

Chelsea close in on Neymar

Chelsea are reportedly close to signing Brazilian midfielder starlet Neymar, who could join compatriot and fellow international Ramires at Stamford Bridge. The Daily Telegraph reported Thursday that Chelsea are also set to offer Neymar's Brazilian club Santos 25 million pounds (30.3 million euros) for the highly-rated 18-year-old. The newspaper said Neymar has a 29.6 million pounds (35.9 million euros) buy-out clause in his contract, and although Chelsea will not go that high they could tempt the club into releasing the player.



Opener sold out for now

SPORTS REPORTER

There is no ticket available online for the opening match between Bangladesh and India as all five per cent tickets have already been sold out.

The five per cent tickets went online for sale from June 1 through the World Cup central organising committee and the respective boards of the three co-hosts -- Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka -- will sell the rest of the tickets.

The fans will get the opportunity again to buy the opening match tickets when Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will start selling the tickets. The opening match of the showcase event will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on February 19 after the opening ceremony at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on February 17.

Bangladesh will host eight matches in Dhaka and Chittagong including

two quarterfinals.

"The fact is that the central organising committee holds the rights of five per cent tickets which already went to sale online. And from that all the opening match tickets were sold out. The rest of the tickets will be sold by the respective boards," said the host tournament director Ali Ahsan Babu.

He also informed that the rest of the tickets will go into sale simultaneously in the three host countries and everything would be settled in the next World Cup operations committee meeting which will take place in Bangladesh in the first week of next month.

He said that an estimated number of tickets whose designs will be the same, though the respective boards hold the selling rights of their matches, will be available online in different outlets too.

"The remaining ticket sale is likely to start three or four weeks before the start of the tournament," said Babu.

Bangladesh Cricket Board is now

negotiating with two ticket management organisation companies, which actually looks after the issue in Bangladesh.

"A number of foreign companies took part in the request of proposal and from there, two companies have been selected. BCB is now negotiating with them," he said.

Besides the opening match, Bangladesh will take on Ireland on February 25 in Dhaka, West Indies on March 4 in Dhaka, England on March 11 in Chittagong and Netherlands on March 14 in Chittagong.

The two quarterfinals will take place at Dhaka on March 23 and March 25.

BCB had already fixed the rates for the galleries.

TICKET RATES

Eastern Gallery (Category D) USD 3.00
North Gallery (Category C) USD 6.00
South Gallery (Category C) USD 6.00
Club House (North-South) USD 10.00
International Gallery (North-South, Category A) USD 30.00

Hosts take on NZ today

Kiwis turn favourites suddenly

Cricket

CRICINFO, Dambulla

New Zealand came into the Micromax Cup tournament looking at it as a chance to sample subcontinental conditions in the build-up to the World Cup but, in Dambulla, they found a track with plenty of swing and seam, unlike most pitches in Asia.

They even went into their first match with a distinctly un-subcontinental bowling line-up, having no frontline spinners. Scott Styris had talked about the 'lack of respect' from the opposition and the media ahead of the tournament, but after their 200-run demolition of India on Tuesday, they won't be taken lightly by Sri Lanka when the sides clash in the second game of the meet today.

Sri Lanka are a tough team to beat at home and are the only side in this tournament with something resembling a full-strength squad. They will be using the tri-series to assess their lower middle-order: Thilina Kandamby and Farveez Maharoo have been axed, while Chamara Silva and Thisara Perera have been recalled after solid performances on the A tour of Australia. It will be an important tournament

for Ajantha Mendis as well, returning to the squad after being left out of the Asia Cup.

For those interested in the ICC one-day rankings, the next week will be an exciting one. With only six points separating five teams, there could be four different teams officially rated as the world's second best in the next few days. New Zealand parked themselves in the No. 2 spot two days ago, but a loss on Friday will send them sinking to fifth.

Martin Gupthill has been a regular with the New Zealand team for more than nineteen months, and in a top order containing newcomers like Peter Ingram and Kane Williamson, the responsibility on him increases. He has also had a bit of a lean run, not making too many runs in the five one-dayers against Australia, and New Zealand will be desperate for him to return to form.

