

ITF U-14 tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh teams had a mixed day in the ITF U-14 Asian Tennis Championship in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday. The boys' team lost all their singles and doubles matches in the consolation place-deciders while the girls' team won their consolation place-deciders.

Hridoy Hasan and Naimul Islam Amiyo lost their singles matches against Sri Lankan and Pakistani counterparts respectively while the duo lost in the doubles against an Indonesian pair.

The girls' team comprising Afrana Islam Preetty and Popy Akter won their singles matches against Sri Lankan and Mongolian opponents, said a press release from the Bangladesh Tennis Federation.

Maria ignores request of waiter!

AFP, Melbourne

An Australian waiter's bold request for a "selfie" from Maria Sharapova has met with an icy response from the Russian world number three.

Sharapova admitted she was taken aback when her bill at a Melbourne cafe arrived together with the waiter's smartphone and a request for a photo, along with an autograph.

Sharapova, who was relaxing ahead of next week's Australian Open, duly took a picture -- not of herself, but of a man sitting nearby.

"I actually took a picture of the guy next to me. True story," she told journalists on Saturday.

Jamaica names Fraser-Pryce, Bolt as best

AFP, Kingston

Usain Bolt, the world's fastest man, and sprint queen Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, were named Jamaica's Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year on Friday.

The 27-year-old Bolt, who won his second IAAF World Championships sprint double title in Moscow in 2013, ended the Championships by anchoring a Jamaican quartet to the gold in the men's 4x100m relay.

Meanwhile, Fraser-Pryce, who had the best season of her career, won the sprint double in Moscow.

Both Bolt and Fraser-Pryce were last November named IAAF Male and Female Athletes of 2013.

Sammer's choice Ribery

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich sporting director Matthias Sammer on Friday insisted that the Bavarian club's French winger Franck Ribery deserves to win the Ballon d'Or having been "the most complete player" in 2013.

"I think that only he can win. And if he does so, he will be at the summit of Mount Olympus," said Sammer from Bayern's winter training camp in Doha, Qatar.

Ribery is part of a three-man shortlist along with Real Madrid and Portugal forward Cristiano Ronaldo, the favourite having scored 69 goals in 2013, and Barcelona and Argentina's Lionel Messi, who has won the award in the last four years.

The winner will be announced at a gala event in Zurich, Switzerland on Monday.

Pellegrini wants more

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini believes his side must improve if they are to reclaim the Premier League title this season.

City travel to Newcastle on Sunday looking to move back to the top of the Premier League, with current leaders Arsenal not playing until Monday.

They have improved on their early-season form which led them to away defeats at Cardiff, Aston Villa, Chelsea and Sunderland.

Now they are on an nine-game unbeaten run in the Premier League and are just one goal shy of their total for all competitions last season.

Nevertheless the Chilean boss called on his side to raise their game still further as the title race heats up.

"We are in a very good moment, but we are just in the middle of the season," he said.

"It will be a very close until the end of the year with four or five teams.

"I hope we can do better. It is very important to win titles, not to make mistakes in important games. That is why every game is a test for all of us, it doesn't matter against who we play."

And Pellegrini said proving City's strength in depth would be an important factor in their title bid.

"It is important for the whole squad to see we can change names and we can continue playing the same way."

City's local rivals Manchester United, the reigning champions, are currently 10 points behind them and 11 points off the lead but Pellegrini does not discount them in the race for the title.

"The major rivals are the teams that are very near," he said. "Arsenal sit top, one point on top of us and Chelsea is one point behind but we are absolutely sure Manchester United will continue fighting to the end, because they are used to doing it."

"Liverpool and Everton are teams that will continue fighting to the end, they play very well both teams so maybe five or six teams can fight for the title."

Pellegrini has no new injury concerns but Newcastle are set to be without several key players as they look to improve their woeful record against City.

The north-east club have lost their last nine games against City, a team they haven't beaten for more than eight years.

Their task this weekend is likely to be made harder by the absence of captain Fabricio Coloccini, who is out until late February with knee ligament damage, and fellow defender Mathieu Debuchy, who is suspended.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea winger Eden Hazard celebrates his opening goal of the Premier League match against Hull City at the KC Stadium yesterday.

Chelsea atop, Everton 4th

AFP, London

Eden Hazard and Fernando Torres scored two excellent goals as Chelsea won 2-0 at Hull City on Saturday to climb to the top of the Premier League table.

Hazard, who turned 23 on Tuesday, broke the deadlock early in the second period at the KC Stadium before Torres marked his 200th Premier League appearance with a late goal.

Victory moved Jose Mourinho's side into first place above former leaders Arsenal, who visit Aston Villa on Monday, and set them up nicely for next weekend's home game with Manchester United.

Everton climbed back into the Champions League places with a 2-0 victory at home to Norwich City.

RESULTS

Cardiff 0 **West Ham 2** (C.Cole 42, Noble 90)
Everton 2 (Barry 23, Mirallas 59) **Norwich 0**
Fulham 1 (Sidwell 52) **Sunderland 4** (Johnson 29, 69, 85-pen, Ki 41)
Hull 0 **Chelsea 2** (Hazard 56, Torres 87)
Southampton 1 (Lallana 66) **West Brom 0**
Tottenham 2 (Eriksen 50, Defoe 73) **Crystal Palace 0**

Gareth Barry put Everton ahead in the 23rd minute with a fine 20-yard shot that fizzed into the top-right corner, with Kevin Mirallas adding a free-kick shortly before the hour.

