

Gifts bring a smile to Titu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star's photo of the physically challenged teenaged beggar Mohammad Titu, who was plying the roads of Karwan Bazar in a Bangladesh national team jersey, had garnered a tremendous response from a wide array of people over the last couple of days.

And a number of those responses bore fruition yesterday, when Titu found himself the recipient of different financial and logistical support from a wide cross-section of people and corporates.

Dashing Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal, who had pledged his jersey to the beggar, delivered it and also assisted him in summing up Tk 3,000 for the young man. Tamim's team-mate, wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim also gave Titu his training jersey at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Housewife Nargis Rahman, from Eskaton who was the first in a long line of callers to enquire about Titu, also delivered on her promise to provide him with a wheelchair, which she handed over at The Daily Star office on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue yesterday.

Zahir Ahmed, chief executive officer of Mir Telecom, and

gladesh opener who had World Cup young began on his promise further by pledging a 3,000 every young man.



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal (L) gifts his jersey to disabled fan Titu (R), also seen is his opening partner Imrul Kayes (C), at the GP-BCB Academy Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Lanka may return to Pakistan in October

AFP, Hambantota

Pakistan's cricketing isolation could end in October if Sri Lanka, who were targeted in a deadly terror attack in Lahore two years ago, agree to tour the troubled country.

Sri Lankan officials said Wednesday they were in talks with the International Cricket Council's Pakistan Task Team (PTT) to explore the possibilities.

"We are still discussing the option with the ICC and with all the other board members," said Sri Lanka Cricket chairman Somachandra de Silva.

"There are still some security concerns in Pakistan but if things improve, and Pakistan is a brotherly nation, we can consider it -- all depends on the ICC's clearance," De Silva said.

Sri Lanka are scheduled to tour Pakistan in October this year under the Future Tests Programme.

India think of more spin

AFP, New Delhi

When India meet England in a high-profile World Cup match in Bangalore on Sunday, it will not be surprising if they name a second specialist spinner in their playing eleven.

Spinners have caught the eye in early matches on low, slow pitches, with Zimbabwe going to the extreme of using five slow men to make defending champions Australia struggle for runs in Ahmedabad on Monday.

The performances of Zimbabwean spinners Raymond Price, Prosper Utseya and Graeme Cremer, who conceded 127 in a combined tally of 30 overs, against a formidable batting line-up will surely encourage captains to turn to spin.

India went with three seamers and one specialist spinner (Harbhajan Singh) in the opening game against Bangladesh, but realised they were short of one quality spinner after paceman Shanthakumaran Sreesanth leaked 53 in five overs.

They did not have to pay dearly for Sreesanth's off-day as they had already posted a massive 370-4, a total they successfully defended.

But the hosts need to be on their toes against England, having excellent batsmen. England skipper Andrew Strauss and Jonathan Trott smashed half-centuries in their team's win against the Netherlands on Tuesday, but off-spinner Graeme Swann's contribution with the ball was equally important.

Swann illustrated the significance of spin when he finished with 2-35 off 10 disciplined overs.

England will face their first big spin test against India as the hosts are likely to include either leg-spinner Piyush Chawla or off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

"It's still very early in the tournament but India need to get their bowling sorted," former India leg-spinner Anil Kumble wrote in a newspaper column.

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White, a teacher who plays cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

From taking the world cricket by storm four years ago by reaching the Super Eights stage of the World Cup, Irish cricket has made enormous strides in the time between to claim their stake as the leading ICC Associate Member nation.

One of the driving factors behind the rise has been the number of cricketers who have turned themselves from their semi-professional status to full-time cricketers. While there were only six of the players in that side who were full-time cricketers, the squad this time boasts as many as thirteen.

One of the two players who are still not full-time cricket professionals is the 30-year-old all-rounder Andrew White who feels the lure of the sport and the future in it encouraged him to adapt to

two professions neither of which he wants to let go.

