

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 1
Asia cup
Bangladesh V India
Live from: 7:30 pm
Also on: Star Sports 3, Star sports HD 1, Star Sports HD 3.
TEN CRICKET
T20!
South Africa V Australia
Live from: 6:30

STAR SPORTS 2
Bundesliga
Hamburger V Hertha Berlin
Live from: 9:30 pm
Also on: Star Sports HD 2
STAR SPORTS 4
English Premiership
Crystal Palace V Liverpool
Live from: 7:30 pm
Also on: Star sports HD 4
West Bromwich Albion V

Manchester United
Live from: 9:30 pm
Also on: Star Sports HD 4
STAR SPORTS HD 2
Bundesliga
FSV Mainz V SV Darmstadt
Live from: 8:00 pm
SONY ESPN
Liga
Real Betis V Granada FC
Live from: 5:00 pm

Eibar V Barcelona
Live from: 9:00 pm
Sporting Gijon V Athletic Club
Live from: 11:00 pm
SONY SIX
Serie A
Torino V Lazio
Live from: 5:30 pm
Atalanta V Juventus
Live from: 8:00 pm

MESSI SHOULD'VE BEEN PUNCHED

Diego Maradona admits he might have punched Lionel Messi over his trickshot penalty with Luis Suarez. Barcelona beat Celta Vigo 6-1 last month but the highlight of the game was Messi's penalty in which he opted to pass to Suarez from close range, instead of shooting. However, Maradona insists he would have reacted angrily as a player. "If I'd have been on the pitch for Messi's indirect penalty, there would have been punches thrown, regardless of whether it was the A, the B, the C or the D division, for sure there would have been punches thrown," said Maradona. —AGENCIES




With Bangladesh vying for the title today, the Asia Cup T20 fever has gripped the whole nation like nothing before. In Faridpur, Tigers fans paraded different parts of the city with a 250-ft national flag.

PHOTO: STAR

Biggest test since 2015

NAIMUL KARIM

Five years ago, in this very month, Bangladesh were on the brink of history. Having unexpectedly beaten England in the group stage of the 2011 World Cup, they were just one win away from making it to the knockout stages for the first time ever.

The outcome of that game against South Africa in Mirpur though was quite tragic. After the Proteas powered their way to 284, the hosts were bundled out for a meagre 78.

Fast-forward a year and the Tigers had surpassed expectations again, this time in the Asia Cup. An all-round effort from Bangladesh, led by phenomenal performances from Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan, took them to the final of a major tournament for the first time.

However, they were, almost villainously, denied by Pakistan who played much better under pressure.

Two years on, Bangladesh had the honour of hosting the ICC World Twenty20. It was the first time that the nation was going to host a major tournament on its own and even before the first month had passed by, 2014 was dubbed as the year that would witness the rise of the Tigers.

What followed however, was nothing short of a disaster. The high expectations seemed to get the better of the Tigers and they were downed not just by the major teams, but also by the likes of Hong Kong and Afghanistan that year.

Prior to 2015, the Tigers crumbled almost every time they found themselves in a crunch scenario of a major event—especially at home.

Ever since the World Cup last year though, they have been a different side. They held up just long enough to ace the England game and make it through to the quarterfinal in that World Cup.

They carried that confidence and beat Pakistan, a side that until then had almost always found a way past the Tigers, for the first time since 1999. The boundaries were surpassed further after the India and South Africa series.

It goes without saying that this particular team has a different mindset.

They have regularly overcome challenges that were previously considered unthinkable, which makes the match today a lot more interesting.

This is arguably the biggest test that this group of cricketers, celebrated for their newfound belief, will face.

Sure, they have beaten India before. But can they cross that final hurdle today and hand Bangladesh their first ever championship trophy at the top level?

With the tickets sold out, the stage is set for a dramatic finale at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. All that remains to see now is whether Bangladesh's new-found belief is good enough for them to come out on top of this battle.

Teams diplomatic on rivalry talk

SPORTS REPORTER

There have been whispers in the past and they became increasingly louder yesterday as people question whether India-Bangladesh has become the biggest battle in the subcontinent. The question was raised in the pre-match press conference yesterday and both

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and India team director Ravi Shastri logically poured cold water all over that notion.

