

What to WATCH DAY'S EVENT	STAR Sports 1 Australia v England First Test, Day 4 Live from 6:00am (Sunday) STAR Sports 4 English Premiership	Everton v Liverpool Live from 6:45pm Arsenal v Southampton Live from 9:00pm West Ham v Chelsea Live from 11:30pm	Primera Liga Almeria v Real Madrid Live from 1:00am (Sunday) Atletico Madrid v Getafe Live from 3:00am (Sunday)	STAR Sports HD 1 Primera Liga Barcelona v Granada Live from 9:00pm Serie A Verona v Chievo	Live from 11:00pm AC Milan v Genoa Live from 1:45am (Sunday) NEO Prime Bundesliga Hertha Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen	Live from 8:30pm Dortmund v Bayern Munich Live from 11:30pm
	Dhaka Premier League (Super League Round)	Gazi Tank v Sk Jamal Venue: Fatullah Stadium	Prime Doleshwar v MSC Venue: SBNS	Prime Bank v Kalabagan CA Venue: BKSP-2	Federation Cup Uttar Baridhara v Soccer Club, Feni Time: 3:45pm Rahmatganj v MSC, Time: 6:00pm	Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

'I am not obsessed with Ballon d'Or'

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo has insisted he is not obsessed with winning the Ballon d'Or for a second time in January despite a series of scintillating performances that have made him the strong favourite to win the award.

Ronaldo scored his fifth hat-trick of the season for club and country against Sweden in midweek to ensure Portugal will travel to next year's World Cup in Brazil and take his tally for the campaign to 31 goals in just 21 appearances.

FIFA's decision to extend the date for votes to be cast for the award from November 15 to November 29 is also expected to weigh heavily in Ronaldo's favour with Barcelona's Lionel Messi, winner of the award for the past four years, sidelined until the end of the year with a hamstring injury.

And the former Manchester United man, who was previously crowned World Player of the Year in 2008, refused to confirm rumours that he was considering not even attending the awards ceremony after reacting angrily to comments FIFA president Sepp Blatter made recently about his demeanour on the field.

"I don't think a lot about the Ballon d'Or. I know that it is handed out in January, but I

cannot say that I will not go," he told Spanish radio station COPE.

"I prefer to not say anything because things don't depend solely on me. I am not obsessed with the Ballon d'Or. We will see what happens."

However, worryingly for Madrid's rivals, Ronaldo insisted he is focusing on continuing to improve his staggering return of 225 goals in 216 games since joining the club over four years ago.

"In my head I always think I can improve. My ambition is always to be better. Perhaps you reach a level that is hard to beat, but I always think I can improve in everything.

"The best thing is that, right now, I am better prepared and you could say that I am in one of the best moments of my career. I have demonstrated a very high and good level and I hope to maintain that for the rest of my career."

And, having recently signed a new deal with the Spanish giants tying him to the club until 2018, the 28-year-old reiterated his desire to retire as a Madrid player.

"I don't think a lot about the future. I prefer to think more about the present. When the present is good, when you are happy and motivated to do things well then you are less worried about the future.

"But truthfully, right now, I feel like I want to end my career here because I feel very happy."



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo does warm-up stretches before a practice session at the Valdebebas training ground in Madrid on Friday.

Timo speaks out against criticism

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04 goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand has spoken out about the wave of criticism he faced in the wake of his Champions League blunder against Chelsea.

Hildebrand was left red-faced after his goal-kick was charged down by Chelsea's Samuel Eto'o and flew into the empty net for the first of two goals for the Cameroonian in the Blues' 3-0 win over Schalke at Stamford Bridge at the start of this month.

Hildebrand, 34, said the barrage of criticism that followed showed that little has changed in the public's reaction to on-pitch errors since the suicide of Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke in 2009 after a long battle with depression.

"The issue has already been discussed after the death of Robert Enke," Hildebrand, whose Schalke contract expires at the end of the season, told magazine 11Freunde.

"At that time, everyone pledged to be more considerate in their dealings with each other, but basically, the situation has only gotten worse.

"We're just trying to do the best possible job and sometimes mistakes happen."

Placente arrested

AFP, Berlin

Former Argentina international left-back Diego Placente has been arrested in Germany over tax fraud, German regional newspaper WAZ said Thursday.

The charges relate to Placente's four-year spell at Bayer Leverkusen from 2001-2005, when he was in his pomp.

The 36-year-old, who although not retired is currently without a club having left Argentinos Juniors at the end of last season, is under provisional detention said WAZ, citing the Cologne prosecutor.

