



The Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne and the Hagley Oval in Christchurch will welcome back the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand after a gap of 23 years with flamboyant opening ceremonies today.



PHOTOS: COURTESY

Thunder down under

ICC Cricket World Cup opening ceremony today

STAR SPORT DESK



Australia and New Zealand are ready to welcome back the ICC Cricket World Cup after a gap of 23 years. Much has changed over the years but the exuberance of people down under for the sport has not and it is expected to be the toast of Thursday night.

With 14 teams and countless fans waiting with bated breath, Melbourne will join Christchurch in officially kick-starting the 11th edition of cricket's most coveted tournament -- two days before the first ball is bowled.

From the razzmatazz of music and brilliance of fireworks to David Warner boxing a kangaroo -- a symbol of Australia's sporting culture -- no stone is being left unturned in either Melbourne or Christchurch. A chance to showcase their splendour before cricketing battles take over, both cities -- 2,400 kilometres apart -- are ready to welcome the world with open arms.

As a city, Melbourne has been well-known to host spectacular ceremonies ahead of international sporting events. The city of over four million was the first in the southern hemisphere to host the Olympics -- in 1956. More recently, it

hosted the 2006 Commonwealth Games and welcomes tennis and F1 superstars each year as well.

As such, many feel the red carpet for sportspersons is never really rolled back here. On Thursday, it would be the turn of cricketers -- both present and former -- to walk under the spotlight.

Adding to the festivities would be local artists between 2:30 pm and 5:30 pm Bangladesh time.

Over at Christchurch, the celebrations are expected to be every bit as splendid at

At an estimated 30 million dollars, the 2011 World Cup opening ceremony in Dhaka was the most expensive in cricket's history

Christchurch's North Hagley Park. While weathermen have predicted a rather gloomy sky, there would hardly be anything dreary on the ground.

The third-most populated city in New Zealand, Christchurch may be a much smaller cousin of Melbourne, with a population of just over 367,700. What it lacks in number though, the city in the southern islands of the country is expected to make up in sheer spirit.

The main event -- which begins from 2:00 pm Bangladesh time -- will

put New Zealand's culture and love for cricket to the fore. The event will commence with a cultural welcome produced in association with Ngai Tahu, one of the original settlers. A live stage show will follow that will feature a special video appearance by all-time greats from New Zealand sport as part of a celebration showcasing an unrivalled history.

The momentous event will be capped off with extravagant fireworks displays, one that locals would not have witnessed here before. While alcohol is not permitted here, according to New Zealand's tourism website -- an exciting party towards the end will end the grand event.

The biggest challenge for Melbourne and Christchurch though, won't be thrilling fans. Bad weather and logistics too won't be a daunting concern. What would be, however, is providing it all under an impregnable security blanket.

Overall though, the ICC World Cup opening ceremonies would be a chance for both cities to blend their rich culture with the zeal with which cricket is watched and played down under. While opening ceremonies at large are more about pomp and splendour, expect Thursday's events in both cities to be more about a general euphoria of getting the World Cup home.

Messi to help '1 in 11' in Bangladesh

STAR SPORT DESK

The FC Barcelona Foundation, Unicef and Reach Out To Asia (Rota) had last month presented the '1 in 11' campaign to offer educational opportunities to at-risk children in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal and they will now raise money through independent donations as well as via an art auction at London's Sotheby's auction house today.

The auction will be featuring donated works by 17 renowned artists, including Takashi Murakami and Damien Hirst. Murakami and Hirst have created specially commissioned works of art featuring Lionel Messi, the Barcelona superstar and Unicef goodwill ambassador Serena Williams are offering their images and knowledge to the campaign.

'Don't bring a dinosaur from mountains'

In the last part of a two-part interview with *The Daily Star's* Atique Anam and Anisur Rahman, Bangladesh football team's coach Lodewijk de Kruif spoke elaborately about his plans with the national team and made suggestions about the development of the game.

DS: You will be back in mid-March ahead of the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers. What are you looking forward to when you come back?

