

FOOTBALL FOR DUMMIES

Belarusian side FC Dynamo Brest are filling their stands with mannequins sporting cut-out portraits of fans to boost match-day atmospheres while supporters stay home due to the coronavirus pandemic. The club found a creative solution to the lack of in-stadium support by inviting fans from around the world to buy virtual tickets online. In return, the fans' photos were pasted onto the top half of a fashion dummy sitting inside the stadium, and the fans themselves receive a matchday magazine sent to their home address. The money raised will be donated toward fighting the pandemic. Dynamo Brest tested the idea during their 2-0 home victory over Shakhtyor Soligorsk on Wednesday.

— AGENCIES



Zlatan Ibrahimovic was unable to stay away from football, and trained with his own team, Hammarby, after having returned to his native Sweden. Manager Jesper Jansson said that the AC Milan striker "felt he wanted to touch the ball again", adding that he was always welcome to train with them.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Behind the crisis at the Nou Camp

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI



The heat in the corridors of the Camp Nou offices went up a few notches with six Barcelona board directors handing in their resignations on Thursday night.

A chasm had opened up between club president Josep Maria Bartomeu and his board members resembling hit TV drama series Game of Thrones, as was explained by an ESPN source who also claimed that many in the board were vying to position themselves ahead of the presidential elections next year.

The internal fracture reportedly started in February this year when it was leaked that the club had a relationship with a third-party company, I3 Ventures, that had been discrediting players, potential presidents and club legends on social media. Bartomeu, eager to quell any apparent division, held talks with senior players.

The players, in the media at least, said they believed the explanation that Bartomeu offered, but not before Messi said that he found the situation in Barcelona to be 'weird'. The six-time Ballon d'Or winner had before that come out and hit back at sporting director Eric Abidal for suggesting that players were behind the sacking of former coach Ernesto Valverde in January.

The crisis deepened last month when negotiating a wage cut with the players due to the coronavirus pandemic. Again there were suggestions from the players' side that

the board was using local media to transmit lies. Messi said that there were some in the board who "tried to put us under the magnifying glass and add pressure to do something that we always knew we would do" after confirming the players were going to take a 70 per cent pay cut.

When the club's biggest names hit out at the processes and how the club is run, it usually does not bode well for the management. As a result, Bartomeu has decided to re-model his board. According to reports, he asked the vice presidents Emili Rousaud and Enrique Tombas and directors Silvio Elias and Josep Pont to resign.

"To be honest, I feel betrayed by Bartomeu. And what riles me the most is this is not the moment [during Spain's coronavirus-enforced lockdown]. Do it face-to-face, not hidden [behind a phone]," Rousaud told Marca. "And the board is not the most suitable to take on these challenges. Especially a board in complete crisis, with the players confronting them and with fans waving white handkerchiefs every home game."

In an explosive interview with Ra1 radio, Rousaud went further the following morning. "I think someone has had their hand in the (club's) till," he said. "You pay one million euros (to I3 Ventures) for a job that has a market price of 100,000 euros. Who? Definitely someone on the board, I don't know who, but you can have your suspicions..."

Meanwhile, Bartomeu increasingly finds himself alone.

Players can 'walk away', says PFA advisor

AGENCIES, London

A leading sports lawyer who is advising the Professional Footballers' Association says out-of-contract players in England can ignore FIFA proposals and leave their clubs at the end of June, even if the season has not resumed.

Nick De Marco QC, who has represented sports governing bodies, players, clubs and agents since 2002, says players will be entitled to "walk away" from clubs if their contracts expire on June 30.

Earlier this week, FIFA proposed that contracts are "extended until such time that the season does actually end", and asked for the same principle to be applied to contracts due to begin when the new season starts. But De Marco says their recommendations cannot be enforced under English employment law.

"Legally, they cannot be forced to continue to play for the club," De Marco, of Blackstone Chambers, told Sky Sports News. "Nobody can force them to do so; FIFA, the FA, the club or anybody else. If they want to walk away, that's a matter for them but it will really be a matter of whether, financially, that makes sense for them."

"What you're most likely to see as a preferred option is probably very short-term extensions of contracts based on existing salary terms. That won't suit everyone, and it can't be forced on anyone in England."

"For example, if you're a player coming towards the end of your contract and, perhaps, the end of your career, maybe you only have one more contract left, you may be very reluctant to sign a contract for only a few weeks or an indeterminate period of time."

"If the players are out of contract then, so far as the law is concerned, they're no longer employees and they're free to walk away," he explains. "The real issue is, 'Do the players walk away or not?'. That will depend on the circumstances of each case."

"If you're a lower league club, financially stressed, you won't be wanting to pay players beyond June 30. So, a one-size-fits-all solution isn't going to work. It's going to depend on each case. The key is going to be agreements."

Reminiscence: My first match

In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill. We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.



FAHIM INTIAZ from Chattogram, 2014



It was late spring of 2014 with mocks underway and final exams looming over the horizon. Bangladesh was given the honour of hosting the ICC T20 World Cup, and at that time we felt very proud of our nation.

My hometown of Chattogram came alive with lights and monuments at various points in the city dedicated to the tournament. Big screens were set up at different points of the city so everyone could watch the games. That year's catchy theme song "Char Chokka Hoi Hoi" caused quite a sensation, which added to the anticipation and excitement as the clocks counted down the days.

Crowds gathered in front of the large screen in GEC circle and outside of TV showrooms to watch the wonderfully organised display of performances and fireworks during the opening ceremony.

