

Pele's humility a lesson to forever stick with Klopp

REUTERS

Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp is convinced no one can be greater than Pele but what he marvelled at the most was the Brazilian football great's humility despite being one of the most popular people on the planet.

Pele, known as "The King", died on Thursday at the age of 82, and people from all walks of life mourned the death of the only man to win the World Cup three times as a player.

Klopp said he did not have even "0.01%" of the skills of Pele and described how he received a signed number 10 Brazil shirt on his birthday when he met the former striker and German great Franz Beckenbauer at the World Cup in 2006. "Whatever anyone tells me in the future, Pele was the best. I will not forget that," Klopp said.

"Both of them showed me that if you are the most famous person on the planet, you can still be a completely normal guy. That's what I love the most, that's what I took as a lesson, that's something I will never forget."

Nadal brushes off talk of retiring anytime soon

REUTERS, SYDNEY

Rafa Nadal brushed off talk of retiring anytime soon after the 22-times Grand Slam champion was stunned by Cameron Norrie in the United Cup mixed team tournament on Saturday, saying he still enjoyed competing at the highest level.

Nadal's preparations for his Australian Open title defence got off to a shaky start as Norrie beat him 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to seal his first victory over the 36-year-old Spaniard in their fifth career meeting. "I lost my match. That's it, no? Every time I come to a press conference it seems that I have to retire. So you are very interested on my retirement. I mean, that, for the moment, isn't the case," a smiling Nadal told reporters in reply to a question.

"When the day arrives, I'm going to let you know, guys."



Players and officials observe a minute's silence to honour football legend Pele, who died on December 29, ahead of the English Premier League match between Manchester United and Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Molineux Stadium yesterday. [Inset] A Wolves young fan holds up a banner with a message of thanks to tribute arguably the sport's greatest ever player. Leagues the world over will pay tribute to Pele during this weekend's matches.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'More than history in the making'

AGENCIES

Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo has joined Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr on a two-and-a-half year contract, the club announced on Friday, after leaving Manchester United to become a free agent.

Al Nassr issued a statement saying Ronaldo will join on a deal until 2025 but did not disclose any financial details. Ronaldo's contract has been estimated to be worth more than 214 million dollars.

"I am fortunate that I have won everything I set out to win in European football and feel now that this is the right moment to share my experience in Asia," Ronaldo said in the statement.

The five-time Ballon D'or winner, who could double his earnings via image rights, said that the vision Al Nassr showed him is "very inspiring."

"I'm thrilled for a new experience in a different league and a different country, the vision that Al Nassr has is very inspiring.

I am looking forward to



joining my new teammates and together with them help the Club to achieve success."

The Portuguese star will arrive in Saudi Arabia with a vast collection of club honours after a glittering spell at Spanish giants Real Madrid from 2009-18, which was followed by a successful spell at Juventus and then a return to Manchester United, where he

rose to stardom before signing for Real.

Before the recently concluded World Cup, Ronaldo had virtually cut his ties with Manchester United last month following an explosive television interview in which the 37-year-old forward said he felt betrayed by the club and did not respect their Dutch manager Erik ten Hag.

Ronaldo said Qatar would probably be his last World Cup as he plans to retire at 40, with a move to Saudi Arabia likely to mark the swansong in the career of one of the game's greatest current players alongside Lionel Messi.

Ronaldo is expected to play a huge role in the Saudi bid for the 2030 World Cup.

"This is more than history in the making," Al Nassr Football Club president Musalli Almuammar said. "This is a signing that will not only inspire our club to achieve even greater success but inspire our league, our nation and future generations."

The Saudi Arabian club, who have won nine Saudi Pro Premier League titles, are hoping Ronaldo can help them win another domestic league title and a first AFC Asian Champions League.

However, the Portuguese forward will miss his first two domestic games after being banned for knocking a phone out of a fan's hand after United's defeat at Everton in April.

Tigers can make 2023 a positive one

SPORTS REPORTER

2023 is expected to be the year of hope for Bangladesh, especially with the ODI World Cup in the calendar.

Bangladesh have raised the bar with their performances in the 50-over format over the past few years so expectations are heightened ahead of the showpiece event in India, where familiar conditions are expected to aid the Tigers' cause.

That burgeoning belief in the ODI unit, coupled with the fact that it is expected to be the last ODI World Cup for stalwarts like Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad, means the Tigers will be dreaming of something truly exceptional.

According to prominent coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, the Tigers can play better cricket if they are able to keep applying themselves accordingly.

"I think it would be good for Bangladesh, not just because of the fact that it is going to be their (the four senior cricketers') last World Cup, but because this team now looks different to what we saw three months ago. I think a great positive will be Mehedi Hasan Miraz and the way he played in the India series, if he is able to continue that. Having all-rounders like Shakib and Miraz can help us have a balanced side.

