

What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA
BBPL
Dhaka v Rangpur
Live from 2:00pm
Khulna v Cumilla
Live from 7:00pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
India v Sri Lanka
Third T20I
Live from 7:30pm

English Premier League
Sheffield v West Ham
Live from 2:00am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League
 Venue: Sher-e-Bangla

National Stadium, Dhaka
 Dhaka v Rangpur
 Time: 2:00pm

Khulna v Cumilla
 Time: 7:00pm

Day brings focus on finishing

SPORTS REPORTER

After returning from England just the day before, Bangladesh head coach Jamie Day yesterday conducted the national football team's training session, where focus was placed on goal scoring skills, just six days ahead of their Bangabandhu Gold Cup opener against Palestine.

Finishing has always been a concern for the national team, as evinced by their disappointing campaign in the recently concluded South Asian Games in Nepal.

"We have a fairly solid defence. Obviously, the issue is scoring goals so we need to work on that and how to get the boys into good areas from where they could try to score. It's going to be a problem and it's not going to change soon but we need to do some work on that. That's what we are going to do for the next 4-5 days," said Day.

During yesterday's training at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, the players were made to practice attacking, getting into the box and fast breaks on counters.

"We are focusing on the attacking phase of players for next couple of days. If we want to reach the semis and final, we have to win games and to do that, we have to score goals," said the 40-year-old coach.

However, Day still believes that fatigue is a concern even though the players' fitness is adequate at the moment.

"Fitness is not a problem because they played the Federation Cup. The main concern for us is fatigue but the boys trained well today. Those who got knocked out of the competition [Federation Cup] earlier had more rest than the players of Bashundhara Kings. We just monitor the Kings players for now but they are from a good club with a good coach who knows how to look after players. Hopefully they will be in near fit condition before the Palestine game," explained Day.



Bangladesh head coach Jamie Day (C) is seen during the national football team's training session at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday. Since problems in finishing persist to this day, the 40-year-old had the team practice their goal scoring abilities.

Day also believes that the match against Palestine will be a good test for the players, who played against the same opposition during the last edition of the Gold Cup, when they lost 2-0 in the semifinals.

"We played Palestine in the semifinals last year, so we know it's going to be a tough game. We are looking at it as test for the players. If we can beat Palestine, it will be great and if we can't do it, we move onto Sri Lanka and try to win that game," said Day, adding that their primary target surmount the group stage first.

"We need to be positive and confident going into the Bangabandhu Gold Cup. It's going to be tough, so everyone should be in a good frame of mind and ready to go," continued Jamie, who believes the African teams are going to be hard to beat.

"African teams are going to be big and strong physically and they are going to be tough to beat but again, it's a new challenge for the players to play against different oppositions. Hopefully we will get into the semifinal and play one of them."

World No.1 Barty loses season opener

AFP, Brisbane



World number one Ashleigh Barty remains upbeat about her Australian Open preparations despite losing her opening match of the season at the Brisbane International yesterday.

American qualifier Jennifer Brady notched up her first ever win over a top 10 player when she beat Barty 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) on Pat Rafter Arena.

It was Barty's first match on home soil since becoming world number one, and came at the venue she trains at and in front of thousands of her adoring home fans.

Barty conceded afterwards she had simply been outplayed by Brady, who also beat former world number one Maria

Sharapova in the first round.

Barty grew up in Ipswich on Brisbane's western outskirts and has had hundreds of fans packing outside courts to watch her practice this week.

But when she was asked whether she felt any pressure because of the attention she insisted she didn't feel any different.

Brady will now play two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, who beat Russian qualifier Liudmila Samsonova 6-3, 6-2.

World number two and defending champion had to battle for two hours to avoid the same fate as Barty, eventually beating Australian wildcard Ajla Tomljanovic 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1.

Pliskova will meet Alison Riske of the US in the quarter-finals.



Jennifer Brady (L) shakes hands with World No.1 Ashleigh Barty after winning their women's singles match in Brisbane yesterday.

Espanyol break bank for Tomas

AFP, Lisbon

Raul de Tomas is returning to Spain after just six months in Portugal in a 20 million euros move from Benfica to Espanyol, the two clubs announced yesterday.

