

What to WATCH

STAR Cricket

England v New Zealand

Second Test, Day 1

Live from 4:00pm

SET Max

Indian Premier League

Qualifier-2

Mumbai v Rajasthan

Live from 8:30pm

TEN Sports

Brussels Open

Semifinals

Live from 6:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live from 8:30pm

A long-awaited victory

26 years without winning the title, the signing of Eric Cantona by Sir Alex Ferguson proved to be the turning point for Man Utd. The Reds were back in superb form and victory was finally theirs for the taking.





1992-93

Barca to tour Middle East

AFP, Madrid

Lionel Messi and his Barcelona teammates will take part in a Middle Eastern tour in August that will include sporting workshops for both Palestinian and Israeli children.

"FC Barcelona, with the help of the Israeli government and the Palestinian National Authority, will organise in August the Barcelona Peace Tour, an initiative that will include two sporting events for peace in which children from Israel and Palestine will participate and in which all FC Barcelona players will be present," said a statement on the club's website.

"FC Barcelona has become a point of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. The Barcelona foundation has organised sporting events with the children and young people of both communities in the past and it will continue to do so in a persistent effort for peace, freedom and democracy."

The workshops will take place on the third and fourth of August.

Thailand win game, Philippines hearts

SPORTS REPORTER



In the end it was Thailand who won the battle of the two East Asian rivals in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers and all but ensured a berth in the finals from group B with an exciting 1-0 win over Philippines.

But it was the lower-ranked Philippines who won the hearts of a couple thousand spectators at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, where they gave their more fancied opponents a run for their money especially in the last 15 minutes when they created a number of scoring opportunities but could not translate those into goals due to the absence of a sharp shooter.

"I congratulate the Thai team for winning the match. But I'm proud of my team for the way they fought. We are unlucky that we could not

score at least two goals," remarked the Philippine coach Ernest Nierras after the pulsating game.

Philippines, who lost the last game between the two teams 5-1 two years ago, put up a much improved performance against Thailand. And it was due to the injection of American expats into the team this time around.

"The America-based players played a big role in our team. They are physically strong but tactically not. They are too straight in their approach and I had to change it to suit our style," said the Philippine coach. He also said that he will support Iran against Thailand on Saturday, fully aware of the fact that only a highly unexpected win for Iran can revive their grim prospects.

A physically and technically superior Thai side, who thrashed Bangladesh 9-0 in their first game, quite inexplicably decided to sit on

their 37th-minute lead by Nisa Romyen during the last quarter of the game.

And it almost proved costly for them as Philippines seized the opportunity to mount an all-out attack. Sitting on the stands one could easily feel the mental stress the Thai coach was going through. He was not only looking at his watch during the four-minute injury time, but was also complaining to the assistant referee about the time added on. The pressure got the better of him, so much so that when Thailand won a free-kick just outside the opponent's box he instructed his player to kick the ball at the corner flag instead of taking a shy at the goal.

If that was the odd moment of the game, the Philippine also showed their re in the 90th min-

ute when they won a free-kick on the edge of the box. Spectators are familiar with a wall being set up by the opponents in such a situation and interestingly the Philippine players formed a human wall in front of the Thai wall. However, it did not work as the shot flew over the bar.

Although Thailand won the on-field battle, the enterprising forays off the field was evenly balanced. When 150-odd Thai fans, sitting at the Club House, cheered their team by beating drums and waving flags, the Philippine section at the Western Gallery matched it throughout the match.

In the press box, an 11-member Thai team however won a walkover and who says the Bangladeshi journalists are second to none when it comes to showing patriotic zeal ahead of professionalism. Better watch the excited Thai journo before making a judgment.

Xavi's extra motivation

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez has admitted that beating Real Madrid boss Jose Mourinho has been an extra motivating factor for his side over the past three years.

Mourinho's exit from the Bernabeu at the end of the season was confirmed on Monday after a turbulent final season in which he clashed with a number of senior players and failed to win a major trophy.

"He is a controversial coach," Spanish international Xavi said.

"He has always been an extra motivation. I don't know if we will miss him or not.

"With Mourinho we have continued to win titles. In the three years he has been here he has taken the odd title away from us, but we have kept winning. This has to continue being our objective."

And despite Mourinho's relative success in winning the title last season and reaching three consecutive Champions League semi-finals, Xavi does not believe his departure will unduly influence Madrid next season.

"We are going to see what happens without Mourinho, but I am convinced that Madrid will continue winning titles with Mourinho or without Mourinho."

Meanwhile, Xavi was also asked about Brazilian international Neymar's potential arrival at Barca in time for next season.

The 21-year-old has been linked with a move to the Catalan capital for some time and with Barca representatives now in Brazil to close the deal it seems only a matter of time before he joins the Spanish champions.

"Neymar is a great player and he is said to be one of the world's stars. At the moment they are all rumours but he is a great player and I am sure he would adapt."



