



'CAN'T WAIT TO START TRAINING'

AFP, Paris

Lionel Messi has set his sights on more Champions League glory after being unveiled as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Wednesday as hundreds of fans gathered outside the club's stadium hoping to see their new idol.

The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar was presented to media from all over the world at a news conference at the Parc des Princes after arriving in the French capital the previous day and penning a two-year contract with the option of a third season.

PSG quickly emerged as the favourites to sign Messi following the shock of his departure last week from Barcelona and he arrives eyeing a fifth Champions League, with the most recent of his four victories with his old club coming in 2015.

"I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," Messi told reporters inside a packed auditorium, with the audience including his wife Antonella, their children, and his father and agent, Jorge.

Messi and Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League last season by PSG, who went

on to reach the semi-finals following their run to the final in 2020.

"Sometimes you can have the best team in the world and not win. That's football," Messi, who won 35 trophies in total with Barca, added as he prepares to team up with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in Paris.

"We know how difficult the Champions League is but Paris know that too -- they have come

on Wednesday morning to buy the shirt with his name and number on the back.

Messi appeared unfazed as he emerged, immaculately turned out, to talk to media, although he did seem slightly uneasy at times, not least when one member of the audience started chanting his name.

Unlike when Zlatan Ibrahimovic signed for PSG in 2012 there was no

amazing and historic day for the club, for the football world."

Messi made no secret of his sadness at leaving Barca, the only club he has so far represented in his 17-year professional career, as he gave a tearful news conference at the Camp Nou last weekend.

However on Wednesday he said he was looking forward to getting started in his new home.

"Everyone knows that my departure from Barca was very hard because I spent so many years there, but as soon as I arrived here I felt enormously happy," said the player who scored 672 goals in 778 games for the Catalans. "Now I can't wait to start training."

Messi has had no pre-season having been on holiday since winning the Copa America with Argentina a month ago.

He is therefore unlikely to make his debut for PSG any time soon, and certainly not this weekend when Mauricio Pochettino's team play Strasbourg at home in Ligue 1.

Attention will now turn to the future of 22-year-old Mbappe, who has just a year left on his contract and has been strongly linked to Real Madrid. "Kylian is a Parisian, he's very competitive. He said he wanted a competitive team," Al-Khelaifi said. "Now there's no-one more competitive than us. He has no reason to do anything else," other than stay, he added.

PHOTO: TWITTER



PHOTO: REUTERS

very close in recent years but it is a competition in which the best teams take part and the best team doesn't always win."

PSG are reportedly paying 35 million euros (\$41 million) a year to Messi, who will wear the number 30 jersey -- fans were already queuing up outside the club's different shops in the capital

glitzy unveiling in front of the Eiffel Tower, but Messi was photographed on the pitch before greeting the supporters who had waited at the stadium entrance, watching his press conference on a big screen.

"I'm very proud to present Leo Messi as a PSG player," said Nasser al-Khelaifi, the president of the Qatar-owned outfit. "It is an

Shakib on top again

STAR SPORT DESK



Bangladesh's premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has reclaimed the top spot in the ICC T20I all-rounder rankings and was also voted the ICC player of the month for July following Bangladesh's first-ever bilateral series win against Australia.

Meanwhile, ace left-arm pacesman Mustafizur Rahman, who was pivotal during the Tigers' 4-1 series win over Australia, also moved into the top 10 of the bowling rankings.

Shakib's contributions helped Bangladesh win series in all three formats against Zimbabwe last month. Shakib took five wickets as Bangladesh started the tour with a nine-wicket win in the lone Test match. The all-rounder then scored 145 runs and took eight wickets as Bangladesh won the ODI series 3-0. He also took three wickets in the T20 series, which Bangladesh won 2-1.

"It is very humbling to be voted ICC Men's Player of the Month for July 2021. There have been many outstanding performances during the month and that is why this is special for me. I find most pleasure and satisfaction when I

contribute to wins and therefore, I am very happy to have helped in Bangladesh's successes over the last few weeks," Shakib was quoted as saying by ICC.

Shakib, who was placed second in the all-rounder rankings with 241 rating points before Bangladesh's five-match series against Australia, has toppled Mohammad Nabi for the top spot.

Shakib now remains in the top position with 286 rating points while Nabi is just behind him with 285 points.

Shakib was adjudged player-of-the-series against Australia for his all-round performance -- scoring 114 at an average of 22.80, most by a Bangladeshi in the series, and scalping seven wickets in five games.

Shakib also made a unique record in the series as he became the only cricketer to reach the double of 100 wickets and 1000 runs in T20Is. In doing so, he also became the first Bangladeshi and only the second player ever to reach the 100-wicket milestone in T20Is.

Mustafizur, meanwhile, was rewarded for his exceptional display with the ball in the Australia series as the left-armer finished with seven wickets from five games, bowling at an economy rate of 3.52 -- the least among bowlers of the two sides.