Espanyol issued a statement saying the Spanish youth international had signed a contract until June 2026.

De Tomas becomes the most expensive signing in Espanyol Barcelona's history, ahead of Argentina's Matias Vargas who arrived in July for 10.5 million euros. Espanyol are last in La Liga.

The 25-year-old came through the youth system at Real Madrid, making one 14-minute appearance for the first team.

He had spells on loan at Cordoba, Valladolid and Rayo Vallecano, where he scored 38 goals over the last two seasons. Rayo were relegated last season and Real sold de Tomas to Benfica for a reported 20 million euros.

He only scored three goals, none in the league, in 17 matches in all competitions since his arrival in Lisbon.



PSG players celebrate after securing a 6-1 win over Saint-Etienne in a French League Cup encounter in Paris on Wednesday. Mauro Icardi (R) scored a hatrick while Neymar (L), Kylian Mbappe (3rd from L) and Jessy Moulin added the others.

PSG fly into semis

AFP, Paris



Mauro Icardi scored a hatrick as Paris Saint-Germain demolished a depleted Saint-Etienne 6-1 on Wednesday to power into the semifinals of the French League Cup.

Icardi struck the opening goal inside two minutes at the Parc des Princes before teenage Saint-Etienne defender Wesley Fofana was dismissed for a second booking on the half-hour.

PSG ruthlessly capitalised on their man advantage as coach Thomas Tuchel elected to field all four members of his fearsome attacking quartet -- Icardi, Neymar, Kylian

Mbappe and Angel Di Maria -- against a side decimated by injury and illness.

Neymar doubled the lead with a nonchalant chipped finish over goalkeeper Jessy Moulin, who scored a comical own goal on the stroke of half-time.

Di Maria's low cross was hacked by teammate Loic Perrin, the ball rolling back off the post before hitting Moulin and trickling over the line.

The hosts bagged a fourth when Mbappe rounded Moulin and cut back for Icardi to add to his tally, and he completed his hatrick when the former raced clear before selflessly presenting the Argentine with a tap-in. The pair then reversed roles for the sixth goal.

United lose Maguire to hip injury

REUTERS, London

Manchester United defender Harry Maguire is set for an extended spell on the sidelines after scans showed the centre back tore his hip muscle in Saturday's goalless draw at Wolverhampton Wanderers, British media have reported.

Maguire, who was signed by United for 80 million pounds (\$104.83 million) in the close season, suffered a blow to his leg in the first half of the FA Cup third round match but played the full 90 minutes.

That aggravated the injury, and the 26-year-old failed a fitness test before missing Tuesday's League Cup semi-final first leg 3-1 defeat by rivals Manchester City, with Phil Jones in the back line.

A return date has not been announced yet, and his injury will be a blow to manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, whose side play five more matches in January - including the FA Cup replay away and the second leg of the League Cup semi-final at Etihad Stadium.

United, fifth in the league standings, host bottom side Norwich City on Saturday.

Football has become a business: Valverde

AFP, Jeddah



Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde said Wednesday the Spanish Super Cup is being held in Saudi Arabia because of the money on offer and admits he preferred the previous format.

Barca face Atletico Madrid in the second semi-final on Thursday after Real Madrid take on Valencia on Wednesday. The winner will play for the trophy at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium in Jeddah on Sunday.

This is the first year the Spanish Super Cup has been held in Saudi Arabia, after a controversial three-year contract worth 120 million euros was struck with the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), who run the competition.

The clubs will also benefit financially. For participating alone, Real Madrid and Barcelona will earn around 6 million euros while Atletico and Valencia will make around 3 million euros.

But the RFEF have faced accusations of betraying local Spanish fans while critics also question the association with a country long-condemned for its treatment of women and record on human rights.

"I know there has been a lot said about this competition but the bottom line is football has become a business and as a business it looks for income," said Valverde at a press conference in Jeddah. "That's the reason we are all here."

Previously, the Spanish Super Cup has been held in Spain in August, before the start of the league season and involving only the winners of La Liga and champions of the Copa del Rey.

But the RFEF has not only changed the location but expanded the format, with the next two highest placed teams in La Liga also now taking part.

"It's a completely different format to what we're used to," said Valverde. "It was always the first title and the opener of the season and to me that seemed fine."

