

NORMAN HUNTER DIES FROM COVID-19

Leeds United great Norman Hunter has died aged 76 after contracting coronavirus, his former club announced Friday. "Norman was taken to hospital last week after being diagnosed with COVID-19 and despite continuing to battle and the best efforts of NHS (National Health Service) staff, he sadly lost his fight earlier this morning," the club said in a statement. The club said it was "devastated" at the news. A famously tough-tackling centre-half, England international Hunter made more than 700 appearances for Yorkshire club Leeds during their most successful era of the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s under manager Don Revie. -- AFP



With the whole nation under an unofficial lockdown, there is little opportunity for youngsters to enjoy recreational activities outdoors. Hence some cricket enthusiasts took to the roof of a building in Kodomtoli area in Chattogram on Thursday and with makeshift arrangements, indulged in their favourite pastime.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Rubel pleads for selflessness

RAMIN TALUKDER

During this time of crisis when the whole world is fighting the spread of coronavirus, the roles played by the country's footballers and cricketers have earned a lot of praise. Starting from premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan to footballer Jamal Bhuyian -- all the players have come forward and made their contributions. Their contributions ranged from monetary help to awareness posts through Facebook and social media. Even a few well-off players came forward and stood by their less-fortunate fellow athletes and such an example was recently set by Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal when he took the responsibility of providing expenditure to the family members of the fastest teenage sprinter Samiul Islam.

However, among all these athletes who came forward in this crisis, Bangladesh pacer Rubel Hossain's activities grabbed most public attention. Rubel has been posting awareness messages on social media since COVID-19 was first detected in the country. Aside from making monetary donations, the pacer also donated infrared thermometers in his hometown Bagerhat. For Rubel, who has also voiced his outrage against wrong doers publicly, cricket has now become secondary as his prime concern has been the nation's condition and its people's plight during this pandemic.

According to Rubel, two things need to be addressed more than anything now. Firstly, the need to provide food for the needy and next to that is the need to stay safe and conscious to help curb the spread of the virus.

"Bangladesh is currently going through a horrible situation. What should I say; I guess there is no other option than staying safe and conscious. We need to stay at home and also help the needy ones as much as we can," opined Rubel during an interview over phone with The Daily Star.

Drawing up on the example of his hometown Bagerhat, the pacer further mentioned, "We do not have many COVID-19 cases in our locality. But the main problem here is that there are numerous people who are living below the poverty line. And the ratio of such people is higher in the area I live. I own three buildings here and I have already asked the tenants to not worry about the rent till the situation is contained. I am trying my best to help the

people around me. I am also using social media to make people aware as a number of people follow us on Facebook."

Some unwanted things are also troubling Rubel. The pacer is left worried and with immense grief as the ones who should have come forward in taking care of the less fortunate ones more than anyone else in the country are now the ones who are stealing essential commodities that came in as relief for the needy people.

"I do not know what to say about the ones who are stealing essential commodities like rice, lentil and oil. Instead of helping others they are stealing government allocated reliefs. I just do not know what to say about them. I think these sort of heinous activities have only made our heads bow down in shame," sighed Rubel.

A nationwide lockdown has already been imposed due to the coronavirus. And hence, the income source for many people has also been halted. Rubel believes if steps

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are not taken against such heinous acts, the situation will only worsen.

"The whole country is suffering, especially the needy ones. The needy ones are unsure which will take their lives first, coronavirus or hunger? This thought might lead them to think differently which they usually do in such cases," Rubel said, issuing a warning to the nation.

However, even after all that is happening, Rubel is still keeping his faith on the leaders of the country. Even he urged his countrymen to do the same and have faith.

"We need to have faith in the administration, doctors, nurses and military personnel as they are the ones who are fighting from the frontline. They are the ones who are taking the virus head on. Whereas we have very little to do here," concluded Rubel.

A trip down memory lane

ATHAR ALI KHAN



The world has come to a standstill and it is only normal for many of us sitting at home to feel completely helpless in the present situation. But what each of us can do is observe, appreciate and acknowledge the significant moments of our past. I would like to take the readers on a trip down memory lane -- to the moments that stand out in my mind as the biggest turning point in our cricketing history.

