

NIALL SHOWS GERRARD A THING OR TWO

LA Galaxy stars Steven Gerrard, Ashley Cole and Robbie Keane warmed up for the new MLS season by having a kickabout with One Direction's Niall Horan. With Gerrard & Co. hoping to improve on last season's disappointing showing in the league, the three former Premier League stars were put through their paces by Horan just hours before facing DC United. Did the training session reap positive rewards? Sort of, Gerrard lost possession after just five minutes to gift United an opener, but later assisted the fourth in a 4-1 win after Keane scored from



PHOTO: AFP

Gareth Bale's (R) return to fitness will be a major boost for Real Madrid, who will be looking to seal a quarterfinal spot in the Champions League when they host AS Roma on Tuesday night, with a 2-0 advantage from the first leg.

Real look for European tonic

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane is preparing for his biggest game since taking charge as the Spanish giants eye a place in the Champions League quarterfinals against Roma on Tuesday. Madrid hold a commanding 2-0 lead from the first leg in the Italian capital three weeks ago, but have little room for error with the Champions League their last realistic hope of a trophy this season after a poor domestic campaign.

"For me it is the most important game because it is the next one," said Zidane. "The only thing we have to do is win the game tomorrow. That is our goal, we need to think solely about tomorrow's game. Many people think it is

suffering a slew of injuries during his three years at Madrid. Lucas Vazquez, who has been praised for his tireless work in defence and attack, is likely to be the man sacrificed for Bale's return.

Luka Modric, Toni Kroos and Marcelo are also expected to return to the starting line-up after injury as all three featured in training on Monday.

French international Karim Benzema remains sidelined by a thigh injury, so 18-year-old Borja Mayoral and Jese Rodriguez -- who scored the crucial second goal in Rome -- are expected to fight it out for a place alongside Ronaldo and Bale.

WOLVES STRUGGLE WITH INJURIES

Wolfsburg are waiting on the fitness of goal-scoring Germany midfielder Julian Draxler for their clash at home to Gent.

Draxler netted twice in Wolfsburg's 3-2 win in Belgium in the first leg and scored in both of the German Cup holders Bundesliga wins over Hanover 96 and Borussia Moenchengladbach last week.

But having netted the opener in Saturday's 2-1 win over Gladbach, Draxler picked up a knee ligament injury, but is desperate to help Wolfsburg try and reach the quarterfinals in Europe for the first time in the club's history.

"It should be ok by Tuesday," said the 22-year-old who has made 16 appearances for Germany and was part of the 2014 World Cup-winning squad.

"I mean, on Tuesday we are playing in the Champions League. Your legs run by themselves on occasions like that. This is a great opportunity to make history for the club."

Wolfsburg striker Max Kruse is also an injury concern as he struggles with a thigh injury after also scoring against Gladbach.

The Germans come into the return leg with the upper hand and fresh from back-to-back Bundesliga wins.

But having raced into a 3-0 lead at Gent three weeks ago, they left the door open as the Belgians roared back with two goals in the last 10 minutes to give them hope at the Volkswagen Arena.

"We know that the thing hasn't run its course yet, but if we play the way we did against Gladbach then we'll reach the next round," said Wolfsburg's director of sport Klaus Allofs.

Coach Dieter Hecking just wants "90 minutes of hard work" from Wolfsburg.

Women's team leave today

SPORTS REPORTER

While the men's national cricket team reached Dharamsala yesterday, the women's national cricket team are scheduled to leave today morning for Bangalore. Led by Jahanara Alam, the team will be participating in their second ICC World Twenty20. The last time they featured in this event was back in 2014 when they played as hosts.

Placed in a very difficult group, that includes the top three ranked T20I teams of the World -- West Indies, India and England -- it will no doubt be a difficult task for the women in green. However, Jahanara and Co have trained well, with practice matches taking place in Fatullah, and seem confident.

They are scheduled to play their first two games in Bangalore. They face India on March 15 and then England on March 17. They will then travel to Chennai to face the West Indies on March 20. Their final group stage game will take place in Delhi against Pakistan.

