



Head coach Russell Domingo and bowling coach Ottis Gibson observe as Mustafizur Rahman tests the defences of Mominul Haque during a nets session of the Bangladesh national team at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. Despite no apparent headway yet in the proposed tour of Sri Lanka, the Tigers kept sweating it out in a bio-secured bubble.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A tale of two keepers

AFP, London



The gulf that still exists between Liverpool and Chelsea was on show on Sunday as the Premier League champions secured a 2-0 win at Stamford Bridge in a match defined by the differing fortunes of the world's two most expensive goalkeepers.

Alisson Becker's record £67 million (\$87 million) move from Roma to Liverpool in 2018 lasted just three weeks before Chelsea paid £72 million to buy Kepa Arrizabalaga from Athletic Bilbao. Just over two years on there is no doubt who got value for money with Chelsea prepared to spend again to solve their 'keeper crisis with the imminent arrival of Edouard Mendy from Rennes.

Kepa's latest calamity saw him gift possession to Sadio Mane for the Senegalese's second goal after heading Liverpool into the lead early in the second-half. Chelsea's decision to spend £200 million in recent months before addressing their goalkeeper situation raised questions before the season started as to their title credentials.

Just two games in, doubts over Kepa's ability to start for a title contender have proven well founded as he also let Leandro Trossard's long-range striker under his arm in Monday's 3-1 win at Brighton. "He's our player and it's clear there are two games where we feel (he made mistakes)," said Lampard. "Brighton was a mistake as well. He's reflected on that. "It's a clear mistake that's cost us because at that point we go onto have a penalty which we might score and those fine margins change games at this level. "Kepa has to keep working, he has to have support around him that's very clear but it was a clear mistake."

The Spaniard was dropped twice by Lampard in favour of 38-year-old Willy Caballero last season and Chelsea's failure to solve their goalkeeping problem before splashing out to reinforce in other areas of the field, where they are better stocked, has been a puzzling one. Kepa had the lowest

save percentage of any goalkeeper to play at least 10 games in the Premier League last season and conceded 10 more goals than he should have, according to Opta's expected goals metric. Liverpool can now boast one of the best goalkeepers in the world as Alisson showed by saving Jorginho's penalty on Sunday having had barely anything to do for the first 75 minutes.

However, it was not so long ago that Klopp found himself in a similar situation to Lampard. After reaching the Champions League final and finishing fourth in the Premier League in 2017/18, Klopp's side were clearly on the rise.

But two catastrophic errors from Loris Karius in the 3-1 final defeat to Real Madrid in Kiev convinced the German and the Liverpool hierarchy they needed a top goalkeeper to win major trophies again.

SCORES FROM ACROSS EUROPE

Southampton 2 – 5 Tottenham
Chelsea 0 – 2 Liverpool
Leicester 4 – 2 Burnley 2
Parma 0 – 2 Napoli
Juventus 3 – 0 Sampdoria
Real Betis 2 – 0 Valladolid
Real Sociedad 0 – 0 Real Madrid
Nice 0 – 3 PSG
Marseille 1 – 1 Lille

Six weeks later, Alisson arrived at Anfield and has played in major part in winning the Champions League and Premier League over the past two seasons. "Even at 2-0, we could have scored more but we didn't and the game is open," said Klopp. "We produce the penalty, I'm not sure I would have given it, then Ali had to make the save."

"This is a proper team performance, everybody had to work hard." Chelsea have spent big and looked to the future in the signings of Timo Werner, Hakim Ziyech, Kai Havertz and Ben Chilwell.

But without a world-class keeper behind them, they still do not have the foundations of a title contender.



Uncertainty continues for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER



While cricketers have stepped into a bio-secure bubble and have finally started group training from Sunday after

a long wait, the main purpose of the residential camp for the 27-member preliminary squad -- the tour of Sri Lanka -- was still under a cloud of uncertainty yesterday.

It has been an anxious wait both for Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the cricketers, who have checked into a city hotel with the aim to fly for the island nation for the three-match Test series.

According to sources, the Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) officials were supposed to send the revised health protocol for the upcoming tour by

yesterday and it was expected that the BCB would reveal the revised health protocol sent by the SLC to the media today.

It was also learned that the BCB would sit in discussion with the board members over the revised health protocol before making the final decision of whether to tour Sri Lanka or not.

There has however been no information either from the BCB or the SLC about the revised directives about touring safely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier, BCB President Nazmul Hassan rejected the health protocol sent by the SLC, under which the visitors had to undergo a mandatory 14-day strict quarantine. Since then the SLC had a series of meeting with its government's health authority and requested that the quarantine

"I want to play in all three formats. I am now trying to do all those works that would help me play in all three formats. Starting from working on my fitness, bowling skill -- I am trying to do all these so that I can be a regular in every format."

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

protocols be relaxed.

Meanwhile, much like the BCB officials the cricketers also seemed clueless despite starting group training. There was curiosity among the players about whether the tour will finally get the green signal.

"It's good that we have finally started the group training and

are now under a bio-secure environment. But we are still curious about whether the tour will finally happen or not as it is a psychological thing that works in our mind and it's better if we get to know about that soon," said a national cricketer, who preferred not to be named.

Cricket in Bangladesh has been halted since mid-March due to the coronavirus outbreak worldwide and the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka will be a comeback for the Tigers in international cricket after a gap of over six months.

But with the scheduled departure date approaching, the uncertainty hangs heavy on the players and the board. The training, however, may still prove valuable as the BCB boss said that they would start domestic cricket soon if the tour does not go ahead.



Umpiring in focus

AFP, Dubai

Kings XI Punjab lodged a formal complaint on Monday over an umpiring error which proved critical in their narrow Indian Premier League loss to the Delhi Capitals.

The second match of the world's richest Twenty20 tournament ended in a tie on Sunday before Punjab lost out in a super over.

But in the 19th over of Punjab's chase, square-leg umpire Nitin Menon had signalled Chris Jordan for a short run -- not grounding his bat inside the crease when running between the wickets. TV replays showed Jordan's bat was in the crease. But nothing could be done as the third umpire does not have the authority to overturn an on-field call, unless it is referred for review.

"We have appealed against the decision which could have been corrected had technology been brought into play," a Kings official told on condition of anonymity.

AFP, Shanghai



Joseph Minala does not wish to dwell on the bizarre age claim which propelled him into the headlines in 2014, but there is just no getting away from it.

"It held back my career and is (still) holding back my career," the Cameroonian tells AFP. Minala was a budding star at Italian giants Lazio when a report out of Senegal claimed that he was not aged 17, as he said, but 41.

The allegation gained traction because Minala's rugged appearance and well-developed physique made him look significantly older. He was subjected to cruel ridicule on social media. But Italy's football association conducted an investigation and concluded that he was telling the truth. Minala turned 24 last month and is now playing in the Chinese Super League, but the midfielder says that he cannot shake off the

stigma.

"I had opportunities at some clubs (to move there), but I think it didn't happen because of this business," he said. "This is an image that some people unfortunately have of me," Minala added. "I had the opportunity to go to France, I had the opportunity to go to Paris Saint-Germain at the time... but it didn't happen."

Speaking by telephone from Suzhou, where his new team Qingdao Huanghai are playing in a 'bubble' to thwart the coronavirus, Minala said: "I would have had a different career (without this controversy)."

"Sometimes people prefer to ignore that I'm a good player and only point out that aspect of me."

Minala's agent at the time explained that Minala looked older because of his difficult back story, which includes a spell in an Italian care home. The player was spotted as a talented youngster in Cameroon, and a former player who was also an agent promised him a trial at AC Milan.

His parents spent "a lot of money" to finance the trip to Italy,



but after arriving the 14-year-old Minala found himself stranded at a Rome train station.

"I was told that people were coming to pick me up for the trial but I waited an hour, an hour-and-a-half, and still no one was there," he said. "I only knew two words of Italian. I was abandoned at the station with my two suitcases and a mobile phone without a SIM card in it. "In the end, it was a scam that I never understood." "I didn't know anyone, I didn't know where to go, I wanted to tell my story to the police and return

to my country," he recalled. "But since I was an unaccompanied minor, they took me to a hospital for tests, then to a social welfare centre and I was enrolled in an Italian school. "This is where my adventure began."

Minala lived in the housing centre with other youths and it was there that he trained to do another job in case his football dreams failed to materialise. "I'm good at baking. Maybe after football, I'll open a bakery, you never know," he laughed. Mino Raiola, the high-profile agent who

represents Paul Pogba and a slew of other stars, spotted Minala playing in amateur football in the Rome region and took him south to Napoli.

After one year as a youth player at Napoli there was interest from Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan, he says, but in 2013 he joined Lazio's under-19 squad.

It was a year later that the claims were made about his age and he then made several loan moves, notably to Bari and Salernitana in Italy's second tier. At the start of this year he moved to Qingdao on loan, but the coronavirus pandemic delayed his debut until last month. He will spend this season with Qingdao and is unsure what will happen when his contract expires in June 2021 at Lazio, where he has made a handful of first-team appearances.

"I keep going on with my life, despite everything people have tried to do against me," said Minala, who has ambitions of playing for Cameroon's national team.

"A lot of people expected me to stop playing or go crazy."



Defending champions in Italy and Spain had contrasting starts to their league campaigns on Sunday night. While Cristiano Ronaldo got his name on the scoresheet to drive Juventus to a 3-0 win at home against Sampdoria, his former boss Zinedine Zidane saw his Real Madrid side disappoint in a goalless draw away to Real Sociedad.



PHOTO: JUVENTUS FC/AFP

Glory for Pogacar and Slovenia

AFP, Paris



Slovenian rookie Tadej Pogacar won the Tour de France on Sunday, riding triumphantly into Paris in the race leader's yellow jersey at just 21 years old.

Pogacar became the Tour's youngest champion since 1904 as Ireland's Sam Bennett won the 21st and final stage after the eight-lap dash around the iconic Champs-Elysees to clinch the green sprint points jersey.

The Tour will forever be remembered for a dramatic last-gasp turnaround as Pogacar grabbed the



overall lead when his rival Primoz Roglic suffered a mountainside meltdown on the penultimate day. This storied edition of the

century-old race packed with thrills and spills will be equally recalled for outspurring the dark shadow of Covid-19.

Starting two months late due to the global pandemic, the race set off under strict health guidelines in Nice with doubts it would make it all the way to Paris.

But after 3,400km of intense racing the 146 remaining riders embarked Sunday for a parade of the winners until the hotly-disputed sprint in Paris.

The race was a triumph of organisation after the French president gave them the green light to belatedly stage the event, although just 5,000 fans lined Sunday's finish due to the health protocol.