

Sprinter takes up sickle with eyes on the track

ANISUR RAHMAN



Promising sprinter Al Naim Sheikh has turned into a day labourer, working on agricultural fields in Khulna as his bread and butter has been snatched away by the coronavirus pandemic. Naim, who won gold medals in 200m and 400m sprint events in junior athletics championships in 2018, has been forced to work on jute and paddy fields to earn a living for his five-member family, which includes a sick father and a mentally challenged elder sister. However, Naim is still continuing his training with the hope of returning for the national athletics championships and he hopes to repeat the feat of the 2018 meet and draw attention of services teams to get a government job. "As a contractual athlete of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), I used to help my father with solid financial support but now I can't do so since losing the job last year. I also used to earn Tk 500 to 600 for each match when I used to play on hire, but that opportunity also went away due to coronavirus. So I was not left with any option but to work on jute and paddy fields five to six days a week. I



earn Tk 200 to 250 each day," Naim told The Daily Star over phone from Khulna's Fulbaria Thana yesterday. "My father also works as a farmer on others' fields but sometimes he can't work due to illness. I am buying our daily essentials through my income as we have some rice at home," explained Naim, who had also won silver medal in 100m sprint in 2018. Naim was hoping for some monetary support from the Bangladesh Athletics Federation and the sports ministry, but he was disappointed after not receiving any support from either institution. "I saw on television that the



federation and sports ministry would help athletes and I was hoping to get some help from them but I didn't get any," said Naim. The 18-year-old could not attend the 2019 junior athletics championships due to a hamstring injury. After recovering from the injury, he continued training to participate in the 2020 edition of the junior meet which was scheduled to take place in June but later got cancelled due to coronavirus outbreak. "My target was to win three gold medals in the 2020 meet but the meet did not take place due to

coronavirus. I want to participate in the next championship whenever that takes place. I am preparing myself accordingly as I follow a training schedule prepared by my coach. I am working on the field in the morning but training in the afternoon," Naim said. "I am hopeful of producing good results in the next junior national meet because I have improved my timing." Though Naim is temporarily taken up a farmer's work due to the hardship caused by the pandemic, the youngster is eager to get a job in services teams by his impressing in upcoming junior meets.

Juggling between cricket and volleyball

While much fandom surrounds Bangladesh's male cricketers, the story is not the same for women cricketers who have nevertheless been growing in stature on the international arena. Since the halt in cricketing activities, The Daily Star has been talking to women cricketers to learn stories of their early days. In today's instalment, we talk to right-arm pacer Panna Ghosh, who made her ODI debut back in 2011 against Ireland.

MOSTAFA SHABUI

At a time when the world offers challenges in every step, it is not often that you find someone who takes multiple challenges head-on and thrives in those pursuits. Bangladesh women's cricket team pacer Panna Ghosh is one of the courageous ones who represents the national team all the while playing volleyball professionally. Panna, the right arm pacer, is also a member of Bangladesh Ansar's volleyball team.

Cases like Panna's are, however, not uncommon in our country. Mashura Parvin, who now represents Bangladesh under-19 football team, has previously played age-level Kabaddi before switching to football. Mirona, now a football coach, represented the national football team while also being long-distance runner. There were more instances of players, especially in the mid-70s and the 80s, playing in multiple disciplines simultaneously. Panna's advantage was her height, which helped in her becoming a fast bowler and a volleyball player. But in Bangladesh, a girl often needs to show persistence and determination to pave her own path even after having natural athlete-like qualities. "I used to play volleyball, cricket since I was seven or eight years of age. I was a bit stubborn and I decided to arrange a cricket tournament by myself. I even bought some medals for the tournament. Even in that tournament, a few boys did not want to see me participate but they could not do much as I was the one who arranged it," Panna said. Panna had, however, played volleyball professionally before getting into the



women's national cricket team. The 30-year-old, who hails from Rajshahi, was first inspired chosen for her school's volleyball team for her height. She played in volleyball tournaments in the early and mid-2000s. It was while playing in such a tournament that Panna got attracted to cricket. "I was playing in a volleyball tournament at the Dhanmondi Mohila Complex representing Rajshahi division. There I saw 10-12 girls playing cricket and I was intrigued. I started practising cricket under the tutelage of Mijanur Rahman (local coach of Rajshahi) and continued training for five years," recalled Panna. "In 2006, an open tournament was held in Dhaka where a number of teams participated. It was the year when the BCB was trying to form a women's team. I trained under Farida Begum for six months and played for Bhola district. I was declared the player-of-the-tournament as Bhola emerged champions," explained Panna. Soon Panna was called for the very first batch of women's cricketers. "We [Bangladesh women's team] went to Thailand to play in the Asian Games in 2007. I was adjudged player-of-the-series with Bangladesh winning that tournament," said Panna. Panna has been representing Bangladesh team since 2007 and in 2008 she secured a job in the Ansar under the [volleyball] players' quota. The 30-year-old sometimes had to make interesting decisions while balancing both cricket and volleyball. "Even last year I fled from the Ansar camp in Gazipur and went to Rajshahi to play cricket. At that time a volleyball tournament was being held in Dhaka. However, I returned from Rajshahi later and played in the final of the volleyball tournament representing Bangladesh Ansar and became champion," said Panna, who holds the dream of becoming a volleyball coach at the end of her career.

