

T SPORTS

Bangabandhu T20 Cup
Dhaka vs Khulna
Live from 12:30 pm
Barishal vs Chattogram
Live from 5:30 pm

TEN 1

UEFA Europa League

Napoli vs Real Sociedad
Live from 11:55 pm
Sparta Prague vs Milan
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)

TEN 2

UEFA Europa League
Dundalk vs Arsenal
Live from 11:55 pm

Tottenham Hotspur
vs Royal Antwerp
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)

SONY SIX

UEFA Europa League
Wolfsberg vs Feyenoord
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)

Rajshahi on the brink; Dhaka aim to qualify

SPORTS REPORTER



Following the exciting play on the opening day of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup, the tournament seemed to have slowed down due to the lack of competitive cricket and low scoring affairs at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Many pointed to the slowness of the Mirpur surface as one of the reasons for low-scoring encounters. The average first-innings total after the first half of the tournament was around 140 and teams twice being bundled out below 100 runs raised concerns over a lack of competitiveness.

But Tuesday's high scoring encounter between Minister Rajshahi and Fortune Barishal changed the scenario after both sides displayed an exciting brand of cricket.



Gemcon Khulna's star player Shakib Al Hasan plays football with his teammates during training in Mirpur yesterday. The all-rounder has been out of form since his return to cricket and will be hoping to come good today when they take on (bottom) Mushfiqur Rahim's Beximco Dhaka in their Bangabandhu T20 Cup fixture, which is scheduled to start at 12:30pm.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Rajshahi posted 220 for seven courtesy of Najmul Hossain's century but Barishal went on to complete the highest successful chase in T20s in Mirpur after a sublime century from young Parvez Hossain.

All of a sudden, the tournament got its excitement back and it seemed clearer that quality of cricket mostly relies on the players' approach and attitude rather than the nature of the pitch.

After their second win of the tournament against Rajshahi, Tamim Iqbal's Barishal remain bottom of the points table but still have hopes alive to qualify by making the top four. They today face table-toppers Gazi Group Chattogram, who have qualified for the top four with five wins from six games.

On the other hand, Rajshahi have four points from seven games. Najmul's side will be desperate to

win their last game but even that would not confirm a top-four spot as they have to wait on results of other games. Beximco Dhaka, with three wins from six games, will be looking to seal a place in the top four today when they take on the star-studded Gemcon Khulna, who are in second place with four wins from seven matches.

Meanwhile, chief selector Minhajul Abedin said that they had already started to chalk out plans for the upcoming West Indies series in January, when the visitors are expected to take part in a two-Test and three-match ODI series.

"We have almost finalised the 20-member Test and ODI side for the upcoming West Indies series. You need to realise that it was important for us to start competitive cricket first in this pandemic situation. So this Bangabandhu T20 Cup will certainly help them return to the groove before we start the national camp on December 25. We are glad to see youngsters performing well with the seniors and it will help them in the future," Minhajul told The Daily Star.

There was some bad news as pacer Abu Jayed, who is a vital member of the Tigers' Test squad, was ruled out for at least 15 days after tearing a muscle while running in to bowl during Tuesday's game for Barishal.

Juniors primed to push seniors for places

SPORTS REPORTER



Following a long layoff due to the coronavirus pandemic, some senior players of the national hockey team are likely to face a stiff challenge from junior players to retain their places in the squad for the Men's Asian Champions Trophy to be held in Dhaka next March.

The national hockey team were supposed to start their preparations in early December but the training has been pushed to January due to the arrangement of the Victory Day Hockey tournament, scheduled to be held from December 21-27 with the participation of six teams.

The tournament will no doubt give an edge to the junior players who have just played the President's Cup on the back of a six-week training camp for the Bangabandhu Junior (U-21) Asian Cup, which was also pushed back to July from its scheduled February start date amid the second wave of the pandemic.

National team head coach Mahabub Harun will have just nine weeks to prepare his charges before facing strong opponents like India, Pakistan, Korea, Japan and Malaysia and he wants to pick the players after watching their performance in the upcoming Victory Day tournament.

