

Community Shield pits Haaland against Nunez

AFP, London

Manchester City striker Erling Haaland will go head to head with Liverpool forward Darwin Nunez as the Premier League title rivals unveil their expensive new recruits in the Community Shield.

Heading into Saturday's curtain raiser to the Premier League season, the pressure is on Haaland and Nunez to provide evidence they can justify their hefty price tags over the coming months.

The pair represent over £100 million (\$121 million) of goalscoring firepower as the rivalry between City and Liverpool intensifies.

Much has changed at City and Liverpool since Pep Guardiola's side pipped the Reds to the title by one point after a thrilling come-from-behind victory over Aston Villa on the last day of the season.

City's fourth title in five seasons was just reward for their incredible consistency, but Guardiola's perfectionist personality ensured he would not rest on his laurels.

Aware that City's success last season was achieved despite their lack of a natural central striker, Guardiola made a blockbuster move for one of Europe's brightest young stars as he landed Norway international Haaland from Borussia Dortmund for £51 million.

Having failed to prise Harry Kane from Tottenham's clutches 12 months ago, Guardiola hopes Haaland can emulate his prolific form at Dortmund in the more demanding Premier League.

The early signs are promising as Haaland took just 12



Bangladesh players enjoy a bus ride to the Harare Sports Club for a practice session yesterday, ahead of today's first match of a three-match T20I series against hosts Zimbabwe. (Bottom) The hosts were gearing up for the challenge with a training session preceded by a pep talk from the coaching staff a day earlier.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK/TWITTER

British kit maker spares Nigeria's blushes

AFP, Birmingham

A British sportswear manufacturer had to answer an SOS call from Nigeria's Commonwealth Games team after they were left with no kit.

Gino Ruffinato, manager of the MG Sportswear firm, which is based in a town near host city Birmingham, at first thought it was a "wind-up" before launching his 14 staff into action.

"As it progressed I started getting emails with orders on, so at that point I thought, hang on, I think this is serious," he told the BBC.

"When they hit us with the deadline saying it needs to be there for Friday and today was Tuesday... there's all the fabric, the print, the designs to get out in two days. It was a bit hair-raising."

His team had to make 200 pieces of kit including running vests and shorts, staff tracksuits and even 400 Nigerian badges.

Ruffinato said it had been "panic stations" but his staff had embraced the challenge. He said he would pay even keener attention to the Games after providing the emergency help.

Tigers looking to play own brand of cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

There has been a lot of talk about the new-look Bangladesh T20I side named for the tour of Zimbabwe. A team was set up to test younger cricketers with T20I skipper Nurul Hasan Sohan in help, with the upcoming Asia Cup and the ICC T20 World Cup later this year in mind.

Bangladesh's performances in the shortest format have been disappointing over the years and recent below-par performances in the West Indies prompted the think-tank to try something different.

They opted to rest the seniors, the likes of whom included regular skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim. Among other seniors, Tamim Iqbal has retired from T20Is while Shakib Al Hasan took a break from the Zimbabwe tour.

Since Mushfiqur became the first of the big four to make his international debut, the Tigers have played only 31 of their 659 matches without any of their four stalwarts.

Last year, Bangladesh team took part in the third and final T20I against New Zealand in Auckland without the big four, which marked the first time none of them had featured in the shortest format. where Liton Das led the Tigers on that occasion.

As Bangladesh take on Zimbabwe in the first of three T20Is in Harare today, the mantra for the Tigers will be to play fearless cricket, break the shackles and come out of the shadows of the seniors.

"There will be challenges for us but we are not here only to learn. We are here to win. You can say we are youngsters, but we are not an inexperienced since. Some of the guys have played over six-seven years in international cricket,"



Nurul told the media yesterday.

Batting will once again remain the vital component for the Tigers, especially given it has not clicked well in recent times. Apart from Nurul, Liton also needs to shoulder responsibility in that department, which also features uncapped Parvez Hossain Emon, Anamul Haque Bijoy, Munim Shahriar and Najmul Hossain Shanto, all of whom will be trying to make an impact and cement their place in the team.

