

Football fraternity questions timing of Bayern Munich showpiece

Is it necessary for Bayern Munich to play a show match against Mohun Bagan at this peak summer in Kolkata? That's the question being asked, and not many are convinced that it's the right time for such a shallow extravaganza.

The match is being played at a time when the national team is preparing for a tough international season ahead and as part of its preparation for the SAFF Cup and the AFC Challenge Cup they will be playing a Chinese Taipei side in a friendly in [Chennai](#) on the day Bayern are playing.

An official of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), not wishing to be named, said the Bengal Peerless have sunk Rs.100-150 million to organise the match but wondered what was the use of 'such meaningless show matches when it is not going to take Indian football even an inch forward'.

Mohun Bagan captain Bhaichung Bhutia is also not happy about the timing of the match. Though he is not playing for his club as he is on national duty, he wondered how the club could think of organising a game during off season when its key players are not available.

'It is off season here and, moreover, the national camp is going on. I don't think this is the right time for playing such a big match. The only benefit is that people will get to see some star players like Oliver Kahn,' Bhaichung told IANS.

The national captain also said even Mohun Bagan players were not prepared to take on Bayern without being match-fit as they have not been training, this being off-season. The players joined practice camp only May 15.

'Even our new coach Karim Bencherifa hasn't joined the camp and a ten-day work-out is not enough to take on a world-class club like Bayern,' he said.

Bhaichung does not see any logic in spending such a huge amount on a one-off match, an amount with which the Nehru Cup could have been organised for five years.

National coach Bob Houghton is also against the idea of playing the match around this time. People close to him say that he sees it as a 'joke' and he has refused to release the national players of the club for the game. 'I am not interested in such a stupid concept and in the match,' he is reported to have said.

AIFF vice-president Subroto Dutta, however, feels there will be some positives coming out of the match.

'It will popularise the game more and would help us to know where we stand. Also, it will help us to understand how to run a football club successfully as a marketing entity,' he said.

Dutta, however, agreed that these sporadic attempts to bring big teams to play would hardly do any good for the sport in the country.

'But if we can streamline these ventures, there could be a sustainable growth in future, but mere hype will take us nowhere,' he said.

Organisers Bengal Peerless maintained that they are organising the match to create an interest in football.

'We hope our efforts will create an interest in football. And more corporates will come in to support the game,' said Kumar Shankar Bagchi, director, Bengal Peerless.

Abhishek Roy (© IANS / India eNews)