LDK: We worked very hard in the last two years and now we have a good national team. The important thing now for BFF is to decide whether they start from the scratch again or take the good work ahead. Mr Salahuddin is trying to do things. But there are still a lot of things to do. There are 170 million people in the country but only 30/35 players in the reckoning for the senior side. So we have a problem there.

DS: But you have to work with what you have. How do you overcome this problem?

LDK: I gave Salahuddin a list of where to start from. I'm already a little bit anxious about the AFC U-23 Qualifiers because we face Uzbekistan, Syria and India. The former two teams are very good and have fantastic players. So this is a big challenge.

DS: But since you are supposed to come only twelve days before the tournament, how will you be able to prepare for the challenge given you have to find some new players for the tournament?

LDK: We have Titu (assistant coach) and Kaiser (trainer) on the ground and they've done a tremendous job so far. For me, it's a situation of coming into the country and going out of it, watch a few matches and scout players. I don't want to sit here and work permanently because of my family and my family business back home. Maybe I can come every month for two weeks.

DS: But is it an ideal situation to be coaching this way; i.e. instructing over the internet or telephone and can BFF even afford that?

LDK: I think it's possible. I will watch matches every month and scout from there. Before my assignments I will run my camp. I think with more financial certainty, BFF can afford the plane tickets; it won't be a big problem.

DS: But only success will determine everything in the end. How challenging do you think it will be to succeed?

LDK: For me it's simple, if they can't fulfill that list, success won't come. You have to have a good academy, good coaching; development of the game throughout the country. In two years in this country, I've only seen Dhaka and Sylhet. I did not see Chittagong, I did not see Cox's Bazar, I did not see Khulna. Why?

DS: You said you would be scouting for players of Bangladeshi origin in Europe. Do you have any one under your radar?

LDK: There is an under-19 player with Bengali parents at Newcastle United and an under-17 player with Bengali parents at Cardiff City FC. They are playing in the youth teams. If we can have two or three players like that then that will make some change. Look at where Jamal Bhuiyan was two years ago and where he is now.

DS: What are the other things that you sug-

gested?

LDK: The first thing is to educate your coaches like in Europe, not like the AFC standards. We need to co-operate with KNVB (my football federation) and they are willing to do that. When I visit BKSP in Sylhet, I see they play 4-4-2; then I feel we have a problem because I play 4-3-3 and I want to bring those boys up in 4-3-3 style. The 4-4-2 is not for these boys, it's for the English boys and the Scandinavians, and all



those 'trees'.

DS: You mean something like the successful Belgian model where a single system in all the academies and even across professional leagues?

LDK: Yes, I think you have to always play in the same system even though you have to teach all the systems, because they have to recognise all the systems.

DS: But the modern systems of football were already introduced by some of the coaches like Maruful (Haque), (Shafiqul Islam) Manik and (Joseph) Afusi, even before you came here. Don't you think they deserve some credit?

LDK: I cannot speak about Maruf or Manik because I don't know them well. The local coaches must understand what style they should be implementing. Give coaches from Bangladesh the chance to develop with training, the chance at the club level to implement. Don't bring 'dinosaurs' from foreign countries at club level; that won't help football.

DS: But dinosaurs like Fabio Capello or Trapattoni are still doing well.

LDK: They are 75, but they develop every year. They go to countries and adapt. I won't complain if Mr Salahuddin says he wants to get Trapattoni; don't bring a dinosaur somewhere from the mountains.

DS: What if you don't continue after the March assignment? Where do you suggest BFF should be looking for?

LDK: I told Salahuddin, if we cannot go through, go for another coach. But don't bring a guy from Norway; don't bring a guy from England. Bring a guy from my area; Netherlands, Spain, France or Germany because of the football philosophy, the educational background and the approach of coaches from those places.

Fed Cup finally from Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER



The country's football season finally gets underway on Sunday through holding of the Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The new season is starting roughly six-and-half months later after the end of the 2013-14 season.

