

Ronaldo omission headlines Premier League weekend

AFP, London

No matter what Erik ten Hag does to lift Manchester United towards respectability in his first season, the Dutchman is yet to escape the long shadow cast by Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ronaldo's latest show of disdain for Ten Hag's authority came in the final minutes of Wednesday's 2-0 win against Tottenham when he walked down the Old Trafford tunnel while the match was still in progress.

The 37-year-old's refusal to wait for the final whistle reportedly came after he told Ten Hag he did not want to come on as a late substitute.

Ronaldo's temper tantrum was not his first this term and, after his failed attempt to engineer a transfer in the close-season, the Portugal striker is clearly frustrated at finding himself in limbo.

In response to Ronaldo's antics, Ten Hag has finally laid down the law and the star, who has scored just twice in 12 appearances this season, has been dropped from the squad that will travel to Chelsea on Saturday.

United will surely look to end Ronaldo's turbulent second spell at the club by selling him in the January transfer window, but until then Ten Hag has to deal with the malcontent's presence in the background.



NUNEZ REVIVAL LIFTS LIVERPOOL

Nunez is rounding into form at just the right time for Liverpool as the Uruguay forward rewards Klopp for his patience.

Nunez was sent off in his first Premier League game at Anfield against Crystal Palace in August and then went five games without a goal, fuelling unflattering comparisons with Manchester City's prolific striker Erling Haaland.

But, with Diogo Jota and Luis Diaz sidelined by injuries, Liverpool boss Klopp needed Nunez to start showing why he paid £64 million to sign him from Benfica in the close-season.

And the 23-year-old has risen to the challenge, with his winner in Wednesday's 1-0 victory over West Ham taking him to five goals for the Reds, including three in his last four games.

"It is important. He has scored now a couple of times in the last few games. He arrived 100 percent, now even with numbers, which is fine," Klopp said.

Liverpool have recorded consecutive league victories for only the second time this season and head to struggling Nottingham Forest on Saturday aiming to close the gap on the top four.

SPURS KEEP FAITH OVER TOP-FOUR WOES

Outclassed by Manchester United in a 2-0 defeat that could have been far heavier, Tottenham have yet to silence the critics who question their poor record against the other contenders for a top-four place.

Antonio Conte's side were well below their best at Old Trafford in a limp display reminiscent of their recent 3-1 loss in the north London derby at Arsenal.

Tottenham also needed a controversial stoppage-time equaliser from Harry Kane to rescue a 2-2 draw at Chelsea in August.

That series of underwhelming performances when the stakes were highest has led some to doubt Tottenham's right to be ranked as title contenders, despite their current lofty third-place position.

However, Tottenham captain Hugo Lloris said it is too early to panic.



Robert Lewandowski became only the third player since 2000 to pass the 600-goal career mark after Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo as the Polish striker netted a brace to help Barcelona bounce back from their painful Clasico loss in style with a 3-0 home LaLiga win over Villarreal on Thursday. Despite the win, Barcelona remained second in the standings on 25 points, three behind Real Madrid and three clear of third-placed Real Sociedad.

PHOTO: STAR

LOCAL BOOTERS' commitment issue resurfaces

ANISUR RAHMAN

Signing for a club after taking advanced payment from another club has apparently become a common phenomenon for the country's top footballers during the Bangladesh Premier League transfer window, and the latest one that began on October 8 ahead of the 2022-23 season proved to be no exception. Mohammedan Sporting Club has recently lodged complaints to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) regarding national defenders Riyadhul Hasan Rafi, Rahmat Mia, and goalkeeper Nayeem Sheikh -- who have allegedly kept themselves out of reach from the Mohammedan officials despite taking advanced payments from the Black and Whites, who intended to form a strong squad this season by signing a few national players. Meanwhile, there have been whispers indicating the possibility of Rafi and Rahmat signing for the six-time champions Abahani, while Nayeem Sheikh is likely to stay back with Sheikh Jamal DC for the upcoming season. Last season saw Mohammedan, Bashundhara Kings, and Uttar Baridhara Club officially complain about right-back Atiquzzaman, central-back Yeasin Khan, and goalkeeper Mitul Marma, respectively, for taking payments in advance but ending up signing for others.

And previously in the 2018-19 season, Abahani made it known that Nasir Chowdhury joined Bashundhara Kings after taking advanced payment from them, while Sheikh Jamal in the 2016-17 season also accused several players of the same misconduct. Back then, Mamunul Islam, Raihan Hasan, Yeamin Ahmed Munna, Nasir Chowdhury, and Sohel Rana signed for Chittagong Abahani while Jamal Hossain Bhuiyan and Alamgir Kabir Rana were roped in by Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra, and Shahidul Alam Sohel joined Abahani despite taking the advanced money from Sheikh Jamal, who later went as far as High Court to get the verdict in their favour. However, the court ordered the local game's governing body to settle down the issue according to FIFA laws. Going further back, during the 2013-14 season, Mohammedan claimed to be the victim as five footballers -- Zahid Hossain, Shakil Ahmed, Mamun Mia, Nahidul Islam Nahid, and Shariful Islam -- signed for Sheikh Russel and Abahani despite allegedly taking advanced payment from Mohammedan. Interestingly, the local game's governing body looked into each of those matters and every time the BFF players' status committee cleared the players to play for the clubs they eventually signed for in BFF's prescribed transfer forms.

