

WHAT TO WATCH

<b>SONY SIX</b> England v Australia Second ODI (D/N) Live from 6:00pm	Real Valladolid v Real Sociedad Live from 8:00pm Villarreal v SD Huesca Live from 10:30pm Valencia v Levante Live from 1:00am (Monday)	West Brom v Leicester Live from 7:00pm Tottenham v Everton Live from 9:30pm
FACEBOOK LIVE La Liga Alaves v Real Betis Live from 6:00pm	<b>STAR SPORTS SELECT 1</b> English Premier League	<b>STAR SPORTS SELECT 2</b> US Open Live from 2:00am (Monday)



Austria's Dominic Thiem flexes muscles after digging out a win over third seeded Russian Daniil Medvedev in the semifinal while his Sunday's opponent German Alexander Zverev smiles as he overcame a listless start to secure a thrilling semi-final win over Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta on Friday to reach first Grand Slam final.

PHOTO: US OPEN

## First-timers battle for glory

AGENCIES

For the first time in four years, a Grand Slam men's singles tournament will end without Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal or Novak Djokovic as the champion.

Dominic Thiem of Australia will face friend and first-time Grand Slam finalist Alexander Zverev of Germany for their first Grand Slam titles after they won their last-four matches in contrasting styles on Friday.

Sunday's final will see a first-time Grand Slam champion for the first time since Croatian Marin Cilic won at Flushing Meadows in 2014. It also means there will be a Grand Slam champion other than Djokovic, Nadal or Federer for the first time since Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka won the third of his tennis majors at the US Open in 2016.

One can expect some great

attacking tennis from both players. Zverev will, however, have to be cautious in the way he approached in the semifinal. The German simply cannot expect to get away with the several inconsistencies that he displayed against Carreno Busta.

The German will have to introduce a lot more variety into his game, especially from the mid-court area to try and close out the points against Thiem. Indulging in long, baseline rallies will only draw out more errors from his groundstrokes and thus tilt the balance in favor of Dominic Thiem.

Thiem will look to dominate the game from the baseline as he did so superbly against Medvedev in the semifinal. On return games especially one can find the Austrian displaying a touch of Rafael Nadal by standing several feet behind the baseline. This not only helps him take the pace off the ball but also affords him a bit more court length to execute his topspin induced groundstrokes.

Thiem hopes fourth time's the charm after seizing on yet another chance to win his first-ever Grand Slam title. The 27-year-old, who has reached a Grand Slam final three times - only to lose on each occasion, well aware of the heartbreak that could be in store

want to achieve."

Thiem lost to Rafa Nadal at Roland-Garros in 2018 and 2019. But his greatest disappointment came at the hands of world number one Novak Djokovic, who overcame Thiem's best efforts in a four-hour-long, five-set thriller at the Australian Open this year.

Thiem joked he will be giving Britain's Andy Murray a call if he suffers a fourth straight Grand Slam final defeat on Sunday.

Zverev becomes the first German man to reach the final of a tennis major since Rainer Schuttler at the 2003 and is bidding to become the first German men's Grand Slam champion since Boris Becker won the 1996 Australian Open.

"I'm through to my first Grand Slam final and that's all that matters. Sunday is going to be extremely difficult. But I'm looking forward to it. I'm in the final of a Grand Slam. The two best players in the world are going to be playing on court," said Zverev.

HIGHLIGHT

Thiem leads Zverev 7-2 in head to head, most recently defeating him at the Australian Open semifinals earlier this year.

should he once again be denied.

"It's the biggest goal and also the biggest dream I have in my tennis career since a few years," the world number three told reporters.

"Since the moment I realized that maybe one day I can make it, and especially since I played the first finals of the French Open (in 2018). This was the biggest goal I

## SLC 'unreachable'

Nizamuddin says after quarantine complications

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are waiting for Sri Lanka Cricket to provide clear information regarding the health protocols in their country ahead of an upcoming three-match Test tour around which dark clouds are gathering quickly.

The Tigers are expected to travel Sri Lanka in late September ahead of the first Test on from October 23, but the latest complication is that visitors to the island nation will have to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine, which would force players to isolate in their hotel room.

