

'It's not football, it's La Liga'

AGENCIES

Football and beyond rallied around Vinicius Junior on Monday, demanding action against racism, after the Real Madrid star was abused once again in Spain's La Liga.

The 22-year-old Brazilian international forward was targeted by a home supporter during a 1-0 defeat at Valencia on Sunday and was later sent off.

Vinicius, who has frequently been singled out for racial abuse in La Liga, issued a statement afterwards saying that La Liga "belongs to racists" and several Brazilian players past and present offered their support.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva condemned the abuse, telling a news conference at the close of the G7 summit in Hiroshima: "He was attacked. He was called a 'monkey'."

Vinicius stood in front of fans behind the goal and pointed to the apparent culprit. Play was delayed for several minutes in the second half.

Referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea spoke to stadium officials, who made an announcement calling for racist insults to stop before play resumed 10 minutes later.

The referee wrote in his post-match report that a fan shouted "monkey, monkey" at the player.

"The Spanish league has a problem, and Vinicius is not the problem. Vinicius is the victim. There's a very serious problem," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said.

FIFA reiterated on Monday that stopping matches is permitted as well as players walking off the pitch in their three-step approach when racist abuse takes place.

"Full solidarity to Vinicius," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in a statement. "There is no place for racism



in football or in society and FIFA stands by all players who have found themselves in such a situation. Events during the match between Valencia and Real Madrid show that this needs to be the case."

Writing on Instagram, Vinicius said Spain was viewed as "a country of racists" in his homeland.

He said Spain was "a great country. I am sorry for the Spanish people who do not agree, but today, in Brazil, Spain is known as a country of racists."

"The prize for the racists today is that they have sent me off. It's not football, it's La Liga," he said. "The league that once belonged to Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Cristiano (Ronaldo) and Messi now belongs to racists," Vinicius added.

"If Vini wants to keep playing, we keep playing, but if Vini says he's not playing any more, I'm leaving the pitch with him, because we cannot tolerate these things," said Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

"You are not alone. We are with you and we support you," PSG striker Mbappe wrote on Instagram.

On Twitter, Brazilian Football Confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues said: "Vini Jr., you have our love and support, and that of all Brazilians."

Real Madrid has lodged a hate crime complaint with Spanish prosecutors over racist chants hurled at Brazilian player.

The attacks, in its view, "constitute a hate crime" for which the club has filed a complaint with the State Attorney General's Office, the club said.

Separately, the Movement Against Intolerance (MCI) and the Association of Spanish Soccer Players (AFE) said in a joint statement they had also filed a complaint with the same prosecutor's office, citing racial slurs against the Black player.



Bangladesh batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim paddle sweeps one in training at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla Stadium yesterday. Known for his dedication, it was no surprise the 36-year-old was among the Tigers who began preparing earlier for the one-off Test against Afghanistan in June. Mushfiqur would look to build on the 126 and unbeaten 51 he scored against Ireland at home in April.

PHOTO: BCB

Selectors keeping a close eye on Bangladesh A series

SPORTS REPORTER

The ongoing three-match four-day series between Bangladesh A and their visiting West Indies counterparts emerged as a good scope for good match preparation for a few in Bangladesh's Test team ahead of the upcoming one-off Test against Afghanistan next month.

The second game will begin today and selectors will be keeping a watchful eye on the likes of Shadman Islam, Zakir Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Nayeem Hasan, who are in contention for a place against Afghanistan.

"Some of our regular Test players are featuring for Bangladesh A in the ongoing series. We are keeping a close eye on their performances and I think it is an ideal platform for them to prepare ahead of the Test series against Afghanistan," chief selector Minhajul Abedin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Selectors will announce the squad for the Afghanistan Test in the next few days ahead of the start of training in Mirpur on May 29.

Minhajul said they were considering including a few more players for the third and final four-day.

"We are planning to include the likes of Mominul Haque, Yasir Ali and Nurul Hasan for the final four-day. We are willing to have a look at some of the cricketers before the Test."



"The last time I was here, 13 years ago, they were born and came straight here. They were probably eight weeks old. They were here for two years, so maybe honorary citizenship would be good. Then they can play for Bangladesh."

Bangladesh A team head coach Jamie Siddons on whether his children could represent Bangladesh in the future.

The first four-dayer ended in a draw, but the hosts were pushed hard by the visitors before rain eventually rescued the result for Afif Hossain and Co. The hosts' batting was the biggest area of concern for coach Jamie Siddons, with Bangladesh forced to follow on after the visitors declared their first innings on 427 for seven.

Saif Hasan top scored with 95 runs in the first innings, but the right-hander faced just 71 deliveries and his attacking approach did not embody a longer-version mentality.

"I want to see the batters bat for six hours. I don't want to see quickfire thirties and flashy twenties. We want to see batters knock the bails off at the end of the day and be ready to bat the next day. That's what four-day cricket is all about. Letting the coach and captain declare. Not being bowled out cheaply," Siddons told the media yesterday.