Club	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1 Real Madrid	34	23	8	3	41	77
2 Barcelona	34	22	7	5	42	73
3 Atlético Madrid	34	16	14	4	21	62
4 Sevilla	33	15	12	6	15	57
5 Villarreal	34	16	6	12	10	54



Everything seemed to fall into gear for Barcelona with Antoine Griezmann (R) scoring a spectacular goal against Villarreal, assisted by Lionel Messi as they cut down Real's lead to four after Sergio Ramos (L) penalty at Bilbao had stretched Los Blancos' lead to seven earlier in the day.

Barca dazzle in win, but Real maintain lead

AGENCIES

Barcelona responded to a trying week by producing a scintillating display to thrash Villarreal 4-1 away on Sunday and stay alive in the Liga title race. The Catalans had drawn their last two matches to hand more momentum to league leaders Real Madrid but Sunday's win took them to 73 points after 34 games, four behind their arch-rivals who won 1-0 at Athletic Bilbao earlier in the day. They entered the day trailing Real Madrid by four points, but that deficit became seven points Sunday morning following Real's win as captain Sergio Ramos scored his 22nd straight

penalty kick in 1-0 win. "Getting all three points here was a group effort, and we knew they were crucial in our hopes of winning the league," said Ramos. "It was crucial to get the three points to stay in the hunt but the way we played was important too because that's a part of our identity so we need to keep playing like that until the end of the season," said Barca defender Gerard Pique. There had been also plenty of speculation surrounding coach Setien after he had brought Griezmann on in added time against Atletico, a move described in the Spanish media as an act of humiliation against the World Cup-winning forward.

Griezmann was named in the lineup against a Villarreal side who had won five of their last six games and was lively from the kick off, helping force the opening goal as well as working tirelessly in midfield and combining well with Messi and Suarez. He adorned his performance with a sumptuous goal, receiving a back-heeled lay off from Messi and coolly delivering a chip that skimmed off the crossbar and into the net. Messi produced an outstanding performance but failed to score as the Argentine had one effort ruled out for offside after a thrilling team move and then hammered the bar with a late free kick.

Messi reached 19 assists for the La Liga season with the two assists against Villarreal. He previously racked up 18 assists in 2010-11 and 2014-15. One more would see Messi equal all-time highest number of assists in a single season currently held by former teammate Xavi Hernandez.

Messi also became the only player to notch 20+ assists (all competitions) in two different seasons among players in Europe's top leagues in the last 20 years.

It is the 12th consecutive time Messi has been involved in 50 goals for Barcelona in all competitions



WHAT TO WATCH
LA LIGA (FACEBOOK) Valencia v Real Valladolid Live from 11:30pm Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE Star Sports Select 1 Crystal Palace v Chelsea Live from 11:00pm Arsenal v Leicester City Live from 1:15am (Wednesday) Star Sports Select 2 Wartford v Norwich City Live from 11:00pm (Ten 2) SERIE A Lecce v Lazio Live from 11:30pm AC Milan v Juventus Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)



Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, who yesterday went to the BCB headquarters in Mirpur to get some gym equipments, took a picture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium ground -- a place where he hoped to return soon.

Int'l cricket returns tomorrow

REUTERS, LONDON

When the players of England and West Indies walk out on to the lush Ageas Bowl pitch on Wednesday it will be a landmark moment for international cricket after a 117-day hiatus. It will also be a milestone in the career of England's talisman Ben Stokes as he captains the side for the first time. The circumstances will be surreal with the COVID-19 pandemic meaning no fans will be present in the bio-secure environment -- the only sounds being the thump of leather on willow, the chit-chat between the players and some piped-in crowd effects. Once the strangeness of the 'new-normal' sinks in, however, an intriguing series looks on the cards between the sides ranked fourth and

eighth on the ICC's test list. With England captain Joe Root missing for the birth of his second child, Stokes will get to pit himself against West Indies counterpart Jason Holder. Holder, embarking on his 33rd test as captain, is first on the ICC's all-rounder rankings while Stokes is second. Both have similar problems to solve, namely fragile batting lineups that could be at the mercy of top-class bowling attacks. West Indies won the last series between the sides in 2018-19 on home soil, but have not won a series in England since 1988. They will be buoyed by virtually the same pace attack that England found such a problem in the Caribbean with Kemar Roach, Shannon Gabriel, Alzarri Joseph and Holder complimented by Bajan quickie Chemar Holder. "It's an exciting time for us. We've

got a group of fast bowlers we think can challenge any team in the world," West Indies assistant-coach Roddy Estwick said. "The fast bowling is key to us and we're beginning to get blessed again." The batting is more problematic and the form of Shai Hope, who scored two centuries when West Indies claimed a famous victory at Headingley two years ago, will be vital. With Root missing, England's shaky top-order will be under scrutiny. Rory Burns and Dom Sibley look set to open with Joe Denly or Zak Crawley likely to bat at four. Whatever the pairings, West Indies bowlers will fancy their chances. Stokes will have numerous pace bowling options with James Anderson and Jofra Archer, both of whom struggled with injuries in England's 3-1 win in South Africa last winter, refreshed.