Several members of the New Zealand side have never faced Lasith Malinga and his slingy action, which makes his yorker-and-bouncer mix even more dangerous on Friday.

Jacob Oram is a doubtful starter due to a hamstring problem, though a final decision on his availability has not been taken yet. BJ Watling is recovering from a stomach bug and, if fit, could be handed a one-day debut.

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First-class start to season?

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket operations committee of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has suggested starting the domestic season with the National Cricket League (NCL) longer-version matches.

The committee discussed the domestic calendar in yesterday's meeting.

"The national league is likely to start from September 24 and complete the first phase by October 25. The tournament committee has now prepared the complete calendar," said BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Enayet Hossain Siraj.

The committee has also decided to send strong men's and women's cricket teams to the 16th Asian Games to be held in Guangzhou, China in November.

The committee members also discussed the World Cup preliminary squad but everything will be finalised after the return of head coach Jamie Siddons on August 17.

The poor jersey quality for the national players was also discussed after the clothing during the West Indies tour last year and in England were of low quality and torn in places.

The cricket operations committee are now also in a difficulty to find a slot for the two-match Test series against New Zealand next year.

The two Tests were scheduled for next September-October but BCB has decided to play five one-day internationals against New Zealand ahead of 2011 World Cup.

Patel joining India in SL

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian medium pacer Munaf Patel is heading to Sri Lanka to strengthen the team's depleted bowling attack for the ongoing tri-series, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said on Thursday.

"Munaf Patel is joining the Indian team in Sri Lanka as an additional member of the squad. He will reach Dambulla tomorrow," BCCI secretary N Srinivasan said in a statement.

India were hampered by injuries before the team departed for Sri Lanka for a three-match Test series, which ended 1-1, and the ongoing one-day series that also includes New Zealand.

Pace spearhead Zaheer Khan missed the tour because of a shoulder injury while right-arm seamer Shanthakumaran Sreesanth returned home before the Test series began with an injured knee.

Ishant Sharma missed the opening match of the tri-series due to an ankle injury with India going on to lose Tuesday's encounter against New Zealand by 200 runs.

Abhimanyu Mithun was drafted in to replace Ishant but the medium pacer could only

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Spanish winger David Silva (R) celebrates his last minute equaliser in their international friendly against Mexico at the Aztec Stadium in Mexico City on Wednesday. The defending world champions escaped with a draw.

Silva rescues Spain

Football

AFF, Mexico City

Substitute David Silva saved Spain's blushes with a stoppage-time equaliser as the world champions drew 1-1 with Mexico at the Azteca on Wednesday.

Mexico took a 12th-minute lead through striker Javier Hernandez and looked set to hand Spain defeat in their first outing since winning the World Cup in South Africa a month ago.

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque praised his side's attitude in the friendly, with players having little practice since their 1-0 World Cup final win over Netherlands in Johannesburg on July 11.

"We, who turned up with few training sessions, have behaved extraordinarily. It's just another match but it has big symbolic significance because we came here almost without preparation," Del Bosque said.

"Some of the (team) members only had yesterday's practice," he told the post-match news conference.

"We must give the players 10 (out of 10), they made no excuses for playing the minutes they were asked to."

Hernandez put Mexico ahead when he chased a ball into space, faced goalkeeper Iker Casillas, and with the Spain captain expecting a shot across his body Hernandez slotted the ball inside the near post.

"Mexico have a team of quality with young players who were a threat in attack throughout the 90 minutes," Del Bosque said.

The Mexicans showed greater urgency than Spain and were worth their lead but the arrival of Xavi just past the hour injected some bite into the Spanish attack.

Playing their trademark short passing game at near walking pace in the first half, Spain had come closest when a venomous shot from Santi Cazorla rattled Guillermo Ochoa's crossbar.

Casillas had to make a diving save from midfielder Rafael Marquez before ceding his place to Victor Valdes in the second half.

