

## Deitz to coach BD women

SPORTS REPORTER

Australian Shane Alan Deitz joined as head coach of the Bangladesh Women's Cricket Team on Thursday. The 38-year old New South Wales wicketkeeper-batsman, who played 66 first-class matches in his 10-year career and had a coaching stint in New Zealand, will continue his job till the end of next year's ICC World Twenty20 in Bangladesh. The first task of the new coach will be overseeing the conditioning camp of the 29 selected women cricketers which starts from Saturday. The women's event of the mega tournament will begin on March 23 and will see 10 sides, divided into two groups, fight for four knock-out spots. Bangladesh have been placed in Group B alongside England, West Indies, India and Sri Lanka. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and Ireland are in Group A.

## Women GM Chess

SPORTS REPORTER

WFM Zakia Sultana and WIM Rani Hamid finished in 34th and 37th positions in the Women Grandmasters Chess Tournament at the close of the 11th and final round in Chennai, India yesterday. In the final round, Zakia drew against Indian WFM Bidhar Rutumbara while Rani lost to Pratyusha Bodda. Both Bangladeshi chess players earned six points each from eleven matches and their standings were decided through tiebreaker. Masuda Begum, Jaharana Haque Runu and Mahmuda Haque Chowdhury Moly finished 60th, 71st and 80th respectively.



PHOTO: AFP

Mexico forward Oribe Peralta (C) scores the third goal against New Zealand during their 2014 World Cup intercontinental play-off in Mexico City on Wednesday.

## Mexico thrash Kiwis

AFP, Mexico City



Mexico took a huge step toward next year's World Cup finals, shaking off recent bad form to pummel New Zealand 5-1 on Wednesday in their intercontinental play-off first leg.

Playing in Mexico City's imposing Azteca Stadium, El Tri delivered on their manager Miguel Herrera's pre-game call to take a big goal advantage into the second leg in New Zealand on November 20.

It was a huge turnaround for Mexico, who barely made it to the play-off after struggling in their North and Central America and Caribbean regional group, finishing fourth out of six teams.

After winning just twice and scoring a

paltry seven goals in 10 games within the CONCACAF final group, the Mexicans looked like a revived team as they came out charging against the All Whites.

Herrera, who last month became Mexico's fourth manager in six weeks, had voiced confidence that his team would win, even asking his squad to score at least three goals to take them closer to Brazil next year.

New Zealand, who made it to the 2010 World Cup after a memorable play-off victory against Bahrain, had hoped to keep it close but Mexico were the stronger side.

Goalkeeper Glen Moss made several valiant saves but Mexico's relentless attack was too much, with Santos forward Oribe Peralta leading the charge with a brace.

Defender Paul Aguilar opened the

score sheet when he volleyed home a ball deflected inside the Kiwi area in the 31st minute.

Fellow Club America striker Raul Jimenez followed eight minutes later with a header following a corner kick.

Peralta scored his first goal three minutes into the second half, tapping in a nifty low cross from Miguel Arturo Layun, who gave New Zealand all kinds of problems on the left wing.

Layun gave Peralta his second goal in the 80th minute, this time with a high cross that the forward headed out of Moss's reach into the left corner of the net.

Former Barcelona defender Rafael Marquez, the 34-year-old who now plays for Mexican club Leon, scored the fifth goal with a header from a corner kick in the 84th minute.

## 'Messi feeling low'

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi is feeling down after being sidelined for up to eight weeks with a leg injury, teammate Gerard Pique said in an interview published Thursday. Pique, who has been struggling himself with a groin strain, said the 26-year-old Argentine international had a serious injury.

"His case is different. He has had several injuries in a row and perhaps that has led him to lose confidence. I haven't had muscle problems like Leo's. Touch wood," Pique told Barcelona-based sports daily Mundo Deportivo.

"He is feeling low but that's normal. It is a serious injury. His spirits will improve in a matter of days but right now it is logical that he feels a certain psychological fatigue," the Barcelona defender said.

Asked whether it was possible to speak to Messi about the injury, Pique said: "When you get injured you need some space and that's the case with Leo who has had several injuries in a row."

## Dark horses meet

REUTERS



Belgium and Colombia are not usually considered heavyweights in world football yet their meeting on Thursday is arguably the most attractive of the friendlies being played this week.

Both teams qualified for the World Cup in style, sit proudly in the top five of the FIFA world rankings and will be among the eight seeds when the draw takes place in Brazil next month.

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari faces tormentors Honduras, Argentina and Ecuador meet in New Jersey, Italy host Germany in a heavyweight clash in Milan and England play an exciting Chile side at Wembley in matches featuring eight other finalists.

World and European champions Spain continue their games against former colonies on Saturday in Equatorial Guinea,

whose team include several players from the Spanish lower leagues.

Altogether, 17 of the 21 teams who have so far made sure of places at next year's finals in Brazil will be in action between Thursday and Saturday with only Iran, Costa Rica, Australia and Bosnia sitting out.

Belgium, blessed with an outstanding generation of talented players such as Eden Hazard and Marouane Fellaini, stormed through their qualifying group, winning eight and drawing two of their 10 games.

