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'THE MOUNTAIN' BREAKS DEADLIFT RECORD

Game of Thrones actor Hafthor Bjornsson has set a world deadlifting record by lifting 501kg (1,104lb). Bjornsson, a powerlifter who portrayed Ser Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane in the HBO series, broke the record at his gym in his native Iceland. He lifted the barbell for two seconds, before dropping the weights and roaring in delight. The event was streamed by sports broadcaster ESPN and filmed for Bjornsson's YouTube channel. Bjornsson, who is 2.05m tall (6ft 9in), previously won the World's Strongest Man competition in 2018. The record was previously held by Eddie Hall, a British man who in 2016 became the first man to lift 500kg. --BBC

While many of Bangladesh's promising young players have failed to take their talent to the senior level due to a lack of institutional nurturing, India has given their youth teams a platform to shine in top-tier football through Indian Arrows, a club which turned many young talents into future stars. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Solutions closer to home?

ANISUR RAHMAN

India sit at around 100 in the FIFA rankings, Maldives and Nepal have been playing competitive football for a long time while Bhutan are also showing potential at international level. These improvements are due to the countries' effective plans that are focused on youth development.

India have always been the superior side in South Asia in terms of performances, domestic standards, infrastructure, club structur and youth development. However, the likes of Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan have been progressing, courtesy of the 'educated footballers' coming through youth development.

Yet, Bangladesh -- who have been languishing at the bottom of the rankings -- do not look at these neighbours as development models. Long-serving Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin has always pointed to European countries as examples whenever the development processes of other South Asian nations were presented before him in the last 12 years, although the BFF boss never imported any ideas from the countries he was so fond of citing above his neighbours.

That the federations in India, Nepal and Bhutan operate football academies is not news. It has now been seen that that initiative is paying dividends, but the BFF believes it is the duty of clubs to operate football academies, not the federation, which had suspended a FIFA-supported academy programme despite a group showing promise by clinching the inaugural SAFF U-16 Championships in 2015).

Although nurturing youth is the duty of the clubs in the top-tier Bangladesh Premier League as they are bound by AFC guidelines to have permanent youth development programmes, most clubs have youth programmes only in name.

With the clubs not doing their part, the BFF can follow a project such as the All India Football Federation's (AIFF), which is now paying dividends after being started.

In 2010, with the aim to provide young players with more minutes against experienced players, the AIFF launched a team titled Indian Arrows, comprising of young players from different clubs and gave it approval to take part in top-tier I-League.

India is now reaping the rewards of that project and their national team now features players like Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Jeje Lalpekhlua, Pritam Kotal, Pronay Halder, Lalrindika Ralte, Halicharan Narzary, who are all products of Indian Arrows. Meanwhile, promising players like Narender Gahlot and Amarjit Singh were in the pipeline of the Blue Tigers.

At the start of the professional football league in 2006, roping in at least five U-19 players was mandatory for each clubsand fielding those players in competitive matches for a certain period was also compulsory, but now there are no such obligations for the result-oriented clubs.

Thus, youth footballers have been deprived of quality minutes against hardened players this season and warmed benches most of the time. The BFF can easily take a pilot project to nurture young players by forming a youth team that will compete in the professional football league as well as international age-group tournaments.

They can assign local coaches to coordinate with the national team's foreign coaches to train them and improve' physical, technical and tactical development.

It is believed that the youth team would not be very expensive for the BFF [which spends approximately Tk 30 crore per year] as the BPL clubs completed their season within Tk one crore each, including payments to foreign players.

Apart from their own expenditure, the BFF can also get sponsors for the team and make the nation hopeful about the revival of what was once the country's most popular.

Tamim wants long deals for BPL icons

SPORTS REPORTER

With the entire world at a standstill due to the coronavirus pandemic, cricketers around the world are spending time isolated with their families.

But despite the lockdown, the cricketers have kept in touch with each other through various social media platforms, and there were no exceptions for the Tigers as well.

For the very first time, Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal and wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim appeared in an instagram live conversation on Saturday night.

It was an interesting conversation between the two fiends where they shared a few light-hearted dressing-room stories which made the session very lively.

During the conversation, Tamim reminded Mushfiqur on how the wicket-keeper batsman had to lock himself up in the toilet of The Oval dressing room during the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017.

"It was not the toilet, it was the shower room," Mushfiqur corrected Tamim during their Instagram Live chat.

But apart from the light-hearted topics, the experienced duo also gave some valuable suggestions over cricket, including icon player selection process of the Bangladesh Premier League.

Tamim's suggestion is to follow the Indian Premier League model where icon players play for a certain team for a number of season, so it makes the players relate more to the franchise while the fans can have their own allegiance.

"Look, there is no doubt that the BPL has been a huge platform for our cricket. But I truly feel that if we, the players, could play for a certain team for like two-three years or a longer period then our bonding with the team and also with the fans of the region will get stronger. Everyone knows that Dhoni is for Chennai or Rohit is for Mumbai; it actually helps the fans too to support their teams and remain loyal to their favourite players.

"Normally in our BPL, we change teams every year which does not allow us to know the team management and teammates. The fans do not often realise who is playing for which team this season. I think if the authorities at least give some instructions that a player will be signed for at least three years by a particular team and only if the team and the player mutually agrees to change the franchise then they can do it. It will help the players to be more dedicated towards the franchise and there will also be a regular fan base," said Tamim.

'Coronavirus made me psychotic'

AGENCIES

Juventus midfielder Blaise Matuidi has revealed that his coronavirus diagnosis made him 'psychotic'.

Matuidi was one of three Juve players to contract the infection. The Frenchman has since made a full recovery, but admitted the condition left him in 'shock, total panic'.