The curtain-raising tournament was supposed to begin in the third week of December last year, but the organising committee postponed it twice due to the extension of the players' transfers and the deferment of Bangabandhu Gold Cup, which was held from January 29 to February 8.

Eleven Bangladesh Premier League sides and one Bangladesh Championship League club, split into four groups, will compete in the prestigious tournament, which was last held in December 2013 and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club clinched the title beating Muktiyoddha Sangsad. The groupings of the tournament will be held at the BFF House today.

BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy informed that they would start the professional football league soon after the completion of the Federation Cup as they would have to accommodate both domestic and international schedules in a short period of time.

Balotelli breaks duck

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool assistant manager Colin Pascoe said Mario Balotelli's long-awaited first Premier League goal for the Reds could kickstart the

striker's spluttering Anfield career.

Balotelli came off the bench to net a dramatic winner seven minutes from time in Tuesday's 3-2 victory as Brendan Rodgers' side boosted their hopes of a top-four finish.

It was the Italy international's first goal for Liverpool in 13 league games, and his first in the English top flight since he scored for Manchester City against Wigan in 2012.

Pascoe hopes Balotelli's struggles will now become a thing of the past and that the enigmatic 24-year-old, who had previously scored only twice in all competitions this season, can take confidence from the goal.

"I hope it can be a springboard, he is training hard," Pascoe said. "It's testament to him that's he kept going and got his

reward. It was great movement from Mario in the six-yard box and a good finish."

The Reds had twice led through Lazar Markovic and a Steven Gerrard penalty, only to be pegged back by goals from Tottenham's Harry Kane and Mousa Dembele.

However, Balotelli came off the bench to strike the decisive blow and secure the points against one of Liverpool's rivals for a Champions League spot.

Liverpool now lie seventh in the table, one place behind Spurs and only three points off the all-important top four.

"The last couple of weeks Mario's been ill," Pascoe added. "And he has had some knocks on his foot and he couldn't get his

boot on. So it's great that he scored the winner

"To get a winner at Anfield, he is immensely happy."

Pascoe also revealed that Liverpool captain Gerrard was withdrawn in the second half as a preventative measure because of a slight hamstring problem.



Arsenal win but suffer twin injury blows

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger said he was concerned about the fitness of Alexis Sanchez and Aaron Ramsey after the Arsenal stars suffered injuries in his side's 2-1 win over Leicester.

Wenger lamented what looks like a third hamstring injury of the season for Ramsey as the Welsh midfielder went off just nine minutes after coming on as a second half substitute.

He was also critical of heavy Leicester tackling that saw Chile winger Sanchez taken off with a knock following a clash with Matthew Upson at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

"I don't know (the extent of the injury) but it is not good news," Wenger said of Ramsey. "He's had a recurrence now of a few injuries."

"Sanchez had a knock with his knee and I don't think he was himself. From the moment he got his knock, he was never comfortable. I don't know how long he'll be out. It was a heavy tackle, yes."

First-half goals from Laurent Koscielny and Theo Walcott gave Arsenal what Wenger

described as an "important" response to Saturday's derby defeat to Tottenham, and kept them right in the middle of a tight race for the top four.

Arsenal overcame an impressive Leicester start with Koscielny side-footing in from a corner on 27 minutes, before Walcott volleyed home after 41 following Mesut Ozil's powerful parried effort.

Despite that lead, they lost energy in the second half, and Wenger put it down to the effects of last week's north London derby.

"The Spurs defeat was a bit in the head and, especially second half, in the legs. I have seen Tottenham has lost 3-2 to Liverpool as well in the final minutes. It was a very intense game," he said.

Wenger also backed Leicester, who previously had to deny reports that they sacked manager Nigel Pearson, to stay in the Premier League despite their position at rock bottom.

"When you see the way they (Leicester) play football, it is a surprise they are bottom of the league and want to get rid of their manager."

"If they keep quiet, don't panic, they will survive, because they are one of the better sides we have played."



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