it is also where his hopes have frayed,

from the brutal ankle injury that cut short his 2022 semifinal against Nadal to his defeat by Alcaraz in the 2024 final.

Zverev carries another near-miss into the French Open final after his loss to Sinner in the 2025 Australian Open final, but he now has a golden chance to finally get over the line with a



personal edge over his close friend Cobolli.

The 24-year-old Cobolli booked his place in the title clash after fellow Italian Matteo Arnaldi pulled out of their semifinal due to a viral illness, and the 10th seed will be the fresher player heading into Sunday’s clash.



PHOTO: BHF

Organisers pose with the sponsor jerseys during the announcement of the IHF Trophy 2026 at the Bangladesh Olympic Association auditorium yesterday. The five-day age-group international handball tournament will be held at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium in Dhaka from June 10, featuring six nations -- Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Yemen, Maldives and Afghanistan. The competition will be played in Under-18 and Under-20 categories under the Asian Zone II of the International Handball Federation.

How legends are redefining longevity

AGENCIES

The FIFA World Cup 2026 is set to celebrate something remarkable: longevity. Thanks to advances in sports science, recovery methods, nutrition, and individualized training, elite footballers are extending their careers longer than ever before. As a result, some of the sport’s greatest legends are preparing to compete in their fourth, fifth, or even sixth World Cup.

Among them are Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Guillermo Ochoa, who could make history by appearing in a sixth World Cup. Their continued presence reflects a broader transformation in modern football, where players are finding new ways to maintain peak performance well into their late thirties and beyond.

Paraguay’s Miguel Almiron exemplifies this commitment. He travels with a physiotherapist, begins recovery immediately after matches, and even has a treatment room at home. Argentina’s Rodrigo De Paul revealed that after training with Inter Miami, he and Messi often completed additional individualized fitness sessions to ensure they arrived at the World Cup in top condition.

Cristiano Ronaldo has long embodied this mentality. Known for his relentless discipline, he carefully manages his workload and recovery. At 41 years old, he continues to prove that elite performance is no longer limited by age alone.

According to Argentina fitness coach Luis Martin, modern preparation is increasingly personalised.



“Training programmes are becoming increasingly tailored to the individual. Every player is different.” Clubs now monitor performance data closely, helping players train smarter and avoid unnecessary strain.

The list of returning veterans is impressive. Neymar, Son Heung-min, Luka Modric, Manuel Neuer, Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku, Nicolas Otamendi, Fernando Muslera, and Yuto Nagatomo are all aiming for another World Cup appearance. Nagatomo, now 39, admitted, “I know I’ve already been to four World Cups, but I’ve never felt as nervous as I do now.”

After Japan’s elimination in Qatar 2022, Nagatomo considered retiring from international football. However, watching the dramatic Argentina-



France final reignited his ambition. “I said to myself, ‘Why can’t I aspire to that too?’” Despite injuries and setbacks over the following years, he recovered in time and kept his World Cup dream alive.

Fitness expert Javier Valdecantos believes the explanation is simple: “The way players train has changed.” He points to major scientific breakthroughs over the last 15 years. In the past, training relied heavily on tradition and experience. Today, clubs measure nearly every aspect of performance, allowing them to identify harmful practices and optimise recovery.

Nutrition has become equally important. Athletes now follow carefully planned diets based on their



training demands, recovery needs, and energy expenditure. Valdecantos notes that modern players understand exactly how many calories, carbohydrates, and proteins they need after specific workouts. “It’s remarkable how much science goes into training these days. That’s why players are still going strong at 40.”

Messi, preparing for his sixth World Cup, remains driven by the same love for the game that has defined his career. “I love playing football and I’ll keep doing it for as long as I can,” he said.

The 2026 World Cup will showcase more than star power. It will stand as a testament to resilience, adaptation, and careers built to last – proof that in modern football, greatness can endure longer than ever before.

TOUGHLINE

Iran slams US ‘discriminatory treatment’ over visa refusals

Iran on Saturday slammed World Cup host the United States over what it called “discriminatory treatment” in not granting visas for some members of the Iranian delegation to the tournament. “Why do you not say that visas were denied to a large portion of the managerial and executive staff, technical advisers, and others who are an integral part of any national football team?” the Iranian embassy in Turkey said in a post on X, referring to an earlier announcement by US envoy Tom Barrack that visas had been granted to players.

France to lift World Cup trophy, Brazil to flop: economists say

France will beat Spain to lift the World Cup trophy and five-times winners Brazil are expected to be the biggest flops, according to a Reuters survey of economists who said football was still harder to call than inflation. For 160 respondents from around the globe, this poll conducted once every four years is a welcome break from their macroeconomic forecasting in an era of wars, energy shocks and revived “transitory” versus persistent inflation debates. Their brief this time is the biggest World Cup yet – a 48-team tournament spanning 104 matches across the United States, Canada and Mexico – the first staged in three countries.

Germany starlet Karl ruled out of World Cup

Teenage Germany forward Lennart Karl has been ruled out of the World Cup after sustaining an injury in training, the German Football Federation (DFB) said on Friday. “Lenny tore a muscle bundle today in the final training session and is ruled out because of this injury. Have a good recovery, we’re thinking of you,” the DFB said on Instagram.