Placente played 22 times for Argentina from 2000 to 2005, appeared in the Champions League final with Leverkusen in 2002 and won the French Ligue 1 title with Bordeaux in 2009.

He also played for Argentine giants River Plate and San Lorenzo as well as Spaniards Celta Vigo in a career that began in 1995.

Der Klassiker today

AFP, Berlin



Second-placed Borussia Dortmund host leaders Bayern Munich on Saturday in a Bundesliga top-of-the-table showdown with injuries having decimated the hosts' defence.

The rematch of last season's Champions League final between the Bundesliga's top sides -- billed as Germany's Clasico or Der Klassiker -- comes with Pep Guardiola's Bayern four points clear and Dortmund's defence in disarray.

Centre-back Mats Hummels and left-back Marcel Schmelzer have been ruled out after returning from international duty with injuries.

With centre-back Neven Subotic out for six months with torn ligaments and right-back Lukasz Piszczek only just back in training after surgery, Dortmund will face the European champions without their entire first-choice back four.

"It is a disaster," admitted Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke.

"The worst thing that can happen to you in football is to have to replace the entire back four.

"A defender, a midfielder or a striker can be replaced by every team, but a whole back four?"

Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp summed up

the situation when he said that "80 percent of my grey hairs were earned this week", but he has reacted by signing ex-Germany defender Manuel Friedrich, who had been released by Bayer Leverkusen, until the end of the campaign.

The 34-year-old is likely to partner Greece international Sokratis Papastathopoulos at centre-back, while youngster Erik Durm is expected to play at left-back with Kevin Grosskreutz on the right.

"We have had to put together a defence which has not yet played 20 games together, but we still have a lot of quality in the squad," said Klopp, while sporting director Michael Zorc has defiantly said Dortmund "won't raise the white flag to anyone".

Even with Bayern's France winger Franck Ribery ruled out with a fractured rib, the pressure is firmly on Dortmund.

Their defeat away to Wolfsburg a fortnight ago left them four points adrift, and if they are serious about bringing the Bundesliga trophy back to the Ruhr Valley, this is a match they must win.

The difference between the two squads is strength in depth with Guardiola able to call on Germany's Mario Goetze or Swiss star Xherdan Shaqiri to fill in for Ribery.

"It's just like it so often is with us: we have a good enough squad and will certainly have a decent team

on the pitch, whose goal will be to win there," said Bayern's Germany star Thomas Mueller.

Goetze, who is returning to Dortmund having left to join Bayern in the summer, will be making his first appearance at the Westfalenstadion in the red shirt.

The 21-year-old has said he has "no fear" and understands the passionate home supporters would rather see him playing for Borussia, but ex-Dortmund and Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has advised him "not to take throw-ins or corners" to stay away from the fans.

February 2010 was the last time Bayern beat Dortmund in the Bundesliga, but the Bavarians were victorious when it mattered most, beating the black and yellows in May's Champions League final.

Much has been made of Bayern's failure to beat Borussia in their previous six Bundesliga showdowns, but having gone 37 league matches and more than a year without defeat, Munich will be confident of extending their unbeaten Bundesliga run.

Certainly, Bayern want to again exert their authority over their rivals, who won back-to-back league titles in 2010/11 and 2011/12 before Bayern swept the treble of Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup last season.

Jurgen Klopp (L) and his injury laden Borussia Dortmund will be hosting Bayern Munich under the management of Pep Guardiola (R) at the Westfalenstadion today.

PHOTOS: AFP

Gerrard wants EPL glory

AFP, London



Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard heads into the Merseyside derby against Everton admitting there will be a "huge hole" in his career if he retires without winning the Premier League.

Gerrard has enjoyed a magnificent career with Liverpool and is already regarded as one of the club's all-time greats after almost single-handedly inspiring their 2005 Champions League final win over AC Milan.

The England midfielder cherishes the memory of his heroics that epic night in Istanbul and also a year later in the FA Cup final victory against West Ham.

But he knows the absence of a Premier League winners medal from his glittering CV is a major blemish.

After a surprisingly strong start to the season lifted Liverpool to second place, two points behind leaders Arsenal going into this weekend, Gerrard finds himself in with a chance of finally mounting a serious title challenge

And, speaking before Saturday's clash with hated city rivals Everton at Goodison Park, Gerrard made it clear he won't give up fighting for the crown.