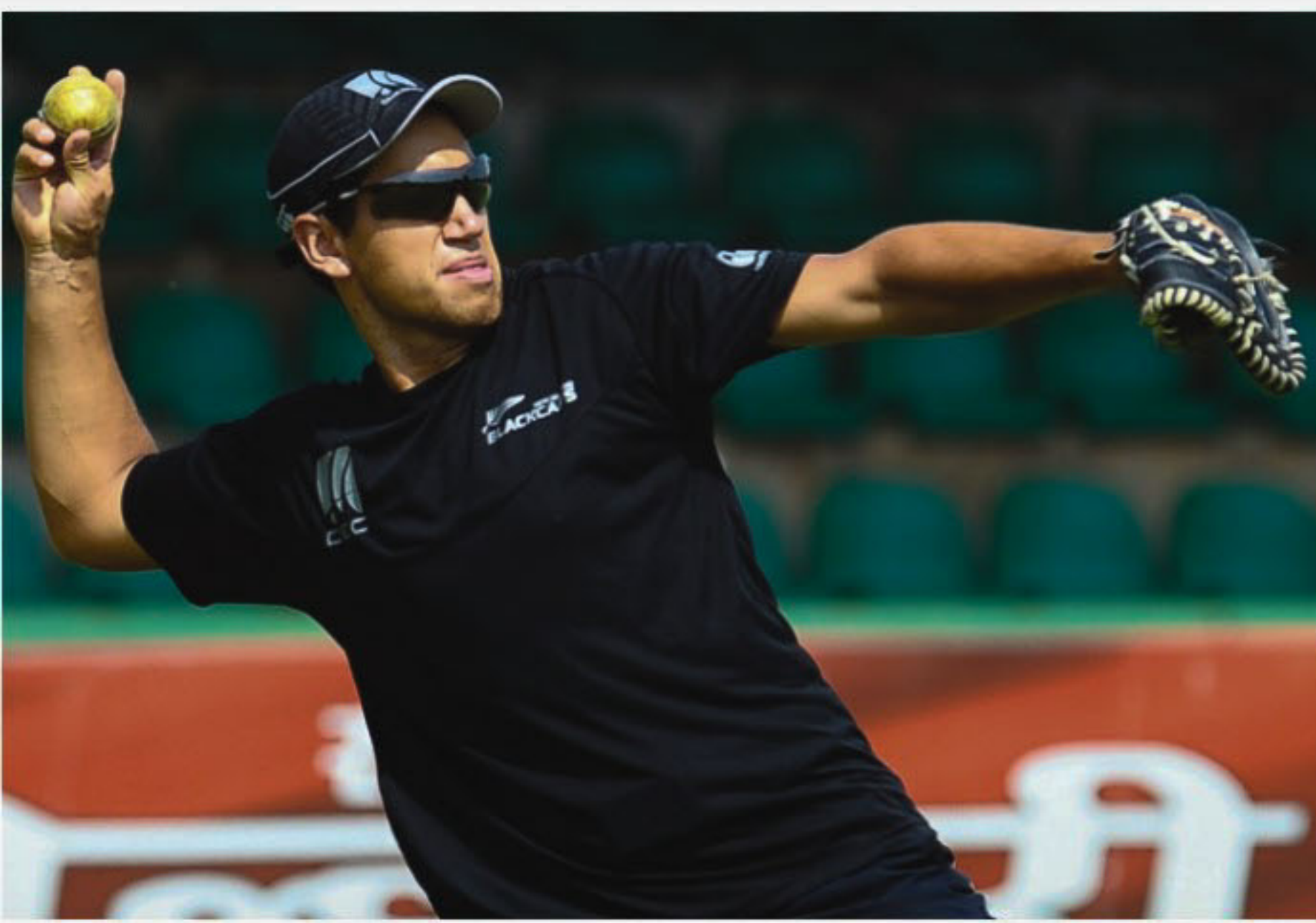
Substitute Pedro, who came on in the 72nd minute, brought a good save from Mexico's substitute keeper Jesus Corona when he looked set to equalise three minutes from time.

Silva, however, made no mistake two minutes into added time when he ran on to a fine through ball from Xavi to shoot past the diving Corona.

