

5TH BPL FACTS

Duration of league	153 days
Champions	Abahani Ltd
Runners-up	Muktijoddha
Total registered players	343
Foreign registered players	93
Total league matches	110
Winning results	82
Draws	28
Goalless matches	8
Total goals	295
Top Scorer	
Ismael Bangoura (BJMC)	17
Local top scorer	
Mithun Chowdhury (Mukti)	6
Hat tricks	10
Biggest margin wins	
Abahani: Feni Soccer	5-0
Muktijoddha: Feni Soccer	5-0
Yellow Cards	436
Red Cards	9
Team scored most	
Muktijoddha	43
Team conceded less goals	
Muktijoddha	10

Terry set for scan

AFP, London

Chelsea coach Roberto Di Matteo says John Terry will undergo a scan on his right knee after injury cut short his comeback in the Blues' 1-1 draw at home to Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday.

Suspended for four domestic matches after being found guilty of racially abusing Queens Park Rangers defender Anton Ferdinand in a match last season, Terry got on the score-sheet at Stamford Bridge with a 20th-minute header.

It was the former England defender's 50th goal in all competitions for the reigning European champions, but he was forced to leave the fray less than 20 minutes later.

Terry went down clutching his right leg after an accidental collision with Liverpool striker Luis Suarez and was carried from the field on a stretcher in the 39th minute, with Gary Cahill coming in on his place.

Suarez later claimed an equaliser for Liverpool, to leave Chelsea three points behind leaders Manchester United in third place.

"He has a problem with his knee and will have an MRI scan tomorrow," Chelsea coach Di Matteo told Sky Sports.

"At the moment we can't say (how serious the injury is). We'll have to wait for the scan, which will tell us the extent of the injury.

Suarez took to Twitter after the game to send Terry his best wishes.

"Hugs to Terry, I hope it's nothing serious," he wrote.



What to WATCH

Channel 9 & BTB
Bangladesh v West Indies
First Test, Day 1
Live from 9:30am
BTB
Bangladesh Premier League
Abahani v Soccer Club, Feni
Live from 4:45pm
STAR Cricket
Australia v South Africa
First Test, Day 5
Live from 6:00am
ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News



DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v West Indies
First Test, Day 1
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Bangladesh Premier League
Abahani v Soccer Club, Feni
Time: 5:00pm

Fair play please

On the eve of the sixth edition of the professional football league, The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman takes an in-depth look into an epidemic that threatens to ruin the spirit of the beautiful game in Bangladesh. Match-fixing has been around for a while, starting with seemingly innocent coalitions between small clubs. But over the years, it has taken a darker turn with many insiders claiming that no modern league champion has achieved glory in an untarnished manner. Match-fixing is a systemic and a collective issue and the only way to overcome this is by taking a systemic and collective approach. This is a call-to-arms.

The ball finally dropped in 2011. After years of hushed tones in dark corridors and literal instances of envelopes passing under the table, the first time the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) ever officially took a decision to call a compromised game was only last year.

As expected though, evidence was insufficient and in the end both clubs who were involved, including ultimate champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and minnows Rahmatganj MFS got off with merely a cursory slap on the wrist in the form of monetary fines.

The lack of action on the part of the football authority was galling but in spite of this most people in the sports community were somewhat heartened. Because this finally represented an admission that match-fixing is alive and very much a concern with regards to football in Bangladesh.

In most countries, betting patterns are often the most accurate trends for a fixed game. In Bangladesh, however, betting is almost non-existent which means that any hard proof is that much harder to come by. This is due to the 'unofficial' nature of the fixing. This state of affairs is hardly helped by lack of proper laws, documents, technology and a serious attitude from the game's governing body to clean up this mess.

A number of high-profile former footballers, coaches and officials were consulted and everyone unanimously admitted to have been savvy to fixed matches, either directly or through a convoluted game of collusion involving club officials.

Matches in Bangladesh are fixed less for the benefit of third-parties and more in an effort to appease officials who might be on friendly terms with other officials. This interpersonal relationship between club officials is often leveraged to meet the needs of one specific team with the promise of the other team being appeased at a later date or in the next league.

"There is often long ties among the club officials so when one is approached to give up full three points or one, he is ready to do it to keep their relationship intact," said one ex-player on condition of anonymity. Political power often also plays a role, especially if both clubs are 'controlled' by members of the same party. A high profile ex-national team player admitted that he was once advised to give-up a game at half-time to quench the thirst of the club officials.

