

Bethlehem, July 17: The Bangladesh boys are mentally prepared for the challenge of AFC U23 Championship qualifiers tournament set to kick-off on July 19.

It will begin with the homeboys facing off with Asian heavyweights Jordan in the opening match.

Bangladesh's other opponents in Group E are Tajikistan and hosts Palestine.

Considering the current situation, Coach Andrew Ord said, "Bangladesh have never won a game at this U23 tournament level. So, our goal is to create history and bring a victory back."

Asked about the team strategy, Ord said, "We will chiefly adopt a counter attacking strategy with a compact midfield."

Reminded of the 3-0 loss to Qatar while applying the same strategy, the newly appointed head coach said, "Yes, we did lose 3-0 but we limited Qatar to very few chances in the first half as well as breaking away dangerously sometimes ourselves."

Implying that the team played good football with the counter-attacking strategy despite the loss, he said, "You have to remember that Qatar have some excellent players. They have all the resources money can buy and were very well prepared. They had played in a very competitive tournament before the game and when we lost concentration or got tired, they punished our mistakes."

"In the 2nd half, we actually pushed them back for 20 minutes and trapped Qatar in their own half but they produced a move or real class and quality to score the 3rd goal and that is what

separates us from countries of this level at the moment," added Ord, while reiterating the team's gradual improvement.

Talking about the team combination, Ord said that he is still evaluating his players each day and can only finalize the playing eleven before the match.

"Every game we play, I get to know the players a little better which is helpful. However, the improvement of the players' fitness level will be a factor for the best eleven."

Asked about the importance of the two practice matches played before the main tournament, Ord said, "The two games have been vital. Without them, we would have had no chance in Palestine."

"We beat the champions of Bangladesh (Dhaka Abahani Ltd.) and controlled the game but now, we are outside in the real football world. I'm sure we will improve from these games. It's the only way to test yourself against higher level opponents," added the English-born Aussie.

After arriving in Bethlehem, Palestine, the team manager said, "Finally we are in Palestine. The players will adjust with the conditions and prepare for the game on the 19th."

Assistant coach Roksy said, "The team is now mentally prepared to face the challenges of this AFC Championship qualifying round. From today, our main mission starts and we are fully focused. We seek blessings from Bangladesh."

Bangladesh will square off against Jordan in their first match of the qualifier tournament at 7:30pm Bangladesh time on July 19.