"Honestly, it's tough," he told YouTube channel Bros Stories. "When I tested positive, I couldn't even go out shopping. It made me psychotic.

"You always try to make sure people aren't too close, you have to be mentally strong. It'll take time, this is a new situation for all of us.

"I had no symptoms but, as soon as I heard the news, I was in shock. I was in total panic, I feared for my family and friends. It was difficult for them, but I was able to reassure them. It's not a good time, we really want this to end as soon as possible. I ask myself what will happen to football and everyday life."

The Crown Taverners Cricket Club in Camberley was scheduled to be swarmed from next weekend, when the Hampshire cricket league was scheduled to begin. But with all sport shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, this scarecrow is as close to a batsman as the pitch can expect to see in the near future. PHOTO: AFP

'Have to fight with a little margin for error'

AGENCIES

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly compared the coronavirus pandemic to a Test match on a dangerous wicket. The former India skipper opened up on life amid lockdown in India due to pandemic while speaking on 100 Hours 100 Stars, an initiative started by Fever Network.

"This situation is a Test match on a very dangerous wicket. The ball is seaming and spinning as well - the batsman has very little margin of error," the former India captain said. "So, the batsman has to score runs and keep his wicket safe with this little margin of error, and win this Test match. This is very difficult, but we hope that we will win this match together," he added.

Ganguly said that he is enjoying the time he is getting to spend with his family. "It's been a month. I didn't mind it earlier. Earlier, I wouldn't get time at home like this. My lifestyle involved travelling for work everyday. For the past 30-32 days, I have been at home with my family, spending time with my wife, daughter, my mother and my brother. I have got a time like this after long, so I am enjoying," he said.

"But I am also really upset seeing the current situation, because so many people are suffering outside. This atmosphere all over the world has really bothered me. We don't know how, when and where it came from - we all were unprepared for this.

"People are being affected by this so much. There have been so many deaths. This situation upsets me, and I also feel scared. People come to my house to deliver groceries, food, so I feel a little scared as well. So it's a mixed feeling. I just want this to end as quickly as possible," he continued.

Speaking about what he is doing at home, Ganguly added: "I have been working from home - BCCI and ICC work and my own work. But my own work is a little less right now.

Serie A stars to resume training

AFP, *Milan*

Players from several Italian football clubs were on course to resume individual training as the country prepared to gradually roll back its lockdown.

The Italian government has been feuding for weeks with regions about which activities will be allowed when the nation begins to emerge the lockdown on Monday. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte is lifting' stay-at-home orders but has delayed announcing a restart to the Serie A season.

Several regions that have avoided the worst of the outbreak say they will use a loophole to individual players to start training on Monday.

The voluntary sessions will affect teams such as Napoli in the south and the central Emilia-Romagna region's Bologna.

Serie A clubs unanimously voted on Friday to finish the 2019-20 season -- suspended since March 9 with Juventus leading Lazio by a point.

But Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora noted this week the chances of a restart were "increasingly narrow".

'Stir-crazy' Roy desperate for cricket

REUTERS, *London*

England's Jason Roy is ready to play in empty stadiums if the post-coronavirus situation demands, so said the opener who got a taste of it in his last outing.

Roy played a Pakistan Super League match on May 7 which took place behind closed doors in Lahore just before the pandemic halted sport across the globe.

"There was no atmosphere, simple as that," the Durban-born batsman, a key figure in England's World Cup winning squad last year, told British media. "It was very strange. As a batsman when the bowler's running in you learn to block out the crowd, but as soon as the ball is done you can hear them going absolutely berserk.

"[In Lahore] there was just dead silence. You could hear your mate calling ones and twos, so you don't just have to work off each other's body language. It was hard to get up for it. But it was something we knew we had to deal with."

Playing without fans has been suggested as one possible way to resume cricket as soon as the pandemic subsides and Roy was ready to adjust.

"I'm more than happy to play behind closed doors. It would just be nice to get out there. I feel like a kid again," he said, adding he was "going a bit stir crazy" in the shutdown.

The global health crisis and the restrictions it has forced have clouded the outlook for this year's Twenty20 World Cup scheduled in Australia.

"If players aren't able to prepare in the right way and are unable to get over to Australia, then it makes sense to postpone it," Roy said of the tournament scheduled in October-November. "But if it goes ahead and we're told we have three weeks to prepare all the boys will be putting in the hard yards to make sure we're ready."

He also said he had not given up on Test cricket although he averaged only 18.70 in five Tests last summer before being dropped for the final Ashes Test.

"I worked very hard to crack the nut in

Test cricket and for it to get taken away that quickly was really heartbreaking," he said. "I'm going to be trying my hardest to get back into the side."

"Scoring the weight of runs in white-ball cricket and then not being able to do that in Test cricket was upsetting for me, because I really felt like I could. I still feel like I can, but I need to fight for my position again, get back in there and prove to myself that I can actually do it."

Minister backs resumption of Bundesliga

AFP, *Berlin*

Germany's minister for the interior and sport said Sunday he supports a resumption of the country's football season this month.

"I find the schedule proposed by the German league plausible and I support the restart in May," Horst Seehofer told Bild, three days before a meeting of German authorities to discuss the issue.

The German Football League (DFL) backs a resumption of matches without spectators around mid-May, which would make it the first major European championship to make such a move.

Seehofer, who plays a key government role on the issue, has emphasised that the teams and players must respect several conditions.

"There will continue therefore to be risks for the schedule of matches and for the classification," if there is any contamination.

But he said clubs would not have any special testing privileges denied to the rest of the population. Some sides had suggested carrying out frequent tests of their players as a preventative measure against the virus.