



A photo published in The Daily Star of teenage beggar Mohammad Titu plying the roads of Karwan Bazar in a Bangladesh national team jersey in February, 2011, garnered a tremendous response and Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes even met with him. The former pledged his 2011 World Cup jersey to the teen, delivered on his promise and further assisted him by pledging to provide him with Tk 3,000 every month. Titu, who lost his legs in an accident, also received a training jersey from Mushfiqur Rahim and other gifts including a wheelchair, tickets to Bangladesh's matches against Ireland and cash assistance. In 2018, Titu was spotted walking down the road but did not seem to be doing very well and he was recently pictured again, lying on the sidewalk as people walked by.

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

Home, Sweet Home!

EKUSH TAPADER



Returning to his West Jummapara abode in Rangpur during any break from his cricketing duties was always special for Akbar Ali as especially-prepared meals from his mother, the addas with childhood friends and serene atmosphere provided a welcome getaway.

Unfortunately, the latest break provided an altogether different experience for the youngster, who led Bangladesh to an international cricketing milestone by clinching the ICC Under-19 World Cup.

Although special meals and the serene atmosphere remained, the coronavirus pandemic restricted movement and, most importantly, forced Akbar to put off his favourite addas with his friends.

"Earlier, when I came home during any break, a massive adda with my friends was always on the top of agenda. But this time, I am missing it. Everybody can understand the current situation. We need to maintain social distance for our betterment. We are maintaining our addas through social media because there is no chance to meet," Akbar said while speaking to this reporter over phone.

When asked if he was staying home, Akbar said in a helpless tone: "Yes, it's seems like I have to stay home."

The underlying tone was perhaps because he was not sure when he would be able to return to the field, with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) having postponed all activities indefinitely help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Akbar has spent most of his time reading news regarding the devastating effects of coronavirus, but as a professional cricketer he knows that he has to maintain his fitness and so he has been maintaining a practice schedule.

Akbar said that he was very conscious of his eating habits as he wanted to stay in shape.

"I do light exercise at home. I am working with my fitness as much as possible with the available equipment. There is a field near my home and I go there only when no one else is there. But I am missing skills training for batting and keeping," he added.

"Our trainer and physio are providing advice through our WhatsApp group and I am trying to follow them," he informed.

On top of that, Akbar is desperately missing on-field cricket with the Dhaka Premier League underway, especially during a time when the U-19s were garnering a lot of focus following their historic World Cup one-and-a-half months back.

Above everything, the death of many people due to coronavirus all over the world and its spread in Bangladesh saddened the youngster.

"Everyone in our locality is anxious due to the spread of coronavirus in our country. We are always watching news on television channels and reading all the news. Everybody is trying to be conscious. The positive side is that we don't have any returnees from abroad in our area."



Akbar, now a household name in the locality, was trying to use his popularity to raise awareness about precautionary measures against the virus.

"I am speaking about the importance of washing our hands properly and maintaining social distance. I am requesting everyone to follow instructions from WHO and our government so that we can prevent the spread of this virus," he said.

Although this time's visit proved a little bittersweet, Akbar will stay in West Jummapara until further instructions from the government because life is bigger than anything.

Archery camp postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Archery Federation (BAF) yesterday postponed its ongoing training camp for the Tokyo Olympics, which was earlier postponed until 2021, at Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi, Gazipur to make way for the accommodation of army personnel.

The government on Monday announced that all public and private offices would be shut down from April 26 to May 4 as part of effort to stop the spread of coronavirus. It also announced that Bangladesh Army would be deployed in divisional and district towns to help local administrations ensure social distancing and the implementation of other precautionary measures.

"On Monday, we learned that we have to vacate the stadium for the army and today [Tuesday], the UNO of Tongi came to the stadium and informed us of the decision. As army has been deployed in the greater interest of the nation, we have released all of the archers from the training camp after taking measures to send them to their respective districts," said BAF general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal, adding that they had made the stadium completely ready for the accommodation of army.

Of 32 archers, Ruman Sana was scheduled to take part in the Tokyo Olympics.

Suspending women's league was a good decision: Sabina

SPORTS REPORTER



Much like all other athletes in the country, women's football team captain Sabina Khatun has been confined to her home after the Tricortex Women's Football League was suspended on March 16 in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

The prolific striker is now thinking only of health, instead of the sport she loves.

"All of our family members are staying at home in Satkhira. Coronavirus is now an epidemic and it is a serious issue for everyone. At the moment, I'm not thinking of the league because you saw what is happening around the world. Health is most important for us," Sabina told The Daily Star over phone from Satkhira yesterday.

