

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

English Premier League
Bournemouth v Watford
Live from 8:00pm
Aston Villa v Man City
Live from 10:30pm


TEN 2

Serie A
Torino v Bologna
Live from 8:00pm
Hellas Verona v Genoa
Live from 11:00pm
Roma v Juventus
Live from 1:45am (Monday)

VARDY ‘MADE HIS DECISION’

Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers doesn’t expect Jamie Vardy to end his England retirement despite his prolific form this season. Vardy has been linked with a return to international football after Three Lions captain Harry Kane ruptured a tendon in his left hamstring that requires surgery. With Vardy sitting top of the Premier League’s goal charts with 17 this season, it would be natural for England boss Gareth Southgate to consider trying to tempt the Foxes star out of his self-imposed exile. Vardy stepped back from England duty in August 2018, but Southgate recently admitted the 32-year-old is “a ready-made player who could come in if we felt that was the right thing”. With Kane absent for the March friendlies with Italy and Denmark, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Southgate could lure Vardy back. Rodgers, though, does not see that happening and he said. “Jamie has made his decision on that. He has always been clear and I don’t see that changing to be honest.”

–AFP





Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (R) was distraught after receiving his marching orders in yesterday's English Premier League encounter with Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park. Aubameyang put Arsenal ahead in 12th minute, however, Jordan Ayew's equaliser ensured a 1-1 draw.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gunners see red as Eagles force draw

AFP, London



Arsenal captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang opened the scoring at Crystal Palace yesterday but was later sent off as the hosts fought back to draw 1-1 at Selhurst Park.

New Gunners boss Mikel Arteta was on course for a third straight win when his skipper made the breakthrough in the first half, but a deflected effort by Jordan Ayew cancelled it out early in the second period.

When Aubameyang received a red card with 23 minutes left, the experienced Roy Hodgson would have fancied his chances of gaining three points but had to settle for a share of the spoils.

Captain Aubameyang was recalled by Arteta after sitting out the FA Cup win over Leeds and opened the scoring at Selhurst Park in the 12th minute.

Mesut Ozil's licence to roam had already caused the hosts problems and he moved inside to combine with Alexandre Lacazette, who played in his fellow forward to curl into the bottom corner for his 16th goal of the season.

It was a breathtaking Arsenal move, which started with a brave through ball between the lines by David Luiz, and Palace struggled to gain possession during the opening 30 minutes.

Arteta introduced Matteo Guendouzi at half-time, with Torreira not returning but Palace continued to win free kicks in dangerous positions after the break.

Eventually they made one count, when Jairo Riedewald found Max Meyer in space down the right. His cross was poor, but Kouyate was first to it and set up Ayew, who saw his strike take a big deflection off Luiz and loop over Leno in the 54th minute.

Arsenal's problems deepened when Aubameyang caught Meyer high on the ankle with a poor challenge by the touchline.

Referee Paul Tierney showed a yellow card but VAR had a look and after a two-and-a-half minute delay, the caution was upgraded to a sending off.

Aubameyang was distraught as he left the pitch in the 67th minute and Meyer had to follow him down the tunnel after failing to recover from the tackle.

James Tomkins almost produced a winner 12 minutes from time, but his header was cleared off the line by Sokratis Papastathopoulos and Arsenal then almost stole it.

Vicente Guaita came to the rescue though, when he superbly tipped Pepe's shot on to the post and saved Lacazette's follow-up in the 83rd minute as it finished all square.

Defence in focus too

SPORTS REPORTER



Defender Sushanta Tripura believes defence will have to play a key role if Bangladesh are to succeed in the upcoming Bangabandhu Gold Cup, scheduled to take place at the Bangabandhu National Stadium from January 15 to 25.

Tripura, who has staged a comeback to the national team after missing out three World Cup qualifying matches against Qatar, India and Oman due a hamstring injury which he sustained during Bangladesh's 2-0 win over Bhutan in a final friendly in October last year, said this after yesterday's training session at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground.

"Defence is one of our main strengths and we can rely on it, but it is also important to have a good combination between the defence and midfield if we want to not concede goals. The return of centre-back Tapu Barman is a plus point. The reserve-bench has a good backup in absence of any regular defenders. I think the defence will have to play an important role in order to get a good result in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup," said Tripura.

Since taking over the charge of Bangladesh team in May, 2018, English coach Jamie Day has applied the philosophy of defending well against any opponent and then going for attack to get results. His style has worked well at international level and achieved some praise for good defending against strong sides.

The charges of Day will start their campaign against Palestine on Wednesday. Tripura echoed the sentiment of captain Jamal Bhuiyan, who on Friday said that



SUSHANTA TRIPURA

their target is to earn a point against Palestine before facing Sri Lanka in the group's final match.

"Palestine are a very strong opponent but we don't want to lose our confidence before facing them. The coach has been working on defence for a long time and how we defend against Palestine would be clear to us after watching their video footages in the latter part of training," Tripura said. "We are all ready for the tournament and our target is to win one point against Palestine. They are a really tough team and holding them to a draw will be a good result for us."

Tripura's teammate Biswanath Ghosh is confident too about drawing against Palestine, a team to whom they lost 2-0 in the semifinals of the last edition of this tournament in Cox's Bazar in 2018.

"We have some idea about Palestine and it will help us a bit when playing against them. If we can play in line with the plan, it is possible to hold them to a draw," said left-back.

Nadal up against Djokovic today

AFP, Sydney



Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will face each other in the final of the inaugural ATP Cup after winning epic three-set matches yesterday to steer Spain and Serbia into the decider.

World number one Nadal ground down pumped-up Australian Alex de Minaur to guide the Davis Cup champions through their semi-final while Djokovic battled past Russia's Daniil Medvedev.

