



The former assistant teacher of a nondescript primary school in remote Kalsindur village at the foot of the Garo hills, Mofiz Uddin, who coached the institution to a hatrick of titles in the Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup from 2013 to 2015, poses with the students (L) while budding footballers of the famed village of Dhobaura upazila in Mymensingh have been confined to practising in their courtyards amid the pandemic.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Double whammy for Kalsindur girls

AMINUL ISLAM from Mymensingh

Budding footballers of the famed Kalsindur village of the Dhobaura upazila in Mymensingh have been confined to practising in their courtyards after a double whammy; the coronavirus pandemic paired with flash floods.

The young girls, some of whom have represented the national team at age level and others hoping to emulate that feat, have been left with little to survive with, let alone play football.

According to Kalsindur Govt School and College principal Mala Rani Sarker, the village currently boasts around 50 active female footballers. 14 play for age-level national teams or the women's national team. The rest ply their trade in local and district competitions.

"As Kalsindur has earned name and fame from football throughout the country and abroad, we are trying to produce more football talents through our limited efforts", Mala told this correspondent.

But the past four months have been

very difficult. Mala claimed that these girls did not get any support from official quarters, adding that she and her peers, with assistance from some affluent people, arranged relief materials for 40 girls before Eid-ul-Fitr.

But with another Eid knocking on the door and floods exacerbating the situation, financial assistance is paramount for the girls and their families.

Mohammad Juel Rana, coach of the Kalsindur girls' football team, said it was becoming increasingly difficult to continue coaching. The young man gets only Tk 5000 as a monthly honorarium from the school and it is only due to his devotion to the game that he is continuing, he claimed.

Unfortunately, the current crisis is not the first setback to the fertile breeding ground for footballers. The village's primary school, which produced famed players such as Sanjida Akter, Tahura Khatun, Maria Manda, Sajeda Akter, Shamsunnahar Sr and Shamsunnahar Jr, saw football activities cease completely in 2018 due to a row over the credit for these players' success.

According to local sources said, the row

started in 2016 between Kalsindur Govt Primary School and Kalsindur Govt School and College over credit for the success.

Mofiz Uddin -- a former assistant teacher of the primary school who had coached the institution to a hatrick of titles in the Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup from 2013 to 2015 -- was eventually transferred to another school and football activities at the primary school were stopped. The consequence for the schools from the famed football village was failure at the national level.

Despite all that, there are several players from that successful period who are very much part of the national team set up.

Sanjida is such an example, having graduated from the primary school well before the infamous row and claiming a regular place in the national team. She is nurtured and trained by the BFF along with 40-plus others round-the-year.

"I want to improve my performance and I dream of playing in the Club World Cup one day", the 19-year-old midfielder said.

But her plans have been upended and she is now training at home. Sanjida was

playing for Bashundhara Kings in the long-awaited women's football league in mid-March when the pandemic broke out, forcing the BFF to halt the league.

Having been away from the game for four months, Sanjida is trying her best to maintain fitness by following BFF coach Golam Rabbani Choton's instructions, which she receives online.

Like Sanjida, Shamsunnahar Jr, captain of the under-15 national women's team, is training at home and sends footage to the BFF every week for further instructions.

"I suffered huge mental pressure when I lost my mother when I was a fifth-grader. But I want to do well in football and lead a decent life with my siblings and ailing father", Shamsunnahar said.

Both Sanjida and Shamsunnahar know online instructions and individual drills are a far cry from the experience they garner from BFF camps or competitive matches, domestic or international.

They know their current test is navigating through this situation, but once the twin crises are over, their skills and fitness will face a much sterner test.

