Rashid Khan to miss CPL 2021 over national duty

KABUL: Rashid Khan, one of the busiest cricketers around, will give the upcoming Caribbean Premier League (CPL 2021) a skip due to his commitments with the Afghanistan team.

A few months ago, when the world of cricket was still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic with lockdowns in place, Rashid uploaded an Instagram story that revealed he had taken as many as 100 Covid-19 tests. It revealed the intense calendar the Afghan spinner had, who has made it a habit of hopping on flights for various T20 leagues around the world, besides turning out for his international team.

In the last year alone, he played ten games in the CPL before immediately flying down to the UAE, where he took part in the Indian Premier League for Sunrisers Hyderabad. He turned out for Adelaide Strikers in the Big Bash League Down Under before cutting the tourney short to turn out for Afghanistan against Ireland. An outing in the Pakistan Super League followed, which was cut short as he played the series against Zimbabwe before taking part in this year's Indian Premier League.

The player is now gearing up for the remainder of the PSL, before flying to England to participate in the T20 Blast for Sussex Sharks and the Hundred, where he will turn out for Trent Rockets.

If his team manages to reach the finals, Rashid will be in action till August 21 but could leave the tournament midway as Afghanistan are slated to play Sri Lanka in early August, according to the FTP program. They are also scheduled to play Pakistan in the first week of September, which means that he would have to leave the CPL mid-way if he had not pulled out this year.

Rashid was released by Barbados Tridents ahead of the 2021 player's drafts that ended this week. Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi will skip the tournament as well due to Afghanistan duties.

The Kabul Times

Phoenix Suns spoil LeBron James' fun to level series in Game 4 against Los Angeles Lakers

For much of the first half of this Game 4 encounter between the Phoenix Suns and Los Angeles Lakers, it felt like LeBron James' personal highlight reel.

At 36, he was the oldest player on the floor and yet still the same bulldozing, pirouetting, no-look reverse spin behind-the-back-passing freak of nature that has ruled over the league for the entirety of his 18-year career.

The Lakers headed to the tunnel at halftime just four points down. However, after the break one major problem became apparent: Anthony Davis would not be coming back out of it.

'The Brow' did not return to the game after sustaining a left groin strain while driving to the basket late in the second quarter, with Kyle Kuzma replacing him in the third's starting lineup.

At which point, as though pouncing upon a wounded animal, the Phoenix Suns rampaged to a 16-point lead, outscoring the Lakers 27-15 in the period.

James (25 points, 12 rebounds, 6 assists) upped his efforts into the fourth quarter, swapping the showy highlight reel stuff for his alternate head down, brute strength, attack the basket mode.

With Marc Gasol helping stretch the floor off the bench and Alex Caruso continually doing Alex Caruso things, the Lakers just about clawed themselves back into it. Suddenly after a Gasol corner three and a LeBron free throw the Lakers found themselves only seven down with 2:40 remaining.

Enter one of the most chaotic minutes of basketball you'll ever see. It started with a missed Jae Crowder three, obviously, which was followed up by a typically cerebral Chris Paul steal on Gasol - he had three for the game, moving to 18th all time in the playoffs in the process.

Paul missed the mid-range pull-up, Gasol got back to get the very edge of a fingertip to the shot, and Schroder raced up the other end to do the same on a finger roll layup. Ayton snatched down another impressive rebound while both James and the German point guard stood around the basket waiting for a foul call that wasn't coming.

That gave the Suns all the space and time in the world to find Crowder all alone in the corner to make amends. The swingman was shooting a woeful 10% from three-point range in the series heading into this game, but on the biggest

shot of the night he made no mistake. That was that, the series tied at 2-2.

After the game, Paul's rallying cry was clear. "Game 5 is going to be a dogfight. We're going back home though: Phoenix we need you."

Tonight, it seemed all they needed was the Point God's range of movement back after he had struggled with his right shoulder through the first three games. With nine assists on zero turnovers, this was classic Paul (18 points), who seems to elevate everyone else on the court through sheer presence and force of will alone.

Ayton (14 points, 17 rebounds) was once again superb, barrelling up, over and through Andre Drummond at every available opportunity. This included three straight baskets in the crucial third period that sent the Suns on their merry way.

For Game 5, head coach Frank Vogel must now be considering starting Gasol (+1), Caruso (+8) and bringing Montrezl Harrell (+6) back into significance within the rotation. Other than LeBron James they were the only players with a positive net impact for the Lakers (although Ben McLemore did go 2-3 from deep off the bench).