That would contradict previous assurances from Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) that visitors would get an opportunity to avail practise facilities during that period, a benefit that prompted the BCB to plan to take the High Performance squad.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday that the board was unable to communicate with its Sri Lankan counterparts.

"If we don't get information from them (SLC) then it will be difficult for us to prepare and plan accordingly. We are trying to communicate with Sri Lankan officials but are unable to reach them. The scenario is changing from time to time

across the world due to the pandemic, which forces health authorities of each country to act accordingly," Nizamuddin said.

"We are trying to solve this issue quickly as there are many things related to it. A few of our foreign staff were expected to arrive in Sri Lanka directly. A few internal issues need to be solved as well."

Although the 'Tigers' return to cricket seemed to be going smoothly at first, things have been getting complicated day-by-day in relation to health protocols and the creation of a bio-secure bubble for the visitors.

From the BCB's point of view, it is difficult to remain locked in a hotel room for 14 days without any activities because that would hamper players' preparation.

Allaying concerns that stemmed from the announcement of the team being delayed, Nizamuddin said that preparations would continue in full swing and selectors were expected to announce a preliminary squad soon. However, he added that it would be better if SLC announces a schedule quickly.

The BCB has already conducted coronavirus testing for cricketers and support staff and is planning a short residential camp before travelling to Sri Lanka, although the tour itself now seems in doubt.



## Roy 'pulls out' of BFF polls

SPORTS REPORTER

Day-long whispers about Badal Roy's withdrawal from the president candidature of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF)'s upcoming elections became reality as his wife Madhuri Roy turned up at the BFF headquarters with a withdrawal letter at around 6:00pm, an hour after the deadline.

This could prove to be another big turning point in the much-hyped BFF polls after potential president candidate Tarafder Ruhul Amin, also chairman of Saif SC and vice-president of Chattogram Abahani, pulled out of the race due to 'alleged pressure from some quarters' even though he had claimed his business commitments to be the reason for his withdrawal.

Roy, who had earlier challenged to not leave incumbent president Kazi Salahuddin uncontested, was allegedly put under pressure by some quarters. The former national footballer was believed to be in hesitation regarding the decision before his wife tendered the withdrawal letter, citing Roy's illness as the reason.

"Badal has been sick for a long time. He wanted to do something for football but his health is not supporting him. His physical condition has been deteriorating, so we, the family members, decided to withdraw his nomination," said Madhuri, who denied facing any pressure from any quarters.

"As per law, 5:00pm today was the deadline for withdrawal of nomination. Any withdrawal after the deadline won't be counted and his name will come on the ballot paper," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag in the absence of the three-member election commission at the BFF House. Shohag later added that the commission will take a decision in this regard.

If the withdrawal of Roy is accepted, it is going to be two-horse race between Kazi Salahuddin and Shafiqul Islam Manik for the president's post.

Meanwhile, two member candidates withdrew from the elections, leaving 34 candidates contesting 15 posts.

## Stamford Bridge flooded by intent



(L-R) Chelsea had one of the busiest breaks, ensuring that their first signing, Hakim Ziyech, would have similarly capable talent around him by adding Kai Havertz and Timo Werner. Meanwhile, Donnie van de Beek moved to Manchester United from Ajax and Fabio Silva became the latest Portuguese sensation to arrive at Wolves.

SAMAMA RAHMAN



It is not often that a team win their domestic league 18 points clear of their second-placed rival. It is rarer still that they do so by winning a staggering 26 of their first 27 matches and staying on top for 37 of the 38 rounds of matches. It is practically unheard of that the same team not be counted on to repeat the feat at least retaining their crown in the coming season.

Nevertheless, that is the position Liverpool find themselves in.

Although they had wrapped a maiden Premier League crown with almost a quarter of the season to go and marked their first league title in 30 years in 2019/20, the Reds have been overshadowed by Manchester City as the bookmakers' favourite.

That is mainly attributed to a

string of below-par performances after the coronavirus enforced break that saw them exit the Champions League in the round of 16 after losing both legs to Atletico Madrid. But a lot of it also has to do with the manner in which Liverpool surged to the title. It is unfathomable that Juergen Klopp's men can repeat the dominance they had at the start of last season, even if they arguably have the most rested players following the extremely short pre-season.

