



Manchester United players (L-R) Phil Jones, Chris Smalling, Alexander Buttner, Shinji Kagawa and Javier Hernandez train in Carrington, Manchester yesterday ahead of their European clash against Bayern Munich. PHOTO: AFP

## Thorpe in ICU

AFP, Sydney

Australian swimming great Ian Thorpe is in intensive care in a Sydney hospital after contracting two potentially deadly infections following a series of shoulder operations, a report said Tuesday.

The 31-year-old five-time Olympic gold medallist fell ill after undergoing the operations at a hospital near his home in the Swiss town of Ronco sopra Ascona, said the Australian Associated Press (AAP) news agency.

Thorpe returned to Sydney where he is receiving treatment at an intensive care ward, it reported. "It's serious but it's not life-threatening," Thorpe's manager James Erskine told AAP. "He's contracted two forms of bugs in hospital... He's quite sick but that's the situation."

Erskine dismissed reports that the swimmer could lose the use of his arm but said it was unlikely Thorpe would swim competitively again.

"From a competitive point of view - he will not be swimming competitively I don't think," he said.

Thorpe is Australia's most successful Olympian with five gold medals at the 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Games, with his success attributed partly to his abnormally large feet and hands.

He became the first person to win six gold medals at one world championships, in 2001, among 11 world titles overall -- along with 10

## Attack v defence

Abahani-Mohammedan semifinal today

SPORTS REPORTER



Perennial foes Abahani and Mohammedan will renew their rivalry for the fourth time this season when they face off in the second semifinal of the Modhumoti Bank Independence Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Abahani beat Mohammedan twice and drew once in three previous meetings this season.

Although the battle of country's two giants hardly draws the spectators nowadays, it still means something on the pitch where adrenalin among the rival players run high, the referee's decision is greeted with vicious collective protest, brawls pop up at the drop of a hat and more importantly the level of intensity rises to some heights. But it is more like a pale imitation of a great rivalry that captivated the whole nation till the late 1980s.

With holders Sheikh Russel, favour-

ites Sheikh Jamal and former champions Muktijoddha already being eliminated from the tournament, the winners of the two bitter rivals will certainly take the pole position to claim the Fourth Independence Cup title come Saturday's final against Feni Soccer Club.

Abahani are desperate to make it to the final, which they could not make in any domestic tournament since the 2011 Super Cup.

Mohammedan however have enjoyed better recent track records than Abahani in tournaments; the Black and Whites won the Super Cup last year.

"We have been playing better in the tournament than the League and if we can play our own game, we can leave the field with our heads held high," said Mohammedan captain Zahid Hasan Emily on the eve of the semifinal.

New signing Nigerian defender Ubom Henry and midfielder Zongo Oussen from Burkina Faso are providing fresh hopes for Mohammedan, who have now a solid defence marshalled by towering defenders

Henry and Cameroonian Bayback. The inclusion of Zongo made Mohammedan's midfield more effective though they still have problems up front.

"With the inclusion of new players, we are now in a better position. But I think it will be a competitive and 50-50 match," said Mohammedan's Portuguese coach Rui Capella Batista.

Abahani, on the other hand, have showed improved performance in the tournament with an organised attack, good ball possession and crisp passing. The attacking zone has been bolstered with the inclusion of Portuguese forward Leonildo Soares, who showed his striking prowess with a brace on his debut in the quarterfinal against Muktijoddha.

It is expected to be a battle between Abahani's striking foreign trio versus Mohammedan's fortified defence.

"If we can carry the momentum of our last match to the semifinal we will win, though Mohammedan is always a tough opponent for Abahani," said

## Guardiola bets on Rooney fitness

AFP, Munich



Bayern Munich's Pep Guardiola says he is sure Manchester United's Wayne Rooney will face the holders in their Champions League quarter-final, second leg after the England striker trained on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old Rooney missed United's 4-0 win at Newcastle United on Saturday due to a toe injury, sparking fears that he could be forced to sit out Wednesday's return leg at Munich's Allianz Arena.

However, he took part in a light workout at United's Carrington training centre on Tuesday morning prior to the squad's departure for Germany, appearing to have no adverse reaction and to be in good spirits.

"Good training session with the lads ahead of the Bayern Munich match," he wrote on his Facebook page.

"It's a massive game for us against a top side but we'll be going in confident and looking to progress into the semi-finals."

Patrice Evra (knee), Ryan Giggs (groin) and Ashley Young (hand) also took part despite injury concerns.

Bayern coach Guardiola is positive Rooney will play against the European champions with the Munich tie delicately poised after last Tuesday's 1-1 draw in the first leg at Manchester's Old Trafford.

"He will play, I am 100 percent sure and I am willing to bet a large glass of beer on it," the Spaniard quipped during Tuesday's press conference in Munich.

"This is one of the best players I've seen play and the big players do not want to miss this type of game."

Rooney's presence in Munich will be a key factor for United with Netherlands forward Robin van Persie sidelined with a sprained knee and Juan Mata cup-tied.

Bayern have a few concerns of their own with Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger and Spain's Javi Martinez both suspended, while attacking midfielder Thiago Alcantara is injured.

Winless in their last three matches, the Bavarian giants suffered their first Bundesliga defeat in 18 months when they were beaten 1-0 at Augsburg on Saturday.

Having taken charge in June, Guardiola admits failing to reach the Champions League's semi-finals with a defeat to Manchester United would be a mistake on his behalf.

