

## 'DEAR KOBE, THANK YOU'

Los Angeles Lakers legend Kobe Bryant was inducted posthumously to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on Saturday, as the class of 2020 was enshrined after months of delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The five-time NBA champion died last year aged 41 in a helicopter crash alongside his daughter and seven others, shocking the world of professional sport and sending his legions of fans into mourning. Bryant's widow Vanessa, who started dating Kobe when she was 17, offered an acceptance on his behalf as presenter Michael Jordan stood nearby. "Dear Kobe, thank you for being the best husband and father you could possibly be," she said. "Thank you for never giving up on us. Thank you for all of your hard work." Vanessa Bryant noted that she always avoided praising the former Los Angeles Lakers star in public. "Someone had to bring him back to reality," Vanessa Bryant said. "Right now, I'm sure he's laughing in heaven because I'm about to praise him in public for his accomplishments on one of the most public stages." -----REUTERS



(L) Sri Lanka players come out of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport after landing in Dhaka on Sunday morning for three ODIs against Bangladesh, starting from May 23. (R) Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal sweated it out at the Mirpur facilities.



PHOTO: BCB

## Kings players finally join nat'l training

SPORTS REPORTER



All footballers, barring the injured Bishwanath Ghosh, yesterday joined the national team's preparation camp for the June World Cup Qualifiers after defending Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings finally allowed their players to join. Bashundhara Kings were scheduled to leave Dhaka on May 9 to take part in AFC Cup matches in Maldives between May 14-21, but that trip was cancelled after the AFC postponed the Group D matches due to Covid-19.

Instead of allowing them to then join the national camp, Bashundhara Kings released all their players on May 10 and sent a letter to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) seeking assurances that the World Cup Qualifiers in Qatar would be held on time.

After that development, the BFF permitted a four-day Eid-ul-Fitr break to all other players, who checked into hotels between May 10-12. In the meantime, Kings changed their mind and released nine of the 10 players included in the squad. They did not allow Bishwanath Ghosh, who has been recovering from knee injuries sustained while playing for the national team during the Tri-Nation Cup in India in April.

"We have Covid-19 tests and the weigh-in today. Training will start tomorrow," said head coach Jamie Day, who returned to Dhaka on May 11 along with goalkeeping coach Les Clevely. Assistant coach Stuart Watkiss came back on May 14.

Day's charges are now scheduled to have four days of training in Dhaka before heading to Qatar on May 21 for the second phase of their preparation ahead of the seven Group E matches of the World Cup Qualifiers that will be held in Doha between June 3 and 15.

India are supposed to reach Doha on May 19 while Oman will have their third and final-phase preparations in the UAE and are likely to play two practice matches against Thailand and Indonesia. Day also wanted to play a couple of practice matches in Qatar before facing Afghanistan on June

3, but the BFF has not fixed any yet.

Day will have to work less on the fitness of his players relative to coaches at other neighbouring nations as Bangladeshi footballers had the opportunity to play in domestic competitions while many others, including Indian players, have not been getting match experience.

Without any prospect of reaching the second round of the World Cup Qualifiers, bottom-placed Bangladesh can still gain direct entry to the 2023 Asia Cup as the third-best team in the five-team Group E. They could also book a direct ticket to the Asia Cup by finishing among the best four of the teams that finish fourth among the



eight groups.

However, with Bangladesh having only one point from five matches, even those appear distant dreams. Captain Jamal Bhuiyan said he wanted to produce good results without thinking too much.

"I expect all players will be very motivated for the upcoming games and that we will get some good results in Qatar," Jamal said ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr break.

## Tigers, BCB brace for ANOTHER CHALLENGE

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will look to halt their losing streak in the upcoming three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka at home. Tamim Iqbal and his troops will be desperate to return to winning ways in their favoured 50-over format after recently losing two-match Test series in Sri Lanka.

It will also be a chance for the Tigers to add to their points in the ICC ODI Super League. Although Bangladesh began the ODI Super League with a 3-0 whitewash against the West Indies at home in January this year, they lost all the three ODIs in New Zealand in March.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will have to contend with the challenge of maintain health and safety standards and ensuring a bio-secure bubble for the visitors, who reached Bangladesh yesterday.

This will be the second international series

hosted in Bangladesh since March last year, when the pandemic led to the halt of cricketing activities.

While the experience of having hosted the West Indies will be useful, there are growing concerns about Covid-19 especially in this region. Even the cash-rich Indian Premier League was suspended midway through its schedule, so the BCB will be even more cautious this time around.

The visitors will be quarantined in their rooms for first three days. They will then undergo two tests over the next three days before they are allowed to train. The squad will then be allowed to practice at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur on May 19 and 20.

The Kusal Perera-led side will also play an intra-squad practice game on May 21 at BKS before the first ODI on May 23 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The second and third game of the series be held on May 25 and 28 at the same venue.

"It will be pretty similar to the health protocols the Bangladesh team had followed on

their recent tour of Sri Lanka, according to the guidance of the health ministry. There will be a total of four tests. The final test will be done before departure. The third test will be on May 22 and depending on the result of that test, the ODI series will begin on May 23," chief BCB physician Debashish Chowdhury said yesterday.

On the other hand, the Tigers will check into hotels and enter the bio-secure bubble from May 18. The players in the 23-member squad already started coronavirus testing from Saturday. Shakib Al Hasan and Mustafizur Rahman, who have been in quarantine after returning from India on May 6 upon the suspension of IPL, are expected to join the team on May 18.