There would be little room for debate about legitimacy had the already-impressive Citizens managed to sign a particular Argentine during the transfer window, but Pep Guardiola's side has an embarrassment of riches. He and his players will be eager to make up for 'only' winning the FA Cup last year.

Yet, both of these teams will be

acutely aware of the emergence of a third contender. In just one season, Chelsea have rubbished the notions that they would be just another vassal to the duopoly and Frank Lampard's rebellion at Stamford Bridge in full swing.

When Lampard took over at Stamford Bridge, he had to steer the Blues in a direction that they had not gone down in years. A transfer ban had been hanging overhead that disabled them from doing any business and, following a 4-0 loss to Manchester United on the opening matchday, many wrote off their season.

However, Lampard worked diligently and the first proof of his 150-plus IQ came when he decided to give Tammy Abraham a chance. The 22-year-old striker netted 15 times in the league and finished as the team's top-scorer. When things splintered, Christian Pulisic, brought in during the

January window, reinvigorated them. The American netted nine times as Chelsea finished fourth. To that batch of youngsters, including Pulisic, Abraham, Mason Mount and Calum Hudson Odoi, Chelsea paid 53 million euros to add 24-year-old German striker Timo Werner, who decided after 95 goals in 159 appearances that it was time to move away from RB Leipzig. A further 100 million euros were spent on Kai Havertz, an attacking midfielder who stands at 6-foot 2-inches and has the intelligence to play across midfield without his game suffering.

Hakim Ziyech will be more than happy with his decision to leave Ajax after pledging to make the move to London last January.

Blend of youth and experience was also added at the heart of defence in the form of 21-year-old Malang Sarr and 35-year-

old Thiago Silva. Fullback Ben Chilwell, signed from Leicester City, adds to the backbone.

No team has improved as significantly, if at all. Chelsea's closest rivals last season, Manchester United who pipped them to third, have added only Donnie van de Beek, a player that they hope will harmonise the midfield and free Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba.

Liverpool have only added Kostas Tsimikas, while Manchester City picked up midfielder Ferran Torres and defender Nathan Ake.

These moves belie the state of the uncertainty that prevails in the world when it comes to making investments following the coronavirus pandemic. But in uncertain times, Chelsea have moved with certainty. They wrapped up their deals quickly, now the only price left to pay is that of expectation.



Arsenal got their Premier League season off to a comfortable start away at Craven Cottage, dispatching of newly-promoted Fulham 3-0 yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Gabriel and Willian shine on debuts

REUTERS, London

Arsenal got their Premier League campaign underway with a 3-0 win at promoted Fulham thanks to goals from Alexandre Lacazette, new signing Gabriel and captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang in the opening game of the season on Saturday.

Lacazette fired the Gunners ahead in the eighth minute after poor defending by the home side before new signing Gabriel made it 2-0 in the 49th and Aubameyang put the icing on the cake with a superb shot into the top corner.

## Smith doubtful starter for today's 2nd ODI

AGENCIES



Australia's stalwart Steve Smith will have to undergo a fresh concussion test before the second ODI against England today after being ruled out of Friday's opener at Old Trafford.

Smith was ruled out of the 1st ODI after being hit on the head during a throwdown session in the nets with Australia's coaching staff.

There is also doubt over left-arm seamer Mitchell Starc's availability for the second match of the series after having experienced some groin pain on Friday.

A century stand between Mitchell Marsh and Glenn Maxwell and four wickets for spinner Adam Zampa helped Australia down world champions England by 19 runs in the opening clash of the three-match



Australia's Adam Zampa celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Jonny Bairstow during first ODI on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ODI series at Old Trafford on Friday. Australia are in with a chance to claim a bilateral ODI series win over England for the first time since 2015 and end the recent dominance by Eoin Morgan's men in 50-over cricket. England have won 11 of their past 14 encounters against Australia.

Australia quick Josh Hazlewood produced a performance he ranked "right up there" in his one-day career to put the visitors' just one win away from becoming the first side to knock off England in a bilateral ODI series in almost four years.

Hazlewood, who was omitted from last year's World Cup squad as he recovered from injury and with an eye to the Ashes series that followed, was in scintillating touch with the new ball in helpful conditions at Old Trafford in Manchester, claiming 3-26 in a player-of-the-match performance.