

# 'Fufu' charges Adeyemi

AGENCIES

Borussia Dortmund star forward Karim Adeyemi revealed that the secret to how he became so fast is African dishes, especially fufu.

The German striker of Nigerian descent scored the only goal for Dortmund against Chelsea in the champions league round of 16 first-leg tie at Signal Iduna park on Wednesday.

Germany international Adeyemi sprinted more than 60 metres, leaving Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez in the dust, and slotted home against the run of play to give his team the advantage going into the return leg in London on March 7.

In a post-game interview with CBS Sport Golazo, Adeyemi, the speedster claimed that he eats a specific Nigerian dish that elevates his speed.

"I eat a lot of African foods," he explained. "I have good genetics from my dad so I think it will be difficult."

Pressed as to the exact food he eats, Adeyemi responded, "It is called fufu, and it's a Nigerian food which is very good," he revealed.

Asked specifically if he was the fastest player in Germany, he laughed and said: "I don't know. But it's one thing I can do well but the other players can also do other stuff better."

Adeyemi's goal also earned praises from Dortmund coach Edin Terzic, who compared the forward to cartoon character Road Runner for his incredible goal.

"Meep Meep! And then he goes," Dortmund coach Edin Terzic told BT Sport when asked to describe the 21-year-old's goal.

"This is the quality of Karim. If you are quick like this then it is going to be very tough for every defence. It was a great goal and very important as it was the winning goal," Terzic said.

However, unlike Terzic, Chelsea manager Graham Potter was not so impressed by Adeyemi's goal.

"It's a poor goal. We have to do better. We were pushing at the time and we were the better team," said Potter. "They (players) know they can do better with that. But we will focus on the positives. It was another step forward for us."

"The spirit is there in the team. We need a bit of luck and the performance level we had tonight and just keep improving," Potter added.

Meanwhile, the lack of cutting edge in front of goal is what disappointed Chelsea midfielder Kai Havertz overall.

"It's frustrating to lose because I thought we played quite well. We came here to win the game, or at least draw, but in the end we have lost and it's just really frustrating for us," Havertz said when speaking after the game.



Najmul Hossain Shanto turned up with yet another impressive performance for Sylhet Strikers in the final against Comilla Victorians in Mirpur yesterday. Shanto smashed a 45-ball 64, his fourth fifty of the tournament, and stitched a crucial 79-run third-wicket stand with Mushfiquir Rahim to help Sylhet to a commanding 175 for seven. Mushfiquir also remained unbeaten for 74 off 48 deliveries. [Bottom] Earlier, Nagar Baul, led by James, and two other household names in the Bangladesh band music fraternity -- Warfaze and Maqsood O' Dhaka -- mesmerised the crowd at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium before the all-important final.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Some positives amidst the criticism

SPORTS REPORTER

Is the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) going to leave a mark upon the conclusion of the final of the ninth edition being played on Thursday in front of a packed Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur?

Some would suggest that the cricket has been below-par. But while that assertion stems from the absence of the usual extravagance of this tournament due to the absence of foreign stars at the front end, it opened door for locals to play far more important roles than they are used to. The effect that it created was that a few performers were able to stake their claims to being T20-cricket savvy as the tournament gears to a close.

Sylhet Sixers are the foremost side when it comes to showcasing local talent. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's side were not earmarked for a successful tournament but proved doubters wrong early by winning their first five games on the trot. And although they lost the first qualifier against tournament favourites Comilla Victorians, they bounced back in extraordinary fashion in the second qualifier to thwart title contenders Rangpur Riders.

Sylhet's opening duo of Towhid Hridoy and Najmul Hossain Shanto impressed in particular, with the latter ending as the top run-getter of the tournament and Towhid not far behind. Shanto had amassed



451 runs before the final, playing consistently at a very good average. The left-hander had been criticised for his opening role in the national team but Mashrafe showed the effect a positive dose of faith can have on cricketers.

