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Coach Habas Stays Calm As ATK Are Desperate For Turnaround

It's quite ironical that two teams that played the final in the inaugural edition of ISL, Atletico de Kolkata and Kerala Blasters, are lying in the bottom half of ISL points table when they cross swords against each other at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Tuesday. Blasters are at the rock bottom with eight points from eight matches while ATK are placed slightly better at sixth place with 10 points from eight games. But a win will see both teams clawing their way back in the points table as not much separate them from the top-four teams in the league.

ATK hold a slight advantage over Blasters going into the game as they have beaten the Kerala side on the last two occasions they have met. They defeated Blasters 2-1 earlier in the season in front of Brazilian legend Pele in Kolkata. But since then ATK have lost four of the five games they have played and don't look a confident unit.

On the other hand, Blasters seem to be on a revival path. After going winless in six matches, Blasters made a strong statement by posting an impressive 2-0 win over FC Pune City. "We are not the same team anymore. We play different formation and different combination and more important we are high on confidence," striker Sanchez Watt told TOI indicating the upbeat mood in Blasters camp.

But assistant coach Trevor Morgan didn't want to undermine the task on hand for his boys. "It's true that the players are high on confidence after the win against Pune. But they should be aware that each game is different and ATK is a tough opponent. The speciality of ISL is that any team can defeat any opposition. It means that we can beat any team but at the same time any other team can beat Blasters too. So I want my players to be extra careful on Tuesday," he added.

ATK coach Antonio Habas said that there was no reason for his side to panic. "ATK and Blasters have been in similar positions this season. Kerala want to win right now and we also want to win. We are the two finalists last season. Both of us need a win. But we have the time to recover and secure top position. We just need to be calm and not be nervous," said ATK coach Habas.

Blasters will miss the services of Sandesh Jhingan and Cavin Lobo who have already left to join India's preparatory camp for the World Cup qualifier against Guam on November 12. Blasters defender Gurwinder Singh has not regained his full fitness and it is learnt that Joao Coimbra has an upset stomach which makes him a doubtful starter.

But the biggest threat for the Kerala side may come from someone who was the toast of Blasters fans last season, Iain Hume. The Canadian will be keen to enthrall the fans in Kochi on Tuesday but this time in ATK jersey. But the Kerala side doesn't seem to be unduly worried about Hume. "Every opposition player is important. We have played against Mendoza (Chennaiyin FC). There is no point in preparing a special plan for a particular player," Morgan said. Hume will be once again the focal point of ATK's attack though all his goals in ISL this season came in one game against Mumbai City FC.



Iain Hume (centre) and his teammates during Atletico de Kolkata's practice session at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Kochi on Monday