

*The women's football players yesterday gathered for their first training to aim at a berth in the finals of the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 and further a slot in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.*



Deputy captain Nguyễn Thị Tuyết Dung says the door is open for Việt Nam to qualify for the 2022 Asian Cup but they still need to focus to win every match in the qualification tournament in September. Photo courtesy of VFF

HÀ NỘI — Việt Nam's women's football team trained together for the first time yesterday. The team is aiming to secure a berth in the finals of the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 and further a slot in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Head coach Mai Đức Chung has picked 34 players who he believes performed the best in the national cup and the U19 and U21 tournaments in 2020 and 2021.

"My players come from six clubs and are both experienced and young. Among them are Đặng Thị Mai and Lê Thị Thùy Trang who have joined the national squad for the first time," Chung told Việt Nam News.

"Veterans Trần Thị Thùy Trang and Phạm Hoàng Quỳnh, who left my team a couple of years ago for different reasons, have come back. Hà Nam's Quỳnh is a skilled midfielder while Trang, despite her age, is still an active and stable midfielder for HCM City."

"I have also called up young faces like Trần Thị Duyên and Đặng Thị Vân who have just recovered from injuries, to test their abilities," Chung said.

There are 28 teams playing in the qualifiers divided into eight groups.

Viet Nam, world No 32, are in Group B with hosts Tajikistan, ranked 135; the Maldives, ranked 144; and Afghanistan, ranked 152. Matches will be held in mid-September.

After a two month break, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, coach Chung has a lot of work to do.

"We will watch the players practice first and adjust our exercise program if needed. Then, I will arrange matches for them to practise. I hope that they will get inspired and make it difficult for me to choose the final list for the tournament," said the 71-year-old who is for the first time being assisted by fitness coach Cedric Serge Christian Roger from Germany.

Viet Nam has a higher world ranking compared to their rivals but Chung is still cautious.

"Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Maldives are foreign to us. We have never played a West Asian team yet. I think that they have also received a lot of support to develop."

"They stand far below us but don't think it will be easy to beat them. I am doing my research and have asked my players to try their hardest every time. We must get a good result to qualify for the finals."

Deputy captain Nguyễn Thị Tuyết Dung confirmed her team's determination at the coming Cup.

"We are all affected by the pandemic which has prevented us from competing. However, we kept practising within the club's centre to retain our physique and technique," she said.

"In this competition, coaches combine a team of seniors and juniors. We will be a united team and pay attention to all of the qualifiers. We have a high chance to advance to the finals but we respect all of our rivals and will try to defeat them one by one," she told Việt Nam News.

The winning team from each group will clinch a place in the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022, scheduled to take place from January 20 to February 6.

Defending champions Japan, 2018 runners-up Australia, and third-placed China PR, as well as hosts India, have already qualified.

Following this, the top five teams will go on to represent Asia, along with hosts Australia, at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

"We aim at the top place of the group to qualify for the Asian Cup before securing a ticket to the World Cup," said Việt Nam Football Federation Vice President Trần Quốc Tuấn.

Tuấn said the VFF will adjust the domestic competition so that the national squad's footballers will have more time to prepare for upcoming international fixtures.

"Apart from domestic training camps, VFF will also arrange intensive courses abroad and talk with other federations to arrange international friendly matches to warm-up ahead of the qualification.

"These activities are important for players who have not played a single international match for more than one year," he said.

Viet Nam who are currently No 6 in Asia were very close to the World Cup in 2015 when they lost 1-2 to Thailand in a play-off match.

Source: *VNN*