

Sports

Social media boycott as footballers in England say 'enough' over racism

'We are using our voice to stand against racist abuse'

LONDON: Premier League stars led footballers in England and Wales in a 24-hour social media boycott on Friday in a bid to combat racist abuse online. Watford striker Troy Deeney—who blocked replies to his Instagram account earlier this month after receiving abuse—summed up the anger he and fellow footballers feel, saying: "Enough is enough."

The campaign, which is being coordinated by England's Professional Footballers' Association, urges players to stay off all social media. The universal message across the footballers' Twitter accounts used the hashtag #Enough with the message "MAKE A STAND AGAINST RACISM-A campaign by the PFA".

The PFA said the boycott was the "first step in a longer campaign to tackle racism in football". The boycott is not just aimed at those who use the platforms to air their racist views but also at the social media companies themselves and football authorities.

There have been growing concerns over how football should tackle racism following a number of incidents of abuse both at grounds and on social media. England's black players faced repeated racist chants during their Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro last month.

One of those targeted, full-back Danny Rose, said afterwards he could not wait to turn his "back on football". Some like Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp—whose star player Mohamed Salah was the target of Islamophobic abuse by Chelsea fans last week—has said he would have no hesitation in taking his players off the pitch. "If it's the whole stand, then I would do it 100 percent," Klopp said after the Montenegro incidents. "But that's too much power for one or two idiots or three or four idiots. But if the whole stand would do it then it is completely different."

For the moment though the likes of prolific tweeter Raheem Sterling—who has been subject to abuse from Chelsea fans and then in Montenegro this season—and Harry Kane will have to resist the urge to tweet or

post on Instagram.

Liverpool's England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold was among those who posted the PFA message on his Instagram account on Friday morning. "We are making a stand against racist abuse," said a message on his account.

"We recognise that our platforms come with responsibility, and so we are using our voice to stand against racist abuse. "Together, we are calling on social media platforms and footballing bodies to do more!"

Manchester United's central defender Chris Smalling—whose teammate Ashley Young was the victim of racist abuse after a mistake during the Champions League defeat to Barcelona on Tuesday—echoed these sentiments, warning harmful and hate-filled posts can have a debilitating impact on those targeted. "Throughout my career I have developed a thick skin against verbal abuse, justifying it as just 'part of the game' but the time has come for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to consider regulating their channels, taking responsibility for protecting the mental health of users regardless of age, race, sex or income," Smalling said.

Twitter has defended itself, saying it is "suspending three times more abusive accounts within 24 hours after receiving a report than this time last year". A Facebook spokesperson told Press Association Sport they had made progress in developing tools that users can deploy to moderate and filter content on their pages by hiding or deleting comments.

"We will remove hate speech or credible threats of any kind, and we encourage anyone who sees content they find offensive to report it so we can remove anything that breaks our Community Standards," the spokesperson said.

Instagram too said they would act as soon as anyone reported anything relating to offensive posts. "We encourage anyone who sees content they find offensive to report it in-app and we work quickly to remove anything that breaks our guidelines." — AFP



AJACCIO: Former French national football team player Lilian Thuram speaks about racism to Laetitia high school teenagers on Friday in Ajaccio on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica. — AFP

Chelsea aims to end Lyon reign in women's Champions League

PARIS: French powerhouse Lyon remain on course to win a fourth consecutive women's Champions League crown as they prepare to take on Chelsea in the semi-finals. The clubs meet in France today before the return leg in England on April 28, with a place in the final in Budapest on May 18 up for grabs. The winner of that tie will take on either Bayern Munich or Barcelona, who go head to head in Germany in the first leg of their last-four clash today.

LYON V CHELSEA

Chelsea's reward for ousting Paris Saint-Germain in the last round is another trip to France, but getting the better of an all-conquering Lyon side is likely to be another challenge altogether. The English side beat PSG 3-2 on aggregate in the quarter-finals thanks to a dramatic injury-time goal by Norwegian midfielder Maren Mjelde, and are through to the last four for the second season running.

Last year their European dream was ended by German club Wolfsburg, who went on to lose to Lyon in the final in Kiev. Lyon have won the Champions League five times overall and closed on their 13th consecutive French title by hammering rivals PSG 5-0 last weekend before a crowd of 25,907, a record for a women's game in France.

Ballon d'Or winner Ada Hegerberg set Lyon on their way with her 19th league goal of the season. She has also netted four times in the Champions League, but was eclipsed in the quarter-finals by Eugenie Le Sommer, scorer of three goals in Lyon's 6-3 aggregate victory over Wolfsburg.

It all points to a gargantuan task for Chelsea, who are coming off the back of an agonising defeat against Manchester City in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend and are hoping to keep the tie alive before the return in Kingston upon Thames on April 28.

