

ROBBEN'S STUNNING COMEBACK

Arjen Robben has announced a stunning return to football with his first club, Groningen. The winger retired from the game in July 2019 after a brilliant career, which included more than 20 major title wins. Now, with his boyhood club reeling from the devastating effects of coronavirus, he is planning to return to the pitch to lend a helping hand at the age of 36. "I was 12 years old when I started playing in Groningen's youth academy, I made my home debut against Feyenoord when I was 16," Robben said in a video on Twitter released on Saturday. "After two years I made a transfer to PSV Eindhoven. After a wonderful adventure of 18 years we're coming home! Back to Groningen."



'No fear of Bangladesh cricket being isolated'

SPORTS REPORTER

Recently a fear has emerged that Bangladesh may not feature high on the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) priorities in the post-pandemic world because of the powerful member countries' commercial interests as they inevitably try to recoup losses incurred during the halt in play. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), were not entertaining the notion as they believe, under the new system of the World Test Championships and ODI League, it would not be possible to keep any country away from cricket too long.

The coronavirus pandemic has taken a toll on the international calendar, with Bangladesh missing out on eight Tests that were part of the ICC Test Championship, which was launched on August 1 last year.

The eight Tests include one away match against Pakistan in April, a two-match series against Australia in June, two Tests against New Zealand and with three against Sri Lanka.

"Unless the current ICC Test Championship cycle is extended there is no way we can play those eight Test matches in the stipulated time frame of the first cycle," BCB cricket operations chairman Akram Khan told Cricbuzz.

"We are looking forward to see what ICC does with the Test Championship because unless it is reshuffled, there is hardly any possibility to play the eight Test matches that got cancelled," he said.

BCB chief executive Nizamuddin

Chowdhury however said that it is not an easy decision as there are a lot of 'ifs and buts' because of financial issues.

"It's not an easy decision and there are many options to think about before taking the final decision and ultimately the ICC member countries together will reach the decision," Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"There is hardly any possibility of these eight matches to take place by next June [the date for the Test championship final as originally scheduled] and in that case, everybody should reach a consensus regarding the first cycle. See, if the Test Championship final date is extended it will have an impact on other schedules as well because we have a compact schedule until 2023, so you can understand it's not an easy decision," he said.

"But one thing is sure -- under the new system, which was developed to bring a balance among the member countries in terms of match distribution, there is no scope to deprive any country in the post-Covid-19 world until and unless you abolish the current system. In the previous system there were a lot of loopholes and that's why you saw that we were idle for long stretches sometimes but this new formula ensures all countries' engagement. Four home and four away series are guaranteed.

"Everybody is well aware that ICC reaches decisions through the consent of member countries. We are going to face a challenge in the post-Covid-19 era but this challenge is more or less the same for any member country," he explained.

"If this system exists, you cannot be isolated," he added.



There were plenty of goals and records broken on the final day of the Bundesliga season on Saturday. Robert Lewandowski scored a record 34th goal as Bayern Munich, already champions, cruised to a 4-0 win over Wolfsburg. Chelsea-bound Timo Werner scored twice to finish his Leipzig career as the club's all-time leading scorer with 95 goals while Hoffenheim striker Andrej Kramaric scored four goals in a 4-0 thrashing of second-placed Borussia Dortmund at Signal Iduna Park.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS/COLLECTED

Bundesliga wraps up with exciting results

AFP, Berlin



BUNDESLIGA

Bayern Munich received the Bundesliga trophy following Saturday's victory at Wolfsburg while Werder Bremen pulled off a final day escape with help from Union Berlin to keep alive their hopes of avoiding a first relegation since 1980. Here are four standout moments from the last round:

Eight in a row: German league chief executive Christian Seifert presented Bayern with the "Meisterschale" -- or championship shield -- following their 4-0 victory over Wolfsburg, the club's 19th win in their past 20 league outings. Muted celebrations were the order of the day with the traditional beer

shower strictly off limits owing to the coronavirus-related hygiene regulations. French youngster Michael Cuisance grabbed his first Bundesliga goal while Robert Lewandowski struck for the league-best 34th time this season.

Bremen earn stay of execution: Werder Bremen, the longest-serving Bundesliga club, snapped an appalling run of 14 home games without a win by crushing Cologne 6-1 to spare themselves from relegation, at least for the time being. Their final day victory coupled with Fortuna Dusseldorf losing saw Bremen climb out the bottom two at the latter's expense. Florian Kohfeldt's side will take on either Heidenheim or Hamburg in the two-legged promotion/relegation play-off next week. Bremen's goal glut was all the

more remarkable given they had scored just twice at home in 1,000 previous minutes.

Werner signs off in style: Timo Werner rounded out his RB Leipzig career in trademark fashion, scoring twice in a 2-1 win at Augsburg to secure his club third place in the Bundesliga. The Germany international finished the season with 34 goals overall, 28 coming in the Bundesliga, and became the club's all-time leading scorer (95) in his last match. His final touch at Augsburg delivered the winning goal, with the 24-year-old on his way to Chelsea after the Premier League club triggered Werner's 60 million euro (£53 million, \$67 million) release clause. The forward will join Chelsea in July, meaning he will play no further part in Leipzig's

Champions League campaign.

