

'We won't stop'

AGENCIES

Premier League Liverpool's first English title for 30 years had been sealed almost a month ago with seven games remaining and the players finally got their hands on the trophy on Wednesday in a muted presentation ceremony in front of an empty Kop after a thrilling 5-3 victory over Chelsea in their last home game of the season.

Kenny Dalglish, the last Liverpool manager to deliver the title, presented the medals wearing a red face mask before handing the trophy to captain Jordan Henderson who raised it to the night sky as fireworks and tickertape filled the air. Sadly, because of the pandemic that interrupted Liverpool's charge to the title, the fans missed out on what would have been a momentous night at Anfield stadium.

Despite the sanitised ceremony in the 53,000-seater stadium, Liverpool's players did their best to fill the void, belting out a rendition of the club's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" along with manager Jurgen Klopp and his staff.

Klopp's side won the Champions League, Super Cup and Club World Cup titles last year, but the German said that their rivals will look to close the gap.

"We're champions of England, of Europe and the world. I know what that sounds like, but it's the truth. It's unbelievable, to be honest," Klopp told reporters.

"We'll not stop. We have internal challenges and each player can improve. Five years ago I asked the supporters to believe us. I told the doubters to become believers, they made it happen."

Liverpool can take their league points tally for the season to 99 with victory at Newcastle United on Sunday.



Just a kid from Breda, becoming a Premier League Champion. This is a dream come true but also an opportunity for me to remind every kid in the world that anything is possible. Hard work & perseverance! Don't let anyone's ignorance, hate or negativity stop you from being the best you can be! Thanks to my family, fans, teammates and the whole staff! Liverpool this is for YOU!

LIVERPOOL'S SUCCESS IS PROBABLY BEST DESCRIBED ON VIRGIL VAN DIJK'S TWITTER POST.



Domestic cricketers, who are outside the national team, have become somewhat outcasts, with no matches, training or income since the coronavirus pandemic brought a halt to sport in the country in mid-March. Meanwhile, players within the national fold, like Taskin Ahmed (R), have been given the green signal to return to individual training at BCB facilities. PHOTO: STAR



A matter of livelihood for domestic cricketers

RAMIN TALUKDER AND ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

"I feel the situation will improve little by little but if you think that things should resume when situation becomes very good, by that time cricketers won't be able to survive," Shamsur Rahman Shuvo said while talking to The Daily Star when asked about the difficulty that the pandemic has brought.

Cricket is coming back to life in the country amidst the coronavirus pandemic even if it is on a small scale. A few of the national team players have begun individual training last week at the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) training facilities across the country. Plans are being considered to reschedule the postponed tour of Sri Lanka while the U-19 and HP sides are understood to be gearing up for camps. There is however a big portion of professional cricketers outside that spectrum of aforementioned teams. These players are eager for

domestic cricket's return as many use it as a platform to get a national team call-up while almost all depend on it financially.

What situation do they find themselves in?

It is not only the financial burden of having to run families, but from a cricketing aspect too, players outside the sphere of the national team have been left in the lurch.

"The situation is such that you won't be able to give everyone opportunities [to train] like before and it's natural that the national team will be given the highest priority," Shamsur said. "Maybe after Eid if you take some time to assess the situation and make the national team academy available for players outside the national team who play in the domestic circuit, we will be greatly benefited."

"Because when matches start, we will be lagging behind those in the national team in terms of skill and fitness levels since they are getting the opportunity but we are not. We understand the situation is difficult but hope the BCB will consider our

situation and find some balance. If the gym, indoor facilities and the academy grounds could be used after Eid, since most of the national players who resumed training are done by 3:00pm, it will be better.

"Even national players depend on domestic matches in the BPL and DPL for year-round income. We are all dependent on the Premier League. We might make do till Eid but after that it will be difficult," Shamsur reiterated.

"I don't have any first-class contract. After NCL payments last year, I have not earned a single taka in the last seven or eight months," Brothers Union medium-pacer Alauddin Babu said.

"It's been a very difficult time," he added. "Fitness too is so important for a pacer, cardio logical fitness especially. We are doing some small-level work but a break like this creates many issues."

The BCB had handed guidelines to national players on how to work on fitness at home. While those outside have not received such guidelines, some have started work

outside or are considering it.

"Since national players' training has begun, we are hoping to get permission to train soon. We have done fitness work at home as was possible. We didn't have any guidelines but started with what means we have. Hopefully after Eid a government directive will arrive so clubs can start proceedings. The BCB are positive and some of us have talked to the CEO and they assured that things will start with the Premier League first. If it doesn't happen then for most it would be difficult bear our families' expenses," said Enamul Haque Jr, who plays for Sylhet Division in the NCL.

"If the Premier League doesn't happen this year we will be in great danger," veteran first-class batsman Tushar Imran said. "We are hopeful but the situation is difficult. If we don't have cricket for a year the clubs won't be keen on paying us. Maybe if we can have a deal to negotiate for some payments this year and compensate with next year's payments, we can make do," he added.