"We were the out of the title race, but it was a crucial match for the opponents. The game was goalless at half-time, and in the dressing room, there was talk of

letting the match go. We eventually lost the match 1-0," he said. Officials related to the same game also admitted that there was a ploy to lose the game to throw the title-race into an interesting play-off based on the folly of political leaders who had large stakes in the club.

But it doesn't always have to come from the top. Often clubs target certain players who can help turn the result their way. A former national midfielder admitted that in his first stint as a coach, he found a player in his team engaging in such practices.

"We were playing a game and in the lead. With a few minutes left, my player while defending an attack, suddenly pulled up with cramp and let the striker through who scored. After the game we found that he had packed his bags and left the club. It was later revealed that he had received Tk 20,000 for his 'services.'" Recently, allegations of a similar nature has been bought against the foreign players who under-performed after being allegedly bribed by the opponents.

Team collusions often reach higher levels involving third parties or future points in return of current ones. Title contenders often take advantage of smaller clubs by offering to pay the due wages of their staff in exchange of points. Other times, the return gifts for points are even lesser. As one ex-professional says, "Sometimes a club gives up a match in return for trousers, practice-jerseys, or even just dinner at a Chinese restaurant."

Mid-table clubs also often meet to create a syndicate to ensure equal points among themselves when they play each other. Forming such syndicates is often an attempt to put a club or clubs outside the capital under the threat of relegation.

What is without doubt is that match-fixing has permeated to the absolute basic level of the sport to the point that it has internalised by each and every club who have embraced this as a basic and wholly acceptable practice. Part of the reason for this rampant spread has been the absolute reluctance of the game's governing body to take stern actions against perpetrators for engaging in actions that do not just bring the game into disrepute but also qualify as criminal offence in many instances.

The prevailing feeling is that match-fixing is a win-win situation for clubs and all, but in truth it shows a stark disrespect for the basic elemental point of sport — where two teams go up against each other in a battle of glorious uncertainty. Take that out and what are you left with?



Lazio win derby honours

REUTERS, Milan

Lazio splashed their way to a 3-2 derby win over AS Roma in atrocious conditions on Sunday, helped by a puddle of water which played a crucial part in their second goal.

Daniele De Rossi, given a rare start by Roma, was sent off seconds before halftime for punching Stefano Mauri in the face as they tussled for the ball in the penalty area and Mauri was also dismissed late in the game for a second yellow card.

Alexandre Pato missed a first-half penalty as Milan's brief revival ended with a 3-1 home defeat by fourth-placed Fiorentina, and third-placed Napoli scored three times in the last 15 minutes in a 4-2 win at Genoa.

Second-placed Inter Milan's run of 10 consecutive wins ended in a 3-2 defeat at Atalanta as they dropped four points behind leaders Juventus, who won 6-1 at Pescara on Saturday.

German Denis scored two second-half goals, including a penalty, for Atalanta to atone for scooping the ball over the goal from six metres in the first half.

Giacomo Bonaventura had given Atalanta a first-half lead and Fredy Guarin levelled from a free kick before Denis sprang into action with a seven-minute

brace. Rodrigo Palacio pulled one back with six minutes left.

Eighteen-year-old Argentine forward Paulo Dybala scored twice to give Palermo a 2-0 win over Sampdoria and hand the visitors their seventh consecutive league defeat.

Chievo and Udinese drew 2-2 after both scored in the last two minutes and Torino beat Bologna 1-0.

Juventus lead with 31 points from 12 games, followed by Inter (27), Napoli (26), Fiorentina (24) and Lazio (22).

Roma, who have the second best attack and joint worst defence in the league, got off to a flying start when Erik Lamela met Francesco Totti's corner with a diving header to score his eighth goal of the season.

Torrorial rain left puddles of water on the pitch, making it almost unplayable, and the conditions had a hand in Lazio's first two goals.

Antonio Candreva levelled in the 35th minute with a long-range free kick which flew straight at goalkeeper Mauro Goicoechea but slipped through his hands and into the net.

Ten minutes later, Hernanes sent a low cross into the area, the ball was slowed down by a puddle and fell perfectly for Miroslav Klose to score from close range for the Germany striker's seventh goal of the season.