Cricket has never been and never will be an individual's game. Priority must and should always be placed on the combination of players, a chemistry that is not entirely possible to explain. Sport, and cricket in particular, is unique in that way. It is part science -- in the facts and statistics -- while part of it is art due to the indescribable emotions we feel when someone plays a shot to win our hearts, or misses one to break it.

It was heartbreaking to see Masarafe Bin Mortaza resigning from captaincy but this also gave us the opportunity to reflect on his contributions. Mashrafe's ability to change the complexion of the Bangladesh national team by uniting the playing eleven was commendable.

When I interviewed Mashrafe a few weeks ago, after his decision to resign as captain of the ODI team, I was reminded of the dusk of the career of another Bangladesh captain -- Habibul Bashar. The



Bangladesh players celebrate the dismissal of an India batsman during the historic 2007 World Cup fixture at Port of Spain.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

2007 World Cup was some of his last playing days but I know that he played a crucial role in bringing the team together with his years of experience.

March 17, 2007 was a memorable and unforgettable day at Port of Spain where Bangladesh created the biggest upset by defeating red-hot favourites India by five wickets in the World Cup and that too against a line-up full of legends of the game in Saurav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh, Harbajan Singh plus the future global star MS Dhoni. Looking back, the moment that stands out for me was the sight of Tamim Iqbal going down the wicket against Zaheer Khan to hit a six into the second tier of the stands.

I could hear my disbelief reflected

on my fellow commentator's voice, as he too was shocked by Tamim's bravado and could merely utter, "Oh my, what has he done!" I can only imagine what that shot meant for the confidence of the dressing room.

As it happens, even though Bangladesh qualified for the next round, since it was a completely unexpected outcome, the production company tried and failed to extend my contract. Hence, I found myself on the same flight as the Indian team, their bags packed much earlier than they had hoped, going home. Upon seeing me, Dravid had asked: "Athar, what are you doing here? Your team has gone through."

As cheers and applause erupted, it felt as though Tamim, a young

and fresh-faced flamboyant opener from Bangladesh, through his no-fear attitude added a burst of fuel to a flame in Bangladesh's cricket history that had been flickering, but had surely been ignited in 2005 when Bangladesh beat Australia for the very first time in an ODI.

When we beat Australia in 2005, history was made. I remember the tour as special because as a selector, along with Faruque [Ahmed] and [GM Nausher] Prince, I had taken a leap of faith in the inclusion of Mushfiqur Rahim. Some may say it was a premature decision, but when he started scoring so heavily in trying conditions while on tour in England, we saw a spark in him that we knew the Bangladesh team could not miss out on.

In terms of being taken seriously as a cricketing nation, 2015 will be at the forefront of people's minds when they think of Bangladesh. It was the glorious year in which we won three series at home, back-to-back, against India, Pakistan and South Africa.

It is important to learn from our past mistakes but also to draw inspiration and strength from the moments in which we have overcome challenges.

It is needless for me to say that we all have a role to play in making this earth a better place. As I pray for this virus to disappear quickly from the earth, I also hope that we will be ready and equipped to embrace a future that holds amazing experiences for all of us, akin to those of our 'Tigers' once again taking the field by storm.

'Chances of IPL in SL very low'

AGENCIES



After Sri Lankan Cricket Board has reportedly offered to play host for 2020 IPL season, BCCI has refused to commit either way saying it neither accepts nor rejects "the proposal" which was yet to officially come to the Board adding that the chances were rather low.

A top BCCI official, who is also IPL governing council member, told Republic TV that the chances of Sri Lanka hosting IPL was in fact very low.

"Officially the request has not come to us so the question of considering or rejecting it does not arise. Once it comes officially we may or may not consider it. But frankly speaking, the chances are low. The availability of foreign players and logistical matters are big issues," the top official told Republic TV on a telephonic conversation on condition of anonymity.

