

Hockey icons roll back the years

SPORTS REPORTER

A host of stars from yesteryears took up their hockey sticks for an exhibition match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday, organised to celebrate the Victory Day of Bangladesh.

Hockey icons including Abdus Sadek, Bashir Ahmed, Jummon Lusai, Jamil Parvez Lulu, Ehsan Nammi, Mahbub Harun, Anvir Adil Khan, Mamunur Rashid and Rafiqul Islam Kamal entertained the crowd as if they were young again and had never quit the game they loved so much.

The entertaining affair – between Federation XI and President's XI – was witnessed, among others, by the visiting president of the International Hockey Federation, Leandro Negre.

Khaza Rahmatullah, the general secretary of Bangladesh Hockey Federation, scored a hat-trick as Federation XI won the match 6-4, even though the result hardly mattered. The getting together and taking to the turf was what was most pleasing for these hockey icons.

Bashir Ahmed, who last played a friendly match in 1988 on grass field after calling time in 1976, said he enjoyed every moment of the match.

"I was invited to the Bangabhaban for the public greeting held by President on the occasion of victory day, but I chose to come here to play hockey which I love most," said Bashir during the interval of the match.

"Playing hockey always makes me happy and I am enjoying this special day as I brought my two sons with me," said former Bangladesh coach Mahbub Haroon.

Gobinathan Krishnamurti, the coach of the Bangladesh national team, also participated in the match. The Malaysian informed that veterans of Malaysian hockey play such matches on weekends.



International Hockey Federation president Leandro Negre stands before former hockey stars, who played an exhibition match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium on the occasion of the Victory Day yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Barkley lifts Everton

AFP, Liverpool



Ross Barkley produced a sublime solo strike as Everton cruised to a 3-1 win over struggling QPR at Goodison Park on Monday.

Barkley's first goal of an injury-hit campaign was well worth the wait as the England midfielder broke the deadlock with a 20-yard thunderbolt after a driving run from inside his own half.

The 21-year-old's moment of magic once again prompted comparisons with former England great Paul Gascoigne and proved the catalyst for Roberto Martinez's side to secure their first win in four Premier League matches.

Kevin Mirallas doubled their lead before half-time and Steven Naismith added the third, with Bobby Zamora's late goal offering little consolation for outclassed QPR.

Everton had the added pleasure of moving above Merseyside rivals Liverpool into 10th place, while QPR remain in the relegation zone after losing their ninth successive away game in all competitions.

The only worry for Everton was a late injury to Mirallas that saw the Belgium winger carried off on a stretcher.

Martinez had made three changes from the Toffees team beaten by Manchester City, with Naismith back after a hamstring injury and Barkley and Aiden McGeady also starting.

All three switches turned out to be inspired moves by the Everton boss.

Martinez's side were soon in complete control and Naismith had a half-volley blocked from Seamus Coleman's cross before Mirallas drove a powerful effort narrowly over from the edge of the penalty area.

Everton's dominance was finally rewarded in the 33rd minute thanks to Barkley's brilliance.

Taking possession just inside his own half, Barkley strode forward with pace and purpose and played a one-two with Romelu Lukaku before unleashing a rising left-foot drive that took a slight deflection off QPR's Mauricio Isla as it rocketed into the roof of Robert Green's net.

The hosts pressed home their advantage two minutes before half-time when Mirallas whipped in a free-kick that took a huge deflection off Eduardo Vargas's head and flashed into the far corner past the wrong-footed Green.

McGeady curled a good effort wide just before the interval, but Everton didn't have to wait long for their third goal as Naismith struck in the 53rd minute.

QPR's defending was suicidal as Green started a comical sequence by slicing a clearance that barely made it outside his area where Richard Dunne made a hash of controlling the high ball.



Everton midfielder Ross Barkley (C) scores the opening goal against Queens Park Rangers during their Premier League encounter at Goodison Park on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Henry calls it quits

AFP, Paris



French striker Thierry Henry said Tuesday he was retiring from football after two decades and will become a TV analyst for Sky Sports in England.

"After 20 years in the game I have decided to retire from professional football," Henry said in a statement on his Facebook page.

Henry, 37, a world and European champion with France, and the scorer of 228 goals with Arsenal including 175 English Premier League goals for the club, finished his playing career at New York Red Bulls just days ago.

Henry first made his mark at French club Monaco before moving to Italian giants Juventus.

But the bulk of his career was spent at Arsenal under Wenger, who brought him to north London in 1999.

He was a crucial part of the 2003-2004 "Invincibles" team alongside fellow Frenchman Patrick Vieira, which went

unbeaten as it marauded to the Premier League title.

In England, Henry won the Premier League twice and the FA Cup three times.

He completed his playing career in the United States, playing for the New York Red Bulls in the MLS but could not prevent them being eliminated in the semi-finals of the playoffs this season.

