Khalida's story: Playing football for unity during EURO 2020

Khalida Popal, former member of the Afghanistan women's national team, shares the story of how she fled her home country, experienced the healing power of football and how she is now using the beautiful game to empower young people from different backgrounds through the Football for Unity project with FC Nordsjælland.

Football for Unity is a project co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the UEFA Foundation for Children.

I grew up with the passion for football

I started playing street football with my brothers when I was a child. I grew up and lived in a warzone, in Afghanistan, and then I left as a refugee when I was nine years old.

Until I was a teenager, I lived in a refugee center as a refugee in Pakistan, because of the war, and the only thing that could motivate me – keep me together – was sport, especially football.

When I returned to my country, I played football with my brothers on the street, because football is the first game in my country.

At that time, I faced people trying to stop me from playing, because I was no longer a child. I was a grown-up woman and, because of that, they were trying to separate me from my team, which was a boys' team – at that time, we didn't have a girls' team. So, people were telling me that I belonged in the kitchen, I belonged at home, and I existed to serve a man and make a man happy.

Every time that they said 'no' to me playing football, I said that I can prove to them that I can do it. Every time I played football, the minute that the ball rolled, I started feeling happy, I started feeling disconnected from all these challenges and problems I had as a refugee, as a child, when I had problems in society as a woman, as a girl.

When I was no longer allowed to play football on the street with my brothers, I was determined not to give up, but bring the passion, the love that I experienced, to all the women and the girls my age so they could also feel that experience.

Founder of the first national women's football team in Afghanistan

Then, I started a campaign at my school which spread to different schools, and then went all the way to creating a kind of league around the schools. That's how we started getting more involvement from the federation, pushing the federation to recognize our league and then establish a first women's national team in Afghanistan.

Every time I was pushed back, I stood back up and I said: 'I'm not giving up'. I was sure I could do it and could do it better. That drove me to find the first national team of Afghanistan, build women's football in Afghanistan, develop women's football, be the very first female employee in the history of the Afghanistan Football Federation, be the first female director, and be the first female and the youngest board member of the Afghanistan Football Federation.

Football actually taught me a certain type of activism, how I could use football as a way to own my voice but also to support the other women in my country to own their voices. That's how activism started in me - through football.

My activism and activities put me in great danger, so I could not live any longer in my country, and I had to leave. It was not only the people who are very religious or extremist, but also people who were afraid of losing power to women. That was a lot of pressure, and I wanted to save my voice to make a bigger impact and a bigger change, so I chose to leave my country.

The challenges of being a refugee

I travelled to Norway, where I lived in different refugee centers, I experienced living as a refugee in a different way, as a grown-up woman. When I experienced it for the first time I was more of a child, and I didn't feel it that deeply. Living in a refugee center in Norway I felt so much pressure on women, the lack of social activities, the lack of interest in women and girls.

Then I moved to Denmark, and in Denmark I also lived in refugee centers. At that time, I was suffering from depression and I was traumatized. Living in a refugee center, leaving your family and everything behind you, it's tough. No matter how strong I was at that time, I felt like I was on my knees, and I was crying nights and days.

Then I witnessed so many women in the refugee centers going through depression and stress and some of the women were trying to end their lives. It was so sad. I said to myself, 'I don't want to sit and cry'. No matter what happens to me, I don't want to give up on my activism, on my mission to empower women and girls and also to use the power of sports to unite people, to unite women, and help women to be powerful and also be strong to manage to go through their difficult situation.

I remember that I felt that living in a refugee center is like you live as a person with no identity – you're no-one. You're not part of the country, even if you're in a very well-developed country, you're known as no-one. You don't have anything and there are not so many activities. There are a lot of restrictions, and you have an unknown future, you don't know what is waiting for you. I felt that living in a refugee center I was like a doll hanging in the air, where I could not land on my feet, I could not fly in the sky, but I was hanging, and I didn't know what to do.

