

'They are all playing and I can't even run'

MOSTAFA SHABUI

"I'm not willing to talk any more about football. Football has ruined my life," said a dejected Chathuima Marma after this reporter finally managed to contact her on phone last Thursday.

It was as late as 10:40 pm after Chathuima returned from a hard day at work and vented out her deep-rooted frustrations. The 19-year-old was an age-level national football player, who played with the likes of Rupna Chakma, Ritu Porna Chakma, Anuching Mogini and Anai Mogini – the household names in the country after the women's national team clinched the prestigious SAFF Championship title in September.

"They are my friends. We played together at the Mogachari primary school, Ghagra high school and later at the national level. They are all playing and I cannot even run. This is hurting me every second," said Chathuima, who had won the golden boot in the 2012 Bangmata Gold Cup Tournament when her Ghagra high school became runners-up before she featured in the U-14, U-16 teams for Bangladesh.

It was all going great for the talented footballer until she tore a ligament in 2014. Ever since, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) sidelined her out from all kind of football activities, informed Chathuima.

"When I got injured at the end of 2014, they [BFF] gave me Tk 2.3 thousand, told me to get good treatment with the money and sent me home. But at that time I needed way more money than that. So, I couldn't take the timely treatment. Later in 2016, I went through surgery after getting financial aid from Bangladesh Army and some kind individuals."

"However, still my leg injury is far from healed. I still can't walk well, can't climb the mountain," said Chathuima, who further said that the BFF officials did not keep track of her even once.

Financial stability-wise, Chathuima fell into a slippery slope since injury.

"There was no shortage of money when I played. My family was under a lot of financial trouble following injury. In 2018, I managed a job at a shoe factory," informed Chathuima, while adding that her Tk 9,000 salary is barely enough as her family – involving 60 plus aged parents and a younger sister – is heavily dependent on her earnings.

Asked about Chathuima not availing rehabilitation assistance, Golam Rabbani Choton, head coach of the SAFF Championship-winning women's team, told The Daily Star: "Chathuima had potential. Unfortunately, we did not have the scope to provide her the necessary treatment at the time since that was the starting period of women's football in Bangladesh."

"But over the years, we provided Tk 16 lakhs for four players' ligament surgeries, including Swapna's [SAFF-winning team's striker]," coach Choton added.

Chathuima still wants to play though but is not convinced whether the evolved scenario in women's football in Bangladesh can give her the backing this time.

"I don't care about injuries, I want to play again but if I get hurt again, who will take care of me? Now I'm afraid to go on the field," Chathuima said.



TT duo's treatment raises questions

ANISUR RAHMAN

The incident of a Bangladesh Table Tennis team handing a walkover to their opponents happened not so long ago – in 2014 during the World Team Table Tennis Championships in Japan. In that event, Rahima Khatun, Akhi Akter and Sharmin of the women's team were fortunate not to face any punishment from the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF).

Eight years later, as the incident repeated in the Birmingham Commonwealth Games earlier in August, the BTTF took hard measures on two players – Sonam Sultana Soma and Sadia Rahman Mou – by banning them two and one year, respectively, from the international and domestic competitions.

However, by allowing the suspended duo to play the two upcoming domestic competitions – Premier Division Table Tennis League and National Table Tennis Championship – only raised questions regarding the intention of the BTTF officials.

BTTF's executive committee had enough time to serve show-cause

notice before taking the initial decision. However, most members of the executive meeting agreed to punish Soma and Mou on basis of the team's manager report, without discussing the merit or demerit of the offence.

After a couple of executive members argued the need for self-explanations from Soma and Mou, show-cause letters were issued to both players later. Turned out, there was wrong information in the letter, which wrongly mentions the match had taken place on August 4, whereas it took place a day later.

Meanwhile, the players had claimed that one of the players was injured, resulting in them skipping the match following verbal communication with the BTTF general secretary Jahangir Alam, who however denied giving them any permission. The executive committee ultimately reduced the margin of punishment after the duo sought exemption.