"We haven't started national training yet but the players have been training under various services teams, from where most players come to form the national side," Mahabub told The Daily Star. "The players have been out of action for a long period due to the pandemic, so I don't know how their condition is at the moment. But I can get a clear picture

after watching the performance in the Victory Day tournament and plan the drills for each individual accordingly in the national camp, which is likely to start in early January."

The former national player is thinking of calling up 30 to 32 players, with 18 players in the Asian Games squad getting automatic call-ups. The rest of the players are likely to come from the national U-21 squad as he sees little possibility of being impressed by players outside these two groups because of the long pandemic-induced gap as well as the fact that there has been no hockey league for more than two years.

National U-21 hockey team's head coach Mamunur Rashid however believes junior players will be ahead of seniors in terms of physical fitness as the juniors trained under him for 47 days and played the President's Cup.

"I think the junior players have already regained 50 to 60 percent fitness through training and playing the President's Cup. They will get sharper in upcoming tournaments and in national training if they get call-ups."

"I can tell you that senior players may face tough challenges in some positions from junior players like forward Mahabub Hossain, who was the top scorer in the last two tournaments [President's Cup and the Shaheed Smriti tournament], midfielders Al Nahian Shuvo, Shamanto Lal Prince and Abed Uddin, defenders Mehdi Hasan and Shawon, who have all been playing really well," said Mamunur, who also believes his U-21 team can put up a good fight in the Junior Asia Cup if they get the chance to play the six matches of Champions Trophy for the senior team.

'Football at tipping point'

REUTERS, Undated



Former defender Rio Ferdinand says football is at a "tipping point" and those in power must make a stand after Istanbul Basaksehir and Paris St Germain players walked off the pitch on Tuesday amid accusations a match official used a racist term.

The Champions League Group H match at Parc des Princes was suspended in the 13th minute when fourth official Sebastian Coltescu was accused of directing a racist term towards Basaksehir's assistant coach Pierre Webo.

The incident comes days after some fans at Millwall's English Championship match against Derby County booed the players when they took a knee in support of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement on Saturday.

"We're at a disturbing tipping point," former England international Ferdinand told BT Sport. "We've got Millwall, the PSG game today, all in the same week. Not a week goes by at the moment without an incident involving race."

"We're at the point now where something needs to be done, we're saying it all of the time, but the powers that be within this game need to make a huge stand."

UEFA said it will launch a "thorough investigation" into the incident and that the remainder of the match would be played on Wednesday with a new team of match officials taking charge.

PSG playmaker Neymar posted a picture of himself on Twitter alongside the caption: 'Black Lives Matter' while teammate Kylian Mbappe expressed his support for Cameroonian Webo. "SAY NO TO RACISM," he wrote on Twitter. "WEBO WE ARE WITH YOU."

Former Australia striker John Aloisi was angered by the incident but praised the action taken by the players.

"It is very powerful. Let's hope it's a turning point," Aloisi said on Optus Sport's coverage.

"I played with Pierre Webo -- a great guy -- to see him get so angry. It hurts."



Istanbul Basaksehir striker Demba Ba remonstrates with the referee after the fourth official had allegedly used a racial slur against the team's assistant coach Pierre Webo during their Champions League fixture against Paris Saint-Germain in Paris on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Leipzig players congratulate each other following their 3-2 win over Manchester United, a result which saw the Germans qualify for the knockout phase while consigning the Red Devils to a group-stage elimination for the first time in five years.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Never saw Messi as a rival: Ronaldo

AGENCIES



Cristiano Ronaldo said he has always got on well with Lionel Messi and never saw him as a rival after scoring twice in Juventus' 3-0 win over Barcelona in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, 35, scored two penalties as the Italian champions ended Barca's 38-game unbeaten run at home in Europe to reach the last 16 as group winners. Barca progress as runners-up.