They have qualified for the World Cup for the first time since 2002 while Colombia, spearheaded by Radamel Falcao and ably backed by Jackson Martinez and Juan Cuadrado, will end a 16-year absence at the finals.

Italy and Germany, who strolled through their qualifying groups, met barely a year ago in the Euro 2012 semifinals, with Cesare Prandelli's side winning 2-1.

## Ibra has 'never played better'

AFP, Stockholm



Sweden's star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic has "never played better", he said on Wednesday, but warned that beating Portugal in the World Cup play-off would require an all-round team effort.

"I evolve all the time and even if I'm 32 now, I have the feeling that I keep improving and that I've never played this well," the Swedish captain said during a press conference at Stockholm's stadium Friends Arena.

"For that, one has to train hard, be mentally strong and have the experience I have after playing with fantastic players and clubs," he added. "I hope this can continue."

The two teams meet in Lisbon on Friday with the return in Stockholm next Tuesday.

Ibrahimovic is at the peak of his game both with the national team, for whom he has scored 11 goals in a year, and with Paris Saint-Germain, for whom he scored a hat trick in last Saturday's 3-1 victory over Nice.

Asked about his chances of winning his first Ballon d'Or for the European footballer of the year, he said he faced tough competition from the likes of Franck Ribery, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

"For me, Ribery has been great so far. He won all the competitions this year and played a central role in doing so. Then there's Messi, who I see as pure talent."

## Ozil travels for Italy friendly

AFP, Berlin

Germany playmaker Mesut Ozil travelled to Milan on Thursday with the rest of Joachim Loew's squad ahead of Friday's friendly match against Italy.

The Arsenal midfielder had stayed in London to recover from illness before joining up with his teammates in Munich on Wednesday.

He is now expected to train at Milan's San Siro stadium on Thursday before a decision is made on whether he starts in what is a repeat of the Euro 2012 semifinal, won 2-1 by Italy.

Ozil's Arsenal colleague Per Mertesacker misses the Italy game but will join up with the Germany squad in London on Saturday ahead of the friendly against England at Wembley next Tuesday.

## Ctg DSA post 11-0 win

SPORTS REPORTER

Chittagong DSA posted a massive 11-0 win over Kishoreganj in the Agrani Bank 24th National Youth Championship at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Joy slammed four goals followed by Shahidul Islam, who scored three while Nizamuddin and Khorshedur Rahman netted two goals each in the one-sided affair.

In the day's other matches, Sylhet defeated Kushtia 6-1 while Comilla and Feni played out a goalless draw. Satkhira were declared 2-0 winners after Mymensingh failed to turn up, said a press release yesterday.

## Junior Tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

All three Bangladeshis suffered defeats in the singles of the 27th Bangladesh International Junior Tennis Championship at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday.

In the second round games, Jamal Bhuiyan lost to fourth seed Allaf Karrem 7-5, 6-3, Akhter Hossain Rana lost to fifth seed Gaware Sahil of India 6-4, 6-1 and Sree Biplob Ram lost to sixth seed Nishangan Nadaraja of Sri Lanka 4-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Top-seeded Shamael Chaudry of England; Indians Syahputra, Paramveer Singh, Vishu Prasad, Alex Sonalika, Richi Agarwal, Ballekere Ravikumar, Prajwal Dev and Scemarinio Soemarno; Kazakhstan's Zhansultan Chembotayev and Bolat Mamyr; Ko Shao Min of Chinese Taipei and Katsuya Ikezoi of Japan all advanced to the third round after beating their respective opponents.

## Por-Swe tops the billing

AFP, Paris



The battle for the final four European places for the 2014 World Cup finals get underway on Friday with France and Portugal battling to join the likes of fellow continental heavyweights holders Spain and Germany in Brazil.

Portugal, led by superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, have the toughest play-off as they face Sweden, who have their own icon in Zlatan Ibrahimovic leading their line.

Former champions France travel to Kiev to play Ukraine and will be hoping if they qualify it will not be in the controversial manner they did for the 2010 finals where the decisive goal against Ireland in their play-off was set up by Thierry Henry's infamous handball.

The other two play-offs pit goal shy Greece against Romania while the fairytale could be provided by Iceland, bidding to become the smallest country to ever qualify for the finals, as they host 1998 semifinalists Croatia.

Many neutrals are disappointed that one of Ronaldo or Ibrahimovic will miss out on Brazil, but the PSG striker says his team deserve their place in the hat when the World Cup finals draw takes place on December 6 at Mata de Sao Joao.

"We have had tough matches during qualification but this has only stimulated us," said Ibrahimovic.

"Portugal are probably favourites given their team and their individuals, but we came second in a group featuring Germany and we deserve to go to Brazil more," added the Sweden skipper.

Ukraine will host a France side in danger of missing out on its first World Cup finals since 1994 and keen also to erase memories of their catastrophic appearance at the 2010 edition both on and off the pitch where the players ended up refusing to train.

## FIXTURES

**Friday**  
(1945GMT unless stated)  
Iceland v Croatia (1900), Greece v Romania, Portugal v Sweden, Ukraine v France



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