

Ashik's second life

MAZHAR UDDIN

From being detected as the first Covid-19 positive case in Bangladesh cricket on May 9 to successfully recovering from coronavirus and leaving the hospital on May 29 – the three weeks were perhaps the toughest journey in entire life for Ashikur Rahman.

Now a development coach of Bangladesh Cricket Board, Ashik had started his career as a promising fast-bowler and had featured in Bangladesh U-19 World Cup side in 2002. He later became an assistant coach of Bangladesh women's team. But to Ashik, all those accomplishments and identities have assumed little significance since his life-altering fight against the deadly virus.

Ashik was distributing relief materials among coronavirus-affected people, organised by the Ramkrishna Mission in his neighbourhood Gopibagh when he first realised something was wrong with his health.

"I didn't understand at first. I thought I had a swollen tonsil. I had sore throat at first; then slowly came the fever and then I started to have chest pain. I got myself tested and at the same time, I informed BCB's chief physician



Debashish Chowdhury and Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the member of parliament from my area. I was shocked when the result of the test came positive. I couldn't believe this had happened to me," recalled Ashik.

Ashik's cricketing identity helped him get tested quickly, yet he was facing trouble in securing a cabin at the Mugda General Hospital after getting admitted there on May 11.

"I knew I had to give it all to get out of that difficult situation,

so I looked for help wherever I could. I must thank BCB, CWAB (Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh) and Saber bhai, who arranged a cabin for me in the hospital. There were a lot of limitations regarding treatment and facilities, still the way the doctors and nurses took care of me was unforgettable," Ashik said.

Like most serious Covid-19 patients, Ashik felt breathing problem. A follower of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, Ashik worked on releasing negative

energy from the body and gaining inner strength.

"After a couple of days at the hospital, I started to feel chest pain and I felt suffocated due to breathing problem. I tried one of Swami Vivekananda's practices, which was to work on my breathing. I used to take deep breaths and while breathing out, I used to say Ameen. It worked well for me and I felt better every day," recalled Ashik.

Ashik's remained mentally strong and recovered from the disease, and was released from the hospital following two negative tests within 72 hours.

"It was the happiest moment of my life when I tested negative, not once but twice. I thanked the Almighty first. While leaving the hospital, I felt this was my second life and I would want to utilise this to the fullest. I must also thank my friend Mohammad Ashrafur along with Mominul Haque, Imrul Kayes – all of whom were constantly in touch with me during my difficult time," he added.

Having found a new lease of life, Ashik wants to contribute to cricket even more, and this time he wants to help age-level cricketers gain inner strength, that strength which helped him walk back to life from a very precarious journey.

'Virus like walking up Kilimanjaro'

AFP, London



Leicester City manager Brendan Rodgers said Friday that being afflicted with the coronavirus was akin to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

The Northern Irish boss is the second Premier League manager to confirm he had suffered with COVID-19 after Arsenal's Mikel Arteta also tested positive in March.

"I could hardly walk and it reminded me of walking up Mount Kilimanjaro, as you climb higher you get more breathless," Rodgers told BBC Radio Leicester.

"Walking 10 yards felt very different. I went for a run, and I just couldn't do it.

"We had a week off when we were supposed to play Watford (on March 14) and then the week after that, I started to struggle."

The 47-year-old former Liverpool and Celtic manager added his wife had contracted the virus as well.

"For three weeks I had no smell or taste. I had no strength, and a week after, my wife was the same.

"We were tested and both of us were detected with the virus."

England's top-flight clubs have agreed a provisional restart date of June 17 after the season was postponed in March due to the outbreak, with Leicester currently third behind runaway leaders Liverpool and reigning champions Manchester City.



Football icon Helal no more

STAR SPORT DESK

Former national footballer Golam Rabbani Helal breathed his last at around 12:00 noon yesterday. He was 67.

Helal, who was on life support at the intensive care unit of Square Hospital following a brain haemorrhage at his Dhanmondi residence on Thursday, left behind his wife and two daughters.

Helal played for the national team from 1979 to 1985. At club level, he had been a permanent player for Abahani where he played from 1975 to 1988 except for a short spell at BJMC.

After retiring from football, Helal became director of Abahani and occupied different roles for the club. He was also an executive committee member of the BFF for five years.

Three namaz-e-janazas were held, including one at the BFF premises and one at the Abahani Club ground before his burial at the Azimpur graveyard.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin, Abahani Club, Mohammedan Sporting Club and other clubs and officials from sporting community expressed their condolences at the passing away of the former national footballer.

Helal had been suffering from kidney disease and undergoing dialysis for the last year. He also underwent an open-heart surgery after cardiac arrest in April, 2017.

Red-hot Havertz fires Leverkusen

AFP, Berlin



Exciting youngster Kai Havertz broke another Bundesliga record on Friday after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory at Freiburg which moved Bayer Leverkusen into third place.

Havertz, 20, became the first player in the history of the league to reach 35 goals before turning 21 years old eight minutes after the break, when he combined with Leon Bailey before squeezing home under intense pressure from Dominique Heintz.

The dynamic German was already the youngest player to reach 50 and 100 appearances in the German top flight and

became the youngest ever player to score a league goal for Leverkusen in 2017.