"There'd be a hole missing in my career (without a title win) but I don't think I'd spend the rest of my life being irritated or annoyed or frustrated," Gerrard told ESPNFC.

"Since I broke into this team at 18 years of age I've tried to win the title but it hasn't happened.

"I've got a couple more chances and I'll continue to fight for it."

The 221st Merseyside derby will be Everton manager Roberto Martinez's first taste of one of English football's most frenetic fixtures.

Barca battling injuries

AFP, Madrid



Injury-ravaged Barcelona could be without seven first-team players as they look to consolidate their position at the top of La Liga at home to Granada on Saturday.

The Catalans will begin a run of eight games across three competitions before Christmas without four-time World Player of the Year Lionel Messi after he tore his left hamstring in Barca's last outing away to Real Betis a fortnight ago.

Barca's injury crisis has deepened since then as goalkeeper Victor Valdes will also miss the rest of the year after rupturing a calf muscle in Spain's 1-0 friendly defeat to South Africa in midweek.

Right-back Dani Alves also returned from international duty with a calf problem that will see him sidelined for up to 10 days, whilst Gerard Pique, Cesc Fabregas and Xavi Hernandez are doubts and Jordi Alba remains out injured.

Valdes' absence means that 38-year-

old stopper Jose Manuel Pinto will start in goal for the next six weeks.

And defender Javier Mascherano is confident Pinto's experience will be key in deputising for the on-form Valdes.

"The injuries to Victor and Leo are very important, but every player is able to play," he said on Thursday.

"The squad is very big. Valdes is important for what he represents and for the excellent level he has had until now. But we have to support Pinto, he has always responded when he has needed to.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday
Barcelona v Granada (1500), Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo (1700), Almeria v Real Madrid (1900), Atletico Madrid v Getafe (2100)

Sunday
Levante v Villarreal (1100), Rayo Vallecano v Espanyol (1600), Elche v Valencia (1800), Sevilla v Real Betis (2000)

Monday
Malaga v Athletic Bilbao (2100)

"He is a keeper with a lot of experience. We cannot forget that he has won two Copa del Reys and had very good performances."

With such a raft of injuries, coach Gerardo Martino may be forced to hand 21-year-old Sergi Roberto his first start of the season in midfield.

Neymar, meanwhile, will carry the significant burden of compensating for the loss of Messi in attack.

Should Barca slip up at the Camp Nou on league duty for the first time in over a year, Real Madrid will be confident of cutting their six-point deficit on the leaders when they travel to Almeria.

Los Blancos will be able to unleash the on-fire Cristiano Ronaldo fresh from his hat-trick that sealed Portugal's place in the World Cup with a 3-2 win over Sweden in midweek.

"It has been a very intense few days with our national teams, but we have two days in front of us to prepare in the best way possible for the next game," Ronaldo told Madrid's website.

"My only goal, like the whole dressing room, is to now work so that all Real Madrid fans continue to be excited by their team."

De Kruif, Koster asked to be patient

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national football team's Dutch coaches Lodewijk de Kruif and Rene Koster have been asked to keep their patience till the completion of the next parliamentary elections, when they met with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin at his residence in Gulshan yesterday.

The coaches have been idle since mid-October following the completion of the AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers. However, they have some plans regarding the national teams, which they are unable to implement due to the BFF's financial constraints, which also has left their wages unpaid for a couple of months.

"They have some plans with the national teams, plans which are in general followed across the world to develop football. But we have financial limitations at the moment to implement those plans," Salahuddin told reporters after the meeting.

"We have decided to place a budget for football to the government and we are working on that. The government is spending some Tk 300 to 400 crore on sports, then why will foot-

ball not get some funds?" Salahuddin said.

"They have asked us to be patient until February due to the current political situation and then they can finance again and continue with the programmes," said De Kruif. "Yes, we have some outstanding bills and they have to pay those because we have a strong contract in line with FIFA guidelines and they told us that they will honour it."

BFF vice president Tabith M Awal, who was also present at the meeting, said that they have assured the coaches that everything will happen in line with the contract. He, however, claimed that Rene Koster has one month's salary unpaid while there is no unpaid wages for De Kruif.

Apart from the financial issues, Tabith informed that the senior national team will play six international friendlies on the FIFA match-days from next January to June and then the Dutch coaches will prepare the age-group teams for the AFC U-22 Championship Qualifiers and the pre-qualifying round of 2016 Olympics.

Tabith also informed that the coaches will work with the national players during the Bangladesh Premier League and they have been asked to make a plan by coordinating the professional football league fixtures.