

BSPA awards on Jan 11

SPORTS REPORTER

Golfer Siddikur Rahman and cricketer Tamim Iqbal were declared the winners of the Walton-Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA) best sportsperson award (SA Mohsin Trophy) for 2011 and 2012 respectively during a press conference at the Bangabandhu National Stadium conference room yesterday. The awards will be given at a ceremony at the National Sports Council on January 11. An agreement was signed in this regard between BSPA and sponsors Walton Group.

Apart from Siddikur and Tamim, 16 other sportspeople, sports organisers and sponsors were selected for awards in different categories. BSPA president Hasan Ullah Khan Rana, general secretary Mostafa Mamun, Walton's additional director Iqbal Bin Anwar Don and sportsperson Zobera Rahman Linu were present among others at the programme.

Fan ban lifted in Italy

REUTERS, Rome

Inter Milan will have their hardcore "ultra" supporters present for Sunday's Milan derby after the Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) Court of Justice suspended a partial stadium closure while it carries out further investigations.

AS Roma will also have their most vocal fans present when they host Catania on Sunday after a similar suspension was lifted for the same reason.

"The Inter and Roma curvas have been reopened with an interim ordinance suspending the penalty and asks for further investigations to be carried out by the Federal Prosecutor's Office," wrote the FIGC on its website on Friday.

The FIGC had announced on Tuesday the two-match section closures following incidents of alleged offensive chanting by away fans during matches last weekend.

Inter were punished after "territorially discriminatory" chants against Napoli fans during their 4-2 defeat at the San Paolo Stadium on Sunday, leading to the closure of the Curva Nord section of the San Siro.

Roma were hit with the closure of the Curva Sud section of the Stadio Olimpico after alleged racist chanting directed at AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli in Monday's 2-2 draw at the San Siro, a claim disputed by the club.

Tourists to spend \$10b during WC

AFP, Brasilia

Foreign and Brazilian tourists are expected to spend \$10.4 billion during next year's World Cup, more than the public funds invested for staging the event, the Brazilian tourism board said Friday.

"These are important resources which fuel economic sectors of all Brazilian regions, from aviation to the informal economy," said Flavio Dino, president of state tourism board Embratur, in a statement titled "Mega-events are worth it."

He recalled that the Confederations Cup, a 15-day dry run last June for the World Cup, injected \$311 million in the Brazilian economy.

It was staged in the middle of massive nationwide street protests.



Liverpool striker Luis Suarez (R) scores one of his two goals against Cardiff City during their Premier League encounter at Anfield yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Suarez sends L'pool top Wenger feels for AVB

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool took over at the top of the Premier League table on Saturday, while Manchester City climbed to second place and Manchester United continued their recent revival.

With previous leaders Arsenal and Chelsea facing off at the Emirates Stadium on Monday, Liverpool took advantage with a 3-1 win over Cardiff City that took them a point above Arsene Wenger's side.

Manchester City followed their lead by winning 4-2 at Fulham to move above Arsenal on goal difference.

United, meanwhile, beat West Ham United 3-1 at Old Trafford to record a fourth consecutive victory after the shock of successive home defeats by Everton and Newcastle United.

At Anfield, Luis Suarez celebrated his new Liverpool contract by scoring twice against Cardiff to take his tally of league goals to 19.

Suarez opened his account in the 25th minute when he met Jordan Henderson's left-wing centre with a controlled volley that found the bot-

tom-left corner.

The Uruguayan teed up Raheem Sterling to tap home the second goal in the 42nd minute and three minutes later he made it 3-0, curling a glorious shot into the bottom-right corner from Henderson's back-heel.

Jordan Mutch replied for Cardiff with a 58th-minute header from a Peter Whittingham free-kick.

Manchester City let a 2-0 lead slip at Fulham, but late goals from Jesus Navas and James Milner saw them record a fifth win in their last six league games.

RESULTS

Crystal Palace 0 Newcastle 3 (Cabaye 25, Gabbidon 39-og, Ben Arfa 86-pen)
Fulham 2 (Richardson 50, Kompany 70-og)
Manchester City 4 (Toure 23, Kompany 43, Navas 78, Milner 83)
Liverpool 3 (Suarez 25, 45, Sterling 42) Cardiff 1 (Mutch 58)
Manchester United 3 (Welbeck 26, Januzaj 36, Young 72) West Ham 1 (Cole 81)
Stoke 2 (Adam 50, Crouch 70) Aston Villa 1 (Kozak 66)
Sunderland 0 Norwich 0
West Brom 1 (Vydra 86) Hull 1 (Livermore 28)

Yaya Toure put City ahead in the 23rd minute with the latest fine free-kick from his growing collection, before Vincent Kompany stabbed home the second shortly before half-time.

Kieran Richardson reduced the arrears early in the second period though, and Kompany inadvertently gifted Fulham an equaliser in the 70th minute when he somehow conspired to slice Sascha Riether's cross over recalled goalkeeper Joe Hart for an own goal.

However, David Silva freed fellow Spaniard Navas to restore City's advantage fourth from a magnificent Alvaro Negredo cross in the 83rd minute.

United moved to within five points of the Champions League places with a breezy win at home to West Ham.