"It's been changed and let's see, it will be judged once it has happened. It's interesting, with four good teams, but from a sporting point of view, I'm not sure."

Valverde's press conference was delayed by over an hour after the team's bus got lost on the way.

Mane forced to skip his prize parade

AFP, Dakar



Liverpool star Sadio Mane's triumphant homecoming to Senegal after winning Africa's top football prize was scuppered Wednesday when problems with overflight permission in Tunisia grounded his jet.

Senegal's capital Dakar had readied celebrations for the 27-year old, who was crowned Africa's 2019 Player of the Year in Egypt on Tuesday.

The first Senegalese player to win the prize since 2002, Mane was meant to land to crowds of supporters in Dakar, followed by a parade and a ceremony with the president.

But the festivities were called off on Wednesday after a delay in receiving overflight permission from Tunisian authorities, said Bakary Cisse, an official in Mane's entourage.

Kroos stunner lifts Real past Valencia

AFP, Jeddah

Toni Kroos scored a wonder goal straight from a corner as Real Madrid beat Valencia 3-1 on Wednesday to reach the final of the controversial Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Kroos caught Valencia goalkeeper Jaime Domenech napping with a brilliant, instinctive strike before Isco made it two and Luka Modric added a classy third from a curling finish with the outside of his foot.

After two superb goals, the only shame was more fans were not there to see them given the King Abdullah Sports City stadium appeared only a little more than half full.

The official attendance was given as 40,877 out of a capacity of 62,345.

Dani Parejo scored a late Valencia penalty but Madrid advance to Sunday's final where they will meet the winner of Thursday's second semi-final between Barcelona and Atletico Madrid.

"I'm happy with the whole performance,"

said Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane.

"For the goal of Isco, because maybe he needed that, the genius of Kroos and then something that only Modric can do. But it is a semi-final, we haven't won anything yet."

Barca coach Ernesto Valverde had said earlier on Wednesday that he preferred the traditional format of this competition, that pitted the La Liga champions against the winners of the Copa del Rey in a match in Spain in August.

Under those rules, Real Madrid, who finished third in the league last term and failed to reach the final of the cup would not even have qualified but they now have the chance to win their first trophy of the season, possibly against Barca in a Clasic final.

But it is the new location that has grated most, because of the lack of consideration for Spanish fans and the implications of associating with a country that has been heavily criticised for its treatment of women and record over human rights.



Real Madrid's Luka Modric celebrates after scoring the final goal of a 3-1 win over Valencia in a Spanish Super Cup encounter in Jeddah on Wednesday.

Ndidi 'may need surgery'

AFP, London

Leicester midfielder Wilfred Ndidi could be ruled out for several weeks after Foxes boss Brendan Rodgers revealed he may need surgery.

Nigeria international Ndidi was missing from Leicester's squad for their League Cup semi-final first leg against Aston Villa on Wednesday.

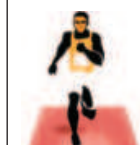
Rodgers said Ndidi suffered an injury in Tuesday's training session and may face an operation, although he did not specify what the problem is.

"Wilf took a knock in training yesterday, which unfortunately means he might need a slight operation tomorrow," Rodgers said.

"That'll put him out for a few weeks, but it's not overly serious, so hopefully, going into February, he'll be fit and ready to go again."

WADA to take Russia case to CAS

AFP, Lausanne



The World Anti-Doping Agency will take its case for the exclusion of Russia from international sporting competitions to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) "by the weekend", a WADA official told AFP on Wednesday.

CAS, the world's highest sporting court, will have to decide whether to confirm the four-year ban WADA imposed on Russia last month, or listen to Russia's case against the sanction.

WADA decided on December 9 to ban Russia for four years from participating in international events, including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and the 2022 football World Cup, over what it considers a state-sponsored programme of doping.

WADA says Russia "manipulated" data from an anti-doping laboratory in Moscow, the latest episode in a scandal which started with the revelation in 2015 of long-term institutional doping that involved senior officials, secret agents and trafficked urine vials.

Under the sanctions, Russian sportsmen and women will still be allowed to compete at the Olympics this summer but only if they can demonstrate that they were not part of the doping network.

This was also the case at the Pyeongchang winter Games in 2018.