Hridoy struck over 400 runs and it was his clean hitting as a top-order batter and ability to pace his innings that gave Sylhet the platform for competitive scores. Zakir Hasan, another who is making a case in the Test format, came up with impactful knocks.

At one point following the first phase of the league stage, Mashrafe was the top wicket-taker.

Runs had been scored as wickets started to fare better after the first few matches, an unusual thing given Mirpur's previous track

record. Crowds turned up in droves, especially in Sylhet, giving the vibe that the tournament could indeed go bigger if planned with sufficient forethought.

The absence of DRS was one of the biggest talking points during the tournament and ace all-rounder and Fortune Barishal captain Shakib Al Hasan's words had induced controversy while highlighting the excitement the tournament induces.

Yet, after the negative branding at the start, the matches started to pull in the crowds. Shakib himself was one of the top run-getters and levelled-up with his power-hitting, scoring at an incredible strike-rate of just over 174.

While Bangladeshi pacers were facing the music on good tracks and spinners had little effect, a few bowlers like Rangpur pacer Hasan Mahmud or Comilla spinner Tanvir Islam left their mark. The presence of bowlers such as Pakistan's Mohammad Amir, Naseem Shah, Harris Rauf and Mohammad Wasem also meant bowling attacks were challenging enough for good cricket.

With a few franchise leagues around the world ending before the eliminator and qualifiers, big-name stars were available for tournament favourites Comilla. As for the lack of ability to create brand value, there remains a big concern. But ultimately it is up to the BCB to create the required value.

# Can Tigresses buck the trend against NZ?

SPORTS REPORTER

After defeats in their first two games, Bangladesh will be desperate to register their first win in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup when they take on New Zealand in their third Group 1 encounter in Cape Town today.

Nigar Sultana Joty and Co. have not registered a win in the flagship event since the 2014 edition and were sloppy as they crashed to comprehensive defeats against Sri Lanka and Australia this time around.

Batting was the biggest area of concern for Bangladesh, with the Tigresses posting 126 for eight against Sri Lanka in a seven-wicket defeat in their opening game.

Things remained unchanged for their second assignment, against Australia, as Bangladesh put up a small total of 107 for seven, going on to lose by eight wickets. New Zealand also lost their first two group games -- against Australia and South Africa -- so Bangladesh will be eyeing to capitalise on that momentum.

# Uncapped Hridoy called up for Eng ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Towhid Hridoy got the reward of his brilliant performance in the Bangladesh Premier League as the uncapped cricketer earned his maiden call-up to the national team on Thursday when the selectors announced a 14-member squad for the first two ODIs of the three-match home series against England.

The 22-year-old right hander showed great consistency throughout the BPL for Sylhet Strikers, scoring 403 runs in 13 games at a healthy strike rate of 140.41. He also struck three fifties in the tournament.

Meanwhile, skipper Tamim Iqbal also makes a comeback to the side after missing out the last home series against India in December last year due to a groin injury. Another experienced left-arm spinner Taijul Islam also returns to the ODI team after missing out in the last India series.

Wicketkeeper-batters Anamul Haque and Nurul Hasan Sohan, alongside batter Yasir Ali, and left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed were dropped due to poor performances.

England are scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh on February 24 to take part in the three-match ODI series, part of the ODI Super League, and three-match T20I series.

**Squad :** Tamim Iqbal (Captain), Liton Das, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiquir Rahim, Afif Hossain, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Ebadot Hossain Chowdhury, Taijul Islam, Towhid Hridoy.

# Abahani meet Kings in season-defining clash

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings will be looking to consolidate their lead at the top of the Bangladesh Premier League when the visitors take on Abahani in a crucial encounter at the Shaheed Dhirendhranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla today.

Three-time champions Kings are on top of the 11-team table with 27 points from nine matches, nine points ahead of closet rivals Abahani, who however have a game in hand.

