

## CURACAO HIRE KLUIVERT

Former Dutch striker Patrick Kluivert will act as an advisor to the Caribbean island of Curacao for their opening World Cup qualifiers next month but has turned down an offer to be coach -- for now. The 38-year-old, who was a Champions League winner with Ajax Amsterdam, will assist preparations for the two-legged preliminary round against Montserrat after signing a six month deal. He will help put the team together and train with Dutch-based players as well as identify new talent. -- REUTERS



## AFC U-23 C'SHIP QUALIFIERS 37 called up for camp

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday called up 37 players for the preliminary camp for AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers, to be held in Dhaka from March 27 to 31.

Among those called up, the largest number (10) comes from Abahani while there are seven players from Sheikh Russel KC, five from Sheikh Jamal DC, four each from Mohammedan SC and Muktijoddha Sangsad, two each from Brothers Union and Rahmatganj MFS and one each from Team BJMC and Farashganj SC. The surprise inclusion is an 18-year-old BKSP student named Masud Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, who was earlier called up in trial for U-19 national team in 2013.

Assistant coach of the national team, Saiful Bari Titu, who will start the camp with these 37 players in Savar BKSP on March 10, informed that he has called up the players based on their performance in the recently concluded Federation Cup and also considering the prospects for future senior national team. Out of the 37 players, 12 are believed to be defenders and five goalkeepers while the rest of the players are midfielders and forwards, informed Titu.

Head coach Lodewijk de Kruijff, who is currently in Netherlands, is expected to take charge of the squad within a couple of days of the start of the camp.

Hosts Bangladesh, pitted in Group E, will start their AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers campaign with the game against Syria on March 27 before taking on Uzbekistan on March 29 and India on March 31.



Bangladesh hockey officially entered the 'blue-turf era' yesterday as the final round of the First Security Islami Bank National School Championship got underway at the newly-laid turf of the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium. Here players of the Keramatia High School and Nawab Habibullah School fight it out in one of the matches of the opening day.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## NAT'L SCHOOL HOCKEY Final round underway

SPORTS REPORTER

Al Hikma Muslim Academy made a good start in the final round of the First Security Islami Bank National School Hockey Championship beating Rafiquddin Memorial High School by 3-0 goals in the opening match on the newly-laid blue turf of the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday. Sagar struck twice while Tofail scored the other goal for Al Hikma Academy.

In the other matches of the day, Keramatia High School beat Nawab Habibullah School 3-1, Khonjanpur High School beat Comilla High School 2-0 while Aided High School and Jessore BAF Shahn High School played out a goalless draw.

A total of 32 teams, who have qualified from amongst 120 schools of 11 zones and were split into eight groups, will compete in round-robin league format. Top teams from each of the groups will advance to the quarterfinals.

## Cisse, Evans banned Rodgers wants silverware

AFP, London



Newcastle United striker Papiss Cisse and Manchester United defender Jonny Evans have been banned for seven and six matches respectively for spitting at each other, the Football Association announced on Saturday.

The punishments follow an incident that occurred between the pair during the first half of United's 1-0 win over Newcastle at St James' Park in the Premier League on Wednesday.

Cisse accepted his charge on Thursday, but Evans contested his charge and his case was heard on Friday. Cisse has been hit with a longer ban due to a previous suspension this season for elbowing Everton's Seamus Coleman.

"Both players were charged in relation to an alleged breach of FA Rule E1[a] in that in or around the 38th minute of the fixture they spat at each other," the FA said in a statement on its website.

"Mr Cisse accepted the charge and his suspension consists of six matches, which is the standard penalty for this offence, with an additional one match as he has previously accepted a violent conduct charge this season."

"Mr Evans denied the charge but it was found proven following an Independent Regulatory Commission hearing on Friday, resulting in a six-match suspension."

Both bans begin with immediate effect. The incident occurred following a tangle between the players near the halfway line, with Evans seeming to spit towards the ground and Cisse appearing to react by spitting at the United defender's neck.

Referee Anthony Taylor did not take action against either player, but footage of the incident was reviewed by a three-man panel of former elite referees, who all agreed that both players should have been sent off.

In a statement, Northern Ireland international Evans categorically declared: "I did not spit at Papiss Cisse." His claim was supported by United manager Louis van Gaal.

But Senegal striker Cisse accepted his punishment and issued a public apology for his behaviour.

AFP, London



Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers has challenged his players to turn their scintillating current form into silverware ahead of Sunday's FA Cup quarterfinal at home to second-tier Blackburn Rovers.

After a poor start to the campaign, Liverpool have rediscovered their swagger in 2015, winning seven of their last eight Premier League games to revitalise their push for Champions League qualification.

Only Wolfsburg, who have taken 16 points from a possible 18, can rival Liverpool's return of 23 points from a possible 27 since the turn of the year in Europe's top five leagues and with a Wembley semifinal within touching distance, Rodgers wants his side to make their form count.

"The first year here was about integration," he told his pre-match press conference. "The second-year objective was to get in the Champions League. This season I felt we had the depth to challenge for trophies."

"If we can arrive in the top four and win a trophy, that will be success for us this season."

Rodgers has yet to lift a trophy in his two and a half years at Anfield and it is three years since Liverpool last won something.

They visited Wembley twice in the space of three months in 2012, beating Cardiff City on penalties in the League Cup final and then losing 2-1 to Chelsea in the FA Cup final.

Rodgers succeeded Kenny Dalglish less than a month after that loss to Chelsea and having steered Liverpool to the brink of last season's league title, his shrewd mid-season adjustments -- notably the introduction of a 3-4-2-1 formation -- have got the club back on the trophy trail.

