

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

GTV & STAR SPORTS 1
Asia Cup
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
Live from 7:30pm

STAR SPORTS 4
Premier League
Man Utd v Arsenal
Live from 8:00pm
Bundesliga
Dortmund v Hoffenheim

Live from 10:30pm
Frankfurt v Schalke
Live from 12:30am (Monday)

TEN ACTION
Capital One Cup Final
Liverpool v Man City
Live from 10:00pm

Asia Cup
Venue: SBNCs

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
Time: 7:30pm

Better batting the key

Bangladesh take on Sri Lanka today

BISHWAJIT ROY

Even in the shortest version of the game there are small battles within the big battle. It will be interesting to see how a misfiring Sri Lankan line-up batting handles Bangladesh's pace bowling sensation Mustafizur Rahman in their first real test in the Asia Cup T20 encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur this evening. The 20-year old left-arm paceman Mustafizur might not have risen to expectations against India in the opening match after all the pre-tournament hype, but he got his rhythm back against UAE with his venomous cutters.

The young paceman from Satkhira has already attracted the spotlight in world cricket during his brief career, but the Lankans are yet to face his cutters and slower balls. However it's not all about Mustafizur; the Lankans will face a tough challenge against the whole Bangladesh bowling unit in the crucial game for both teams who have each won one match against the UAE. Taskin Ahmed has so far showed great intensity, generating good pace, and he will just need some luck. Al-Amin Hossain has proven that he has got the ability to provide early breakthroughs and captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza also provided evidence that his experience can be handy and so far support from the slow bowlers has also been satisfactory.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's batting continues to stumble. Their T20 slide had begun in July last year

against Pakistan at home, followed by their poor showing against New Zealand and India this year. So the Tigers can cash in on the Lankans' fragile batting. On the other hand, Sri Lanka also have a very good bowling attack led by captain Lasith Malinga and the Bangladesh batting faltered in the first two games despite all their preparations. In this context, it will be a battle of two wobbling batting sides and it may well come down to who can bat better, or bat less poorly.

Bangladesh won their second match against UAE by a convincing margin but it was courtesy of their bowling. Bangladesh need to show a much bigger improvement in their batting if they want to neutralise a versatile Sri Lankan bowling attack.

Mohammad Mithun might have scored some runs in the last match but apart from some sporadic good shots the right-hander was not impressive at all; Soumya Sarkar has frustratingly been searching for a way to be successful and contributions from the man in form, Sabbir Rahman, will not be enough if not backed by firepower from the experienced brigade.

But most importantly, the Bangladesh think-tank must look at their batting plan and think whether they are putting the available resources to best possible use.

Sri Lanka so far have a hundred per cent winning record against Bangladesh as they have won all four previous T20s. The Tigers however can prove that they are not the same team that they were in February 2014 when these sides last met in this format, only if their batting clicks.



Bangladesh's batting will have to deliver the goods if they are to pose a challenge against Sri Lanka in today's crucial tie of the Asia Cup T20 in Mirpur. PHOTO: STAR

New-look booters start camp today

SPORTS REPORTER

A total of 19 players out of 22 yesterday reported to manager Satyajit Das Rupu for the training camp ahead of next month's World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifier against Jordan. The new-look provisional squad, which has excluded seven of the regular players for indiscipline and a few more due to poor performance, will be based in Dhaka for the camp starting from today.

Bangladesh, already out of reckoning for the World Cup Qualifiers' third round, will play their last match away to Jordan on March 24, after a preparatory friendly match away to UAE on March 18. A new coach in Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno and a new manager in Rupu have been installed for the job.

However, it will not be the first time that Moreno will work with these players as the Spaniard led the Olympic side, which has 14 players in this squad, to third-place finish in the South Asian Games earlier this month. The players said they cannot do anything about who is chosen as coach, but understanding will not be an issue due to their prior experience.

"We will have to work with whoever is appointed coach by the BFF. This coach [Moreno] knows everyone since he worked as deputy to Maruful Haque. The more we practise, the better will be the understanding among the players," felt striker Shakhawat Hossain Rony.