England skipper Joe Root will have his work cut out as his team are grappling with injuries ahead of the second Test against India, starting at Lord's Today. Root scored a fine century in the first Test, which the home side barely drew thanks to a last-day washout, but with seamer Stuart Broad set to miss out due to a calf problem and fellow pacer James Anderson doubtful with a tight quad, Root will have to lead his side from the front. India, too, have injury issues though. Seamer Shardul Thakur will miss the Test due to a hamstring injury. The touring side have the option of replacing Thakur with either a spinning all-rounder in Ravichandran Ashwin or a fourth seamer in Ishant Sharma.

PHOTO: REUTERS



West Indies and Pakistan commence a two-Test series at Sabina Park in Jamaica on Thursday with head coach Phil Simmons concerned about the readiness of the home players for what is expected to be a formidable challenge from talented but mercurial opponents. The vulnerability of the hosts' batting mercilessly exploited by South Africa two months ago in a similar two-Test duel in St Lucia where Kraigg Brathwaite's team were thrashed by the Proteas with the pace trio of Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje and Lungi Ngidi obliterating a batting line-up that failed to get past 165 in four innings. On the back of four consecutive Test wins, including convincing successes over the same South Africans on home soil, Pakistan would not appear to be burdened by similar concerns.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Will Bangladesh ever realise its Olympics dream?

ANISUR RAHMAN



San Marino, a country with a population of only 34 thousand, Burkina Faso (20.90 million) and Turkmenistan (61.13 million), all three have erased their names from the awkward list of the countries that never won a single Olympic medal. Whereas Bangladesh, a country with 163 million population, are still carrying the tag of the most populous yet unsuccessful nation in the Olympics history, following yet another barren campaign in Tokyo, their tenth overall.

For the last 36 years since its maiden appearance in the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984, Bangladesh had only token-participated at the Olympics and kept gathering experience while neighbouring nations like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka registered their names into the Olympic medal-count list long ago. This edition of Olympics saw India grab seven medals, including one gold.

So far and not so good, some 44 athletes from Bangladesh participated in six disciplines -- athletics, swimming, shooting, archery, gymnastics and golf -- with no remarkable performances to show. And to add insult to injury, in most cases, the athletes could not even match their individual best scores at the Games.

Bangladesh's highlights at the Olympics are involved with golfer Siddiqui Rahman and archer Ruman Sana, who featured in the 2016 Rio Olympics and 2020 Tokyo Olympics respectively, based on their own merit. The rest of the athletes however, could only participate through wild card entry due to the courtesy of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in the spirit of Olympics values that focuses on inclusivity from all

the nations.

Although it would have been difficult to find one optimistic person who was willing to bet on the Bangladeshi athletes to win a medal at the Games this time but the Tokyo Olympics witnessed a new record of 93 nations -- the largest list of medal-winning countries at any Olympic Games in history -- to enter the medal-distribution podium.

Obviously, a world-class sporting infrastructure, which only the developed countries can establish and sustain, is the key to Olympics success

apparent faulty system with no long-term plans that derives sub-standard training facilities, coaches, with little focus in maintaining mental health and financial stability of the athletes, are among the major hindrances in creating world class athletes in Bangladesh.

No doubt, Bangladesh is light-years away from winning an Olympic medal with the athletes from the red and green still struggling in regional South Asian (SA) Games. Even then, the field of archery and shooting has shown vivid glimpses of hope to break the

opponents.

Athletes in Bangladesh at the youth level, especially in the individual events, are generally groomed with the sole motivation to land a job in Services teams like Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Air Force or Bangladesh Ansar instead of setting their sights on Olympics glory. This had led to a seemingly mediocre mindset where the Olympics dream stays confined to mere participation in the Games, whereas the thoughts of grabbing a medal stay beyond the wildest of imagination.

Another bitter truth from Bangladesh's context is that the local coaches can only take the athletes to a certain level, after which, the athletes gradually and invariably lag behind when competing against the overseas opponents due to their sub-standard rate of progress. However, there may have been some exceptions where athletes have managed to overcome all odds with just sheer determination and will power.

With Bangladesh still devoid of any proper sports policy, the onus is on the government and the sports federations under it to create a sporting environment coupled with a big enough of a talent pool that will inspire the youth from all over the country to dream and realistically aim for Olympics glory. By properly and sincerely investing in the top-notch training facilities, quality coaches to raise the quality of the overall infrastructure to an approximately world-class level, the elusive dream could still turn true at the upcoming 2024 Paris Olympics. But the clock keeps ticking as ever. And with each passing day, the rest of the nations go further ahead, especially the 69 nations other than Bangladesh who are yet to taste the triumph at the Olympic Games.



however, in this day and age, utilisation of the rapidly evolving field of sports science is not confined to only the developed nations, rather the smaller nations are reaping rewards from it. Focusing on -- creative coaching methods, collaboration and exchange of ideas among nations and on gender inclusivity -- has proven to be the supporting key factors throughout history.

It is true that an increased number of athletes qualifying for the Olympics directly raise the probability of winning a medal for a nation but the

jinx of an Olympic medal. Now based on the impact of the aforementioned sports, the rational thing to do for Bangladesh is to assign priority on these two areas and establish cutting-edge facilities as soon as possible, the likes of which the gold medallists South Korean archers receive. For example, their training grounds happen to be installed with facilities which can create artificial wind and rain among other things, so that Korean archers can adjust in the most precarious conditions during big occasions with relative ease compared to their