Spain became the latest world champions not to win their first match after lifting the FIFA trophy. Brazil in 1994 were the last team to win a match immediately after their World Cup success.

Before kickoff, Casillas paraded the World Cup to applause from the 100,000 crowd in the Azteca.

He was handed a trophy at the end of the match in recognition of the Spanish team's visit, which is part of Mexico's Bicentennial celebrations.



New Zealand captain Ross Taylor warms up his shoulders during a training session at the Rangiri Dambulla International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

MSC in disarray

Falu quits his post

SPORTS REPORTER

Mosaddek Hossain Falu has tendered his resignation from the convener post of the ad-hoc committee of Mohammedan SC yesterday citing non-cooperation from colleagues.

The submission of resignation means Falu has cut his long 17-year tie with the club and served to deepen the crisis facing the existing ad-hoc committee, which was formed in June 2009 in a bid to turn the Motijheel-based outfit into a limited company.

Falu, who was made the president of Mohammedan in 1993 and was later named the convener of the ad-hoc committee, sent the copies of his resignation to the members of the 48-member ad-hoc committee.

"I resigned following the hostile situation as well as non-cooperation from a group in the committee. I hope that the club come out of this situation and I wish to stay beside the club in the coming days," the resignation letter read.

It also mentioned that he failed to enlist the club as a limited company despite having submitted the necessary papers to the authority concerned because a vested quarter had

been working against it.

Falu also said that Mohammedan emerged champions in cricket and hockey but failed to clinch the football league title only because of the non-cooperation of a few club officials.

"Now I will call an emergency meeting of the ad-hoc committee to take the decision on his resignation and the meeting is likely to appoint an acting convener," said member secretary Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan.

The managerial crisis at Mohammedan first reared its head in November 2009 when Falu declared a 16-member board of directors violating the constitution. Many members of Mohammedan opposed the move and thus the committee virtually became inactive.

The ad-hoc committee was supposed to complete the necessary steps within six months to make Mohammedan a limited company and hold an election to select its 17 directors, but so far 13 months have passed and nothing has yet been accomplished.

And a group of ad-hoc committee members kept mounting pressure on Falu to quit the post to make a way for a new face.

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Beckham era ends

Football

AFF, London

Steven Gerrard launched a new era for England against Hungary at Wembley and then immediately paid tribute to David Beckham, whose international career has been ended by Fabio Capello.

Gerrard saved England from defeat in their first match since a disastrous World Cup, scoring twice in a 2-1 friendly win after Hungary had gone ahead through a disputed own goal from Phil Jagielka.

But afterwards the talk was as much about Capello's decision that Beckham is too old to take part in England's Euro 2012 campaign, even when he has fully recovered from an Achilles injury that prevented him playing in the World Cup.

Capello's comments may well have come as a shock to Beckham, who has always insisted he has no intention of retiring from international football and is currently battling back to full fitness with LA Galaxy.

But captain Gerrard refused to criticise his

manager, who has already been accused of poor communication after Paul Robinson and Wes Brown both retired from international football just 24 hours after being included in the Italian's new-look squad this week.

"I don't know whether Fabio has spoken to David, that's a question you will have to direct to Fabio Capello," said Gerrard.

"But David can hold his head up high with the service he's given to his country and I'm sure the fans will remember him as a legend."

"He's put in a long shift in as an England player, he's produced some fantastic performances, some fantastic goals."

"He's given us so many memories and he was also a fantastic captain, I've learned a lot playing under him and it's been a pleasure to play alongside him."

"If he has played his last game he'll be missed because both on and off the pitch he's a great guy."

Beckham, of course, has seen his England obituary written several times before - not least when he was jettisoned by Steve McClaren following the 2006 World Cup - and Gerrard says no-one should rule him out for good.

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SPORTS POLL

TODAY'S QUESTION

Do you think Bangladesh is prepared for the cricket World Cup in 2011?

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TEN Sports

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Sri Lanka Tri-Series
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SuperSport3

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Club Friendly
Live from 12:55pm (Saturday)