Italy drop De Rossi

REUTERS, Milan

Midfielder Daniele De Rossi paid the price for being sent off in the Rome derby for punching an opponent as he was left out of the Italy squad for Wednesday's friendly against France.

Coach Cesare Prandelli did not immediately comment on his squad but he implements a strict code of ethics under which players are barred for misbehaving in club games.

AS Roma's De Rossi, who has struggled for a place in his club's starting line-up this season, was dismissed on Sunday in first half injury time against Lazio for punching Stefano Mauri in the face as the two tussled for the ball.

He was previously barred by Prandelli for a Euro 2012 qualifying match against Slovenia last year following an incident in a Champions League game.

RENEWED OPTIMISM for new season

ATIQUÉ ANAM



As the sixth edition of the professional football league, the Bangladesh Premier League, kicks off today with the match between defending champions Abahani and Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS), there is a new wave of enthusiasm and expectation among the organisers, clubs and players.

That enthusiasm; emanating from a willingness to compete in earnest, an effort to decentralise the game, a desire to nurture home-grown talents, and a tendency to compensate the players for what they are worth -- has certainly been channelled on to the ground. The Federation Cup, the curtain-raiser for the season, showcased the increasing quality and competitiveness of the game. If the Federation Cup is as a sign of things to come, the Premier League should be an exciting and entertaining footballing experience.

The league this time is down to nine teams which means there will be 16 round of matches for each team, unlike 20 last season, which should make it less exhaustive for the players, and more absorbing for the followers. BNS is home to seven of the teams while the remaining two will have their base in Feni and Gopalganj.

What should make the title race interesting is the fact that there are as many as five teams who are real contenders for the title. Federation Cup winners Sheikh Russel appear to be the strongest side on paper, but not far behind are Sheikh Sheikh Jamal DC who have a very balanced side. Four-time winners Abahani have the experience and the winning

habit which will make it difficult for others to wrestle away the title. Mohammedan SC have a rejuvenated squad and an array of specialist coaches. Team BJMC are the dark horses. With good foreign recruits, they might sneak in for the title.

Like the championship race, the battle to avoid relegation is expected to be a close-fought one as there are no whipping boys this time. Runners-up in previous two seasons Muktijoddha Sangsad, have been much weakened by the exodus of its star players, fallen giants Brothers Union, Arambagh KC and Feni SC -- any of these four might end up on the wrong side of the spectrum even if they retain the potential to upset the big boys on their day.

In terms of player impact there has been a sign of a shift this time with the Federation Cup. Zahid Hasan Emily, the national striker has ended years of domination of the foreigners in the goalscoring chart by scoring seven goals. Some of the other players of the national side and the U-23 side have been impressive as well, not to mention talented winger Zahid Hossain. But still the foreigners are expected to have a big say in scoring and ultimately deciding the title.

There have been changes at the coach's position too. Abahani have replaced their title-delivering coach Ali Akbar with his compatriot Ardeshir Pournimat who has a great understanding of the game from a technical point of view, but his coaching skills are yet to be tested. Sheikh Jamal have promoted Joseph Afusi from assistant to full coach. The Nigerian has been impressive in his first assignment in Federation Cup, but