With Chelsea, Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur among the teams to have fallen by the wayside already

and with only one of Manchester United and Arsenal guaranteed to make the semifinals, Liverpool's fans could be forgiven for thinking the stars are aligning for their team.

Underpinning the club's quest for an eighth FA Cup is the desire to give Steven Gerrard a glorious send-off in the final, which falls on his 35th birthday, before his departure for the Los Angeles Galaxy.

The Liverpool captain has missed Liverpool's last six games with a hamstring problem, but returned to training this week and could be in contention to feature against Gary Bowyer's Blackburn.

Liverpool are unbeaten at Anfield since November 8 and Blackburn have not won there in 11 visits, but it is a ground that holds fond memories for the Lancashire club, who are currently 10th in the Championship.

It was there, in May 1995, that a team bankrolled by late former owner Jack Walker pipped Manchester United to the Premier League title despite a nerve-jangling 2-1 loss to Liverpool on the season's final day.

## PDB retain vball title

SPORTS REPORTER

The Power Development Board (PDB) retained the National Bank Limited Metropolis Premier Division Volleyball title beating Titas Club by 22-25, 26-24, 25-12, 18-16 points in a keenly contested final at the Volleyball Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

It was the third consecutive and fourth overall premier league crown for the PDB.

Harjit Biswas of PDB was adjudged the best attacker of the league. Bhasha of Titas Club was adjudged the best setter and Farid of Bangladesh Police was named the best defender of the league.

## Rooney eyes FA Cup glory

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney is hoping to finally get his hands on the FA Cup this season as Manchester United prepare to face Arsenal in the quarterfinals on Monday.

The United and England captain has won Premier League titles, the League Cup and the Champions League in his career but the FA Cup has so far eluded him.

"We have an FA Cup quarterfinal against Arsenal on Monday and that is massive for us," said Rooney, who saw his boyhood favourites Everton win the trophy back in 1995 by defeating United in the final.

"We haven't been to a final for a few years, we want to try to win that game and we are looking forward to that."

## Parma given 5m-euro loan

AFP, Parma

The Italian professional football league (Lega) on Friday voted in favour of loaning Parma five million euros in a bid to help the cash-strapped Serie A side see out the remainder of the season.

Parma will now be in a position to host Atalanta in the league on Sunday, their unpaid players having refused to play their last two league games, at Genoa away and at home to Udinese.

The Lega said Parma should play until March 19, when a bankruptcy hearing is due to decide whether the club can continue operating. If it rules no, Parma will not complete its remaining fixtures.

Carlo Tavecchio, the president of the Italian football federation (FIGC), was scheduled to travel to Parma later Friday to meet the club's players and explain to them the financing plan.

Sixteen of the 20 Serie A teams voted in favour of the plan. There were three abstentions, from Roma, Napoli and Sassuolo, while Cesena voted against.

The club is said to be 100 million euros (\$113 million) in debt with some 17 million euros owed to the tax authorities.

Serie A has already docked the squad a penalty point as result of delays in meeting players' salaries.



JONNY EVANS (L) and PAPISS CISSE

## Giggs slams rift rumours

AFP, London



Manchester United assistant manager Ryan Giggs rubbish talk of a rift in his relationship with Old Trafford boss Louis van Gaal on Friday.

Reports of issues between the pair emerged when former United midfielder Giggs gave a muted response to Ashley Young's dramatic late winner against Newcastle on Wednesday.

While van Gaal was jubilant, Giggs remained stone-faced while his manager celebrated at St James' Park.

However, the 41-year-old dismissed talk of tension and praised United boss Van Gaal.

"It's coming to that part of the season where the media will look at any little thing to make it more exciting and more interesting," Giggs told BBC Sport.

"Me and Louis have a great working relationship. He's given me a massive opportunity and I'm taking it. I'm working as hard as I can and I'm enjoying every minute of it."

Giggs was handed the reins at Old Trafford for the last four games of last season after David Moyes' exit before being given the role of assistant alongside van Gaal when he joined the club in May.

## Pooling of TV rights demanded

AFP, Madrid



Spanish football authorities on Friday demanded the government enforce centralised bidding for broadcast rights for first and second division matches to defend smaller clubs against their richer top-league rivals.

To stop the top two Spanish clubs, Real Madrid and Barcelona, sucking in all the money from broadcasting contracts, they want broadcasters to be obliged to bid collectively rather than striking deals with each club individually.

A joint commission of Spain's Professional Football League and the Royal Football

Federation called in a statement for "a model for the centralised sale and fair distribution of broadcast rights of the Liga and second division, and solidarity with amateur football".

It called on Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's conservative government to approve legislation to that effect "urgently".

European leagues were alarmed last month when a bidding war for rights to English Premier League matches drove up the price by 70 percent, with two broadcasters paying the equivalent of 7.0 billion euros (\$7.7 billion) between them.

Leagues in other European countries fear that a disproportionate flow of cash to the Premier will lead to the best players from their clubs abandoning them for England.

"We trust that Spanish government leaders

will be able to realise that this is very important so that Spanish football can continue being competitive," said the president of Spain's Professional Football League, Javier Tebas, on Thursday.

Spanish clubs currently negotiate the rights to their matches individually with broadcasters, giving an advantage to Real Madrid and Barcelona, the two most successful Spanish sides and the best-known worldwide.

Barcelona for example last month sold the broadcast rights to its matches next season to Spanish company Telefonica for 140 million euros, according to media reports.

The commission wants clubs to be obliged to cede the rights to the League for it to negotiate with broadcasters on their behalf.

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