Another senior player, Wali Faisal, believes that in absence of some of the regular players, the new ones will have to take the responsibility. "Team management decided that we will have to go there without seven players which we cannot do anything about. We can still get a good result with proper training in the time that is still we have. Our target will be to get a draw away," said the experienced left-back.

Like the coach, manager Rupu has also been handed the charge for this one-off match. The veteran footballer-turned-manager vowed that he would not tolerate any indiscipline in his time. "This is a new responsibility for me. I will show zero tolerance regarding disciplinary issues," said Rupu.

The Abahani manager, however, maintains that there is still chance for some of the players, who have been left out for indiscipline, to get into the squad. "If the team management thinks that any of the players have satisfied with their replies, they can still be considered for the final squad," said Rupu.

Ulloa delivers for Foxes

AFP, London

Substitute Leonardo Ulloa scored an 89th-minute winner as Leicester City breathed fresh life into their improbable Premier League title challenge by edging Norwich City 1-0 on Saturday.

Two weeks on from a last-gasp 2-1 defeat at Arsenal, Leicester were on course to drop points again until Ulloa tapped in at the death to send Claudio Ranieri's side five points clear at the summit.

The Argentine's goal, only his third of the season, puts the pressure on Leicester's closest rivals Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal, who host Swansea City and visit Manchester United respectively on Sunday.

Norwich's approach at the King Power Stadium gave Leicester an indication of the puzzles likely to await them over the final 11 matches of a dizzying campaign.

Alex Neil's visitors lined up with a back three and sat back, forcing Leicester, who had previously averaged just 44 percent of possession in their home league games, to take the initiative.

Marc Albrighton went close for Leicester with a free-kick from wide on the left, but the best chance of the first half fell to Norwich's Cameron Jerome, who headed inches wide from Robbie Brady's corner.

Encouraged by Riyad Mahrez, Leicester took hold of the game in the second period, with visiting goalkeeper John Ruddy saving from Jamie Vardy and Albrighton.

Infantino faces major challenges

AFP, Zurich

FIFA's new president Gianni Infantino on Saturday faced the mountainous task of reforming and uniting world football, with a pile of crises from the scandal-ridden Sepp Blatter era needing urgent action.

Infantino, an executive at European football confederation UEFA, promised an end to the dark days at FIFA following his convincing election win.

But the 45-year-old Swiss-Italian national was immediately met with multiple challenges, as football powerful players including key corporate partners must still be convinced that FIFA can mend its ways.

Infantino will also have to prioritise the interests of developing football nations in Asia and Africa, two continents that publicly backed election runner-up Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa on hopes that a non-European would lead FIFA after Swiss national Blatter's 18-year presidency.

"We will work tirelessly, starting with myself," the shaven-headed, multi-lingual new FIFA boss said. "You will be proud of FIFA. You will be proud of what FIFA will do for football."

Infantino said governance reforms passed just hours before his election win were "groundbreaking" and that implementing them would be a priority.

They include changes to FIFA's management, limiting Infantino's powers compared to the authority held by Blatter.

There will be a 12-year term limit for top officials and salaries will be disclosed. The all-powerful executive committee will be renamed a FIFA council and football's multi-billion dollar business activities will be run separately from football politics. But

there was no decision to create an outside watchdog that has been widely demanded as the only way to solve FIFA's corruption crisis.

Top World Cup sponsors like credit-card giant Visa said after the vote that "independent oversight of the reforms" was still the best strategy to ensure real change.

Infantino has promised to bring in "independent and respected voices" to FIFA but has not given details.

Experts said that corporate partners -- who demanded an end to the sleaze that came to characterise the Blatter era -- will be watching to see if Infantino's desire to make changes goes beyond rhetoric.

Jeff Thinnies, a US consultant to global corporations on ethics and governance, told AFP that the FIFA vote is "only a start."

"Given the culture of FIFA, a very corrupt culture down through the national associations, it is going to be a long slog before what is on paper becomes what is in practice," he said.

Infantino downplayed divisions in world football, saying he had won "an election but not a war."

Sheikh Salman, a royal from Bahrain, had been the pre-poll favourite, and his defeat was a blow to the ambitions of Asia and especially the Arab world, where there had been anticipation of a powerful new voice in sport.