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), guardian of the country's sports, has also formed a committee on September 19 to investigate what happened in

Birmingham. It was also learned from a BOA official that the BTTF officials also tried to pursue the chef de mission to declare both players as 'missing ones and to be reported to the police station,' especially after the duo players failed to pick up phone calls during their visit to their relatives' house.

The investigation committee is yet to consider the players' narratives, even though the written reports from the BTTF officials were taken as the committee was asked to submit their report within 15 working days after formation.

Former player and five-time national champion Manosh Chowdhury demanded a neutral investigation, and added that no player has dared to give away a walkover until officials instruct them.

"I think the punishment was given intentionally. If any players say anything against top three to four federation officials, they must face punishment," said Manosh, claiming that the federation officials tried to take actions against him once but he had countered on legal terms.

Bellingham, Musiala headline Dortmund-Bayern rivalry

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund host Bayern Munich on Saturday with arguably the two sides' most important players, Jude Bellingham and Jamal Musiala, boasting a combined age of only 38. Recent meetings of Germany's two most successful clubs have often been billed as clashes between since-departed strikers Erling Haaland and Robert Lewandowski.

Instead this weekend, Bellingham, who has captained Dortmund in their last two matches, will go up against good friend and former team-mate Musiala at Signal Iduna Park.

The now 19-year-olds played together in multiple England youth teams growing up before Musiala opted to play senior international football for Germany, making his debut last year.

Musiala has nailed down a place in Bayern's starting XI this season, repaying coach Julian Nagelsmann's faith with team-leading tallies in the Bundesliga of five goals and three assists.

Bellingham's rise, to the extent he has worn Dortmund's captain's armband, has maybe been even more impressive – and more crucial to his team. The England international netted for a third straight Champions League match in midweek during a 4-1 thumping of Sevilla in Spain.

The youthful complexion of the teams goes beyond Bellingham and Musiala, however, with Dortmund's Karim Adeyemi and Giovanni Reyna and Bayern pair Mathys Tel and Ryan Gravenberch also nominated for this year's Golden Boy award, won two years ago by Haaland while he was at Dortmund.

Milan eager to do better against Juve, says Pioli

REUTERS

AC Milan are determined to make up for Wednesday's 3-0 defeat by Chelsea in the Champions League when they host Juventus for their ninth Serie A match of the season, manager Stefano Pioli said on Friday.

Both the defending champions and Juve are in need of a win to climb the standings as they sit at an underwhelming fifth and seventh place, respectively.

The match will also be a big test for manager Massimiliano Allegri who has his job on the line and needs to prove Juve can still recover from their poor start to the season.

Milan are unbeaten in four of their last five meetings in Serie A with the Turin-based side, with both of last season's league matches ending with a draw.

"There's in us the willingness and determination to do better than how we played in London," Pioli told reporters.

"We are ready to play this match. Milan, at the moment, is ahead of us in the standings, they are a strong team and are very dangerous when the pitch is open," Allegri told reporters on Friday.

"It will take focus and character, it will be a good test for us."



Warner, Starc star as Australia beat Windies

AFP, Brisbane

An explosive David Warner slammed 75 and Mitchell Starc grabbed four wickets as Australia beat the West Indies by 31 runs Friday to clinch the Twenty20 series 2-0 in the build-up to defending their World Cup title.

The home team were cruising at 95-1, but they lost three wickets for five runs, including Warner, as the visitors got back into contention.

The dangerous Tim David came to the rescue with an entertaining 42 off 20 balls, including three big sixes, to steer them to 178-7.

"It was a fantastic all round performance and well executed by the bowlers. At the halfway mark we had discussed about bowling Test match lines and lengths, and they nailed them," said man-of-the-match Warner.

Skipper Aaron Finch added: "The difference in the game was Davey and David."

The hosts clinched the first match by three wickets, and the West Indies wanted a win in what was their last game before the World Cup.

But they managed just 147-8 in reply, with Starc taking 4-20, his best figures in a T20.

Reigning World Cup player-of-the-tournament David Warner fired a warning shot to Australia's rivals with a crisp 75 from only 41 balls during his side's 31-run victory over West Indies in the second and final match of the Twenty20 series yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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