

## WHITEHEAD geared up for another chapter in his odyssey



Inspirational Olympic figurehead Richard Whitehead, who has a double knee congenital amputation which means he runs with prosthetic legs, is seen to be preparing for the Tokyo Paralympics which kicks off on Tuesday after a year-long pandemic delay as Japan battles a record surge in cases. Gold medalist in the 200m T42 Athletics event at the 2012 and 2016 Paralympics, this 45-year-old British athlete holds the world record for athletes with a double amputation in both the full and half marathon. Overall, Richard is decorated with nine gold medals across the Paralympics, World Championships and European Championships. As at the Olympics, the Paralympics event will be marked by strict health-safety protocols, with almost all spectators banned and tough restrictions on athletes and other participants.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## 'Opponents are always more scared when Messi is around'

REUTERS, Bilbao

Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman has admitted opposition sides are being bolder against his side now that they can no longer count on Lionel Messi, after the Catalans were held 1-1 away to Athletic Bilbao in LaLiga on Saturday.

Koeman, however, admitted his team were still keenly feeling the absence of their all-time top scorer and former captain, two weeks after he left Barca for Paris St Germain following 21 years at the club.

"I don't like to keep talking about the same thing but we're talking about the best player in the world and opponents are always more scared when Messi is around," Koeman told reporters. "It's also the same for us, if you give a pass to Messi, he normally doesn't lose the ball. You can feel that he is not here anymore. We all know it but we can't change it."

Barca had gotten off to a strong start in their first game without Messi by easing to a 4-2 win over Real Sociedad last week but were given a cold dose of reality against an intense Athletic side, who overpowered and outran them for



PHOTO: TWITTER

A thumping late strike from Memphis Depay, his first goal for Barcelona on his competitive debut for the club in La Liga, cancelled out Inigo Martinez's header to earn Barca a point against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

most of the game.

"I think we ran into too many difficulties at the start of the game. They put us under a lot of pressure and did very well and we couldn't play with any patience," Koeman added. "But I have to highlight the attitude we showed after we went behind. I think the draw is fair because if you play like we did at a ground like this you're always going to run into trouble. I have no complaints about the result."

It was a difficult night for Barcelona's defence in particular, with Gerard Pique coming off after half an hour and Eric Garcia being sent off in stoppage time for bringing down Inaki Williams.

Former Manchester City defender Garcia received news of his grandfather's death before the match and struggled throughout the 90 minutes, allowing Inigo Martinez to get away from him to head in the opener early in the second half. "He is a great professional to play so well in a game after the death of his grandfather. We wish him all the best in his personal situation," said Koeman, who insisted the draw was the right result.

## Domestic cricket not on BCB's priority list

SPORTS REPORTER



"At the moment my aim is to perform consistently in the domestic circuit, whether that is the Dhaka Premier League or a first-class competition.

Obviously, I want to make a comeback to the national team by performing strongly in the domestic circuit," out-of-favor Ariful Haque said candidly yesterday.

However, with domestic cricket not a priority for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) due to the pandemic, things seem bleak for players like Ariful, who last played for the national side three years ago. Mohammad Mithun is another in a similar position, having lost his place in the T20I squad for the upcoming home series against New Zealand and without the means to play his way back.

"Right now, domestic cricket is not on our list of priorities. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, we are doing everything on a priority basis and fulfilling international commitments. Apart from the national team, we have to prepare our under-19 and women's team due to international commitments. We are also working with the High-Performance squad because we feel it is manageable for us," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Despite the fact that no 50-over domestic competitions have been played since the outbreak of Covid-19 last year, the BCB did arrange the Bangabandhu T20 Cup last year and also managed to stage the Dhaka Premier League,

albeit after the 50-over tournament had to be halted and then changed to a T20 competition.

According to Nizamuddin, the board is not willing to compromise when it comes to maintaining health protocols and they will not hurry to resume leagues if the situation does not improve.

"We have set a standard of maintaining protocols and are willing to stick to it as we have got success by maintaining protocols. We still don't think that current situation permits us to start domestic cricket because of the standards we are used to following. It won't be possible to move away from that. If you look how we resumed cricket in this situation, we tried to ensure standards and we are willing to work," he added.