Apparently, the SLC has written to BCCI offering to host the IPL, a fact denied by BCCI official. "We are not aware of any such letter of proposal. I am hearing it from you only. In case it comes we will not outrightly reject it. We will discuss the merits and demerits of it and accordingly take a decision. It's too premature to commit either way. But if you ask me personally, I would say the chances are rather slim," he observed.

SLC president Shammi Silva had, on Thursday, spoke about his country's willingness to host the tournament.

"It looks like Sri Lanka will be clear of the coronavirus before India," Silva had told Reuters in Colombo.

"If so, we can host the tournament here. We will be writing to the Indian cricket board soon," he added.

'Humour is most important right now'

PTI, Auckland



Known for his tongue-in-cheek take on life and cricket, New Zealand all-rounder Jimmy Neesham feels focussing on the funny side of things helps him cope with difficult situations like the COVID-19 pandemic currently sweeping through the world.

The coronavirus outbreak, which started in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has brought the entire world to a standstill. The deadly contagion has infected more than 20 lakh people while causing over one lakh deaths across the globe.

Asked about the role humour plays in handling difficulties, the Black Caps pacer, who keeps his fans entertained with witty one-liners on his social media accounts, said it is vital when the going gets tough.

"I think it's probably right out there, the most important one. The sport we play and the career I have had, there's plenty of downs and you've got to see the bright, funny side of it otherwise you'll just go into a dark hole," Neesham said on 'Inside my bubble' podcast.

"I'm certainly used to tough situations and this is another one. All things pass eventually and we should keep smiling and laughing and we'll all be in a better place



JIMMY NEESHAM

and good to go once we come out the other side," he added.

Last month, New Zealand's ODI away series against Australia was called off after the first match and the visiting team was sent home owing to the fast-spreading virus.

Talking about the chain of events leading to the series being called off, the 29-year-old said, "We played on Friday and on Saturday we were called for a meeting at two and by three we were on the bus to the airport. It was pretty quick and we were lucky to have reached home."

No Test captaincy for De Kock

AFP, Johannesburg

Former Test skipper Graeme Smith was on Friday confirmed as South Africa's director of cricket -- and revealed that Quinton de Kock would not be elevated to the Test captaincy.

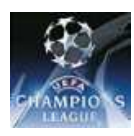
Jacques Faul, acting chief executive of Cricket South Africa, said Smith had been appointed for a two-year term, expiring at the end of March 2022. Smith was appointed in an acting capacity last December.

"It's not going to be Quinton," Smith said, citing De Kock's responsibility as the country's limited-overs captain as well as being wicketkeeper and a key batsman.

"Quinton will be our white-ball captain but from a workload and mental capacity aspect we want to keep him fresh. From personal experience I know that captaining all three formats is challenging and we don't want to overburden him."

Champions League final on Aug 29?

REUTERS, Undated



European soccer's governing body (UEFA) is working on a proposal that could see the remainder of the Champions League condensed into a week-long mini-tournament with the final taking place on Aug. 29 in Istanbul, the BBC has reported.

Football, as with most sports around the world, has been brought to a standstill by the COVID-19 pandemic, with all major European leagues suspended and the Champions League stalled in the middle of its round of 16.

UEFA wants the Europa League final to be held in Gdansk on Aug. 26 and the Champions League final played three days later, the report said.

UEFA is considering two options, one of which is to hold the Champions League quarter-finals and semi-finals across two legs in July and August. This would only be possible if domestic leagues restarted in June.

The second option is to play the remaining Champions League ties as one-off fixtures after the end of the domestic seasons and could see the remainder of the competition played out over the course of a week.

Both options would be discussed at UEFA's Executive Committee meeting next Thursday, the report added.

The Champions League final was originally scheduled to take place in Istanbul on May 30 and the Europa League final was due to be held in Gdansk three days earlier.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the world governing body, FIFA, and regional bodies such as the UEFA, AFC and CONMEBOL have postponed international and club fixtures at least up to June, with the Euro 2020 and Copa America postponed by a year.