Nisa Romyen of Thailand is ecstatic after scoring the all-important goal against Philippines during their women's Asian Cup qualifier at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Finale of bitter rivalry

AFP, London



The all-German Champions League final between Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich on Saturday marks the culmination of an intensifying and increasingly bitter rivalry.

In one corner stand Bayern; German football royalty, and the Bundesliga's dominant force of the last 40 years.

In the other corner stand Dortmund, who have captured neutral hearts with their humble, wise-cracking coach, Jurgen Klopp, and a team committed to smothering their opponents with breathless attacking football.

Dortmund upset the balance of power in Germany by winning back-to-back Bundesliga titles in 2011 and 2012 - a run that included five straight wins over Bayern -- only for the Bavarians to storm back and win the league in record-breaking style this season.

Although they finished a huge 25 points behind Bayern in the

Bundesliga, Dortmund have demonstrated their pedigree in the Champions League, topping a group that contained Real Madrid, Manchester City and Ajax, and then routing Madrid again for good measure in the semi-finals.

But while the final at Wembley should represent a tussle for total supremacy in German football, Bayern's recent acquisition of Dortmund's star playmaker Mario Goetze suggests the odds remain stacked in their favour.

As well as triggering the 37 million euros (£31.7 million, \$47.8 million) release clause in Goetze's contract, Bayern are also expected to win the race to sign Dortmund striker Robert Lewandowski, who scored all four goals in his side's astonishing 4-1 blitz of Madrid in the semi-finals.

Klopp said the news of Goetze's imminent departure hit him "like a heart attack", but he takes solace in his club's more organic approach to transfer dealings.

"What can I say? If that's what Bayern wants... It's like James Bond --

except they are the other guy (the villain)," he said in an interview with British newspaper The Guardian this week.

"We are not a supermarket, but they want our players because they know we cannot pay them the same money. It could not be our way to do things like Real and Bayern and not think about taxes -- and let the next generation pick up our problems."

Klopp has also accused Bayern of aping Dortmund's high-octane 'gegenpressing' tactics, having likened the four-time European champions to a Chinese industrialist shamelessly copying the techniques of his rivals.

His comments prompted a stiff rebuke from Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes.

"When Jurgen one day gets the pleasure of coaching Bayern Munich or Real Madrid, he will realise what it means and how much it is a completely different world," he said.

"Bayern have existed for longer than Jurgen Klopp has been a coach and have always had their own style of playing."

Adriano signs new 4-year contract

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian international full-back Adriano Correia has signed a new four-year deal with Barcelona, the club confirmed on Wednesday.

"FC Barcelona have reached an agreement with Adriano Correia for the renovation of his contract for the next four seasons until June 30, 2017," said a statement on the club's website.

The 28-year-old joined Barca from Sevilla in 2010 for nearly 10 million euros (\$12.9m, £8.5m) and has deputised in a variety of positions throughout the past three seasons, making 105 appearances and scoring 10 goals in the process.

The new deal also maintains the release clause from his previous deal at 90 million euros.

Falcao wants to stay

AFP, Singapore



Atletico Madrid star Radamel Falcao insisted he had not been thinking about a blockbuster summer transfer as he hogged the limelight in a friendly win in Singapore on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old Colombian, reportedly courted by some of Europe's biggest clubs, came on to wild cheers in the second half of Atletico's 2-0 win over Singapore Selection.

Falcao was unable to find the net in his half-hour cameo, although he gave a sign of his sought-after goal-scoring prowess when he forced a fine save from Singapore's Hassan Sunny.

Earlier, Falcao told Britain's Sky Sports News that despite speculation linking him to Monaco and Chelsea, among others, his mind was not on changing clubs.

"I haven't thought about a move too much," Falcao said. "The reality is that I have three years left on my contract with Atletico."

"It's true that last season during the summer there was a lot of speculation with clubs being named as a possible destination, but the truth is that I've not thought about it."

"Of course, it depends on what the finan-

cial needs of my club are and what sort of efforts Atletico make to keep me. I've been trying not to think too much about the rumours of clubs being linked with me.

"Instead, I've been focusing on my objectives as a player and as a team member of Atletico Madrid."

In Wednesday's game, Raul Garcia scored Atletico's opener on 29 minutes and Diego Costa ensured the win after a goalmouth scramble three minutes from time.

Atletico arrived for the whistle-stop publicity visit on Monday, three days after beating arch-rivals Real Madrid in the Spanish Cup final and with two fixtures remaining in their La Liga season.

After the Singapore match, Atletico manager Diego Simeone shot down rumours that Falcao had already been sold to Monaco -- and said he'd be happy with anything that was good for the player.

"I have known Falcao since he was a young kid and anything that is good for Falcao, I will be happy. But of course I will be happy if he stays," Simeone told a press conference.

On Tuesday, Atletico chief executive Miguel Angel Gil-Marín said the club would leave any move up to Falcao, and admitted he wasn't sure whether the Colombian would still be at the club next season.