Then I said to myself, 'I have to help myself and also help others.' I had to again use the power of sport that helped me in tough situations in my country. So, I started bringing the ball again, and then I started getting women and girls involved, we were living in the same center, I started knocking on the doors and saying, 'Come on, get out, we are going to run and then after running we'll go and do some football and then we'll do some dancing.'

I created my own organization, 'Girl Power'

See P7

Gosens gains glorious revenge on Ronaldo as Germany stun Portugal in Euro 2020 cracker

Robin Gosens once asked for Cristiano Ronaldo's jersey after a game between Atalanta and Juventus.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner didn't even look at the German as he said no.

"I was completely blushed and ashamed," Gosens later wrote in his autobiography. "I went away and felt small."

His latest meeting with Ronaldo went a hell of a lot better.

Indeed, Gosens must have felt ten-foot tall as he lapped up the applause of the Allianz Arena after being replaced midway through the second half of Germany's thrilling 4-2 defeat of Portugal.

Just seconds beforehand, he had risen majestically at the back post to add a goal to the two assists he had already racked up in a remarkable comeback by the hosts.

Before the game, even Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp had questioned Germany's decision to stick with the same team – and, more importantly, same formation – which had struggled to fashion openings in their tournament-opener: a 1-0 loss to France.

"Every coach has the right to play as he sees fit," Klopp told Magenta TV. "I would play a back four with this team.

"I can imagine a midfield with Joshua Kimmich, Toni Kroos and Ilkay Gundogan doing extremely well."

Cristiano Ronaldo Portugal Germany Euro 2020 GFX

Low stuck to his guns, though, and was rewarded with a spectacular display.

With Germany, and Kimmich in particular, taking a leaf out of the Atalanta playbook by switching the play to the left flank at every opportunity, Gosens ran riot.

Portugal actually took the lead, and just 15 minutes in too, with Ronaldo tapping home after Diogo Jota had latched on to a stunning pass from Bernardo Silva.

It meant that Ronaldo had equalled Miroslav Klose's record for most goals across the Europe-an Championship and World Cup combined (19). He just keeps making history, and he looks unlikely to stop any time soon.

However, this was a disturbingly disjointed display from the reigning champions. It was telling that Ronaldo's goal represented the Selecao's first shot on goal, and Jota's initial control their first touch in the Germany box.

Even by that stage, Gosens was tormenting Nelson Semedo and had already seen an acrobatic back-post volley disallowed for a handball by Thomas Muller in the build-up.

He racked up his first assist 35 minutes in, volleying a Kimmich cross into the six-yard area that Ruben Dias deflected into his own net under pressure from Kai Havertz.

Just moments later, Portugal conceded another own goal, this time from Raphael Guerreiro, after a clever cut-back from Kimmich.

By that stage, it was abundantly clear that the Seleccao had a major problem with Germany's wing-backs, and Gosens in particular. Yet Portugal proved utterly incapable of doing anything about it.

Indeed, within six minutes of the restart, Muller played the ball into the path of the completely unmarked Gosens, who crossed for Havertz to slide home.

One would have presumed at that point that Portugal would, at the very least, try to get tighter to Gosens but he was totally unmarked as he headed home Germany's fourth.

Credit to Ronaldo, he helped drag his side back into the game with a full-stretch assist for Jota, who made it 4-2 from close range, but there was no doubt that the game belonged to Gosens.

This was the night on which the highest-scoring defender in Europe's 'Big Five' leagues last season announced himself on the international stage.

He was head-and-shoulders above every other player on the pitch.

This time, it was the true colossus of the game that is Cristiano Ronaldo who was made to look relatively small.

Goal

cinch Championships 2021: Cameron Norrie beats Denis Shapovalov to set up Queen's final against Matteo Berrettini

The 25-year-old is one match away from claiming a first ATP Tour title after a 7-5 6-3 semi-final victory over Canadian second seed Denis Shapovalov.

The only other Brits to reach the Queen's final in the last 40 years are Tim Henman and Andy Murray, and Murray remains the only one to lift the title since the Second World War.