Kramaric gatecrashes Goetze farewell: An intended goodbye party for departing Dortmund forward Mario Goetze at Signal Iduna Park quickly turned sour as Hoffenheim striker Andrej Kramaric scored four times in a surprise 4-0 rout. The 28-year-old Goetze missed out on a final appearance, having been unable to comply with the league's health regulations after regularly visiting hospital following the premature birth of his son. He received a bouquet of flowers and a photo collage with memories from his time at the club before kick-off. Goetze is leaving after 219 appearances across two separate spells for Dortmund, who he helped win the 2011 and 2012 Bundesliga titles.



With a flare in one hand and the trophy in the other, Ferencváros FC players celebrate winning the OTP Bank Liga, the top-tier football league in Hungary, at the Groupama Arena in Budapest on Saturday. There were wild celebrations inside the arena as Ferencváros won the league title for a record 31st time following a 1-0 win over Mezokovesd.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BANGABANDHU SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Fate to be decided today

SPORTS REPORTER



The fate of September's Bangabandhu SAFF Championship in Bangladesh will be decided today as the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) is scheduled to meet virtually with the general secretaries of seven member associations this afternoon.

"We are scheduled to sit with the general secretaries of all seven federations [Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan] today [Monday] to discuss this year's SAFF calendar. Then we will discuss outcomes of the meeting with the SAFF president, vice presidents and a few other members to deliver the final decision in the first week of July," SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will mainly discuss whether the tournaments in the calendar can be implemented or deferred due to the pandemic because all seven members will take part in those competitions, depending on their respective situations, taking the situation into

consideration as we [SAFF] can't impose anything," said Helal.

Helal also said the SAFF secretariat had previously sent the agenda of today's meeting to respective federations and hoped that the general secretaries will convey the opinions generated through the high-ups of their respective federations.

Bangabandhu SAFF Championship is scheduled to take place in Bangladesh from September 23 to mark the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman but the coronavirus pandemic has forced the government to cancel most international tournaments organised to commemorate the birth centenary, as well as postpone domestic sports activities since March.

"I think we won't be able to hold the SAFF Championship in September, but we first want to hear from other nations in the meeting and then give our opinions," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag told The Daily Star yesterday. "If everyone agrees to defer the championship, then we will propose holding the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship next February or March and try to hold it within

the Mujib Barsho, Bangabandhu's birthday."

SAFF secretary Helal added: "If SAFF Championship is deferred by a few months, we won't be able to hold it this year because there are FIFA windows in October and November. Besides, AFC also has AFC Cup fixtures in late October."

SAFF is scheduled to hold the U-15 Boys' SAFF Championship in August, U-15 Girls' SAFF Championship in September and U-19 Women's SAFF Championship in October.

"We have already had a meeting with FIFA and let them know that we are doubtful of staging the tournaments as per the calendar because the situation in South Asia is not good. FIFA had a meeting with all regional associations across the world because they are funding youth football tournaments."

"If the situation improves within the next two or three months, we can consider staging a couple of the youth tournaments in December, but it depends on each country's federation because the situation in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan is worsening compared to other South Asian nations," said Helal.

Won't coach for 20 years, says Zidane

AFP, Madrid



LaLiga

Real Madrid's Zinedine Zidane says being a coach is exhausting and insists he has no intention of doing it for 20 years.

Zidane took charge of Real Madrid in 2016 before resigning two years later, explaining he felt the club needed a change. In his goodbye press conference, Zidane said he had not forgotten "the hard moments" of the job. But he returned towards the end of last season and has revitalised a struggling team, with Madrid beating Real Mallorca on Wednesday to go top of La Liga with seven games left.

"I won't coach for 20 years, I will retire before that," said Zidane in a press conference on Saturday. "I haven't planned anything in my head. What keeps me going is the day-to-day. In my head I have always been in football, I spent almost 18 years as a player and I said I would never be a coach. Now I am and it wears you out a lot. We will see but not for 20 years, that's for sure."



In this handout picture released by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday, Pakistan cricketers Babar Azam (R), Imad Wasim (L) and Imam-ul-Haq (C) arrive at the Allama Iqbal International airport in Lahore ahead of their departure for England. The Pakistan squad left for their England tour without 10 players who had tested positive for coronavirus.

PHOTO: PCB

Barca annoyed and frustrated, says Suarez

REUTERS, Vigo



LaLiga

Barcelona forward Luis Suarez lamented his side's 2-2 draw at Celta Vigo on Saturday after the champions twice threw away the lead to hand more momentum to Real Madrid. Suarez scored both of Barca's goals but Celta forward Fedor Smolov and Iago Aspas each levelled for the struggling hosts. Aspas equalised with a free kick with two minutes remaining.

"I'm happy to have been able to help the team with my goals but overall I'm left with sensations of anger and frustration," Suarez said. "We feel as though we have dropped two points and there are many things we need to improve. We are giving away a lot of points away from home which we didn't used to do in previous seasons."

Barca were trailing Real in the standings due to their inferior head-to-head record but Zinedine Zidane's side can now cement their advantage and go two points clear at the top should they beat Espanyol on Sunday. The Catalans were two points ahead when the season was halted in March but have won three of their five matches back, also drawing away to Sevilla last week. Barca's next match is a testing home fixture against third-placed Atletico Madrid.

"We're feeling very negative because we have lost two more points in the fight for the title," Suarez added. "We had our fate in our own hands but now we have to wait for Real Madrid to slip up here and there so overall we are feeling frustrated at giving away the two points today."

WHAT TO WATCH

LA LIGA
FACEBOOK
Getafe v Real Sociedad
Live from 2:00am
(Tuesday)

PREMIER LEAGUE
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
Crystal Palace v Burnley
Live from 1:00am
(Tuesday)