"Nobody's delusional, Lyon are the best team in Europe, where they should be with a budget four



DECINES-CHARPIEU: File photo shows Paris' French defender Eve Perisset (L) vies for the ball with Lyon's Norwegian forward Ada Hegerberg (R) during the French women D1 football match between Olympique Lyonnais (OL) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on April 13, 2019 at the Parc Olympique Lyonnais stadium in Decines-Charpieu. — AFP

times bigger than anyone else's," Chelsea manager Emma Hayes told the club's website. "They've got enough trophies under their belt to warrant the position they're in—they're overwhelming favourites, so we are going to have a glorious time."

BAYERN MUNICH V BARCELONA

Two giants of the men's game, these clubs are relative novices at this level of the women's scene, especially Bayern. Runners-up to Wolfsburg in Germany in the last couple of years, they are second in the table again this season. However, they made it to the last four of the Champions League for the first time after defeating Slavia Prague in the quarters.

Barcelona, meanwhile, made it to this stage in

ahead of their game against relegated Chievo yesterday with Torino seven points adrift of the Champions League places before travelling to Genoa.

Castillejo came off the bench after 66 minutes and had an immediate impact when he headed in a Suso cross three minutes later. Patrick Cutrone had a goal ruled out for offside minutes later but Alves snatched a point for promoted Parma with a free kick that left returning Milan goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma helpless.

Parma move up to 13th place, seven points above the relegation zone with five games left. "It wasn't a great performance," said Milan coach Gennaro Gattuso. "I expected to come here and do more. Parma made the most of that free kick with a wonderful goal. They deserved the point."

Champions Juventus can seal an eighth consecutive Serie A title later, with the Turin giants needing just a point against Fiorentina for their 35th Scudetto. — AFP

2017, only to lose to PSG. Now they are targeting a first final. Engaged in a thrilling battle with Atletico Madrid for the Spanish title, the Catalans are wary of Bayern's threat, however.

"We must not forget that they are a team with a much bigger budget than us and who have the best German players," claimed Barcelona coach Lluís Cortes. Nevertheless, Barcelona boast an impressive array of attacking talent, from England's Toni Duggan to Dutch star Lieke Martens and Spanish international Alexia Putellas.

Bayern will look to Mandy Islacker for inspiration in attack—she scored twice against Slavia in the last round and got the winner for Frankfurt in the 2015 final. — AFP

Liverpool, Man City dominate PFA Player of the Year nominations

LONDON: Liverpool and Manchester City have dominated the shortlist for the Professional Footballers' Association Player of the Year award, with Virgil Van Dijk and Raheem Sterling the leading contenders for the prize.

Liverpool defender Van Dijk joins team-mate Sadio Mane on the list, while City forward Sterling is included alongside team-mates Sergio Aguero and Bernardo Silva. Chelsea's Eden Hazard completes the nominees for the 2018-19 campaign, with the winner announced

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Everton v Manchester United	15:30	beIN SPORTS
Cardiff City v Liverpool	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 2
Arsenal v Crystal Palace	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 1
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Levante v RCD Espanyol	13:00	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Getafe CF v Sevilla FC	15:00	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Real Madrid v Athletic de Bilbao	17:15	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Villarreal CF v CD Leganes	19:30	beIN SPORTS HD 7
Real Betis v Valencia C.F	21:45	beIN SPORTS HD 3
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
SC Freiburg v Borussia Dortmund	16:30	beIN SPORTS HD 5
Hertha Berlin v Hannover 96	19:00	beIN SPORTS HD 5
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Toulouse FC v LOSC Lille	16:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6
FC Nantes v Amiens SC	16:00	beIN SPORTS MAX 5 FR
Stade Reims v Saint Etienne	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6
Paris Saint-Germain v AS Monaco FC	22:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6

on April 28 at the PFA's awards ceremony in London. Van Dijk, signed from Southampton in January 2018, has been an ever-present rock at the heart of the Premier League's tightest defence this campaign. He has helped Liverpool keep 18 clean sheets and concede only 20 times, while chipping in with three goals.

Senegal international Mane, included ahead of last year's winner Mohamed Salah, has also enjoyed a stellar season for Jurgen Klopp's side, hitting 18 league goals as the Anfield club attempt to end a 29-year wait to be champions.

Sterling, the bookmakers' second favourite for the award behind 27-year-old Van Dijk, has been key for Pep Guardiola's side with 17 goals and nine assists going into the weekend. Sterling and Silva, both 24, are also on the shortlist for the PFA Young Player of the Year award.

They are joined in that category by Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, West Ham midfielder Declan Rice, Bournemouth winger David Brooks and Manchester United striker Marcus Rashford. — AFP

Parma draw stalls AC Milan's Champions League push

MILAN: Bruno Alves grabbed a point for Parma to pile the pressure on AC Milan's Champions League ambitions with a 1-1 draw in Emilia-Romagna yesterday. Samu Castillejo nodded Milan ahead after 69 minutes but Alves pulled the sides level with a curling free-kick three minutes from time.

AC Milan remain fourth on 56 points but Roma are two points behind in fifth before they play third-placed Inter Milan at the San Siro later. Atalanta, sixth, can pull level with Milan on points when they travel to second-placed Napoli tomorrow. Lazio are also lurking four points behind