European champions Bayern have already picked up three titles in Guardiola's nine months in charge, including securing the Bundesliga title with a record seven games to spare and remain 20 points clear in the table.

"If we don't reach the semi-finals, that is a big mistake by the coach," he said referring to himself.

"I'm aware of that, I knew it from the beginning after Bayern won the treble last season."

## Niaz sharing second spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Niaz Murshed was still sharing the second position in the DYTMR Raja Dr. Nazrin Shah KL International Open Chess Championship despite drawing the sixth round game at the Olympic Sports Hotel in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia yesterday.

Niaz played against GM Bitoon Richard of the Philippines to raise his points to 4.5 from six matches and shared the second position along with five others.

FM Fahad Rahman beat IM Borsos Bogdan of Ukraine to raise his collection to 3 points from six matches while Anisuzzaman Jewel was with 2 points.

## BFF official beaten up by BU fan

SPORTS REPORTER

An executive of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) was physically assaulted by a Brothers Union fan as the official barred him from entering the ground from gallery during the Independence Cup semifinal against Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The Brothers fan, who was identified as Harun, was nabbed by police and then released following the club's general secretary's interference.

## Brazilians against the WC

REUTERS, Sao Paulo



Less than half of Brazilians favor the nation's hosting of the World Cup in June, with a majority in the soccer-crazed nation believing that the tournament will do more harm than good, a poll showed on Tuesday.

Just 48 percent of Brazilians support hosting the event, down from 52 percent in February and dropping below 50 percent for the first time, a survey by Datafolha found, though the company said the difference was within its margin of error.

The approval rate has dropped from a high of 79 percent in November 2008, a year after Brazil was selected, amid cost overruns, deadly construction accidents and concern that delays in building stadiums and

airports in 12 cities could embarrass the country on the international stage.

Indeed, the number of Brazilians opposed to hosting the 32-nation event is also rising, with 41 percent against it now, up from 38 percent in February and 10 percent in 2008, the survey by the local pollster showed.

The result is surprising for the soccer-loving nation that has won five World Cup titles, more than any other country. Brazil last hosted the tournament in 1950.

Datafolha said 55 percent of those surveyed believe the games will bring more harm than benefit to the country, compared to 36 percent who believe the event will bring more benefit.

In a similar survey in June, in the midst of massive street protests calling for better transportation and less corruption, 44 percent said the games would bring more harm than

## Shine on you Pele diamond

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Pele has unveiled an unusual line of diamonds using strands of the football legend's own hair, local media reported Monday.

The man many regard as the sport's best player of all time presented the ultimate superfan souvenir in Sao Paulo ahead of the World Cup that Brazil will host in two months.

The diamonds are made using a high-pressure, high-temperature process during which strands of Pele's hair are charred.

The limited edition includes 1,283 diamonds -- one for each of the champ's goals.

The gems cost about \$7,500 a piece and come in a gold-plated box featuring Pele -- born Edson Arantes do Nascimento -- on the pitch scoring a goal.

Never far from shop talk, Pele, who is 73, was asked at the event about Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo and Argentina's Lionel Messi.

"From our point of view on football, Messi is the more complete one. He creates (opportunities) and scores goals," Pele said.

"Cristiano is (like) our (late) Vava, our Ronaldo. He is a Dada Maravilha," he added, referring to three Brazilian big scorers.

## All eyes on Atletico

AFP, Madrid



Diego Simeone has called on the Atletico Madrid fans to contribute to a memorable night as they host Barcelona in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final on Wednesday.

The tie is level at 1-1 as Neymar's equaliser cancelled out Diego's incredible strike for Atletico to ensure there has still not been a winner in four meetings between the sides so far this season.

Simeone was seen imploring the crowd at the Vicente Calderon to raise the noise levels as Atletico held on for a 1-0 win at home to Villarreal on Saturday to maintain their place at the top of La Liga.

And the Argentine wants more of the same to help his side get over the line against four-time European champions Barca.

"The atmosphere was rocking and that gives you more energy and strength to compete. When people ask 'why do we support Atleti,' it is for this. We are passionate, humble, work

hard and if we have to suffer, we suffer."

Both Simeone and Barca boss Gerardo Martino lamented how much the first leg had taken out of their respective squads as Barca also struggled to a 3-1 win over bottom side Real Betis on Saturday.

Barcelona will also be affected by key injuries to Victor Valdes and Gerard Pique as they travel to the Spanish capital.

However, Marc Bartra -- who will deputise for Pique at the heart of the Barca defence -- believes they have already shown their ability to overcome injuries this season having lost Lionel Messi for two months earlier in the campaign.

"We have had bad luck with injuries, but this group has shown that it can overcome delicate situations. We need to do that again and do our best," he told the club's website.

"I am very positive, we are going to the Calderon full of hope that we can go through."

Atletico could also be without top scorer Diego Costa as he limped off with a hamstring injury after just half an hour of the first leg last week.



Former national cricketers Athar Ali Khan (L), Khaled Masud (C) and Akram Khan answer questions at a press conference announcing the second season of the Clemon Indoor University Cricket Championship 2014 at a city hotel yesterday. Organised by the three cricketers organisation 3 CRICS and sponsored by Akij Food and Beverages Ltd, the tournament will start from April 10 and feature 40 public and private universities. PHOTO: COURTESY