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Only doubles good enough

REUTERS, Madrid



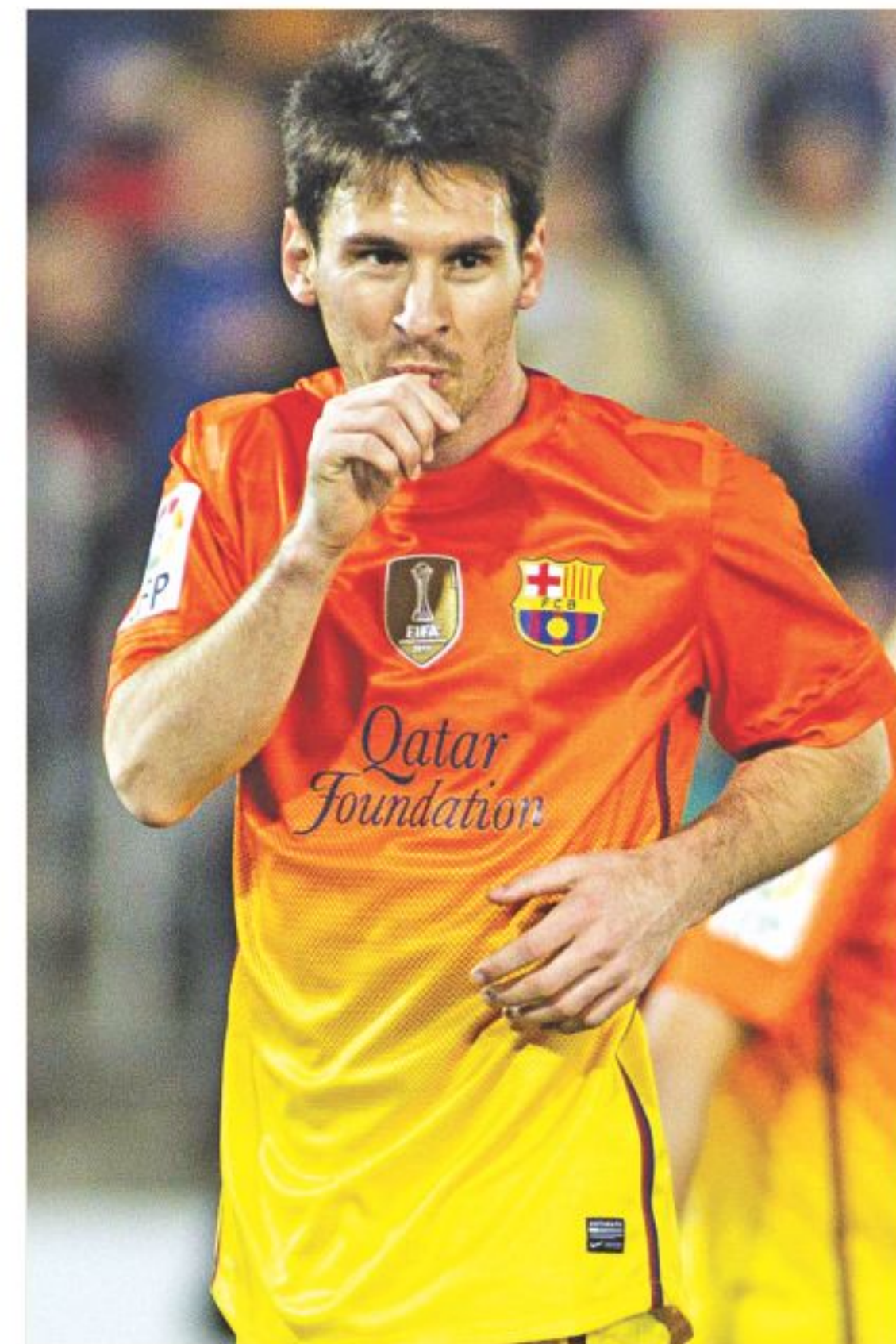
Not content with merely getting his name on the scoresheet, Barcelona's insatiable forward Lionel Messi has set the bar even higher for himself in La Liga this season by netting at least twice in each of the seven games he has scored.

The Argentine World Player of the Year grabbed his sixth double of the campaign in Sunday's 4-2 win at Real Mallorca to take his tally to a league-leading 15, including a hattrick at Deportivo Coruna last month.

The 25-year-old, who recently became a father for the first time and is favourite to claim a fourth consecutive World Player award when the winner is announced in January, has struck 76 times for club and country in 2012.

Sixty-four of those were for Barca and 12 for Argentina and he is closing in on the record for a calendar year of 85 set by German Gerd Mueller in 1972.

"Leo is constantly breaking records and his goal-scoring statistics are spectacular," Barca coach Tito Vilanova told a news conference after the Mallorca match.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi imitates a baby after scoring against Mallorca during their Primera Liga encounter at the Iberostar Stadium in Palma de Mallorca on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP



C'Ron to miss Gabon friendly

REUTERS, Lisbon

Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo will miss Wednesday's friendly against Gabon in Libreville after he sustained a cut above his left eye in Sunday's 2-1 La Liga win at Levante, the Portuguese Federation (FPF) said on Monday.

The FPF confirmed the injury would keep him out adding Valencia defender Joao Pereira and Dynamo Kiev midfielder Miguel Veloso had also pulled out of the squad because of injuries.

Ronaldo was caught by David Navarro's elbow in the opening minutes of the match in Valencia and after being patched up on the side of the pitch returned to score Real's 21st-minute opener.

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho said after the match Ronaldo's vision in both eyes was affected by the blow, which left one side of the Portuguese international's face covered in blood.