"I would like to tell everyone to stay at home to avoid contracting the virus and follow all precautionary measures to keep you and your family members safe," advised the national striker, who struck 15 goals -- including four hattricks -- in five matches of the Tricortex Women's Football League, which resumed after seven years in February this year with the participation of seven teams.

"I believe suspending the league was a good decision because all players are now staying at their respective homes and avoiding public gathering, which we had faced during training and while playing the match at the stadium," said Sabina, adding that Bashundhara Club



extended the suspension of the training up to March 31 from March 24.

Sabina is playing for Bashundhara Kings, who have so far roped in 16 national players to form a formidable squad and there are seemingly no opponents to put up any challenge. After a five-match winning run, Bashundhara Kings looked on course to clinch the title in their debut

appearance and captain Sabina said they were the team to beat in the league.

"You know Bashundhara Kings formed a strong squad by signing up the best players of the country as they want to become champions. It is true that other teams of the league are weak. But what we want is the continuation of the league, which resumed after a long gap.

I hope the clubs that have been playing in the Bangladesh Premier League will take part in the Women's League and it will become competitive from next season," said Sabina.

"No doubt, the revival of the women's league is helping the national players financially because Bashundhara Kings paid handsome money to the players. Besides, Bashundhara players have been accommodated in a good environment with good facilities, including training and standard food. It is good to see that some national players are benefiting financially through the women's league," said Sabina, who was reportedly paid Tk 5 lakh for the season.

The 26-year-old footballer believes that they have been training less as part of Bashundhara Kings than they did when they were part of the national team, but the training is sufficient to produce good results at the club level.

"The training is not like the national team but we have been training as much as we need at the club level and I think it is good enough for us," said Sabina.

"There are many known and unknown players in the squads of the opponents, but both types came to me during the match for my blessing. They are not yet matured enough, so they did not ask for football tips, but I felt their excitement after watching us," said a smiling Sabina, who is the face of Bangladesh women's football as she has also played domestic competitions in India and Maldives.

'What would Johan do?': Remembering a 'born optimist in adversity'

"My father Johan Cruyff left us four years ago. But he lives on in our hearts and minds. In these current times, we're very much reminded of his optimism against adversity," his son Jordi Cruyff his son Jordi Cruyff writes in a special column at SPORT on the Dutchman's fourth death anniversary.



I remember one day when our dad had us all worried because he took longer than usual to return from his usual visit to the clinic where he was undergoing treatment in his battle against cancers. When he got home, my mum asked him if something had happened. "I have good news," he announced with a wide smile. "They have found another tumor." My mother restrained from sending him back out the door. "What type of news is that?" she said. "Well, they have found it and, as they have found it, they can treat it and look for a solution," he responded calmly.

Any person in his place would have arrived home defeated, but my dad always tried to see the positive of any setback. In fact, he treated chemotherapy as his biggest ally. "I

know I am going to feel bad after, but I will go and I will treat it as a friend because it's helping me fight cancer," he would say. His expression of calm, even joy, was an oasis for the more pessimistic patients that surrounded him during his treatment.

My father was a born optimist in adversity. Excessive, some thought. But that's who he was.

In these days of uncertainty and pessimism, many of us can ask, as I usually do when I have a doubt, 'What would Johan do?' Well, he would have looked for the positive side, like with anything, and he would have surprised us with what he came up with.

I imagine him entertaining himself with two of his biggest hobbies: puzzles and crosswords, sat under a

ray of sunshine on his balcony at his Barcelona home. Or fixing things in the garden. What I am certain of is that at no time would he have been weighed down by events, because he always had an antidote against boredom up his sleeve. And that despite not having a mobile phone, let alone access to social media and new technology, like almost everyone else.

Although it would have distressed him that this situation had left his 'kids', the more than 200,000 youngsters with or without disabilities that practice sport each week thanks to the Cruyff Foundation and the Cruyff Courts, which are temporarily closed. But he would have found happiness in thinking of the day when they could leave their houses

again. He would have organised a big party through the Foundation. If there is one thing that has made us proud since he left us, it's that his legacy lives on through the Foundation, FC Barcelona and various social projects, as was his last wish.

Tuesday marks four years since his death and this time we will not be able to repeat the annual dinner we have with the family to remember him. It will be different because my mum, my siblings and I are separated due to the confinement measures. We will probably call each other and try to make the best of the situation. But we will also put on a brave face against the adversity, aware that we are living through uncertain times, but they will pass. That's what Johan would do.