

Pakistan Hockey Federation plays musical chairs

In spite of the Beijing Olympics being just seven months away, the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) seems to have gone into the musical chairs mode, swapping two key posts by appointing Olympian Islahuddin Siddiqui the new chief selector and naming Khawaja Zakauddin as manager-cum-chief coach.

PHF chief Zafarullah Jamali announced the changes Wednesday but he didn't specify why Islahuddin had been removed as manager-cum-chief coach.

'Islah met me recently and said he will voluntarily resign if I ask him, but I told him to serve as chief selector instead of manager. But it is not because I don't have trust in Islah's capabilities as manager. Zaka is a senior person and I don't want to break the continuity from the Champions Trophy,' Jamali was quoted as saying by the Dawn here Thursday.

Zakauddin, who had served as chief selector since April 2007, was named as a makeshift team manager for last year's Champions Trophy following an injury to Islahuddin.

Asked what had compelled the changes at this late stage, Jamali said: 'I agree that I had told Islah that he will be back after recovering from his injury. But I want Zaka to continue with the current job as he is more senior. Sometimes in sports one has to play a gamble.'

While Jamali disagreed that it was team's poor performance that led to Islahuddin's removal as manager, 'it is obvious that the ex-captain's ordinary performance in the job had triggered the switch', Dawn said.

Pakistan finished seventh in the eight-nation Champions Trophy held in Kuala Lumpur in Nov-Dec last year. The tournament was originally to have been held at Lahore but was shifted out due to security concerns.

Asked if the PHF had taken him into confidence about the change, Islahuddin retorted: 'It is better if you put this question to Mr Jamali'.

There was a similar reply from him when asked why Jamali had not reinstated him as manager-cum-coach after his recovery from an ankle injury.

At the same time, the former Pakistan captain confirmed that he had accepted Jamali's decision.

'Both jobs have their own importance. It is the decision of PHF president which I have accepted,' Islahuddin maintained.

On his part, Zakauddin refused to comment on whether he would be interested in continuing as manager after the Olympics.

'I have been asked to continue as manager and that's it. All I know is that my tenure is till the Olympic Games,' he maintained.

In other decisions taken by Jamali, former PHF secretary Mudassar Asghar has been appointed a

selector in place of Abdul Rashid who has quit due to personal commitments, while former Olympian Samiullah has been retained as a selector.

'Mudassar's choice appears to be a bit odd as, apart from his suspect reputation as a former PHF official, he and Islah have never seen eye to eye,' Dawn noted.

Islahuddin, however, didn't agree with this, saying: 'I never had problems with Mudassar when I was the manager during his tenure as PHF secretary'.

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