

Dhaka, July 24: The national head coach Andrew Ord stressed on youth development and physical fitness after Bangladesh lost all three games of the AFC U23 Championship qualifier round in Palestine.

He said the unsatisfactory result only emphasizes the need for solid youth development for Bangladesh's future in football.

Ord, who is also in charge of the national U23 team called for a sustainable youth development master plan centering around physical and professional development for the betterment of football.

While commenting on his team's 7-0, 3-1, and 3-0 defeats against group mates Jordan, Tajikistan and Palestine respectively, Ord said the team needed to do much more. "At the moment, Bangladesh is nowhere near competitive competence in the international arena."

Reiterating his position on physical fitness, Ord said, "Giving it all will not make a difference when you are not physically fit for the professional level."

Ord mentioned that in the first match, the stronger Jordan side managed to take advantage of the Bangladesh team's lack of experience and performance in the international arena, which resulted in the 7-0 defeat.

However, Ord blames fitness and lack of concentration for the defeat against Tajikistan and Palestine in the final two matches. He comments that the 3-1 defeat against Tajikistan proves that there cannot be good results despite giving full effort if the players are not physically fit. "The lack of concentration in the match against Palestine made us concede two goals from set pieces, which is an area we covered a lot in practice."

Ord hoped the youngsters would remember the lessons from this campaign in future, and urged them to be more responsible in international football.

When asked what Bangladesh needs to do at the international level, Ord said that he was surprised at the lack of physical fitness of the boys when he first saw them. "I was shocked at their fitness levels. It is not the federation's job to get the players fit. As a national team coach, you get very little time with the players. You cannot design tactics and make the players fit all at once."

Ord lets out his frustration over fitness, citing that a goalkeeper had to be relieved during a game due to a cramp, a scenario which he has never seen before. "The training and professional exposure of the players is not acceptable at the moment. This has to be fixed if we want to compete against stronger opponents."

He added that Bangladesh is now in a constant cycle of losing matches, which has affected the team's morale. "The boys think they will lose a match even before starting it. This has to change. Bad practices yield bad results under pressure. Long term youth development needs to start now."

Aside from changing current practice, coach Ord has emphasized on young talent hunting and nurturing for better results. He commented that the pool of match winners and game changers are far too small in Bangladesh at the moment as there is no solid youth development. "We need to put time, effort and resources into developing players properly which will not only improve the national team but make the clubs stronger. Then you get into a cycle that will benefit everyone."

Ord agrees that there is no quick way to the top. According to him, players need to be nurtured and trained for professional football from their youth so that they can compete against stronger nations in international football. "It was just a qualifying tournament. The level is much higher as you progress to the next stage. Youth player development is the key."