Although they were already crowned champions, Liverpool were presented with the Premier League trophy after their game against Chelsea on Wednesday. Their breathless 5-3 win over the Blues made their celebrations even sweeter. PHOTO: REUTERS

No backup for Haaland

REUTERS, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund will not sign a backup for main striker Erling Haaland, sports director Michael Zorc said, pointing to a record goal haul in the league last season as proof of their strength in attack.

The 20-year-old joined managed 13 goals, contributing to a club record of 84, as Dortmund finished in second place.

"We did not score few goals last season," Zorc told Kicker magazine on Thursday.

The club would need to act, however, should Sancho, whose contract runs until 2022, leave now.

Can West Indies make history?

AGENCIES

The cricket fraternity around the world will keep a close eye on the third and final Test between England and West Indies, starting today at Old Trafford, after both sides put on spirited displays so far for the coveted Wisden Trophy.

The three-match series, cricket's first international series in the new normal, has been an enthralling affair between the two sides. With the series firmly locked at 1-1, the finale promises to be an edge-of-the-seat contest.

West Indies started the series with a four-wicket win against England in Southampton but England fought back strongly in the second Test and equalled the series with a thumping 113-run win.

West Indies, the Wisden Trophy holders, remain in the hunt for their

first Test series victory in England since 1988.

"We're constantly reminding them that they've got a chance to change something that hasn't happened for 32 years," said West Indies assistant coach Roddy Estwick.

England must decide whether to recall Jofra Archer for the decisive third Test after the fast bowler suffered online racist abuse. Archer is available after missing England's series-levelling win at the same ground following a breach of coronavirus protocols.

Veteran England paceman James Anderson said skipper Joe Root and coach Chris Silverwood would have to assess whether Archer was "in the right place to play".

The West Indies could field the same pace quartet of Shannon Gabriel, Kumar Roach, Alzarri Joseph and captain Jason Holder.

Both Gabriel and Joseph left the field with minor injuries during the second Test but Estwick said: "Shannon was ready to go into the nets today (Wednesday) to have a bowl. The rain curtailed that but I think they'll be fine."

Batting, however, remains the visitors' major problem in a series where they are yet to post an individual hundred, although several batsmen have shown talent with attractive fifties.

Ben Stokes went to the top of the Test all-rounder rankings and number three in the batting charts with 176 and 78 not out, as well as taking three wickets, in the penultimate match of this series. "To have that talent in our team and to be able to watch it firsthand is amazing," said Anderson.

And without any doubt England expect another masterclass from the all-rounder to seal the series.



West Indies captain Jason Holder (L) will be willing to pull out all the stops to keep the Wisden Trophy in their hands when his visiting side take on Joe Root's England in a decisive third Test at Old Trafford from today. PHOTO: REUTERS



Former Australia captain Steve Smith was seen performing fitness drills under brilliant sunshine with Luke Zocchi, one of the leading trainers in the health and fitness industry, at Byron Bay, a coastal town and popular holiday destination in the southeastern Australian state of New South Wales. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Ambitions limited as Online Chess Olympiad approaches

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Niaz Murshed believes studying up on openings is more important than practising online in rapid chess, even though there is very little possibility for Bangladesh to qualify for the top division of FIDE Online Chess Olympiad scheduled to take place from July 25 to August 30.

"It is not that you can produce good results by practising online as there are some matters to consider before playing chess online. Opening is very important in rapid chess. I will study openings over the next two weeks because I made a mistake in the opening moves of a game during Senior Asian Online Chess while trying to play hurriedly," said the subcontinent's first GM, who is all set to take part in the Online Chess Olympiad along with GM Reefat Bin Sattar, WIM Rani Hamid, WIM Sultana

Sharmin Shirin, IM Fahad Rahman and WCM Ahmed Walijah while six others players are in reserve.

"If I study such mistakes this time around, I can easily avoid them. Besides, if you want to save time, you need to review theory more than spending time on the board. You also have to study the opponents you are going to face. I have to face players with ratings ranging from 2500 to 2600, so what use will a few days' practice be? You have to prepare differently to put pressure on them," Niaz added.

Bangladesh is one of 35 teams to gain direct qualification to the second division, which contains 50 teams. The top 15 teams from the second division will qualify for the top division.

Although the Chess Olympiad is played in separate men's and women's divisions with four players playing each round, the Online Chess Olympiad will see a



different format with six boards -- two players each from men's and women's section and two U-20 players, one male and one female.

"With the new combination of boards, I think the results may be a bit poorer because we could not develop overall significantly and the development of women's chess is also less. In that respect, the women are still inexperienced, so they will fall behind. If Rani Pa can spring surprises at her age along with Shirin and Eva, then we can expect something good but the fact

is that they are less familiar with online chess. The two junior players are also inexperienced," Niaz said.

"It will be a bit of a miracle if we qualify for the top division. If we want to qualify, we have to perform outstandingly against the top four to five teams, who are stronger than us and it is all but impossible to fight against them in all sections as we lag far behind. Our target should be to offer a good fight against those top teams and beat the weaker sides. And it will be satisfactory if all players can perform well," said Niaz, who recently faced the problem in internet connect that forced him to leave Senior Asian Online Chess unexpectedly.

Bangladesh Chess Federation is mulling bringing all players under one roof in a bid to provide better internet facilities but the rules of competition are still not clear about whether FIDE allows to do so or play all players in separation room.