While the Suns were balanced on both ends throughout, led by the fiery yet calm play of their future Hall of Fame point guard, Los Angeles seemed uneven and at times desperate - a team still struggling to find its true identity outside of James' ongoing comic book superhero impersonation.

With the Lakers' other superstar now injured that is likely to continue, if not become increasingly exaggerated. The problem is, this individual strain is solely what LeBron was trying to avoid when teaming up with Davis in the first place. It appears as though, once again, he will have to do it on his own. Tonight it wasn't enough and given how good the Phoenix Suns are, and how healthy Chris Paul is looking, it likely won't be in Game 5, either.

19 surgeries, 66 medals: India's para-swimmer Niranjan Mukundan

At the age of seven, Mukundan was advised to swim as aqua therapy, allowing him to fight his way to victories against the choppy waters of life. By 18, he had won his first international medal and by 25 he rose through the ranks to be the first Indian para-swimmer to bag 50 international medals for his country.

He was also crowned the Junior World Champion for a record-breaking performance in 2015. Mukundan also became the youngest recipient of the prestigious National Award from the Indian government. As a child, Mukundan could not walk and had to be operated upon when he was one.

Al Jazeera spoke to him about his journey, challenges, dreams and how he has lived a life he did not choose.

Mukundan: In 2003, I started swimming as therapy and realised it felt cathartic. I was unable to walk but I was able to swim. There was no gravity pulling me down, I felt like a fish. Within three months, I knew this was my sport. I'm told I was a hyper kid and this suited my disposition. What started with a purpose to strengthen my legs, got me noticed. Coaches spotted me and felt I could be introduced to para-sports representing Karnataka state. All this within six months. My parents also took a calculated risk with sports.

Al Jazeera: What challenges did you have to face?

Mukundan: There was no awareness in India with regard to para-sports. People did not know that we (differently abled sportspersons) race with the biggest athletes. They did not realise that it's an elite-level sport. There are Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics for para-sports, too. We take equal pressure, if not more, than able-bodied sportspersons.

Al Jazeera: What has your experience with disability been like?

Mukundan: For the first eight years of my life, I had to be carried around. My parents carried me from my bedroom to the living room and to family events and social outings. Our own circle of friends and relatives would tell my parents to give me food and let me rest at home – why take the burden everywhere?

People thought I would never be independent. In my early sporting days, people failed to see the logic behind my family supporting me with swimming.

Champions League final hits and misses: Pep Guardiola guilty of overthinking as Man City lose to Chelsea?

The suggestion that Pep Guardiola overthinks the biggest games has become a trite observation but how can it be avoided after this latest disappointment? Going into the Champions League final as favourites, the Manchester City boss again sprang a surprise.

In 60 games this past season, Guardiola had only once opted to go without either Rodri or Fernandinho and that was at home to Olympiakos over six months ago. "Our way is to attack," he explained before kick-off. Edouard Mendy hardly had a shot to save.

Ilkay Gundogan, City's top scorer in the Premier League this season, was forced into a holding role. It did not work. The control that had been such a feature of the team's turnaround during the winter months was absent from the outset, the dangers obvious.

Privately, Guardiola is said to have described Bayern Munich's semi-final defeat by Real Madrid in 2014 as his biggest tactical error. For that game, he twice changed his mind over the formation before the second leg - a game Bayern would go on to lose 4-0 at home.

The mishaps at Manchester City are part of club folklore now. The naivety against Monaco, the chaos against Liverpool and the caution against Tottenham when Kevin De Bruyne was left on the bench. Against Lyon last summer, he went with Rodri and Fernandinho.

Perhaps it was only natural that the solution this time was to play neither.

Pep Guardiola insists he picked the Manchester City team he thought was best equipped to win the Champions League final against Chelsea.

Chelsea in Porto joins the list, the blow not quite self-inflicted but with Guardiola certainly seen as an accessory. Would it have been better to trust in the system that has served them so well and go with a specialist holding midfielder instead of Raheem Sterling?

Guardiola would have escaped the blame had he done so but that is not in the nature of the most celebrated coach of his generation. His job, his responsibility, is to make a difference. He tried to do that. For the third time in six weeks, Thomas Tuchel had his number.

Ten years and one day have now passed since Guardiola last won the biggest club game in European football. Barcelona were extraordinary that evening at Wembley, delivering a performance that is rightly regarded as one of the greatest that any side has ever produced.