Havertz's goal was his fifth in his four appearances since the Bundesliga returned from its coronavirus-enforced break and puts Leverkusen a point ahead of fourth-placed RB Leipzig, who travel to Cologne on Monday night.

They are also three points ahead of Borussia Moenchengladbach in fifth ahead of their match with Union Berlin on Sunday.

Havertz's goal was the first shot on target in a largely drab encounter in which Freiburg could have snatched at least a point.

Lucas Hoeler missed a glaring opportunity for the hosts two minutes before the break, pushing wide when sent through one-on-one with Leverkusen stopper Lukas Hradecky.

And chasing an equaliser late on, Nils Petersen forced Hradecky to save the three points for Leverkusen with a fine first time strike that the goalkeeper did well to tip away.



Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Kai Havertz (R) made Bundesliga history on Friday, becoming the first player to score 35 goals in Germany's top flight before his 21st birthday, in a 1-0 win against Freiburg.

PHOTO: AFP



Salzburg won the Austrian Cup with a ruthless 5-0 destruction of second-tier Austria Lustenau in the final at an empty Woerthersee Stadium as the season resumed following the coronavirus stoppage on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Coppa final before Serie A restart

REUTERS, Rome

The Italian football season will resume with the final stages of the Coppa Italia before Serie A gets under way on June 20, following a vote by the 20 top-tier clubs on Friday.

Serie A said in a statement that the "the sporting activity of the 2019/2020 season will resume firstly with the Coppa Italia" with the final to be played on June 17.

It did not give a date for the semifinal second leg matches between Napoli and Inter, and Juventus and AC Milan.

Federer tops sports' richlist

REUTERS

Roger Federer is the world's highest-paid athlete for 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic knocked soccer's Lionel Messi off top spot, according to the annual Forbes list released on Friday.

The Swiss tennis great, owner of a men's record 20 Grand Slam singles titles, earned \$106.3 million in the last 12 months, including \$100 million via endorsements, to move up four places and become the first player from his sport to top the list.

Soccer players Cristiano Ronaldo (\$105 million), Messi (\$104 million) and Neymar (\$95.5 million) and American basketball player LeBron James (\$88.2 million) rounded out the top five.

"The coronavirus pandemic



triggered salary cuts for soccer stars Messi and Ronaldo, clearing the way for a tennis player to rank as the world's highest-paid athlete for the first time," said Kurt Badenhausen, senior editor at Forbes.

"Roger Federer is the perfect pitchman for companies, resulting in an unparalleled endorsement portfolio of blue-chip brands worth \$100

million a year for the tennis great."

Japan's Naomi Osaka (\$37.4 million), who was ranked 29th on the list, surpassed fellow tennis player Serena Williams (\$36 million) as the world's highest-earning female athlete.

Osaka and Williams were the only women on the list.

Basketball players led all sports with 35 players among the top 100. American football occupied 31 spots, none higher than six-times Super Bowl champion Tom Brady (\$45 million) who was ranked 25th.

Soccer was the next most represented sport with 14 players, followed by tennis (six), boxing and mixed martial arts (five), golf (four), motor racing (three), and baseball and cricket with one each.

ECB wants coronavirus substitutes

REUTERS, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board is in talks with the ICC about allowing coronavirus substitutions in its upcoming Test series against West Indies and Pakistan.

ECB director of events Steve Elworthy was quoted saying he hoped an agreement would be reached in time for those matches.

The ICC currently only allows a player to be replaced during a match if they are thought to have suffered a concussion.

'Am I next?'

Gauff joins protests against killings of African-Americans

REUTERS

Teenage tennis phenomenon Coco Gauff released a video protesting killings of African-Americans in the United States on Friday, joining a chorus of outrage across the country that followed the death of an unarmed black man in Minneapolis.

Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was charged on Friday with murder in the death of 46-year-old George Floyd after cellphone footage of the white officer kneeling on Floyd's neck prompted a wave of protests.

Sixteen-year-old African-American Gauff said on Twitter this week she would "always use my platform to help make the world a better place," and on Friday called for action from

others in a TikTok video posted to her Twitter account.

"This is why I am using my voice to fight against racism," the caption reads, as the video cuts to images of Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed black man whose shooting in Brunswick, Georgia, was also captured on video. Three white men were charged in his death earlier this month.

Gauff's video also includes a photo of Trayvon Martin, a black teenager whose killing helped spark the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

The words, "Am I next?" appear on screen, as Gauff, wearing a black hoodie, faces the camera and raises her hands.

"I am using my voice," the caption

concludes, "Will you use yours?"

Gauff joins numerous other athletes, including basketball stars LeBron James and Lisa Leslie, who have spoken out following Floyd's death.

James posted a photo of the police officer kneeling on Floyd next to one of Kaepernick in a similar position before an NFL game. "This ... Is Why," James wrote in a post to his 65m Instagram followers. "Do you understand NOW!!!!!!? Or is it still blurred to you?? #StayWoke". Kaepernick also shared a version of James's photo on Instagram, as did Formula One world champion Hamilton.

Lebron also posted a photo of Floyd and the caption: "We're hunted."



Liverpool players wished a happy birthday to club legend Steven Gerrard during a training session at Melwood yesterday. The runaway leaders of Premier League are gearing up for a scheduled restart on June 17.

PHOTO: COLLECTED