When asked how the Bangladesh Football Federation was able to continue league matches, Nizamuddin said: "I am not sure about their protocols. They are definitely maintaining some protocols but I am not sure. For us, it's not possible after the lofty standards we have already set."

However, there was a ray of hope for players looking to make an impression as Nizamuddin said they would fast-track the Dhaka Premier League if the situation improved.

"There is a kind of session jam in the Dhaka league so, if the situation improves, it will be on our priority list alongside first-class competitions."



### Shakib enjoys time away

Shakib Al Hasan is enjoying a quiet time off the field as he spends the last of his vacation time with his family. The ace all-rounder's vacation is set to end as the Bangladesh team gear up for the upcoming home series against New Zealand. Shakib flew to USA after Australia series and is expected to return to the country on August 24 as all the cricketers go into hotel quarantine ahead of the series against the Kiwis. Shakib's wife Shakib Umme Al Hasan posted a picture of them together, enjoying a date at the Signature Room Lounge in Chicago. She captioned the picture: "When he asked for a date night and I said yes."

### Bruzon looking forward to facing Mohun Bagan

Bashundhara Kings coach Oscar Bruzon said he was satisfied with the performance of his team in a goalless draw against Bengaluru FC and would look to topple ATK Mohun Bagan when the two teams face off in their last group D fixture of the AFC Cup on Tuesday. Bashundhara's fate is in their own hands as they can advance to the inter-zone semifinal with a win on Tuesday. "Bashundhara are still in it and have one more chance to qualify into the next round and we are going to capitalise on this big opportunity," said Bruzon.

### Pacquiao loses to Ugas on return to ring

Cuba's Yordenis Ugas sent Manny Pacquiao spinning to a dramatic upset defeat on Saturday, outclassing the Filipino boxing icon with a composed unanimous points victory at the T-Mobile Arena. In his first fight after a two-year absence from the ring, Pacquiao was made to look every bit of his 42 years as the younger Ugas dominated with a stinging jab and cleaner punching to retain his WBA welterweight belt.

### 'I almost broke my hand'

A collision with an on-court camera spelled disaster for in-form Daniil Medvedev on Saturday when he was stunned 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 by fellow Russian Andrey Rublev in their Western & Southern Open semifinal in Cincinnati. Medvedev was beaten for the first time by Rublev after crashing into an on-court camera and knocking it to the ground while chasing the ball at the baseline in the second set. The world number two offered his hand to the camera operator as the chair umpire walked over to make sure both were okay. Medvedev then kicked the camera, telling the umpire, "Take it away. I almost broke my hand".

## Kane returns in Wolves' win

REUTERS, WOLVERHAMPTON



Harry Kane came off the bench to make his first Tottenham Hotspur appearance of the season as Dele Alli's penalty earned coach Nuno Espirito Santo a 1-0 win on his return to his former club Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League on Sunday.

Kane, who has been linked with a move to champions Manchester City all summer, came on in the second half and missed a great chance to immediately get on the scoresheet.

Alli's ninth-minute penalty was enough for Spurs to pick up all three points, however, as Nuno's first trip back to the club he

brought up to the Premier League during a four-year spell between 2017 and 2021 ended successfully.

The results means Spurs have won two from two so far this season, both by a 1-0 scoreline. Wolves remain without a single point after two defeats from their opening two league matches.

### SLOPPY UNITED HELD BY SAINTS

A second-half strike from Manchester United forward Mason Greenwood cancelled out an own goal from team mate Fred to earn a 1-1 draw at Southampton in the Premier League on Sunday.

United had a euphoric start to the season with a 5-1 home win over Leeds United

but could not repeat that performance and were lucky not to lose to Ralph Hasenhuttl's organised and dynamic side.

Southampton took the lead on the half-hour mark after a bright spell when Jack Stephens dispossessed Bruno Fernandes in the United half and the hosts swiftly moved the ball towards Che Adams, whose shot took a heavy deflection off Fred to squirm inside the near post and past David de Gea.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side levelled early in the 55th when Greenwood thumped a low shot under Southampton keeper Alex McCarthy after clever interplay between Fernandes and Paul Pogba, who added another assist to the five he notched against Leeds.



Southampton's Che Adams, surrounded by despondent Manchester United players, sets off on celebration after scoring the opener in a 1-1 draw during a Premier League clash at St Mary's Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### NEWS IN BRIEF