The Guardiola way still works, his processes still churning out some of the best football around and he has the titles to prove it. But for a decade now the very biggest games have refused to bend to his will. The supposed overthinker now has a summer to dwell on it.

Sergio Aguero stood alone having broken down upon the final whistle at the Estadio do Dragao and he was the sole City player remaining long after his team-mates had collected their runners-up medals and departed, watching on from the mouth of the tunnel as Chelsea continued their celebrations with their supporters.

He had ended his Premier League career in such style, scoring twice against Everton a week ago, but Pep Guardiola elected to field a side without a pivot, and with a false number nine. The system didn't work, with City mustering just one shot on target all night.

In fact, following Kai Havertz's goal in the 42nd minute neither City nor Chelsea managed to land a single shot on target during the rest of the match. Aguero was afforded 20 minutes, including the seven in stoppages, to produce one last stellar moment, when his club needed him most.

Found in space down the left, his cross was easily claimed by Edouard Mendy, while he was agonisingly close to getting his studs on another from Kyle Walker. He just needed the ball to drop his way but when the one final chance came in City's direction, it fell to Riyad Mahrez with his sliced effort grazing the crossbar.

On the final whistle, Aguero was embraced by Kepa Arrizabalaga as he stood on the edge of the penalty area, then came Ruben Dias to offer further commiserations. This was his 390th and final City appearance, but he was unable to bow out in style and unable to affect the game. Manchester City representatives tried to console him but it was a pointless exercise.

It was a sad end for Aguero and it was a sad end for Kevin De Bruyne, departing with a head injury in the 60th minute. He was handed the captain's armband on the night in the surprise absence of Fernandinho but he was well marshalled by Thomas Tuchel's compact system.

Manchester City fans have their say on the Champions League final defeat to Chelsea in Porto.

This was a stage befitting of De Bruyne's brilliance, but too often his trademark passes failed to reach the desired target. So often has he run the show, but here he was on the periphery, ill at ease with Guardiola's inclination to find another way of winning.

He lost possession on 14 occasions and was growing increasingly frustrated when a nasty collision with Antonio Rudiger wiped him out of the game. It was cynical from the Germany defender, worthy of a yellow card, and De Bruyne was left requiring medical attention, emerging with a swollen left eye and unable to continue.

He left the field in devastation and sat briefly with an ice pack over the bruised area but departed down the tunnel shortly after Aguero's introduction for further assessment. Chelsea will be a force to be reckoned with next season, emboldened by the confidence winning the Champions League will breed. De Bruyne will hope his time will come again, but for Aguero, there would be no fairy-tale end.

Has Gareth Southgate's squad selection at right-back for the Euros become easier or harder after the Champions League final? The answer is surely a bit of both.

While the right-back narrative has been framed around the inclusion or exclusion of Trent Alexander-Arnold, the alternative angle is that Southgate faces a choice between a La Liga title winner in Kieran Trippier, a Premier League title winner in Kyle Walker and now a Champions League title winner in Reece James. Each of them has an obvious cause of grievance were they to be overlooked - and even if Alexander-Arnold does miss out, there's still a fair chance that only two of Southgate's three 2020/21 title winner will make the 26-man cut.

But the easier angle to conclusively emerge on Saturday night in Porto was the compelling argument that James must, at the very least, be in the squad, if not a certain starter on June 13 against Croatia.

Daniel Dubois set to challenge for WBA heavyweight title in London if he defeats Bogdan Dinu on June 5

Daniel Dubois could swiftly restore his reputation by challenging for a world heavyweight title in London this year, if he defeats a rival contender on June 5.

The 23-year-old faces Bogdan Dinu in a WBA final eliminator at Telford International Centre as Dubois returns to the ring for the first time since his first professional loss to Joe Joyce last December.

Victory will propel Dubois straight into a shot at a WBA belt, with promoter Frank Warren planning to guide the former British and Commonwealth champion into another major fight.

"We very much hope so," Warren told Sky Sports, when asked whether Dubois could receive a WBA title fight before the end of 2021.

London was named by Warren as the preferred venue to host the bout, although the WBA championship status is complicated. Anthony Joshua is set to defend his WBA 'super' title, WBO and IBF belts against Oleksandr Usyk, while Trevor Bryan holds the WBA 'regular' title and Mahmoud Charr was recently named 'WBA champion in recess' before recently returning with a victory.