Bangladesh's consistent performances in the limited-overs version of the game recently influenced many to think that way, but Mashrafe made it clear that his side have a long way to go in the international circuit and need to be consistent for a while longer before such comparisons may be drawn.

"Look, Sri Lanka is the last Asia Cup champion and they are [T20] World Cup winners so you cannot say that. Maybe they were not up to the mark in this tournament, but they have always been a good side and that's also true for Pakistan. Obviously we have every chance to be there but we can still improve so many things, especially in T20 cricket, and we are looking forward to that; not just wanting to be an Asian power," said Mashrafe.

Ravi Shastri responded: "I think all teams in the subcontinent are very good. You have your ups and your downs. Last year, Sri Lanka were the world champions here. Bangladesh has played very good cricket too. Not long ago Pakistan was in the top two. Now it's India. You can never discount teams in the subcontinent. You will get a phase when you go up and you get a phase where you go off ball. Then you come up again. It happens to all teams."

Mexico keen to host 2026 World Cup

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico's football federation announced on Friday that it will launch a bid to host the World Cup for a record third time in 2026.

The bidding process was suspended last year amid the furore over FIFA's corruption scandal, but the world football body's new president, Gianni Infantino, has vowed to relaunch it within his first three months at the helm.

"Mexico will be present as a candidate when the bidding process for the 2026 World Cup opens," Mexican federation president Decio de Maria said.

"Hosting the biggest party in the world is a very important organizational commitment, and the majority of Mexicans would feel very proud to have a third World Cup," De Maria said.

Mexico hosted the 1970 and 1986 World Cups, which were won by Pele's Brazil and Maradona's Argentina.

Ronaldo nets four in Celta rout

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo silenced his critics with four goals in Real Madrid's 7-1 mauling of Celta Vigo on Saturday after being jeered by the home support.

Ronaldo wheeled away in celebration with his hand cupped to his ear after smashing home Madrid's second after Pepe had headed Zinedine Zidane's men in front before half-time.

The three-time World Player of the Year added three more to surpass Telmo Zarra as the second highest scorer in La Liga history.

And there was further good news for Real as Gareth Bale scored Madrid's seventh on his first appearance after six weeks out with a calf injury.

Victory moved Real back to within nine points of leaders Barcelona.

There was little evidence that Ronaldo or Real were about to burst into life during a quiet first-half played out in front of a frustrated home crowd.

Ronaldo didn't make his presence felt until 20 minutes in when his fierce strike from distance was beaten to safety by Ruben Blanco.

The Portuguese was met with a few whistles from the crowd early in the second-half after losing possession twice in quick succession.

However, he responded instantly with a dipping strike from 25 yards that flew past Blanco.

Ronaldo immediately headed towards the stand behind the goal with his hand placed over

his ear as a warning shot to his critics. More was to come from Ronaldo as he then curled home a brilliant free-kick into the top corner to bring up 250 La Liga goals in just 228 appearances.

Ronaldo hit the bar with another free-kick before Ronaldo completed his 30th La Liga hat-trick with a tap in from Isco's unselfish low cross.

Ronaldo headed home his fourth of the afternoon before substitute Jese Rodriguez smashed home Madrid's sixth after a fine solo run.

And lastly Bale drove at the Celta defence before firing in his 14th goal of the season.

MOST LA LIGA GOALS

NAME	APPS	GOALS
Lionel Messi	337	305
Cristiano Ronaldo	252	228
Telmo Zarra	251	278
Hugo Sanchez	234	347
Raul	228	550

Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo silenced his critics with four goals against Celta Vigo at the Santiago Bernabeu yesterday and moved into second place on the La Liga scoring charts. PHOTO: AFP

Roma make it seven in a row

AFP, Rome

Roma clinched a seventh successive Serie A victory on Friday when a 4-1 mauling of title rivals Fiorentina also boosted their Champions League qualification campaign.

On-loan striker Stephan El Shaarawy, Mohamed Salah, with two goals, and a Diego Perotti strike allowed Luciano Spalletti's third-placed side to cut the gap to leaders Juventus to five points.

Francesco Totti, who has been locked in a bitter dispute with the club over a contract extension, almost completed a perfect evening at the Stadio Olimpico.