Tottenham Hotspur are a point behind Roberto Martinez's side in fifth place after beating Crystal Palace by the same score at White Hart Lane.

After Palace winger Jason Puncheon horribly miscued an early penalty,

Christian Eriksen broke the deadlock in the 50th minute from Emmanuel Adebayor's flick-on.

A day after his imminent move to Toronto FC was announced, Spurs striker Jermain Defoe was granted a warm reception after coming on a second-half substitute and he claimed a well-taken goal with 18 minutes remaining.

Adam Johnson scored the first hat-trick of his professional career as Sunderland won 4-1 at Fulham to climb off the foot of the table and close to within a point of safety.

Johnson teed up Sunderland's other goal, for Ki Sung-yueng, with Steve Sidwell replying for the hosts.

West Ham United spoil Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's first home game as Cardiff City manager as goals from Carlton Cole and Mark Noble gave Sam Allardyce's side a 2-0 win that took them out of the bottom three at their hosts' expense.

Agger out for a month

REUTERS

Liverpool defender Daniel Agger has been ruled out for up to four weeks with a calf injury, manager Brendan Rodgers said on Friday.

The Denmark centre back limped off 10 minutes from the end of their 2-0 FA Cup third-round victory over Oldham Athletic at Anfield on Sunday.

"Daniel will probably be out three to four weeks," Rodgers told a news conference. "Unfortunately he has picked up a calf problem so he will be out for a while."

There was better news for fourth-placed Liverpool on the injury front ahead of their Premier League trip to Stoke City on Sunday with centre back Mamadou Sakho set to return to the squad after a hamstring injury.

Striker Daniel Sturridge, who last featured in the Merseyside derby against Everton on Nov. 23, has also resumed training and will be assessed ahead of the weekend.

"Young Sakho trained today so he looks fine to be in the squad for the weekend," Rodgers added.

"We'll assess (Sturridge) over the next 24 hours. We don't need to rush him, we want to make sure he's going to be ready to make an impact in the second part of the season."

Barca slate prosecutor

AFP, Madrid

La Liga leaders Barcelona have criticised a public prosecutor for demanding that the courts investigate allegations of misappropriation of funds in their 57-million-euro (\$78 million, £47 million) signing of Brazilian star striker Neymar last year.

A member of the fan-owned club, Jordi Cases, lodged a complaint last month against its president Sandro Rosell alleging misappropriation of 40 million euros out of the total fee paid for Neymar.

The complaint accuses Rosell of misappropriation of funds because members do not know the "real destination" of 40 million euros supposedly paid to Neymar family business N&N, according to court documents.

Barcelona were subsequently asked to

deliver to the court the contracts which brought about Neymar's signing, as well as the club's accounts for the past three years.

However, prosecutor Jose Peralas said in a court filing on Friday that the contracts shown to the court contained conflicting details about what exactly the 40 million euros were paid for.

And he also asked the judge in the case to request the contracts lodged with football's governing body FIFA, as well as those signed off by Neymar's previous club Santos.

"FC Barcelona wants to express the severity of its anger towards the report released on Friday by the prosecutor for the National Audience regarding the signing of Neymar Da Silva Santos Junior," the club said in a statement on Saturday.

"The decision of the prosecutor creates doubts over an impeccable operation that allowed FC Barcelona, for 57 million euros, to get a player wanted by our competitors."



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery (C) fights for the ball with Mario Gotze (L) and Claudio Pizarro during a training session at the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence in Doha yesterday.

Suarez to keep his cool

AFP, London

Liverpool striker Luis Suarez insists he has finally learnt how to keep his explosive temper and cynical instincts under control.

Suarez has played a key role in Liverpool's emergence as surprise contenders for the Premier League title this season after surviving one of the darkest periods of his controversial career.

The Uruguay international has played only 15 league matches this term as he had to serve the remaining half of a 10-match ban for biting Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic in April.

The season before that the 26-year-old was banned for eight matches after being found guilty of racially abusing Manchester United's Patrice Evra.

He has also been accused of diving at times and earned widespread criticism for cynically conceding a penalty with a handball during the 2010 World Cup quarter-final against Ghana.

Suarez was sent off for the offence, but Ghana missed the penalty and Uruguay went on to win the tie.

But he has worked hard to keep his vola-

tile emotions in check of late, telling ESPN: "My temperament, attitude, desire and hunger when I am on the pitch has always been like this and will continue to be this way, but I now know I have to control it more."

"An example of this was about two weeks ago when I had an open shot at goal and hit the post and it rebounded close to my hand and I was about to go for it and then I stopped."

"If the same thing had happened two months ago I would have gone for it. These things stay with me but I tell you I am changing."

"I am improving my attitude on the pitch because I know I was wrong in the past and I was creating an image of myself I know wasn't me."

Securing a place in next season's Champions League is widely seen as vital to ensuring Suarez doesn't once again agitate for a move away from Anfield in the close-season.

He tried unsuccessfully to engineer a move to Arsenal before the start of the current campaign, angering Reds boss Brendan Rodgers in the process, but he has put that row behind him by scoring 20 Premier League goals already this term.

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