"The new FIFA needs to become more inclusive and reflect the diversity of world football," the sheikh said after the vote, pledging to work with Infantino.

India, a supporter of Sheikh Salman, said it hoped to receive "due importance" under FIFA's new boss.

The executive committee of Africa's football confederation had also endorsed the sheikh, but some African nations were believed to have voted for Infantino, especially in the second round.



Atletico clinch Madrid derby

AFP, Madrid

Zinedine Zidane suffered his first defeat since taking charge of Real Madrid as Antoine Griezmann's solitary goal kept Atletico Madrid's faint La Liga title hopes alive with a 1-0 win at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Griezmann finished off a lovely team move eight minutes into the second half as Atletico became the first visiting team ever to win at the Bernabeu three seasons in a row.

Diego Simeone's men move to within five points of leaders Barcelona while Real's chances of landing just a second title in eight years now look completely gone as they now trail Atletico by four points in third.

Barca can restore their eight-point lead at the top when they face Sevilla on Sunday.

An error-strewn first half was played at a pace that suggested both sides had already given up on their title hopes.

The first shot on target didn't arrive until the half-hour mark when Cristiano Ronaldo's free-kick was beaten out by Jan Oblak.

The rebound eventually found its way to Karim Benzema just inside the area, but the Frenchman pulled his shot past Oblak's far post.

Atletico were quite content to frustrate the hosts with 10 men behind the ball for long spells, but the visitors ended the half the stronger and were unfortunate not to be in front when Keylor Navas produced a brilliant save to tip Griezmann's drive from 25 yards over.



Atletico Madrid forward Antoine Griezmann (R) celebrates his all-important goal with teammate Koke during their Primera Liga encounter against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

UBICO stands by Mahfuza's father

SPORTS REPORTER

The UAE Investment Co. Ltd. (UBICO) accorded a reception to Mahfuza Khatun Shila, the double gold medallist in the recently-concluded South Asian Games, at the its head office in Banani on Thursday. The swimmer was also handed over a cheque of Tk 300,000 for the treatment of her father, who is suffering from diseases of the liver. The company's managing director, Dr. S. Akbar, handed over the cheque and a bouquet to the ace swimmer in presence of senior employees of the company.



The managing director of UBICO, Dr. S Akbar, greeting Mahfuza Khatun Shila, double gold medallist in South Asian Games, at the company's office in Banani on Thursday. Later she was given Tk three lakhs for her father's treatment. PHOTO: COURTESY

Forhad saves South Zone

SPORTS REPORTER

It might have been a while since Forhad Reza last played in the international circuit, but he continues to put in dominating performances in Bangladesh's domestic cricket.

It was because of his gritty knock that Abdur Razzak's Prime Bank South Zone managed to hold out against Mominul Haque's Islami Bank East Zone for a draw on the fourth and final day of the third round of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL).

South Zone began on 204 for four. While the score may sound good, they had a first innings deficit of 145 runs to contend with, and so were effectively 59 for four. As a result, when Anamul Haque departed early in the day, a draw seemed highly unlikely for South Zone.

That's when their lower order stepped up.

Forhad scored a 147-ball 35 and saw out a number of overs. He was well supported at the other end by Shohag Gazi, who smashed a 55-ball 47, and Abdur Razzak's 19-ball 27.

The day's other game at the Sheikh Kamal International Stadium saw Walton Central Zone do the obvious and record a 202-run victory over BCB North Zone. North Zone began the day on 22 for two chasing a 422-run target. Their main objective was to survive the day, but Central's bowlers ensured that did not happen.

SCORES IN BRIEF	
CENTRAL V NORTH CENTRAL ZONE: 260 and 329 for 7 dec NORTH ZONE: 168 and 219 all out in 56.5 overs (Muktar 60, Anifur 36; Sharif 3-19, Shuvagata 3-39) Result: Central Zone won by 202 runs.	SOUTH V EAST SOUTH ZONE: 262 and 353 all out in 117.3 overs (Anamul 84, Taibur 74, Forhad 35; Iftekhar 5-130, Nazmul 4-82) EAST ZONE: 407 and 112 for 4 (Imtiaz 32, Yasir 27; Moynul 2-18, Shohag 2-34) Result: Match Drawn