## 'India can't match bumper-machine Wagner'

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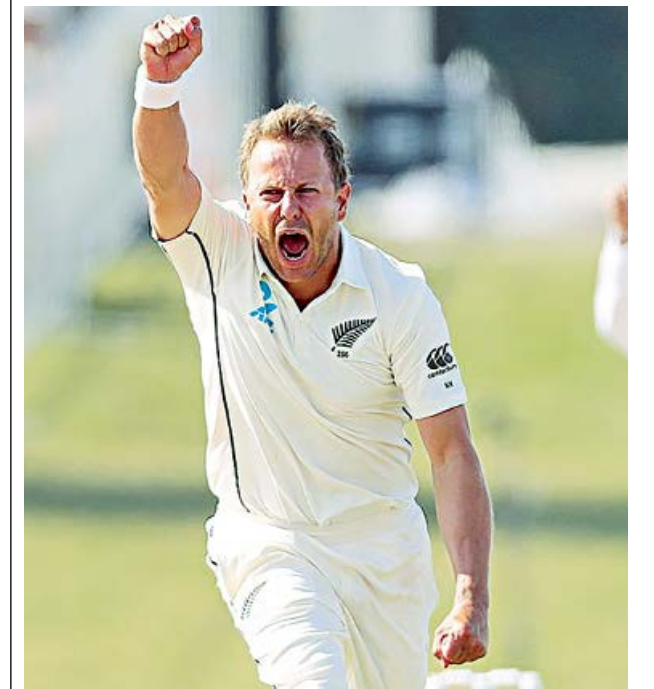


Matthew Wade expects more sustained short-pitched onslaughts this summer but warned that not even India's world-class pace attack will be able to match New Zealand's bouncer-bowling extraordinaire, Neil Wagner.

Wade's showdown with Wagner in Perth was the most enthralling contest of a one-sided Test summer, with the Tasmanian taking a series of blows to his body as he refused to fall into the leg-side trap that would ensnare the previously infallible Steve Smith several times in the series.

As Australia's top-order piled on runs, Wagner's unusual tactics proved the only effective bowling strategy the Kiwis had up their sleeve. The fact Wagner dismissed Australia's three leading batsmen -- Smith, David Warner and Marnus Labuschagne -- a combined 10 times will not have gone unnoticed by India, who are set for a four-Test tour of Australia this summer.

Virat Kohli's men defeated the Aussies 2-1 in 2018-19 but Smith and Warner were banned for that series, while Labuschagne played just one Test. Wade says replicating



Wagner's method will be harder than it looks.

"Teams may try it but I don't think it will be as successful," Wade said. "I don't think anyone has bowled bouncers the way he bowled and been so consistent, and not gotten scored off while also picking up wickets."

"I think we'll see it a bit (from India) but I don't think it will be as effective as Wagner. He's done it for a long time now ... to be honest I've never faced a bowler who is so accurate at bowling bouncers."

Australia coach Justin Langer likened Wade and Wagner to "street fighters" but Wade stressed his approach was not as primitive as it might have appeared.

"If you looked at all the bouncers (Wagner) bowled ... he's always between your shoulder and the top of your (helmet) peak, or in your armpits," said Wade. "It's very easy to say, 'We're going to do this' and set the field like they set. They barely had anyone in front of the wicket. They had really cagey fields, catchers in good places, they were trying to take wickets all the time, it wasn't negative bowling."

"That's why I didn't play the shot all that much because I felt like they could get me out that way. It was a good contest. Hats off to him, he bowled unbelievably well."

While Australia's top-order is now far more settled, Wade expects Kohli's side to be the toughest challenge.

"Everyone, although they might not admit it, is looking towards that Indian series," said Wade. "It's going to be hard work. They are a fierce team. They're as hard a team as I've ever played in terms of the way they compete."

"Led by Virat, you can see the way he goes about it on the field, you can see what it means to him and he drives all those guys, they jump on the back of him. It's going to be as big a challenge as this team has faced for the 12 months we've been together."

## Ibra likens himself to Benjamin Button

REUTERS

Irrepressible AC Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic likened himself to film character Benjamin Button after scoring twice in a 4-1 Serie A win at Sampdoria.

"People tell me I'm old and tired but I'm just getting warmed up," the 38-year-old said after his ninth league goal. "I'm like Benjamin Button, except I've always been young, never old," he added, referring to the main character in a 2008 movie about a man who ages in reverse.

