

DJOKOVIC AND THE CAT & MOUSE

Manchester United's Nemanja Matic on Thursday backed his fellow countryman Novak Djokovic, who was widely slammed for hosting a tennis exhibition where he was one of four players to test positive for the coronavirus, and said the world number one was the "cat" who will chase away the "mice". "Mice came out of the hole and gave themselves the right to criticise the world number one, in tennis but also how he relates to all other people in the world," Matic wrote in an open letter of support to Djokovic published by local media. "But I don't care. Very soon the cat (Djokovic) will be on the court, and the mice in the hole." -- AFP



'ON KLOPP OF THE WORLD'

REUTERS

The end of Liverpool's long wait for a league championship was celebrated across the English media on Friday with most going for the headline "Champions" while the Daily Star, in a nod to their manager, declared they were "On Klopp of the World."

Juergen Klopp's side sealed a first league title in three decades on Thursday when Manchester City were beaten 2-1 by Chelsea, sparking wild celebrations on Merseyside despite the pandemic. "Smashing Crystal Palace 4-0 on Wednesday, showing all the class of champions more than 20 points clear of a brilliant City, ... felt like the sort of emphatic declaration of excellence these strange times needed," Matt Dickinson wrote in The Times.

"No need for asterisks -- this success is deserved, and momentous. Liverpool have enjoyed great European triumphs but there is something about domestic dominance that brings a deeper, richer sense of pride." Martin Samuel in the Daily Mail said Liverpool's campaign came close to topping the achievement of Leicester City in winning the 2015-16 title. "It is the most incredible title

triumph in Liverpool's history, and arguably the best delivered by an elite club in the Premier League era. As irritating as it may sound to their bitter rivals, this one really does mean more. It is a rewriting of the record books few can have expected a year ago ... "It is the season of all seasons, the campaign of all campaigns." Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher said he was happy to be proved wrong after

writing in a 2017 column that he was not convinced Klopp had the ability to win the title. "Klopp arrived at Anfield saying he wanted to turn doubters into believers. I was one of those who had given up hope," Carragher wrote in The Telegraph. "It gives me the greatest pleasure to admit these words now look misjudged. In my defence ... no one took me to task for the remarks at the time."



WHAT THEY SAID

I have no words. It is unbelievable, much more than I thought was possible. Becoming champions with this club is absolutely incredible. This is for Kenny (Dalglish), for Stevie (Gerrard) - everyone!
-- Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp

This was a season for the ages and for the faithful of Liverpool Football Club. It has been an incredible year of magnificent achievement culminating tonight in capturing the Premier League title.
-- Liverpool owner John Henry

The last two years and since Juergen (Klopp)'s come in has been very positive. He's been fantastic and epitomises everything Liverpool Football Club stands for. Whatever they got, they have deserved it.
-- Kenny Dalglish, who led the Reds to the title in 1990



There was little regard for the coronavirus pandemic as Liverpool fans swarmed Anfield and watched 30 years of anguish go up in the flames of their bright red flares. The club's players, many of whom watched the Manchester City-Chelsea game, broke out in song and dance at the final whistle before taking their party to social media and celebrating with their hordes of supporters.

PHOTO: REUTERS/TWITTER

The year of Liverpool's last victory

REUTERS, London

Britain underwent some fairly tumultuous change from the early 1970s to the end of the 1980s but one thing remained constant - come the end of each season, Liverpool would be top, or almost top of the Football League. When they hoisted the old First Division trophy in April 1990 it marked Liverpool's 11th title in 18 seasons, and only twice in that remarkable run did they finish outside the top two. Anyone predicting it would 30 years before the next one might have been considered a victim of Mad Cow disease, which burst on to the scene the same year. Yet dynasties fall - as Margaret Thatcher and Mike Tyson also discovered in 1990. Thatcher had ruled unchallenged as Britain's longest serving Prime Minister of the 20th century and also probably thought she would go on forever, until she was forced out by her own Conservative party and replaced by John Major. Tyson was arguably the most dominant force in heavyweight boxing history but, after 37 usually crushing wins, he was knocked

down and beaten for the first time in his career by Buster Douglas in one of sport's biggest all-time shocks. In 1990 Aston Villa finished second in a top-flight that included Wimbledon, Coventry City and Luton Town. Leeds United won the second division to return after an eight-year absence and would win the league two years later. After four barren years at Manchester United, manager Alex Ferguson finally collected his first piece of silverware as they beat Crystal Palace in a replay to win

the FA Cup, though they came 13th in the league, five points above the relegation zone. It would be another three years until the Scot won the title -- the first edition of the fancy new Premier League -- to end a 26-year drought that used to delight Liverpool fans. The world's highest transfer fee was the 8 million pounds (\$10 million) Juventus paid Fiorentina for Roberto Baggio. England's most expensive player was Chris Waddle, sold to Tottenham Hotspur to Olympique

Marseille for 4.2 million the previous year. Hooliganism was rife. In May, 34 Bolton Wanderers fans, who were convicted of attacking police and rival supporters, were banned from travelling to the World Cup in Italy. England lost to eventual champions West Germany on penalties in the semi-finals and, although Luciano Pavarotti's Nessun Dorma and New Order's World in Motion were the soundtrack of Italia '90, the year's biggest selling single in the UK was a re-release of the Righteous Brothers' Unchained Melody. Paul Gascoigne and England gained legions of fans from that adventure but less uplifting was the country's final rebel cricket tour of South Africa, which came to look even more ill-advised as Nelson Mandela was released from captivity three weeks after they arrived. Back in the UK, recognition of National Health Service staff as "front line heroes" was still a distant dream as the country's ambulance workers eventually returned to work after a crippling six-month strike over low pay.