"As a teacher in Belfast, I feel proud to combine the two men in one and glad to be here. It was in fact a conscious choice to become a cricketer looking at the future it presents," said White who is an English teacher.

"There are 13 guys who are full professionals, hopefully the tournament will see the benefits but the two other odd guys had worked hard to make sure that they matched the other guys."

That professionalism added with the close ties with England and Wales Cricket Board has also lured the Irishmen to the County Championship. White himself is one of seven players who ply their trade in county cricket. So much has been the lure that there has even been export of talent from Ireland to the English national side, in the form of batsmen Eoin Morgan and Ed Joyce, the latter though making a recent

return to the Irish shores. But White feels he is a proud Irish player and is not lured by the prospect of playing for any other side.

"All I know that there are 15 guys here wearing the Irish jerseys, they are only concentrating on our cricket, England and the other things are not in our mind."

White, who along with his team-mates, has welcomed the return of Joyce in the side, feels that there are other match-winners in the side that can make the difference when it matters and collectively they are a side that can go a long way in this World Cup.

"There is no doubt that Ed Joyce is a class act, and I will say that he will present his match winning performances in this tournament, hopefully there are other match winners among the 15 and does not matter who does it as long as we get it in the line and length," observed White.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Where did Bangladesh go wrong against India?

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Xavi suffers calf injury

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona and Spain playmaker Xavi is set to miss the Spanish champions next two league matches because of a slight left calf injury, the club announced on Tuesday.

The 31-year-old - along with Barca team-mate Andres Iniesta the creative fulcrum behind Spain's first ever World Cup triumph last year - could be out for up to 10 days the club said after he underwent a scan.

Xavi will miss the league games against Real Mallorca and Valencia.

Blackpool stun Spurs

AFP, London

Blackpool dealt a blow to Tottenham's hopes of securing Champions League qualification on Tuesday, scoring their first win in seven matches with a 3-1 victory at Bloomfield Road.

First half goals from Charlie Adam and DJ Campbell and a late Brett Ormerod strike secured three precious points for Ian Holloway's side, who had slipped close to the relegation zone after losing five of their six previous matches.

The win saw Blackpool advance to 12th spot, five points clear of the relegation places.

Spurs, who could have moved into third place with a victory, remain in fourth, two points ahead of champions Chelsea who have a game in hand.

Blackpool took the lead from the penalty spot after 18 minutes, when a clumsy challenge from Sebastien Bassong sent Campbell crashing to the turf.

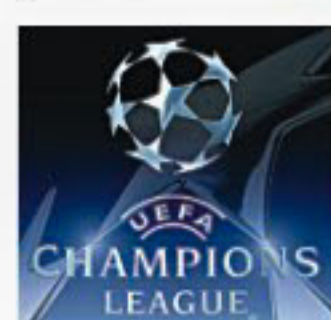
Anelka brace fires Chelsea



Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka (C) shoots to score the opening goal against FC Copenhagen during their Champions League second round encounter at the Parken Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Copenhagen



Nicolas Anelka eased the pressure on Carlo Ancelotti as his double-strike inspired Chelsea's 2-0 win over FC Copenhagen in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie at the Parken Stadium on Tuesday.

Anelka's 15th and 16th goals of the season put Chelsea on course for the quarterfinals and they should have no trouble finishing off the lacklustre Danish champions in the return at Stamford Bridge next month.

It was a crucial victory for Ancelotti as the Chelsea manager fights to save his job following a woeful run of results which left the Blues in turmoil.

Chelsea's first win in four matches was a positive sign for Ancelotti but the Italian will be well aware that much sterner tests lie in wait as the west Londoners seek to reach the Champions League final at Wembley in May.

After Saturday's FA Cup exit against Everton,

Ancelotti unsurprisingly tinkered with his starting line-up and he made four changes, the most notable being Fernando Torres's return in place of Didier Drogba.