However, Siddons praised the sporting green-tinged pitch at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, which allowed young pacer Mushfik Hasan to show a glimpse of ability in the first game.

"I was really happy with the pace bowlers. I was surprised with how well they bowled in good areas. A couple of unlucky lobs that would have changed the game a little bit. Maybe we will see a couple of different bowlers, but we are hoping to see the same performance."

PSG 'ready to celebrate' with their supporters

AGENCIES



Paris St Germain took a decisive step towards a record 11th Ligue 1 title as Kylian Mbappe struck twice in a 2-1 win at relegation-threatened AJ Auxerre on Sunday.

Mbappe's double in the opening eight minutes moved PSG onto 84 points with two games left, six ahead of second-placed RC Lens with a much better goal difference (+50 to +34). Christophe Galtier's side need to avoid defeat at Racing Strasbourg next Saturday to wrap up the title.

Mbappe, who now tops the Ligue 1 scoring chart having netted 28 times this season, broke the deadlock after six minutes with a right-footed effort into the top corner and doubled their tally two minutes later with a 20-metre strike after being set up by Lionel Messi.

"We have taken a big step towards the title. We are ready to celebrate with our supporters," said PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

"In a way, number one, just because it's the first one on clay and it's unbelievable. I'd never have thought I'd be able to make this. I have to be honest; a Grand Slam is always bigger. The U.S. Open is always number one there. This one is special because I didn't think it was going to happen. I still don't believe - not that I won it, but I played so well this week. I don't love clay, but let's call it a friendship. My tennis love is hard court, but I like clay more now."



Daniil Medvedev after claiming the first claycourt title of his career with a 7-5, 7-5 victory against Holger Rune in a gripping Italian Open final on Sunday.

Dortmund one win away from ending Bayern dominance

AGENCIES

Borussia Dortmund manager Edin Terzic said the return of striker Sebastien Haller from cancer was a "pure miracle" as his side moved to the brink of the Bundesliga title.

Most predicted that Bayern Munich would lift the Meisterschale for the tenth consecutive time, especially after Erling Haaland left Dortmund for Manchester City last season. That destiny appeared all but sealed when Haller, who was brought in to replace Haaland, received news of his diagnosis.

The Ivory Coast striker missed the first half of the season due to surgeries and chemotherapy and his last-minute replacement Anthony Modeste failed to deliver, with Dortmund slipping to sixth ahead of the end of the year.

But Haller's return in January has coincided with a rampant Dortmund charge and his two goals in Dortmund's 3-0 win at Augsburg on Sunday took them two points clear of Bayern with just one game to play.

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lost just one of 18 league matches while scoring 56 goals, the most by a comfortable margin. They have also collected 11 points more than Bayern in the 18 games in that time and finally claimed the top spot. It was the first time since the 2006-07 campaign that there had been a change at the top of the table in the last two matchdays.

"That he's back with us is a pure

miracle" Terzic said after the game.

Dortmund can seal their first title in a decade with a win at home against Mainz, who blew the title race wide open by defeating Bayern in April, on Sunday. They will also lift the trophy if they equal or better Bayern's result away at Cologne.

"If someone had told me six months ago that I'd be in this situation today, I wouldn't have believed it. We have all

invested a lot and there is now a huge opportunity to achieve something very big. We have missed a few opportunities in the past, but we've taken this one," Haller said after the match.

Terzic had some rallying words ahead of their final endeavour, saying: "This year, we're closer than we have been for a long time. Now we need to go full-throttle and then we can finally - hopefully! - hold the title in our hands. We now need emotions in the city, in the stadium, and we'll take care of the football."

"We've picked up 70 points so far. That couldn't have been foreseen before the season, after the overhaul and in particular after the illnesses and the injuries."

Given the nature of their roller-coaster season, contributions have had to come from all over the pitch. Dortmund could become Bundesliga champions without a single player having double-digit goals in the league this season. Haller has quickly racked up nine, as many as Donyell Malen and Julian Brandt with Jude Bellingham on eight.

Youth hockey team eye semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Keeping their sights on the semifinals of the AHF Junior Asia Cup to ensure the participation in the FIH Junior World Cup, the Bangladesh under-21 hockey team will start their campaign against hosts Oman on the opening day in Salalah today.

The match will kick off at 10:00pm (Bangladesh time)

The men in red and green are in Pool B alongside strong opponents such as Malaysia and South Korea as well as Uzbekistan.

Bangladesh had previously beaten their Omani counterparts four times (7-0, 4-0, 5-4 and 3-2) during the 2014 and 2015 AHF Junior Asia Cups.

On the back of two weeks' preparation in India, the Bangladesh team got three days to acclimatise with the hot and humid weather in Salalah. The artificial turf will host its first international tournament since its installation seven years ago.

"Definitely we will go there to win the match as we don't have any alternative. The boys are fully focused. The challenge is the artificial turf, which is slow compared to those in Bangladesh and India. But the boys are now much more comfortable playing on this pitch after three days of training here," head coach Mamunur Rashid told The Daily Star over phone from Salalah yesterday.