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SPORT

Ex-keeper eyeing No 9 spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Rafayel Tudu has made a habit of making an impact when it matters, even if his opportunities have been limited. The Fortis FC forward scored in consecutive AFC Challenge League matches after coming off the bench, adding to a return of two goals and an assist in three Bangladesh Football League (BFL) appearances this season, all as a substitute.

Having come a long way from his days as a goalkeeper, the 25-year-old now wants to turn those cameos into a regular starting role and eventually claim Bangladesh's No 9 spot.

Rafayel came on in the 91st minute against Al Qadsia, but made his mark in the next two matches. He scored in the 78th minute against FC Goa to draw Fortis level at 1-1, before they eventually lost 2-1. Against Regar-TadAZ, he entered at the start of the second half and found the net again as Fortis secured their first win in the main stage of the competition.

"I do not want to remain a substitute throughout my career. I want to play in the starting XI," Rafayel told The Daily Star over



the phone from his village home on Monday.

His path to becoming a forward was anything but conventional. The player from Amtalipara village in Godagari, Rajshahi, began training as a goalkeeper at Rajshahi Kishore Football Academy around 2018. After moving to Dhaka in 2020-21 to join Victoria Sporting Club in the Bangladesh Championship League, he found himself third or fourth in the goalkeeping pecking order, with few chances to play.

Back in Rajshahi, he began featuring as a striker in local tournaments and kept asking his academy coach to give him a chance up front. A goal against the academy's team in a local tournament eventually persuaded the coach to make the switch permanent.

The gamble paid off at Fakirerpool in the 2023-24 season. After missing his first few matches, Rafayel scored four goals against Uttara FC and went on to finish as the Championship League's top scorer and best player. Fakirerpool won the title and earned promotion to the Bangladesh Premier League, now known as the BFL. Rafayel subsequently moved to Mohammedan before joining Fortis, where he has found a platform to test himself against opposition from across Asia.

The recent goals have showcased his attacking instincts, though he is clear-eyed about what he needs to improve.

"Moving forward, finding attacking positions and finishing chances are among my strengths. I am comfortable in one-on-one situations with the goalkeeper, and physical contests and pressing do not trouble me much," he said. "My first touch needs improvement. Sometimes I could control the ball better and move more quickly."

Rafayel was disappointed not to be included in Bangladesh's preliminary squad for the SAFF Championship, as a call-up would have made him only the third player from the Santal community, after Hemanta Vincent Biswas and MS Bablu, to be called up for the men's senior national team. However, he says the omission will not distract him from his work.

"I would have liked an opportunity, but I will remain prepared and keep working. I will also support Bangladesh because it is my country," he said.

For Rafayel, the ambition extends beyond securing a place in the starting XI at club level. He wants to become the centre-forward Bangladesh have been searching for.

"I believe Bangladesh need a proper centre-forward, and I want to fill that gap. If I get an opportunity on merit, I want to help end the country's goal-scoring problems."



PHOTO: AFP

Real reign supreme in Clasico

Kylian Mbappe stole the show with a brace to hand Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid a 2-1 El Clasico win over LaLiga leaders Barcelona at Camp Nou yesterday. The French superstar struck just before the interval and buried a late winner to cancel out Raphinha's equaliser, inflicting Barca's first domestic defeat of the season and slashing the title gap to just three points. The victory leaves third-placed Real on 24 points from 10 matches, hot on the heels of Atletico Madrid (25) and Hansi Flick's pacesetters (27). It caps a brutal week for a surprisingly subdued Barca. After a flawless nine-game league start and claiming six of the last seven Clasicos under Flick, the Catalans have now suffered back-to-back losses following Tuesday's Champions League stumble against PSG.

■ **107** Both teams entered with 106 Clasico wins each, but Real moved ahead with their first win at Spotify Camp Nou since October 2023, having won just one of their previous six Clasicos. In LaLiga Clasicos, Real lead 81-76, with 35 draws.

■ **100** Mbappe's brace took his Real tally to 100 goals. He reached the mark in 116 games, the fourth-fastest after Ferenc Puskas (100), Cristiano Ronaldo (105), Alfredo Di Stefano (114) and Pahino (114).

■ Jose Mourinho is unbeaten in his last six Clasicos (W4 D2), dating back to his previous Real spell. Only Miguel Munoz (seven, 1962-65) and Vicente del Bosque (seven, 2001-03) have managed longer unbeaten runs among Real coaches.

■ Yamal missed a glaring first-half chance to equalise and failed to score with any of his five shots. He created no chances and completed 76.6% of his passes (47/76).

■ **13** Raphinha's 60th-minute equaliser was his 13th goal in nine LaLiga games, matching Lionel Messi's 2012-13 tally. Only Cristiano Ronaldo, with 17 in 2014-15, scored more in his first nine games of a LaLiga season.



The way we won is also important because you can win with luck and by defending a lot. We won calmly and with full merit.