Ancelotti opted for a 4-4-2 system with Torres partnered by Anelka instead of the out-of-form Drogba.

With Chelsea's Premier League title challenge all but over, any hope of winning a domestic trophy vanished with that penalty shoot-out defeat to Everton, leaving the Champions League as Ancelotti's main focus.

Ancelotti this week admitted John Terry, Branislav Ivanovic and Frank Lampard are the only Blues in good form at present, but the Italian remains adamant Chelsea's season is far from dead yet.

His positive attitude seemed to have the desired effect as Chelsea took control from the start.

They would have been ahead in the early moments if Torres had shown a better first touch when a miscued shot fell to him.

The Spanish striker's lack of confidence has

been clear for all to see since his British record transfer from Liverpool and his woeful control gave Johan Wiland time to come off his line and block the shot.

Fortunately for Ancelotti, Anelka was in far more predatory mood and the France striker opened the scoring in the 17th minute.

It helped that Copenhagen, playing their first competitive fixture since December 7 because of their league's winter break, looked rather rusty in the sub-zero temperatures.

A misplaced pass from former Chelsea winger Jesper Gronkjaer presented the ball to Anelka and he advanced unchallenged before driving in a low shot from the edge of the area that whistled past Wiland.

Torres had another sight of goal as he twisted past two Copenhagen defenders but his shot from a tight angle was pushed out by Wiland.

Copenhagen were struggling to stem the tide and Anelka should have done better than shoot straight at Wiland before Torres misfired again when his tame effort failed to trouble the Danish goalkeeper.

Benzema stabs Lyon

AFP, Lyon



Karim Benzema scored against his former club Lyon to earn Real Madrid a 1-1 draw here on Tuesday that puts them in a strong position to reach the Champions League quarterfinals.

Benzema put the visitors 1-0 up shortly after coming on as a second-half substitute at a damp and chilly Stade Gerland, only for Bafetimbi Gomis to equalise seven minutes from time.

Gomis's late volley extended Lyon's remarkable unbeaten record against Real to seven matches, but Benzema's away goal makes Jose Mourinho's side slight favourites to progress ahead of the second leg in Madrid on March 16.

Lyon eliminated Real at the same stage of last season's competition and the nine-time European champions are bidding to end an unwelcome run that has seen them fall in the round of 16 for the last six seasons in a row.

Having beaten Real in their three previous encounters on home turf, Lyon began the game in enterprising style, their five-man midfield smothering the visitors' attempts to play the ball through the middle.

Michel Bastos stabbed a shot over the Real crossbar from a tight angle on the right, Cris hooked wide from just inside the penalty area and Cesar Delgado had a penalty appeal turned down after an untidy foul by Sergio Ramos.

Angel Di Maria belatedly called Lyon goalkeeper Hugo Lloris into action with a weak low shot before the France number one was given slightly more to do by a stinging Cristiano Ronaldo free-kick.

It was not long before the hosts were back on the attack, however, and Gomis was guilty of a terrible miss in the 34th minute when he side-footed over an open goal after Iker Casillas spilled a cross from Bastos.

Lyon's re-emergence after half-time drew a thunderous roar from the home fans, but a reminder of Real's attacking threat was quick to arrive as the visitors struck the woodwork twice in a matter of minutes.

Ronaldo hit the far post with a dipping free-kick from a seemingly prohibitive angle on the left-hand side, before Ramos sent a header crashing against the crossbar from Mesut Ozil's in-swinging corner.

Ronaldo's free-kick will have a more lasting impact on the tie, however, as it was awarded for a foul by Bastos on Di Maria that earned the Brazilian a yellow card that rules him out of the return leg.

Another Ronaldo free-kick sparked controversy shortly beyond the hour, with the Portuguese adamant the ball had struck the arm of Yoann Gourcuff in the Lyon wall.

Benzema, who left Lyon for the Bernabeu in 2009, received a rapturous reception when he entered the fray but he immediately silenced the crowd.