Young Afif Hossain and Mehedi Hasan Miraz can also play important roles against the hosts, who will be without two of their most prominent pacers Tendai Chatara and Blessing Muzarabani.

Nurul also informed that his side was looking forward to display their own brand of cricket when queried about concerns over a lack of power-hitting.

"I think the thing is totally different. Obviously there are a few things and we want to display our own brand of cricket. Other teams maybe good at power-hitting, but if we can be smart and sensitive, we will be able to hit boundaries instead of only looking to hit sixes. We have been urged on this tour to play our own brand of cricket and not be worried about what the other teams are doing."

Bangladesh's pace-bowling department looks quite strong, featuring the likes of Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam.

Although Zimbabwe have never won a T20I series against Bangladesh, they will be confident given that they topped the ICC T20 World Cup qualifiers. The likes of Sikandar Raza, Wessly Madhevere, Sean Williams and Regis Chakabva are in good touch and will look to pounce on a rather inexperienced Bangladesh team this time around.

Laporta hopes Messi finishes career at Barca

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has said that he hopes Lionel Messi will end his career "in a Barca shirt".

Messi left the Camp Nou for Paris Saint-Germain last summer, after 17 years in the Barcelona first team, as the Catalan giants struggled with financial problems.

But Laporta is hopeful that the 35-year-old will be able to return to Barca before he hangs up his boots.

"Messi's time at Barca didn't end as we all would've liked," he told Spanish press during the club's pre-season tour of the United States.

"I believe that Barca have a moral debt towards Leo Messi. We would like the end of his career to come in a Barca shirt, being applauded at all the grounds, wherever he goes."

Laporta clarified that "nothing has been discussed" with Messi, who has one season left on his PSG contract with an option for an extra year.

"It was a temporary end (to his Barca career) because I believe that we will make this wish a reality," he added.

Messi scored only 11 goals in all competitions in his debut PSG campaign, the first time he had scored fewer than 30 in a season since 2007-08.



High BP denies Sura Krishna

SPORTS REPORTER

National champion Sura Krishna Chakma was not allowed to take the boxing ring in the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in England yesterday due to poor health.

Sura Krishna, who recently hit headlines after beating a Nepalese boxer in the professional boxing circuit, was scheduled to fight against a Fijian opponent in the lightweight category (60-60.5kg) but he had to sit out due to high blood pressure.

"He underwent a regular medical check-up in the morning and it was seen that he had high blood pressure. 15 to 20 minutes later, he was found in the same condition and the authorities did not allow him to fight," team doctor Shafiqur Rahman said, adding that Sura Krishna's blood pressure only started decreasing one hour later before returning to normal.

"It is bad news for those waiting to watch my fight. The doctor did not allow me to fight after seeing my physical condition. For this, I apologise to you. I can't even express my feelings at the moment," Sura Krishna wrote on Facebook.

Having termed the incident bad luck, Sura Krishna said that he had not slept well last night and that may have been the reason for his high blood pressure.



England's Alex Yee celebrates before crossing the line to win the men's individual sprint distance final of triathlon event to win the first gold medal in the Commonwealth Games at the Sutton Park in Birmingham on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Yee gives England golden start

REUTERS, Birmingham

Alex Yee gave England a golden start to the Birmingham Commonwealth Games on Friday, staging a dramatic late charge to win the men's sprint triathlon.

Trailing top ranked Hayden Wilde by 15 seconds coming off the bike, Yee, urged on by massive crowds, ruthlessly hunted down the New Zealander during the 5km run, crossing the line with arms raised to a roaring ovation.

While it looked a dramatic finish it was actually a comfortable victory for Yee after Wilde was hit with a 10 second penalty for not properly putting his helmet in the basket at the bike transition.

Australia's Matthew Hauser completed the podium taking the bronze.