As the tournament started, streets were filled with discussion and debate about players and teams. You could ask anyone "who are playing today?" and they would be happy to tell you. Our whole nation was unanimous in the hope that we would bring world cup glory home, despite the odds.

I vaguely remember my friend getting us free tickets to watch the England vs South Africa game. To me it was an excuse to have some fun and spend time with my friends, as I wasn't a big cricket fan unless Bangladesh were playing. We joined the long queue in front of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Some had their faces painted, some were carrying placards in the shapes of fours and sixes, others binoculars, and tiger-shaped balloons. Our seats were high up in the stands, but I preferred that view over having the backs of people gathered below obstructing the view,

albeit closer to the field.

There was an infectious energy all around and it was impossible not to give in. Nearby was a slab where the man with tiger stripes painted all over his body was waving the red and green flag with a passion. Some of us took turns taking selfies with him, the digital memories now lost and all but forgotten.

The atmosphere was contagious and I found myself adding my voice to the crowd as an England bowler made the run up and our screams crescendoed when he bowled the first ball of the game. I would have braced myself had I known I would bear witness to a batting masterclass by none other than the AB de Villiers himself.

My memories of that day are all but faded but I will never forget how devastating the South African captain was that day. It seemed like anything that came off his bat was turning into boundaries. He made it look easy, as great players often do. His unbeaten 69 runs off just 28 balls earned him the man of the match award. The crowd cheered, "char chokka hoi hoi" played in the background, and I joined in on the dance despite myself. It was very different from watching on TV. The noise, the atmosphere, the energy within the stadium culminated in a different kind of experience to what I had expected.

I didn't really care much for the result because the two teams weren't in our group, and I remember leaving early, but I went home that day with a newfound appreciation for the sport. I will never forget that powerhouse performance from the batting maestro, and the precious togetherness that my friends and I shared. Looking back, those times were more precious than we realised.

And especially in these times, I find myself longing for that day in 2014 when I was part of a sea of humanity crying out in one voice.

Akbar & Co find respite in memories from WC

NABID YEASIN



In these times, while being held prisoner at your own home behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic, one may try to find relief by recalling the best memories from back when normalcy prevailed. Sports fanatics are reliving the best moments by watching highlight reels and re-watching the matches that left them with goosebumps.

Sporting activities around the globe have come to a halt and the players, much like their fans, are confined indoors with hopes of things getting back to normal once again. And during this time, even the players are trying to recall the sweet memories from back when they were at the field or with their teammates during a tour or playing in an overseas competition.

The best moment for Bangladesh cricket, till date, arguably came when the Bangladesh under-19 side brought home the nation's first ever World Cup trophy after beating reigning champions India by three wickets in Potchefstroom in February this year.

It is obvious that Akbar Ali and Co created a lot of memories, both on and off the field, during their more than a month's stay in South Africa. And those memories now give them relief during this crisis.

"We were based in Potchefstroom and the room where all of our meetings were held was the one used by the Spain football team during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. All their autographed jerseys, pictures were there and one of our coaching staff

said that he too wanted our jerseys and pictures to be there at the end of the tournament," recalled under-19 skipper Akbar.

He also remembered how he, along with his troop, used to make themselves feel relaxed before matchdays.

"We used to have team meetings the day before a fixture. After the meeting we all used to play games for fun. We used to do acting and bits and there was a dart board so we used to



SHORIFUL ISLAM

play dart," sighed Akbar.

Meanwhile, pacer Shoriful Islam recalled some funny incidents from the tour.

"All of us had a favourite dialogue. It was from the Bangla series Bachelor Point Season 2. There was a character named 'pasha bhai' in the series and his trademark dialogue was to make an intimidating noise. We used to do that among ourselves all the time. When we were on the bus on our way to practice or even during practice sessions or matches, we used to say that dialogue among ourselves. By the

time we won the tournament, it had caught on among everyone so well that even our head coach [Naveed Nawaz] and our bus driver also started doing that," chuckled Shoriful as if he was still living those memories while sharing those over phone.

Shoriful, who claimed to be the funniest one in the group, also mentioned how he was vested with the responsibility of making everyone laugh. It was his responsibility that no one had a gloomy day.

Shoriful might have played the role of an entertainer off the field but the 18-year-old was as serious and aggressive as anyone could be when on the field. The left-armer also admitted that the aggressive celebration which he pulled out after dismissing India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on 88, was something very much well rehearsed.

"Actually when we lost to them [India] in the Asia Cup final, they celebrated vigorously. So I planned that when I get a wicket [World Cup final], I would celebrate in a way to trigger them a bit. I actually rehearsed it beforehand. I had come up with a number of celebrations and later stuck with the one which I thought looked the best and fitting. It was something which said that we lost to you a number of times but it is time for us to win and for you to stay in our pocket," explained Shoriful.

While sharing all those memories from time in South Africa, both Shoriful and Akbar mentioned how desperately they would like to get back to the field and perhaps make more lasting memories as they pursue more accolades in their professional career.



This photo, taken by The Daily Star staff photographer Rajib Raihan on December 23, 2019 was shortlisted among eight photographs for the Wisden-MCC Photograph of the Year award recently. Although the photograph, showing three youths playing a game of cricket in one of the few spots in a field not covered by drying fishing nets at Fishery Ghat in Chattogram, did not get the top award, it did make the cover of British newspaper The Guardian's story titled: 'Catches, tea and nets: Wisden-MCC Photograph of the Year'.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN