



IN HIS HEYDAY: Monwar Hossain Nannu (4th from R, back row), in Abahani colours, poses for a team photograph before the start of a Dhaka league match at the Dhaka Stadium, now Bangabandhu National Stadium, in 1977.



FINAL GOODBYE: Members of Sonali Otiti Club place floral wreath on the body of Monwar Hossain Nannu (inset) at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Nannu's death mourned

SPORTS REPORTER

Different organisations yesterday condemned the untimely death of renowned ex-national footballer Monwar Hossain Nannu.

One of the brightest stars in a glittering past for Bangladesh football, the midfielder who once strode the pitch like a titan, finally succumbed to his long battle with cancer.

He was pronounced dead at 8:30am yesterday morning, on his way to a hospital.

His namaaz-e-janaza was held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, Sonali Otiti and the Abahani ground.

He was 60.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Ekattor Ghatka Dalal Nirmul Committee expressed their shock and sadness at the sudden demise of one of the country's biggest sportsmen.

Abahani also bemoaned the death of one of her greatest sons. The midfielder who turned up for the Sky Blues between 1974-1982, enjoyed tremendous acclaim and

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England's WC bid safe

Football

AFP, London

England's bid for the 2018 World Cup will not be put in danger by ground-breaking proposals to play league matches abroad, Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore said.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter voiced his opposition to the plan on Thursday, warning that the proposals could harm England's attempt to host the World Cup.

The Football Association on Friday night also expressed "serious reservations" about proposals to play league matches - a 39th round of fixtures - in venues across the world.

The FA are mindful of the detrimental impact which could be caused by a decision to press ahead with the idea in the face of opposition from FIFA and the game as a whole.

Scudamore, however, said he felt there had been something of an over-reaction.

"We were told we would have the opportunity to talk to the FIFA president about our proposal," he said. "I do not see how there can be speculation about the possible impact on the 2018 World Cup campaign until this meeting has

taken place."

Scudamore is also determined to meet Blatter face to face to put across the advantages of the plans.

"I want to explain the reasons for this proposal to Mr Blatter because I do not think, on the information he will have received so far, he has been given a chance to understand it, or what benefits there would be for the game in England and beyond," he told The Times.

"I am not sure he knows the wealth we generate beyond our league, such as the 124 million pounds that filters down through the game over here."

Earlier this month it was announced Premier League clubs had unanimously agreed to further examine a proposal which would create a new round of 10 competitive fixtures to be played across the world over one weekend in January, beginning in the 2010/11 season.

However the FA cited the importance of international relations as a major factor in citing their concerns.

"As a national association we also recognise the authority of FIFA and its executive committee," said the statement. "We have heard the criticism from supporters and the objections raised by others in the worldwide football family."

"The Football Association has

worked extremely hard for several years to improve our relationships and standing with FIFA and UEFA, and has largely succeeded.

"Clearly we do not want this extensive work to be damaged. We also do not want the Premier League's proposal to affect England's 2018 World Cup bid in any way. At this time, due to the Football Association's strong international relations, we do not believe it has."

The statement also said: "We can confirm that the Football Association did speak to FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke about this matter yesterday. We explained that while we had received a verbal summary on the subject, at this time we are not in possession of any detailed proposals from the Premier League to pass on to FIFA."

"It was also made clear to FIFA that the Football Association has some serious reservations about the proposal. We have a responsibility to the whole of English football and we have to consider any wider consequences and implications that this proposal may create."

FIFA will examine the proposals at their executive committee meeting on March 14 while UEFA president Michel Platini has already hit

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'I was just lucky'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's iconic former striker Alfredo di Stefano claimed on Saturday that he had just been lucky to play at the level he did because there were 40 other guys in his neighbourhood who had been better than him.

The 81-year-old Argentinian-born forward - the club's honorary president - said that for various reasons the other boys from his area of Flores in Buenos Aires had not gone on to play football.

"I was just incredibly lucky to become a footballer," di Stefano told Spanish sports daily Marca.

"I did not think that I would ever play in the top league."

"In my neighbourhood, there were 40 better players than myself, but some opted to study, others had to work, and the rest could not afford to buy boots," added di Stefano, who on Sunday will be honoured with a statue of himself being unveiled at Real's training ground.

Di Stefano, nicknamed the 'blond dart' AND who will be alongside FIFA boss Sepp Blatter and UEFA chief Michel Platini at the unveiling, said that the best players he had ever known were the five strikers who became known as the scoring machine that played for River Plate in the 1940's.

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The irreplaceable Nannu

AI-AMIN

It was at around two in the afternoon yesterday when a small crowd gathered just in front of the players' lounge at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The audience, in a sombre mood, lined up one after another to show their last respect to someone whose white pair of boots, immaculate skills, sliding tackles and defence-splitting through passes enthralled millions on this very ground in the 1970s.

The man draped in all whites this time is none other than Monwar Hossain Nannu, who lost his long battle with colon cancer at around 8.30am on Saturday.

A complete footballer the country has ever produced, Nannu is just not a blast from the past but is a role model for any footballer of any generation.

Fits in any position except the role of a goalkeeper, he can be best described as the Franz

Beckenbauer of Bangladesh.

For the Generation Y who has not seen him play, just imagine his sliding tackle on a hard ground and without little or no contact with his opponent, a measured pass through three opposing players and arguably the coolest head on a battlefield where tempers often flared. And if fashion has anything to do with a football player his long hair was a symbol of the 70s and early 80s.

After making his Dhaka League debut for Wari Club in 1969, the midfield general joined Mohammedan Sporting Club after the War of Liberation. But his association with Abahani from 1974 to 1982 was no doubt the best times of our country's football that also saw fierce rivalry of Abahani and Mohammedan.

Interestingly, it was also the time when brothers turned into rivals with his younger brother Shamsul Haq Monju manning the Mohammedan fort.

A true leader in every aspect, Nannu played a big role in rebuilding Abahani after the dark episode of 1975.

He donned his first national cap in 1973 when Bangladesh played the Merdeka Cup. Unfortunately, it was his only foreign trip that could have been avoided had he not first been picked and then dropped as national captain for the Bangkok Asian Games in 1978. He was so popular among his teammates that seven Abahani players picked for the national team refused to join in protest of the decision and was subsequently banned. Kazi Salauddin, who does not need an introduction, was one of those players who expressed his loyalty to Nannu.

"I want to look at the bright side. It proved united we were as players. He is the finest midfielder of Bangladesh. His precision pass could find the gap through three

players. He had the ability to attack from defence. He was a master tactician," said Salahuddin about his Abahani and national teammate for nearly a decade.

Dewan Shafiqul Arefin Tutul, who grew in the shadow on Nannu and later turned into one of the best right-back, dubbed him as a role model.

"He was a complete footballer. I have not seen a cool head like him when the going gets tough. It was a testing time for him in 1987 when he was leading Abahani against Mohammedan with Monju (his brother) at the other end. To be honest, he inspired us at that time," recalled Tutul.

The scene before that Mohammedan-Abahani clash in 1987 is history now with Nannu even refusing to shake hands with his brother.

There was also no handshake this time around when he said his final goodbye to his followers.

Seedorf worries for friend

AFP, Rome

AC Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf said Friday he was concerned that teammate Ronaldo's latest knee injury would mean the end of the star's career even as club vice-president Adriano Galliani voiced hope the Brazilian would return.

"It's the third time it has happened to him - the third knee injury he has picked up. That's why I'm thinking it may be the end," said Seedorf in an interview with the BBC.

"He's one of the greatest to play the game and hopefully this is not the way it's going to end," Seedorf said after the striker underwent his third knee operation in Paris on Thursday.

The 31-year-old Ronaldo now faces at least nine months on the sidelines and will only be able to

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Drone to police hooligans

AFP, Berlin

Eastern German state Saxony on Friday adopted a remote-controlled drone to keep tabs on football fans' behaviour from the skies, the state governments said.

The small flying aeroplane, fitted with a surveillance camera to film possible troublemakers, will be used at stadiums such as Dresden or Leipzig, known for hooliganism.

The recorded video images could be used in legal proceedings against hooligans caught on camera. Saxony regularly sees clashes between police and supporters of local football clubs bringing numerous arrests.

Dynamo Dresden and two other eastern clubs Magdeburg and Jena in September banned all supporters displaying anything which could be described as racist, anti-semitic or of the extreme right.

Keegan's work cut out

Football

AFP, Newcastle

Former Newcastle manager Sir Bobby Robson has said Kevin Keegan faces a "mammoth job" to turn round the fortunes of the north-east side in his second spell as boss at St James' Park.

Robson said the 57-year-old former Liverpool and Newcastle striker had taken a bold step in

returning as United boss after a spell of relative success in the 1990s.

In an interview with the Newcastle Evening Chronicle to mark his 75th birthday on Monday, Robson said: "Kevin has a mammoth job all right, a really difficult job because his squad is not good enough."

"That is the harsh fact of the matter. He has to make do and mend until the summer, when he can put together his own team."

"That will mean retaining some, but definitely getting rid of others."

"They will not win anything this season, but equally, won't go down. I am convinced of that because of the points they have in hand over the bottom clubs. However, it is not going to be pretty. It is going to be a tough slog."

Newcastle have not won any of their five matches since Keegan returned in place of Sam Allardyce last month to the club he twice guided to second-place in the Premier League in 1996 and 1997.

"Of course he is finding it tough. We all hoped they would have got a lift and won under Keegan by now," Robson said.

Robson added a lack of speed was hampering the progress of Newcastle, currently a mediocre 13th in the table.

"There is a lot that can be improved in the team, including the fact that there is not enough pace throughout the side, not enough legs all over the park."

"Charles N'Zogbia is quick and so is Obafemi Martins, but who else? I don't think Michael Owen is as sharp as he was at his very best."

"And you have to be intelligent, of course, as well as quick."

"The likes of Alan Smith, Nicky Butt, Mark Viduka, Geremi and so on may be all right individually, but put together, the team is short on legs."

"I deliberately got pace into my side and I think Kevin will do likewise come the summer."

Robson, who currently undergoing treatment for cancer for the fifth time and about to embark upon a fundraising exercise for a research centre bearing his name, said a suggestion from Allardyce that Newcastle didn't match the former Bolton manager's ambition was wide of the mark.

"You must give the fans what they want because they are the best in the world in full cry. You must give them a bit of dash and a slice of flair."

"I don't know that Sam could adapt to this club after Bolton. Keegan knows it well, of course,"

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Portuguese focus on 12 referees

AFP, Lisbon

The disciplinary commission of the Portuguese football federation (FPF) on Friday said it had opened proceedings against 12 referees suspected of corruption in matches.

The investigation is sifting through 25,000 pages of information pertaining to alleged malpractice in top-level matches by 24 people in total, according to the FPF.

None of those accused would comment to the tribunal and the

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Driven by fear of failure

Football

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger shuddered as he contemplated the feeling he hates more than anything else - losing.

Wenger's philosophical persona hides a fierce desire for success that still burns as brightly now as it did the day he took charge at Arsenal 12 years ago.

But the flipside of that passion is the emotional scars that come when his thirst for victory isn't quenched.

Wenger, 58, admits to being destroyed when Arsenal lose and

he made no attempt to hide his fear of those down days when asked what keeps him motivated.

Inevitably such stress will take its toll but clearly not enough to make the Frenchman consider calling it a day.

He is determined to carry on pitting his wits against the likes of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson for as long as his competitive juices continue to flow.

After all, legendary Italian manager Giovanni Trapattoni is still going strong at 68 after taking the Republic of Ireland job this week.

"I was asked when I want to retire and I said 'I don't know'. It

could be tomorrow, it could be 10 years," Wenger said. "I don't think like that. I think about the next game, let's do it. Trapattoni has just signed for Ireland at 68 and you want me out at 58!"

"He has fantastic health and still has the drive. I personally believe that winning and losing matters to you until the last day of your life. It matters more to some and less to others."

"I don't know how long I could go on. It's a balance between internal desire, instinctive animal desire to fight and win and being wise enough to make the right decisions."

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Russian star Maria Sharapova arrives at Doha airport late on Friday night. Sharapova is scheduled to play the Qatar Open which begins from Monday, February 18.

PHOTO: AFP



MAKING OF A SUPERSTAR: New Zealand wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum (R) swivels in his dive to take a stunner to dismiss England batsman Ian Bell as first slip Ross Taylor looks on during the second one-day international at Seddon Park in Hamilton on February 12.

PHOTO: AFP FILE