JOSE MOURINHO, Real Madrid coach



Australia captain Pat Cummins steps out for training at Newlands, the venue of the infamous Sandpapergate scandal in 2018, ahead of a high-stakes third and final Test against South Africa starting today. With the series locked at 1-1 following the hosts' emphatic innings victory in Gqeberha, the decider carries immense weight. South Africa can claim the world №1 Test ranking with a win, while a draw is enough for the visitors to retain their crown. As Australia sweat on Steve Smith's fitness and prepare to recall Cameron Green, South Africa will unleash fiery paceman Gerald Coetzee.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Shoriful fetches highest price in D3 auction

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pacer Shoriful Islam fetched the highest price among Category A players at the D3 Trophy Player Auction, with Citizens Bank securing his services for 2.3 crore points at a city hotel on Monday.



Pacer Taskin Ahmed was snapped up by Walton Group for 2.1 crore points, while Fortune secured several national team players, including opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim for two crore points, batter Najmul Hossain Shanto for 1.55 crore, all-rounder Soumya Sarkar for 75 lakh and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain for 60 lakh.

All-rounder Mahedi Hasan joined Blue Star for 1.6 crore points, while Walton Group signed wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das for 1.55 crore.

Seven Rings Cement secured left-arm spinner Taijul Islam for 80 lakh points and left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman for 70 lakh, while wicketkeeper-batter Jaker Ali joined Citizens Bank for 1.8 crore.

All six teams completed their squads, each comprising 22 players recruited through the auction and one icon player.

Players will receive match fees in line with the Bangladesh Cricket Board's domestic structure: Tk 1.5 lakh per four-day match, Tk 1 lakh per one-day match and Tk 80,000 per T20 fixture.

Each team had a budget of 10 crore points, taking the combined auction purse to 60 crore. A total of 275 players were listed for the auction.

The six teams will compete across three formats in 42 matches: seven four-day games, 16 one-day matches and 19 T20 fixtures.

The T20 tournament is scheduled to begin in Barishal on December 15, followed by the four-day and one-day competitions in January and May next year, respectively.

Chaos building towards a perfect storm?



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket cannot seem to escape chaos. Although the Test team have reasons for optimism ahead of the home series against West Indies, beginning tomorrow, a turbulent buildup has left them with plenty to address before the first ball is bowled.

"Is this the first time there's chaos before a match?" Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons asked with a wry smile when questioned about the buildup to the two-match series yesterday.

Batting coach Mohammad Ashraful had attended a session on Saturday, only to be discontinued by evening. The sudden axing came on the back of Bangladesh's faltering batting in the recent ODI tri-series in the UAE, which had already cost them momentum ahead of their red-ball assignments. More troubling, however, is the debate over players' accountability and dedication that has followed the tri-series.

The Tigers' Test side, on the other hand, had been on a high, despite a slightly deflating draw in the one-off Abu Dhabi Test against Afghanistan. Yet the squad had been unable to prepare together before the crucial Mirpur Test, as the World Test Championship (WTC) campaign gathers pace.

"Every series is important," Simmons said. "Those that we were playing at the start of these two years were important too. But the thing is how we go about our business, our preparation for the series."



"No! It's definitely not like last year."

West Indies head coach **DARREN SAMMY** said with a hearty laugh when The Daily Star reminded him of the black wickets that grabbed attention during their white-ball tour of Bangladesh last year.

Following the second Test in Sylhet, Bangladesh will travel to Johannesburg to face South Africa six days later in another WTC assignment, leaving little time between matches to prepare for the upcoming challenges. "It's not what's happening outside, it's what we do as a team to prepare," added the former West Indies coach.

The players had met Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Tamim Iqbal in the UAE after the defeat against Zimbabwe. On Sunday, Tamim again sat down with five national team players, with a few members of the team management also present.

"I was there." Simmons said. "The meeting was more about the things we need to put together to push Bangladesh cricket forward."

With the team in form in the red-ball format, the focus on broader development ahead of a Test series raised questions. The Bangladesh coach, however, dismissed concerns that the meeting had been a distraction "because it was not about the series".

The Tigers will be without Nahid Rana for the first Test. The push for results in Zimbabwe had already cost them the services of the express pacer. His absence could make the South Africa Tests considerably harder, but team management, still harbouring hopes of securing Rana's services, may take risks that only add to the uncertainty.

Litton Das, meanwhile, has yet to receive clearance for the series opener, leaving another question mark, although Simmons understands the wicketkeeper-batter is available.

A perfect storm may be brewing, threatening to engulf Bangladesh as it has in the past, particularly at ICC events. Whether they can keep their heads above water will depend on how they navigate the mounting distractions and respond when the Test series gets underway.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
Pakistan ODI Tri-Series
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
Live from 2:00 pm

SONY SPORTS 1
New Zealand vs India
3nd T20I
Live from 1:00 pm

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