As time ticked down, the 39-year-old substitute just brushed a post with a long-range free-kick.

The defeat left Fiorentina in fourth spot, three points behind Roma but eight off the pace being set by champions Juventus.

Victory was Roma's second in the league over Fiorentina this season but they had lost to their rivals twice at home in the Europa League and Italian Cup.

Roma midfielder Miralem Pjanic said the victory will boost their confidence of playing in the Champions League again next season.

"Can we hope for more than third place? We'll see, we go step by step," he said.

"Tonight we've done the job against a good team. It was a beautiful Roma and we have to keep going like this with the same enthusiasm."



TOP FIVE

TEAM	P	W	D	L	Pts
Juventus	27	19	4	4	61
Napoli	27	17	7	3	58
Roma	28	16	8	4	56
Fiorentina	28	16	5	7	53
Inter Milan	27	14	6	7	48

10-man Arsenal deny Spurs

AFP, London

Alexis Sanchez salvaged a point for 10-man Arsenal and denied Tottenham Hotspur the chance to go top of the Premier League after a pulsating North London derby ended in a 2-2 draw at White Hart Lane on Saturday.

Aaron Ramsey's goal put Arsene Wenger's side ahead, but the dismissal of Arsenal midfielder Francis Coquelin in the 55th minute shifted the game in Spurs' favour, with Toby Alderweireld and Harry Kane putting the hosts ahead.

However, the visitors showed impressive determination to recover through Sanchez's 76th-minute effort to revive their faltering title challenge.

The home side started with more confidence, quickly taking control of the game. Arsenal had offered little as an attacking force but still managed to force the lead with their first meaningful

attempt on goal in the 39th minute.

Wendie Renzo benefited from a fortunate deflection that freed him down the left but the forward showed great awareness to delay his cross before picking out the run of Hector Bellerin.

The right-back's pass found Ramsey and the Wales midfielder was on hand to direct the ball past Hugo Lloris with a clever back-heel.

Spurs were stunned at finding themselves behind but were given a helping hand in their efforts to get back into the game when French midfielder Coquelin collected a second yellow card for an ill-judged sliding tackle on Kane after being

booked for handball in the first half.

And within five minutes Tottenham were level when Alderweireld finished from close range following a corner.

Spurs were on a high and their renewed confidence was illustrated by Kane's spectacular effort that put them ahead just two minutes later.

Alli worked hard to keep the ball from going out for a goal-kick before Kane picked up possession near the by-line and curled a 20-yard shot beyond Ospina from a tight angle.

In the 76th minute Sanchez sent a shot across Lloris and inside the far post to level the game.



Arsenal's Chilean forward Alexis Sanchez celebrates after snatching the equaliser against Tottenham Hotspurs during their English Premier League Clash at White Hart Lane on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

RESULTS

Chelsea	1 - 1	Stoke
Traore 39		Diouf 85
Everton	2 - 3	West Ham
Lukaku 13, Lennon 56		Antonio 78, Sakho 81, Payet 90
Newcastle	1 - 3	Bournemouth
Perez 80		Taylor 28-og, King 70, Daniels 90
Man City	4 - 0	Aston Villa
Toure 48, Aguerro 50, 60, Sterling 66		
Southampton	1 - 1	Sunderland
Van Dijk 90		Defoe 85
Swansea	1 - 0	Norwich
Sigurdsson 61		
Tottenham	2 - 2	Arsenal
Alderweireld 60, Kane 62		Ramsey 39, Sanchez 76

FIFA approves video tech testing

AFP, Cardiff

The International Football Association Board (IFAB) has approved testing of video technology to aid match officials, it was announced on Saturday.

Experiments will be carried out over a two-year period starting no later than the 2017/18 season before a final decision is taken on whether to adopt the technology permanently.

The trials will allow referees to call on the video assistance to help determine four categories of game-changing moments -- goals scored, red cards, penalties and mistaken identity.

"We have taken really a historic decision for football," said new FIFA president Gianni Infantino at a press conference in the Welsh capital Cardiff.

"FIFA and IFAB are now leading the debate and not stopping the debate. We have shown we are listening to the fans, players, to football.

"We are applying common sense. Of course we have to be cautious but we are also open to taking concrete measures."

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