"Our bowling department is reliable and although we did have some issues with our top order, I think Tamim's return to the team will add strength to the batting department. There are a lot of positives. It's important to play with a positive mindset, which was not the case previously

because of the slightly better top-order batter," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

On the contrary, Bangladesh's performances in the longest format have remained a huge concern. Bangladesh began 2022 with a bang, winning their first-ever Test in New Zealand.

And many believed the victory would lead the Tigers in the right direction, especially in terms of their approach in the longest format of the game.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh were unable to capitalise on that and lost their way, losing their next eight Tests while managing to draw one of 10 Tests in 2022.

According to the International Cricket Council's Future Tours Programme (FTP), Bangladesh will play five Tests in 2023. Interestingly, all of them will be at home.

"Unfortunately we are still searching for the players who can survive at this level after all these years. We have struggled over the past one-and-a-half-years and even experimented with new players, especially after the Zimbabwe tour when we tried to go in a new direction," he said.

He added that it would be important to note how the new coach handled the situation after Russell Domingo resigned his post and how the Tigers move forward under a new head coach.

"Players like Miraz had optimum performances and the year ended relatively well. But it will be interesting to see how this team moves forward under a new coach. I think it will be a challenge but the positive intent during the last Test series against India show the positive mental change in the team that wants to win in any situation and this positive intent can help this team to be brave," said Fahim.

Salahuddin rejects second-best award

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin yesterday rejected the second-place award given to him by Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA) on the previous night.

Salahuddin, the former national team captain and coach, came second to cricketer Shakib Al Hasan in the BSPA event, hosted to mark the 60th anniversary of the oldest sports journalists' organisation of the country.

The verdict was made based on voting from a panel of judges, made up of former sports stars and sports organisers, who selected top 10 sporting personalities by taking into account their contribution to various sports in the country.

Salahuddin did not receive the award and left the venue of the programme instead of joining the winners on the stage.

On Saturday, BFF officials also boycotted media, whom they had invited to brief on an executive committee meeting.

Later, the governing body of the country's football issued a press release stating the reason for declining the award.

"BFF executive committee decided to reject BSPA's 'second best sports person award' conferred on Kazi Salahuddin, a brave freedom fighter, Swadhin Bangla Football Team's member, national awardee, Shaheed Sheikh Kamal National Sports Council awardee and president of Bangladesh and South Asian Football Federation," the press release said.

The press release added that BFF executive committee felt that the award was a farce, tantamount to insult of the War of Liberation, the Swadhin Bangla Football Team and to everyone related to football and the sports fraternity.

The BSPA event on Friday night also felicitated 1- sports journalists and writers while giving away a special award to Roquibul Hasan -- former national cricket team captain, freedom fighter, and a former president of BSPA.

Fortis register maiden victory

SPORTS REPORTER

Newcomers Fortis FC registered their first victory in top-flight football with a 1-0 win over Azampur FC yesterday as Bashundhara Kings regained top spot in the top of the Bangladesh Premier League with a 2-0 win over Rahmatganj MFS yesterday.

Fortis FC, who started the campaign with a draw against Abahani before getting beaten by champions Kings in their second match, tasted victory in their third match when former national team striker Shakhawat Hossain Rony scored the decisive goal following a one-two with Luiz Carlos in the 29th minute at the Rafiquddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh. The win lifted the newcomers to sixth position with four points from three matches.

Chittagong Abahani, meanwhile, registered their first point of the campaign with a 2-2 draw against Mohammedan at the Shaheed Dharendra Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla.

The draw left Mohammedan in fourth position with five points from three matches while Chittagong Abahani were in seventh position with a single point from two matches.

Defending champions Kings moved to nine points from three matches, two clear of Abahani and Sheikh Jamal.



The Teer-Prothom Alo Sports Award programme took place at the Grand Ballroom of Hotel Sonargaon yesterday and the brightest stars of Bangladesh sports were given due recognition for their performances in 2021. Star cricketer Shakib Al Hasan (2R) was adjudged as the best sportsman, and one by audience poll as well, while runners-up awards went to his teammates Mehedi Hasan Miraz (3R) and Liton Das, whose brother Bappi Das (L) had received the award on Liton's behalf. The Sportswoman of the Year award was bagged by archer Diya Siddique (2L), and 16-year-old female footballer Shaheda Akter Risa (R) became the Best Emerging Player of the Year. Also, the Lifetime Achievement award was presented to former sportsman and journalist Mohammad Kamruzzaman (3L).

PHOTO: COLLECTED