The mandatory 14-day quarantine for those returning from India according to the government health protocols means that the players can only join the team on May 21. However, the BCB is trying to relax the protocols as the two cricketers have been in a bio-secure bubble since arriving in the country and have tested negative in multiple tests so far.

## 'Bomber' Mueller remains legend to Lewy

AFP, BERLIN

Gerd Mueller remains one of football's greatest strikers of all time, even after Robert Lewandowski equalled his 49-year-old Bundesliga record of 40 goals in one season, a landmark which many thought would never be matched.

Lewandowski wouldn't have it any other way. "What Gerd Mueller did is incredible. Sharing the record with him makes me very, very proud," the Polish star said Saturday after scoring in the 2-2 draw with Freiburg.

Mueller, now 75, lives in a south Munich nursing home for patients with severe dementia and had not been aware his record was in danger -- unlike his wife. She has been hearing about "nothing else everyday for weeks", Uschi Mueller told magazine Sport Bild. Mueller would not hold it against

Lewandowski for matching her husband's record. Uschi said she is "100 percent sure" of that. "Quite the opposite: he would be the first to offer congratulations, to say: 'Well done, boy. You did well!'"

Mueller earned the nickname "Der Bomber" for his goals, having scored 68 times in 62 internationals for West Germany. His total of 365 Bundesliga goals seems out of reach, even for Lewandowski who netted his 276th German top-flight goal on Saturday.

"Without Gerd Mueller and his goals, this club wouldn't exist in its current form," said Bayern forward Thomas Mueller who has spent his entire career at the Bavarian giants. "His goals made this club what it is." Mueller's goals helped West Germany win the 1974 World Cup final and the European Championship final two years earlier.



Leicester City duo Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana held up a Palestinian flag after their side clinched the FA Cup on Saturday. The move was a show of solidarity with Palestinians who are caught in the middle of the ongoing conflict with Israel. During the post-match celebrations as players did their lap of honour, 23-year old Hamza, who was born on the October 1, 1997, to a Grenadian father and a Bengali mother Rafia, raised the Palestine flag along with his teammate Fofana. Hamza, who often say that few of his childhood memories are of Bangladesh as he visited his mother's family in Sylhet during school holidays, draped the flag over his shoulders as he went to pick up his winner medal, before teammates Kasper Schmeichel and Fofana lifted the trophy in front of fans at Wembley. A number of sports stars have posted messages of support with Palestine with Arsenal's Egyptian midfielder tweeting on Monday: "My heart and my soul and my support for you Palestine," followed by a picture of the Palestine flag and a peace emoji. The Palestinian envoy in the UK has expressed gratitude to Hamza and Fofana for showing support for Palestinian. In a letter posted on twitter, Ambassador Husam Zomlot said carrying his country's flag "on the stage of one of football's august cup competitions is a show of support that is reverberating all over Palestine."

PHOTO: TWITTER

## 'It's what dreams are made of'

REUTERS, London



Leicester City captain Kasper Schmeichel hailed the Foxes' first FA Cup triumph as a dream come true on Saturday as manager Brendan Rodgers paid tribute to the collective spirit of his club.

Leicester beat Chelsea 1-0 thanks to a thunderous long-range shot by Youri Tielemans and also two sensational saves by Schmeichel.

"It's what dreams are made of. I've dreamt of this since I was a child. We've talked about wanting to win trophies," said Schmeichel, whose father Peter won the FA Cup three times with Manchester United.

Rodgers said he had not been aware that Leicester, Premier League champions in 2015-16 as underdogs, had never won the FA



Cup until he joined the club in 2019. "It's a real collective effort at Leicester City," said the Northern Irishman.

"The success of this team and this club is getting to positions like this and competing. The so-called bigger clubs in the country are expected to win the trophies, our success is competing and if we can perform

like today we can then go and win," he added.

Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel however said his side had simply not had fortune on their side.

"We are disappointed and not angry with our performance from the boys, I think the performance is enough to win it," said the German, who has transformed Chelsea's season since taking over from Frank Lampard in January.

"I think today we were unlucky and we've never hidden that we need to have that to win at this level. You need momentum, decision making, little details, the referee," the German said.

Chelsea face Leicester again on Tuesday in a key Premier League game in the battle to finish in the top four.

The London club face Manchester City in the Champions League final on May 29 in Porto.

## Zidane to leave Real, say reports

AGENCIES

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane has told his players he will leave the La Liga club at the end of the season, Spanish media reported late on Saturday.

Radio station Onda Cero said Zidane informed the players about his decision before last weekend's 2-2 La Liga draw at home with Sevilla where Real missed the chance to top the table.

Newspaper Marca said he addressed the team on May 8, a day before that game.

Real were dumped out of the Copa del Rey by third-tier Alcoyano in January and were defeated comfortably by Chelsea in their Champions League semi-final.

They trail La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid by two points with two games left and have an outside chance of retaining the title.

Zidane hinted on Saturday he could leave as coach of Real Madrid at the end of the season, saying he believes "there comes a time when it's the moment to change".

Zidane's contract expires in 2022 but he has repeatedly refused to confirm he will still be at the club next season. The Frenchman has a history of surprises after resigning as coach unexpectedly in 2018 before making a shock return a year later.

As a player, he initially announced his retirement from international football in 2004 before coming back for the 2006 World Cup, after which he retired for good.

"You talk about me leaving in 2006 and 2018 and it's like you think I leave because I'm shirking responsibility or that I quit when things get tough," said Zidane.



Bangladesh's top archer Ruman Sana takes a selfie with his teammates at the Istanbul Airport yesterday, en route to Switzerland where they will take part in World Cup Stage 2, to be held in Lausanne from May 17 to 23.

PHOTO: COLLECTED