Wayne Rooney returned to the United line-up after missing the midweek win at Stoke City in the League Cup with an unspecified injury and he teed up Danny Welbeck to give the hosts a 26th-minute lead.

Adnan Januzaj extended United's advantage 10 minutes later with his first goal at Old Trafford, skilfully skirting James Collins before bending home right-footed.

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger on Friday admitted he felt sorry for Andre Villas-Boas when he was sacked as manager of north London rivals Tottenham.

Tottenham used the Gareth Bale transfer cash to fund £107 million (\$175m) of new talent. However, trying to get all those new men to integrate proved in part Villas-Boas's downfall in the wake of the embarrassing 5-0 defeat at home to Liverpool on Sunday.

"You need time, yes," Wenger said. "Look, when I said to you at the beginning of the season that when you sign more than

three players you take a technical risk, you were all laughing at me, but it is a reality.

"If you look purely at the mathematical problem, yes it is a surprise, because he has the highest percentage rate of wins historically at the club.

"Is it an internal problem with the relationship with his chairman or with the board? I don't know. Is it an emotional reaction to a big defeat at home? I hope not because that would not be a good sign.

"I sympathise with everyone because you need to be a manager to know how much you suffer, you know how many sleepless nights are behind every manager and how much everybody wants to win.

"Of course you feel sympathy for people who lose their job."

Jose not bothered

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho is keeping his views on Ashley Cole's decision to join Arsenal players on their Christmas night out this week to himself, but he revealed on Friday the full-back would not face the Gunners on Monday.

Cole was photographed at the London venue where the Arsenal squad were celebrating with a fancy dress party.

And with Cole and his team-mates due to face the Gunners at the Emirates Stadium just a few days later, the incident inevitably raised eyebrows.

Mourinho, though, insisted he will keep his views to himself when quizzed about the night out although he confirmed Cole had not broken any club rules.

He said: "I have my opinion but I keep it for myself. It was a free day for them, so I'm not a father. I'm a manager.

"I can control what they do when they are with me. I cannot control what they do when they are not with me. I don't want to comment.

"I have my opinion, but I keep it to myself. I've not even given my opinion to Ashley Cole because I don't have to.

"It was his free day, his free night. The next morning we didn't train. We only trained in the afternoon, so I have no right to make a comment.

"I won't. I just have my opinion."

position to Cesar Azpilicueta.

And after confirming Azpilicueta has recovered from an injury scare, Mourinho made it clear Cole will once again be watching from the sidelines.

The manager said: "He won't be playing from the beginning, no. I play Branislav Ivanovic right-back and Azpilicueta left-back, and John Terry. I have to make a decision between Gary Cahill and David Luiz. From the beginning, Ashley is not playing.

"Unless... today is Friday, the game is Monday. Something can happen in between. Normally, I'll play Azpilicueta at left-back."

The meeting between Arsenal and Chelsea could determine who will top the Premier League over Christmas.

Mourinho's side will go into the game boosted by the League Cup victory over Arsene Wenger's team at the Emirates last October.

But the Chelsea manager insists that will count for little.

He said: "It is a different competition, different motivation, different responsibilities, and different players in some cases.

"But it's still Arsenal, still Chelsea, still a London derby, first playing third.

"It's a big match, for sure. It's a pity it's not tomorrow because I'm ready and waiting to play the game."

Mourinho once again voiced his frustration at his side's failings after the shock of the midweek League Cup defeat at Sunderland.

He said: "We know that we don't have the players with the qualities to be the killer who scores week after week, game after game, and to express in terms of numbers the quality of the football we are playing."

De Boer rules out Spurs move

REUTERS

Frank de Boer ruled out accepting the Tottenham Hotspur job again on Friday, saying he was satisfied with his post at Ajax Amsterdam.

"I'm very satisfied with the Ajax job," he told reporters at a media conference. "I'd only leave once there is no more challenge here."

Speculation has continued to place the former Dutch international on the list of candidates for the Spurs job after last weekend's departure of Andre Villas-Boas.

He had one day earlier said he would have been "honoured" by the interest from the Premier League club. "It means I have good standing. But I am staying at Ajax," he said after Thursday's 3-0 club win over amateurs IJsselmeervogels.

"Spurs are not a club I'm interested in moving to at the moment. But I think they are certainly a great club. Just as it was with Liverpool, it is to do with the timing. But I'm not finished at Ajax."

Messi can work on his fitness

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi has recovered fully from his thigh muscle injury and can begin work on his fitness although no date has yet been set for his return to action, the Argentine Football Association (AFA) said on Friday.

The Argentina captain was given the good news by team doctors at the AFA's training complex, which is on the city's outskirts, where he has been recuperating from the November 10 injury he suffered with Barcelona.

After the first stage of his recovery involving rest in Barcelona, the forward has now passed the second stage.

"The tests carried out today at the AFA facility have confirmed that Lionel Messi has overcome the clinical stage of his injury," read a statement on the AFA website.

"The player will begin next Monday with the third stage of his recovery process - physical preparation.

"He will do this in (his home town) Rosario under Barcelona physical trainer Elbio Paolorosso and members of the (Argentina) national team's medical staff."

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