It was the first meeting between Ronaldo and Messi in more than two years, since the Portuguese forward left Real Madrid for Juventus in 2018. "I have always had a cordial relationship with Messi," Ronaldo told Movistar after the game. "As I have said before, for 12, 13, 14 years [I have been] sharing prizes with him."

"I never saw him as a rival. He always tried the best for his team, and I tried the best for mine. I always got on well with him. I am sure he will say the same if you ask him." "But we know in football, people always look for a rivalry to create more excitement." Messi, 33, and Ronaldo, who between them have won the Ballon d'Or in 11 of the past 12 years, came to define the Clasico rivalry between Barca and Real Madrid over the past decade.

However, both find themselves in the latter stages of their careers now, and their respective sides have made below-par starts to their league campaigns domestically. However, Ronaldo said he doesn't think Messi -- who had all seven of Barca's shots on target on Tuesday -- is in decline.

"Messi is the same as ever [on the pitch]," he said. "Barcelona are in a difficult moment, but they are still Barca. I am sure they will come out of it. All teams have bad runs, but Barcelona are a very good team."

KOEMAN'S SPAT WITH JUVE

Barcelona boss Ronald Koeman was

involved in a bizarre touchline spat as his side suffered a 3-0 defeat at the hands of Juventus.

Koeman endured a frustrating night seeing his side outplayed by the Italian champions at the Nou Camp but he also found their stars on the bench just as much as a nuisance.

His side were already 2-0 down following a Cristiano Ronaldo penalty and a Weston McKennie effort in the first half.

The Portuguese veteran proved just as deadly from the spot again in the 52nd minute after a Clement

laughing in response to Koeman's outburst, which only appeared to annoy him further on a terrible night for the Spanish side.

PAID THE PRICE FOR SLOPPY START, SAYS SOLSKJAER
Manchester United have only themselves to blame for their exit following a 3-2 loss to RB Leipzig on Tuesday, launching their comeback far too late, coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said.

United only needed a point from their final Group H game to advance to the knockout stage but



Juventus talisman Cristiano Ronaldo shakes hands with Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi prior to the kick-off of their Champions League fixture at Camp Nou on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Lenglet handball. The Barcelona defender's offence inside the box was spotted by VAR calls, and already on a booking led to appeals from Juve stars on the bench for the French defender to be sent off.

According to Football Italia, Koeman responded to the claims by shouting at opponents in the opposite dugout to 'shut up.' However it did little to silence the Juventus substitutes who soon turned their attention to the Barca boss. Paulo Dybala was among those

left themselves with a mountain to climb after falling three goals behind against Leipzig. "We started too late. Great spirit and comeback again," Solskjaer said. "We were unlucky towards the end and you almost thought it was in at the last minute there," Solskjaer said of a stoppage-time save by Gulacsi.

"Of course you can't say we were good enough, we weren't. Today we were close but we knew we had to defend crosses and balls into the box and we just couldn't clear them."

Messi pays tribute to Sabella

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi has paid tribute to Alejandro Sabella, crediting the former Argentina coach with inspiring some of his best football in the build-up to and during the 2014 World Cup finals.

Sabella, 66, passed away in hospital on Tuesday after almost two weeks battling the effects of an acute heart condition, which was aggravated by infection during his stay at the facility.

Aside from his spell in England at the two Yorkshire clubs in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Sabella was best known outside his home country for taking Messi and the Albiceleste agonisingly close to their third World Cup title in Brazil six years ago.

The ex-Estudiantes boss made Leo captain in 2011 and his faith was rewarded with some of his finest performances in international colours, culminating in his star turn as Argentina battled to the final against Germany.

Messi, who had been gearing up for Barcelona's Champions League meeting with Juventus when the news broke, offered a heartfelt homage to another of his national team coaches.

"It was a pleasure to share so much with you," the star said on Instagram.

"Alejandro was a great person, aside from being a model professional who shaped my career and helped me learn much from him."

"We enjoyed together some of my favourite footballing memories during qualification for the World Cup and in the World Cup itself. My condolences to all his family and friends."

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