A transcendent TRIUMPH

AL-AMIN

I have never considered myself a passionate Liverpool fan, although my colleagues and friends think otherwise. The vintage English football club won the Premier League title last night, ending a 30-year wait. The Reds' first title in the Premier League era was confirmed with a staggering seven games in hand after their nearest challengers and defending champions Manchester City lost to Chelsea 2-1 at Stamford Bridge. It is a momentous occasion for Liverpool fans across the world, including Bangladesh, to cherish something that they had to wait for such a long time. Although celebrations were mostly confined indoors due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, many Liverpool faithful thronged to Anfield to celebrate the historic success. The title was irrevocably coming home for Liverpool fans this year under the stewardship of German manager Juergen Klopp, after a near-miss under Brendan Rodgers in the 2013-14 season, when the Reds were leading eventual winners Manchester City by three points going into their crucial home game against Chelsea. A win would have almost certainly sealed the title, but a famous tumble by Steven Gerrard in that game, which they lost 2-0, dashed their title hopes. I had the privilege of visiting Liverpool at the time, thanks to a brief tour to Anfield for a select group from across the world by the club's lead sponsor, Standard Chartered Bank, as part of its promotional campaign. That tour reaffirmed by belief as to why the Merseyside club is considered one of most followed teams in the world. A barefoot walk on the hallowed Anfield turf, a symbol of many successes before the game's commercialisation, is a once in a lifetime experience for any football fan. A visit to the century-old wooden locker room revealed that it was not just about sticking to tradition, but taking inspiration from legendary coaches such as Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley and Kenny Dalglish. And the

enormous Kop end, which was once a grass bank where you never stopped moving and singing, still represents pure adulation for the beautiful game and stands as a symbol of togetherness for a common cause. The Kop end is probably the most hated enclosure for any visiting team. This generation of football fans probably liked to consider Liverpool as a force to be reckoned with only in the past. But the Premier League title that has followed the UEFA Champions League and FIFA Club World Cup glory under Klopp, who combined resilience with flair, has firmly put Liverpool on course to reviving its lost glory. And for its loyal fans, who year after year turned up to every game or tuned in on TV with their kids, telling them how successful their beloved team once was is no longer a thing of the past. Sadly, there are many who are not alive to be part of this success with the younger ones. Al Mussabbir Sadi is one of those Liverpool faithful. It is



an understatement to bracket him just a Reds follower. He is probably one of most devout Liverpool fans I have ever come across. A career journalist and a prolific writer, Sadi was an encyclopaedia of Liverpool. He was one of those who used to sport the famous Liverpool scruff when his team was struggling. He loved to enjoy every Liverpool game with his two beautiful kids. He lost the battle against cancer and died in 2011 at the very young age of 44 while working as the general secretary Bangladesh Football Federation. He is no longer with us but is probably celebrating his beloved team's success from his heavenly abode. And this Liverpool success is more for those who never resigned. After all, it is all about the ageless message of Liverpool's team song: "You'll Never Walk Alone."

WHAT TO WATCH

- LA LIGA**
Facebook
Athletic Club v Mallorca
Live from 6:00pm
Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Live from 9:00pm
Osasuna v Leganes
Live from 11:30pm
Atletico Madrid v Alaves
Live from 2:00am (Sunday)
- PREMIER LEAGUE**
Star Sports Select 1
Aston Villa v Wolves
Live from 5:30pm
- BUNDESLIGA**
Star Sports Select 1
Augsburg v Leipzig
Live from 7:30pm
- FA CUP**
Ten 2
Norwich City v Man United
Live from 10:30pm
- SERIE A**
Ten 2
Lazio v Fiorentina
Live from 1.45am (Sunday)

BFF proposals ready for presentation

Players to sit with BFF president on Monday to discuss contracts

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation has prepared proposals to resolve outstanding contract issues after local players expressed concerns over their payments for the 2019-20 Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) season, which was voided on May 17 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 13 BPL clubs settled wages with foreign players in line with the FIFA-prescribed process of reaching mutual understandings, but are yet to settle with 356 registered local players'. A group of five players met BFF president Kazi Salahuddin on June 16 to express their concerns about wages and informed that a number of players wanted to sit with him in a formal meeting and discuss their issues. They also urged him to start the next season as soon as possible as the players have been suffering financially. BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag told The Daily Star yesterday that although they could not take any initiatives immediately following the

shutdown, they had prepared some proposals to resolve the matter. He also said that they would ensure representation from all 13 clubs in the meeting with the BFF president to get a clear overview of the situation. "Some national players have already sought an appointment with the BFF president, who is ready to sit with players. The meeting is likely to take place on Monday," Shohag said, adding that then they will also sit with the club officials to hear their opinions. "After hearing the opinions of all parties, we will present our proposal to curtail players' wages as the season was not completed. But it is almost certain that will not proportionally cut wages because there is huge difference in the wages of established players and upcoming players," Shohag said. It has been learnt that the BFF has prepared five slabs of wages from Tk one lakh to above Tk 25 lakh. The players in the first slab will be exempted from any slash in wages. In a meeting on May 17, most clubs proposed playing with the same squad

next season as only 25 per cent of league matches could be completed. As per FIFA's players' statutes and COVID-19 regulations, there is no option to play same players in the new season under the old contracts, which is a one-season agreement. Since the last meeting of the professional league committee, clubs did not take any initiative to resolve the local players' issue. Instead, they were also looking to the BFF's initiatives for a solution. A few clubs provided monthly salaries for one or two months during the pandemic, while clubs like Bashundhara Kings have refrained from paying further salaries as they paid up to 90 per cent of the contracts and are now supposed to get money back from players. A few days ago, national team coach Jamie Day emphasised on the need to resolve the issue before the restart of the World Cup Qualifying campaign, saying: "I am sure it will be on their mind if they have no salary for their families."