"It hasn't sunk in yet," confessed Norrie. "I think I played very, very good today and I'm so pleased to get into the final.

"I can't really describe it, it's nice to get over the line. It's a huge tournament for me. I couldn't be more pleased with myself."

The British number two made a nervy start as two double faults and two unforced errors gifted Shapovalov a break of serve in the opening game.

But Norrie retrieved the break emphatically to love and then took a tight first set with a stunning backhand down the line which left Shapovalov on his backside.

Shapovalov, who had to finish his rain-interrupted quarter-final against American Frances Tiafoe earlier in the day, needed treatment on his left leg early in the second.

The world number 14 was powerless to stop Norrie claiming another notable scalp in what has been a stunning season so far - he has now won 29 matches this year, more than any other player on the Tour except for Russia's Andrey Rublev.

Naoya Inoue smashes Michael Dasmarinas with body shots to record a KO win in world bantamweight title defence

The Japanese fighter scored a trio of knock-downs from body shots, the third of which crumpled his rival in agony, to successfully defend his IBF and WBA bantamweight championships.

Inoue is among the world's elite pound-for-pound fighters and his clinical power punching display in Vegas showed why - he now has 18 KOs in 21 fights as a former light-flyweight, an unheard-of ratio of stoppages.

'The Monster' was on the prowl from the opening bell and it took him until midway through the second round to crunch home a left hook to the ribs that sunk Dasmarinas to the floor.

Dasmarinas, nicknamed 'Hot and Spicy', rose again wincing, and Inoue still had time in the round to sting him again.

Inoue whipped Dasmarinas with the exact same body shot in the third round and sunk him to the canvas again.

All hope looked lost for the Filippino challenger, who had trained at the Wild Card gym made famous by Manny Pacquiao, but he bravely got up again.

But Inoue hammered him with a third left hook to the ribs and, when he sagged to the floor, the referee saved him from further punishment.

Three-weight champion Inoue could now look ahead to an undisputed title fight.

Nonito Donaire, who gave Inoue his toughest test so far in a 2019 thriller, recently won the WBA title at the age of 38 and is next set to face dangerous Filipino John Riel Casimero owns the WBO belt.

Skysport

2 positive COVID-19 cases prior to U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials

One athlete and one non-participant tested positive for COVID-19 in the pre-event testing protocols leading up to the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials, USA Track and Field announced Saturday morning.

Both people who tested positive were asymptomatic and fully vaccinated. Both individuals were immediately placed into the isolation protocol. Contact tracing was performed and no additional Olympic Trials participants were affected.

USA Track and Field said in an email Saturday that it could not provide further details on the positive tests.

USA Track and Field is using the Premier Medical Group for COVID-19 testing during the Trials and estimated 12,000 tests will be completed over the 13-day period.

Oregon sophomore outfielder Aaron Zavala added two more all-American honors when he was named to the American Baseball Coaches Association first team on Saturday, one day after being named a first team all-American by Perfect Game.

Zavala was the Pac-12 Conference Player of the Year this season, becoming the first Oregon

player to win the award. He led the Ducks to a second-place finish in the Pac-12 Conference and its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2015.

Zavala led Oregon in batting average (.392), runs (64), hits (78), walks (50), stolen bases (11), on-base percentage (.525) and slugging percentage (.626). He set single-season school records for on-base percentage, runs and walks. He also had nine home runs and 38 RBIs.

He led the Pac-12 Conference in on-base percentage, walks and base on balls per game, while ranking second in batting average, sixth in hits per game and seventh in slugging percentage and hits.

Fiddler's Green Golf Center has seen three holes in one on its course in the past week.

On Monday, Ralph Christenson of Junction City used a pitching wedge to ace the 120-yard second hole for his third ace in 11 years of golfing.

On Tuesday, Kathy Lighty got her first hole in one in 20 years of golfing by acing the 65-yard 17th hole.

ial workers at home, along with other factors like healthcare concerns and childcare or caring responsibilities.