The board also had asked the players to return whatever money they took from the first club or settle the matter with an 'amicable solution between the clubs and the players' despite having clauses in bylaws that a player will face punishment if found guilty of taking money from two clubs. Regarding this unethical conduct during transfers, former national striker Zahid Hasan Emily said, "This practice started before the start of the professional football league and it keeps going only in Bangladesh, though it should have been stopped way earlier. "I think, if there are strict laws as well as exemplary punishment, no players would dare to repeat it. The players also lack commitments, thus they are signing for one club after taking money from other clubs." Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu, however, believes the lack of quality players is primarily creating this type of problem every season. "This type of problem arises when the clubs, who are trying to form a good squad from limited pool of quality players, give money to the players before the end of the season. If the clubs sign the players in the prescribed transfer forms, they won't face any problem," said Rupu as he concluded by urging the BFF to distribute the prescribed forms among the clubs as soon as the league ends.

Niemann sues Carlsen



AFP, Washington

American grandmaster Hans Niemann, in the latest move in a scandal that has rocked the world of chess, filed a lawsuit on Thursday against Magnus Carlsen after the Norwegian world champion accused him of cheating.

Niemann, in the suit filed in federal court in Missouri, is seeking \$100 million in damages from Carlsen, his company Play Magnus Group, Danny Rensch of Chess.com, the world's leading online chess platform, and American grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura.

Niemann accused the defendants of slander and libel and colluding to destroy his reputation and livelihood.

Carlsen has publicly accused Niemann of cheating, and chess.com alleged in a report earlier this month that the 19-year-old American has "probably cheated more than 100 times" in online games.

In his complaint, Niemann said the 31-year-old Carlsen, the five-time reigning world champion, Rensch and Nakamura have inflicted "devastating damages" on his reputation and career by "egregiously defaming him."

It accuses them of "unlawfully colluding to blacklist him from the profession to which he has dedicated his life."

Special ones still long for safety net

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU from Pabna

Following stellar outings at the international circuit, Pabna's special athletes desire to shine in the forthcoming Special Olympics World Summer Games in Germany in 2023. Despite their international success, however, proper measures of bringing them to a mainstream sporting structure have not been executed yet.

In Bangladesh and elsewhere, children with special needs face enormous challenges while battling social constraints, but sports seem to have become an outlet through which these individuals can express themselves and unearth many hidden talents, often neglected, in the process.

Sadia Khan Shetu, who won a gold medal in Floor hockey in the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria, was born as a special child with intellectual disabilities. As a result, she was not treated well in her family from an early age.

The plight of her mother, Aleya, had deepened following the birth of another special child, this time a boy, who also was deaf and could not speak. To add to her miseries further, her husband left the family and remarried.

Despite the hardships and the challenges of raising special children, Aleya now takes pride in her daughter, Shetu, who won

another medal in the 2019 Special Olympics World Summer Games in the UAE.

Shetu is now honing her skills in basketball for the upcoming tournament in Germany and has inspired her brother, who is testing his trade in handball, to join as well.



Aleya said, "My children are special children, who never got love and support but they have god-gifted sporting qualities."

"Their glorious performances have now brought happiness in the family as well as in the society."

Mohirunnesa Begum, the mother of Chadni Khatun who won the gold medal in a basketball tournament in UAE, said her daughter now aims to deliver in Germany.

"As a mother of a special child, I was often criticised. My daughter who was often neglected in family and in society now brings the light of hope to my poor family," Mohirunnesa said, adding that no special child should be neglected.

29 special children, who have Down



syndrome and are intellectually disabled, are now preparing for the Germany assignment while camping in Pabna under the supervision of the district's Special Olympics body.

Rejaul Hossain Badsha, the director of Bangladesh Special Olympics and the general secretary of the Special Olympics of Pabna sub-chapter, talked to the Daily Star about the preparations of the special

players.

"We started training camps earlier this year in Pabna Stadium, roping in 40 children from two schools for special children. We then short-listed 29 special players, including 14 gold medalists for the next World Summer Games in 2023." Badsha informed the Daily Star, while he addressed the challenge behind running year-round camps -- providing sports facilities, and nutrition, among other things -- due to financial constraints.

"We are struggling to continue training camps with local funding. We need government support so that we can expand our program to bring more special children to the facility," Badsha added.

Looking back, Special Olympics Bangladesh's Pabna sub-chapter started its journey in 2010. Since then, the district's special players delivered 14 gold medals, six silver medals, and three bronze medals during Asia Pacific Games (2013), Special Olympic World Games (2015), Winter World Games (2017), and World Summer Games (2019).

Most of these special players come from lower-income families, who can't afford private schools let alone facilitate their children's sporting needs. But the success that these special athletes have brought is giving them the belief to make their lives

better.

Konok Khatun, a handball player, told The Daily Star: "Due to our physical disabilities, we have no hope in life. I have found my dream. I want to establish myself as a successful handball player of the country."

Meanwhile, swimming champion Zuthi Akter, who is preparing for another triumph in Germany, expressed her concerns regarding her family's ability to support her.

"I love to swim, I want to continue my career in swimming but my family does not have enough ability," Zuthi said using sign language.

Zuthi and most of the special athletes have the desire to continue their sporting careers but they want to do it professionally. However, these players have no centralised means of income. The only means of financial gains they have achieved so far were courtesy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina having handed them prize money following the completion of tournaments.

At the end of day, despite garnering medals and accolades for the country, it's quite unfortunate that these special players have not yet found the financial safety net while Bangladesh still holds the unwanted record for being the most populous country to have never won an Olympics medal.