

Dhaka, June 15: The day begins sharp at 7 as the Under-16 girls take to the pitch for their training. The two-hour session is either at the Kamalapur turf or the BFF turf adjacent to the BFF headquarters in Dhaka.

Recently Krishna Rani and company have seen their regime become tougher with more exercises and training keeping the AFC U17 Women's Championship in Thailand in September in mind. The AFC finals also double as World Cup qualifiers, and hence the added importance.

The morning session includes movement patterns, sprinting, running and a brief match play.

BFF officials take keen interest in the development of this promising squad. Most of them are always at hand when the girls are out training. Head coach Golam Rabbani Choton, assistant coach Mahbubul Alam Litu, technical director Paul Smalley, head of fitness & conditioning John Whittle and goalkeeping coach Ryan Sandford have almost become fixtures around the U16 girls.

With most of them busy training with the girls, Mahbubul Alam Litu finds a moment's respite to explain the session. As repeat sprint ability, maximum velocities, accelerations, decelerations and changing directions are key to modern football, Litu explains that John Whittle 'tries to break the elements down and work on them separately as pieces of a comprehensive training programme'.

The new regimen does not only develop athleticism to enhance performance in the field, but also makes the girls more resistant to injury, observed Litu. With the introduction of the training and nutrition regime, the fitness of this team has improved dramatically over the last few months. The improvement has become more visible since they started training thrice a day.

Captain of the team, Krishna said the girls had taken quite well to the new workout regime.

"Yes, we like it. Our coaches have briefed us on how the new menu is healthier for our fitness

and now after several weeks, we can really see the difference,” said Krishna Rani Sarker. The assistant coach is both a parent and a friend. “He checks up on us all the time and makes sure we have what we need.”

The young footballers are now being trained to run less distance but sprint more. The mercury hovered around 32-34 degrees Celsius by the time the youngsters headed back to BFF House at 9AM. The girls get about a couple of hours to rest before their customised rehabilitation sessions. It is just enough to grab a quick bite, take a shower and a short nap.

This is almost the first time during their day that the girls, who now form the core of Bangladesh’s senior women’s team, get time to relax, which is evident with the constant giggle from their dorms. And as it happens everywhere, the U16 team has not only turned into a close-knit playing unit but has also become like their second family with strong bonds. They know each others’ habits, hobbies, obsessions and fears. So much so that Masura can tell what Nazma’s favourite food is, everyone knows how Rumki gave up on cricket and became an avid football fan. Uncanny though it may seem, the whole team actually idolises a single popstar — Imran Mahmudul. And they all fawn over the same actor — Tollywood’s Dev.

The Under-16 women have started putting together a plan for the upcoming Eid ul-Fitr when they present small skits and bits of song and dance at the BFF House. They often perform little scenes from recent films at festivals like Pahela Baishakh, Eid or Puja.

The entire team has customised programmes from 11-12pm, which include rehabilitation sessions. “These sessions are designed for the physical and physiological development of players,” said Paul Smalley.

The girls then join the core and flexibility sessions that start at noon. This fatiguing workout lasts another hour followed by a brief 15-minute break. At 1.15, the girls start their third session till 2.15 before calling it a day.