Kings have been in fantastic rhythm this season, staying undefeated while winning 17 of their 18 games in all competitions. A win today would put a fourth successive BPL title squarely in focus.

Abahani, on the other hand, have struggled at times, drawing three of their eight league games. Although they are also undefeated, anything short of a win would see their title hopes in disarray.

However, it is going to be a tough task for the six-time champions, who have never beaten Kings in the professional football league, drawing twice and losing on four occasions.

Abahani only recorded two wins against Kings, first in the Federation Cup final in 2018 and then in the Independence Cup final in December, 2021.

"I have confidence but I also respect Bashundhara. They have been perfect this season -- eight matches, 8 wins [actually nine wins from nine matches] -- so we have to be perfect tomorrow [Friday]," Abahani coach Mario Lemos told The Daily Star.

Despite being in superb form and ahead in the head-to-head battle, Bashun dhara Kings coach Oscar Bruzon afforded Abahani the same respect.

"Abahani are always title contenders. They have been performing well and finding stability in their ideas. They reach this game in top form, so we will have to be at our best," Oscar told The Daily Star.

# City back in business

AGENCIES

Written off at times during an unusually erratic season, resurgent Manchester City delivered a resounding statement as they moved to the top of the Premier League with a 3-1 victory at title rivals Arsenal on Wednesday.

As City's players celebrated in front of their travelling fans in one corner of the Emirates Stadium at the final whistle, Pep Guardiola's face was wreathed in smiles, and perhaps tinged with a little relief.

Kevin De Bruyne had given City the lead and even Bukayo Saka's controversial penalty equaliser wasn't enough to shake the champions' equilibrium once they rode Arsenal's first half storm on a rainy night in north London.

Having trailed Arsenal by eight points just a month ago, City are now firmly in contention to retain the title.

Arsenal might have a game in hand but it was City who finished a frenetic encounter with all the momentum in the title race.

Defeats at Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham, as well as a home loss to Brentford and a surprise League Cup exit at Southampton, had given the impression that all was not well in the City camp.

Even Erling Haaland's barrage of goals came with the caveat that the Norway



striker's style of play might not be best suited to Guardiola's philosophy.

But as the critics sharpened their knives, Guardiola saw signs in training ahead of their seismic showdown at Arsenal that his squad were about to make their point to the doubters.

Guardiola admitted his tactics against Arsenal -- which included starting midfielder Bernardo Silva at left-back -- had to be altered at half-time but it was an attitude change among his players that was just as important.

"In the first half, they were much better than us. My tactics were horrible. Second half, we were much, much better,"

Guardiola added.

To rub salt on the wounds of Arsenal, who seem to have lost the momentum that could extend their 19-year wait for the title further, Grealish said: "If I'm being honest I thought Arsenal were the better team, but to win titles you've got to come to places like this and win even when you are not at your best."

Haaland urged City to now go all the way and win the title.

"I'm so happy," Haaland told Amazon Prime. "We needed this one and now we need to start going on a run because that's what Man City do."

Even though they are sitting pretty at

the top, Guardiola refused to label City as title favourites.

"We won against Arsenal at the Emirates. They have one game in hand so I consider they are still top of the league. There are still so many games to play, the Champions League is coming as well," he said.

"If we had come here eight or nine points behind and lost it would have been almost over. But we had a chance to be close and we took it.

"If you want the crown, fight for it. We still want it."

Meanwhile, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was left rueing the mistakes that he believed decided the fate of the crucial tie.

De Bruyne's opener came from an awful Takehiro Tomiyasu back-pass, while Gabriel Magalhaes was robbed of possession high up the pitch before City broke to restore their lead through Grealish in the second half after Bukayo Saka had equalised from the penalty spot.

"It's exceptionally difficult to play at the level they require you to play to have a chance to win. I thought in many moments we did and we had them, but if you give three goals the way we did and don't put away the big chances we had, then the margin for error is almost zero. It's a shame because we really had them," Arteta said.