Ibrahimovic left LA Galaxy and joined Milan in January this year, making 17 appearances so far.



Ciro Immobile and Zlatan Ibrahimovic were ecstatic in celebrations during their respective Serie A games on Wednesday. Immobile boosted his chances of clinching the top scorer award as he netted his 35th goal of the season, moving four clear of Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo during Lazio's 2-0 win against already-relegated Brescia and he now has a shot to go ahead of Robert Lewandowski, who had 34 goals. Meanwhile, Ibrahimovic scored twice to help AC Milan win 4-1 at Sampdoria. It was the second time in three matches that the 38-year-old has got a brace. On the other hand, Juventus, who won a record-extending ninth straight Serie A title on Sunday, fielded a much-changed team and lost 2-0 at Cagliari.

PHOTO: TWITTER



## 'Must continue this in the CL' Vardy's story an inspiration in trying times

Boateng urges players to continue showing support for BLM

REUTERS

Bayern Munich defender Jerome Boateng says players must use the platform provided by the Champions League to continue sending messages about racial equality by taking a knee.

Athletes from around the world have taken a knee in a show of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter campaign, which gained momentum after George Floyd's death in police custody in May.

Europe's Champions League, which has been suspended since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will resume next month.

"It's very powerful and very important that we continue this in the Champions League, especially in the final, because the whole world will look," said Boateng, whose side hold a 3-0 lead over Chelsea heading into the second leg of their last-16 tie on Aug. 8.

"Hopefully in some sports that are not back yet, they will join us. I think it's very important."

The German defender, who has been the victim of racial abuse in the past, said he had spoken to his Bayern team mates about the issues raised by the BLM movement.

"We talked about it before our break, I talked actually to Joshua Kimmich and Leon Goretzka about it," the 31-year-old said.

"They asked me how to support, how does it feel, what happened to you when you were younger, so I could tell them my story, what were my experiences, and why is it so painful and hard to hear those things."

SABBIR HOSSAIN



"Even now there are moments when I shake my head at the madness of it all

-- going from the factory floor and playing Sunday morning pub football with my mates, to scoring for my country against the World Cup winners in Berlin. It's the stuff of dreams. It hasn't always been an easy journey, some doubted that I was capable, and at times I was probably guilty of not helping myself, but nobody can question my passion for football or my commitment once I set foot on the pitch."

Leicester City's prolific English striker Jamie Vardy uttered these words four years ago when he launched his autobiography, 'Jamie Vardy: From Nowhere, My Story'.

There have been a lot of stories regarding team and individual achievements in England's Premier League but Vardy's is one about how a person can overcome all barriers and achieve something special. Particularly during a pandemic, when everyone is seeking inspiration, Vardy's story could be a good read.

He proved age is not a barrier to achievement. Last Sunday, aged 33, Vardy became the oldest player to bag the Premier League Golden Boot, overtaking former Ivory Coast superstar Didier Drogba, after finishing top of the scoring chart of the 2019-20 season with 23 goals.

Vardy's story is not short of a fairy tale. Eight years ago, he was playing non-league football with Fleetwood Town in

front of a handful of people. And by May of 2016 -- from a footballer playing in the fifth-tier of the English football league system, he became a Premier League champion with Leicester.

Born in Sheffield on 11 January 1987, Vardy started playing football at local team Sheffield Wednesday but was released as a teenager. He was told that he was too small to make it in football, and for some time, he thought his chance had gone.

But Vardy was far from giving up his dream and joined Stocksbridge Park Steels youth system at the age of 16. He made his

first-team debut in 2007, earning 30 pounds a week at the club while working in a factory as a technician making medical splints.

Stocksbridge tagged Vardy as a 'special' talent, but he was convicted for assault following an altercation outside a pub the same year, and for six months, he had to play wearing an electronic tag.

Vardy then moved to Halifax Town, and after a successful stint, joined Fleetwood Town in 2011. In his only season there, he scored 31 league goals and drew the attention of Championship side Leicester City.