Under the format of the

innovative team event in Sydney, the top-ranked singles players from each country play each other, ensuring the two legends clash for a 55th time since their first showdown in 2006.

World number two Djokovic leads the head-to-heads 28-26, including beating his arch-rival in the Australian Open final last year.

Nadal outlasted De Minaur 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 after unflappable teammate Roberto Bautista Agut tamed Nick Kyrgios 6-1, 6-4.

Djokovic had an equally tough time against impressive fifth-ranked Medvedev, coming through a top-draw contest 6-1, 5-7, 6-4 on the back of Dusan Lajovic beating

Karen Khachanov 7-5, 7-6 (7/1).

"We know it's going to be a super tough final (against Serbia)," Nadal said. "Novak likes a lot to play here, he's had a lot of great results. So let's see. We have a good team too."

De Minaur had a furious start, breaking Nadal in the opening game of the match and then keeping the pressure on, restricting the Spaniard's trademark forehand to take the first set in 46 minutes.

Full of energy, his serve was on fire and he was winning the baseline rallies, but Nadal weathered the onslaught and finally won a break point, converting to take the

second set.

De Minaur was deflated and the fight went out of him as the 19-time Grand Slam showed him who was boss, racing through the deciding set.

Unassuming world number 10 Bautista Agut was in control and all over the groundstrokes of temperamental Kyrgios, who looked lost as he crashed 6-1 in the first set.

The Australian regained some lustre in the second set. But he was broken in the fifth game, mangling his racquet in frustration, and despite saving two match points with booming aces was outplayed.



RAFAEL NADAL



NOVAK DJOKOVIC



CLINICAL FLOOR SIX GRAB TDS INTRA-OFFICE TITLE

The Daily Star's intra-office cricket tournament, held at Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall ground yesterday, was nothing less than the full package. The event had it all, from innovat strokeplay to superb bowling and fielding but more importantly, the spirit of the game was ever evident as Floor Six battled past their seventh and fifth floor counterparts to clinch the trophy. Although a man-of-the-match was not officially named, Mazhar Uddin (R) of Floor Six could be the best candidate, having scored a crucial 25 before going to scalp four wickets in the final.

PHOTO: STAR

National athletics back on grass

SPORTS REPORTER



Chattogram is all set to host the national athletics championships after 14 years as the 43rd edition of the meet will take place at the MA Aziz Stadium in the port city from January 16.

Some 500 athletes from 64 districts, eight divisions, universities, educational boards, BKSP and services team are expected to compete in 36 events -- 22 for male and 14 for female athletes, informed Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) general secretary Abdur Rokib at a press conference yesterday.

With the patronisation of Chattogram Mayor AJM Nasir Uddin and assistance of Chattogram District Sports Association, the BAF is organising the championships in port city in a bid to bring a new hype in athletics even though all the events will take place on grass.

Out of the previous 42 editions, Mymensingh and Jashore hosted the championships once each while Chattogram hosted the premier meet twice, last of which was held in 2005. That was the last time the national athletics meet was held on grass.

"The track and field events may not produce good timing on grass, but we believe other events such as long-jump, high-jump and throw events will not be any impacted by the surface," BAF joint secretary Fariduddin Ahmed said, adding that they chose the Chattogram venue due to the poor condition of athletics tracks at the Bangabandhu National Stadium and the Army Stadium while hosting the meet at BKSP will be too expensive.

"Participating in the national athletics championships in Dhaka has become a bit boring for participants. I believe a lot of affiliated bodies will take part in Chattogram and there will be huge enthusiasm," added Ahmed.

SHORT CORNER

Suarez to undergo knee operation

Uruguayan striker Luis Suarez will undergo another knee operation today, Barcelona have announced.

The club issued a press release yesterday saying the surgery was for an "injury to the external meniscus of the right knee".

It will not be his first knee operation.

Last May, Suarez missed the last two league games and the Spanish cup final, which Barcelona lost to Valencia, so he could have an operation on his right knee and recover in time to play for Uruguay in the Copa America in Brazil.

Suarez also underwent knee surgery in May 2014, returning in time to score twice against England at the end of June in the World Cup.

Suarez played on Thursday as Barcelona lost the semi-final of the Spanish Super Cup to Atletico Madrid in Jeddah.

–AFP

Alexandrova wins maiden WTA title

Ekaterina Alexandrova won her first WTA singles title after the in-form Russian defeated Elena Rybakina in straight sets in the final of the Shenzhen Open yesterday.

The fifth seed won 6-2, 6-4 in 73 minutes to begin her season and her Australian Open preparations with a bang.

The 25-year-old Alexandrova, ranked a career-high 34th in the world, collapsed to her knees after dismissing Rybakina, the seventh seed from Kazakhstan.

Alexandrova, who triumphed in a WTA 125K event in Limoges, France last month, defeated former world number one Garbine Muguruza in the semi-finals in southern China.

–AFP

Madrid derby in Super Cup final

Lionel Messi has predictably been the star attraction but there will be no Clasico in Saudi Arabia this weekend, as Atletico Madrid's defeat of Barcelona set up a clash with rivals Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final today.

Messi was cheered by fans at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium from the moment he jogged out to warm up, yet Atletico were the ones celebrating at the end of Thursday's semi-final in the competition that has been expanded and controversially shipped to a different continent, to a country with a long-condemned record on human rights.

Atletico scored two late goals to beat Barca 3-2, with a derby final now to come against Real Madrid.

When the Spanish Football Federation signed a three-year contract worth 120 million euros (\$133.4 million) to move the tournament to Saudi, a title showdown between Real and Barcelona would very likely have been top of the organisers' wishlist.

–AFP