Henry will also be remembered for a blatant handball in a 2009 World Cup qualifying playoff against the Republic of Ireland which led to the decisive goal for France and a ticket to the 2010 finals.

His last international game was during the 2010 World Cup when he came on as a second-half substitute in a 2-1 loss to hosts South Africa as France were dumped out of a tournament which had been a fiasco for the 1998 World Cup winners.

Capped 123 times for France, he scored a national record 51 goals during his international career which began with a 2-1 win over South Africa in October 1997.

He scored 411 goals during his career.

Pope sides with Rome

INTERNET

The tiny emirate of Qatar hosting the World Cup is one thing, but the Vatican – officially the world's smallest country – hosting the Olympics?

Pope Francis wants exactly that to happen in 2024. A top cardinal has confirmed that the Vatican has backed Rome's attempts to win hosting rights to the Games in 10 years' time, and believes that the Vatican should be one of the host venues.

So serious is the Supreme Pontiff that he is reportedly holding talks with the Italian Olympic Committee later this week.

Ronaldo vows big things

AFP, Miami

Brazilian football legend Ronaldo is promising great things for the Fort Lauderdale Strikers after becoming part owner of the North American Soccer League club.

"I will be very involved with the management of the team and have already started to make introductions that will certainly help us to turn the Strikers into a global powerhouse," Ronaldo said in a statement last week, when his ownership stake was announced.

"There are no doubts the beautiful game is growing exponentially in the United States, and I guarantee you that the NASL will play a key role in the rise of professional soccer here."

The NASL, now a second-tier league behind Major League Soccer, enjoyed its heyday in the 1970s.

Neymar voted for Messi

INTERNET

Neymar has revealed who he voted for to win the Ballon d'Or, with Lionel Messi his first pick ahead of Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Brazil international was made captain of his country in September and is therefore able to vote for the first time. And he did so by putting Messi's arch-rival at second place.

Barcelona teammate Javier Mascherano took Neymar's third place vote after a series of impressive performances for the Catalan giants at centre back last season.

Neymar's votes were revealed in a teaser clip for an interview with Brazil news outlet Globo.

Pirlo named Italy's best

AFP, Milan



Juventus midfielder Andrea Pirlo claimed Serie A's player of the year award for the third consecutive year during a gala event on Monday organised by the Association of Italian Footballers.

The 34-year-old playmaker celebrated alongside former Juve handler Antonio Conte, who picked up the best coach of the year award after leading the Bianconeri to their third consecutive Serie A title last season before quitting to become Italy's national team coach.

"It's always a pleasure to win this award," said Pirlo, one of several Juve stars to be named among the Serie A team of the year.

Juventus won their 30th league title last season with an unprecedented 102 points and reached the semifinals of the Europa League.

Pirlo has scored only twice in seven games for the Italian champions but missed the first six weeks of the season due to injury.

However it has already been a remarkable season so far for Pirlo, who joined Juventus three seasons ago after spending a decade with fallen Serie A giants AC Milan.

Mancini off the mark

AFP, Milan



Roberto Mancini claimed his first win as Inter Milan coach following his return to the club after goals from Mateo Kovacic and Andrea Ranocchia gave them a 2-0 victory over Serie A strugglers Chievo on Monday.

Mancini, who spent four successful years with the Nerazzurri from 2004-2008, took over in time for the Milan derby last month but after a 1-1 draw the 50-year-old was handed a reality check following defeats to Roma (4-2) and Udinese (2-1).

Mancini, who aims to end Inter's two-year absence from the Champions League with a third-place finish this season, saw his side move up one place to 11th to close the gap on Lazio, who presently occupy that third spot, to just six points – although it was a far from straightforward affair at the Bentegodi Stadium.

Inter had to rely on the heroics of Samir Handanovic throughout a one-sided first half that saw Chievo, fourth from bottom but unbeaten in their past five games, test the Slovenian 'keeper on several occasions.

Handanovic saved Inter's blushes inside 10 minutes when Alberto Paloschi pounced on a mis-hit pass only to be denied from point-blank range.

Kovacic broke the deadlock nine minutes later when he seized on a poor clearance by Alessandro Gamberini to beat Benjamin Bizzarri for his first goal in over two months.

But Handanovic came to the rescue again, palming away a Riccardo Meggiorini overhead kick, while Kovacic suffered two horrendous tackles inside the space of four minutes which earned Bostjan Cesar and Meggiorini a yellow card each.

Handanovic was almost caught out again on the cusp of half-time, when a Gennaro Sardo cross from the right byline bounced off post and crossbar and came off the face of Sardo at the back post.



বাংলাদেশের ঐতিহ্যবাহী জেলা নেত্রকোণায়
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১২৩ ছোট বাজার সড়ক, নেত্রকোণা।

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