Malinga steps down as SL captain

PTI, Colombo

Injury-ravaged pacer Lasith Malinga has stepped down as Sri Lanka's captain for the upcoming World Twenty20 in India following another breakdown during a disappointing Asia Cup campaign in Bangladesh.

Malinga, who led Sri Lanka to their maiden World Twenty20 title in the previous edition, is battling a nagging knee injury.

All-rounder Angelo Mathews, who leads Sri Lanka in ODIs and Tests, will now be the team's captain in all three formats of the game, Sri Lanka Cricket sources said.

SLC Vice President Mohan de Silva said Malinga had written to the SLC last night offering to step down.

"He will continue to make himself available for selections," de Silva said.

Sheikh Jamal look for a turnaround

Take on Ceres FC in Dhaka today

SPORTS REPORTER



Coach Shafiqul Islam Manik is hoping his charges will be more motivated for the sake of country's image rather than the club when Sheikh Jamal DC take on visiting Ceres La Salle FC of Philippines in their second AFC Cup encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. The match begins at 6:00pm.

Country's new football powerhouse, Sheikh Jamal, have not been in good position in terms of preparation and performance following the departure of a few important players of last season, and a 0-4 drubbing at the hands of Singapore side Tampines Rovers in their last match showed how disorganized the team is at the moment.

Apart from the departure of the players, the recent suspension on national players, uncertainty of transfers of a couple of players and inadequate preparation has put heavy impact on the team's performance in the previous match and the players have reportedly lack of motivation. Manik's main job will be to boost his charges mentally on the eve of this crucial fixture against the Philippines champions.

"There are some problems regarding the players' transfers, suspension some national players and the call-up for the national team's camp. Due to these problems, the players are mentally down and I have realised it on and off the training ground and it has really had an impact on the players."

"However, we are trying to motivate the players, but if it doesn't motivate the players, then we, coaching staff and club officials, have nothing to do. I think the foreign players are motivated and I will be hoping the local players will finally step up to give their best tomorrow [Tuesday]," said Manik.

Sheikh Jamal DC captain Wedson Anselme also believes his teammates will give their 100 percent as they are not only representing Sheikh Jamal DC, but also representing Bangladesh.

Explaining the reasons behind the 4-0 defeat in the first match, Manik said that the team is not as bad one to concede four goals, but did so due to silly mistakes and lack of concentration of the defenders and the goalkeeper.

"We also got some opportunities to score against Tampines Rovers but we could not avail those," said Manik. "This time our target is to win the match on home ground and I believe if the players can put their best, it is possible to post a win which we are desperately looking for for a change in the environment of the team."

Manik's counterpart, Frank Muescan, is upbeat but equally aware of the challenge to take on the home side within 48 hours of arriving here.

"We played well in our first match with much ball possession and proved that we can be at this level. Regarding tomorrow's match, we highly respect the opposition because they are the home team and assume that they are pretty prepared and that they will be stronger than the last match," Muescan said.

Messi or Ronaldo? Let's get the knives out!

AFP, Mumbai



Indian police said Monday a man has been charged with murdering his friend after a heated argument over whether Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo is the world's best footballer.

They said the Nigerian national stabbed one of his countrymen to death after the two of them wrangled over whether the Barcelona star or the Real Madrid forward was better.

Police Inspector Kiran Kabadi told AFP an offence of murder had been registered against Michael Chukwuma, 21, over the death of 34-year-old Obina Durumchukwu on Sunday in the northern Mumbai suburb of Nallasopara.

The friends had apparently got together on Saturday night to celebrate Durumchukwu's birthday. The following

morning an argument over football turned to tragedy.

"The two Nigerian youngsters were discussing football players. One is a fan of Messi and the other was for Ronaldo," the inspector said.

"During the conversation a quarrel has taken place. The deceased threw a glass into the face of the accused person. The glass broke and caused small injuries."

"After that the accused took the broken glass and assaulted the deceased person who died due to heavy bleeding," added Kabadi.

No one was available for comment at the Nigerian high commission (embassy) in New Delhi.

Argentina international Messi, 28, is a five-time winner of the Ballon d'Or -- the annual award given to the world's best player by the governing body FIFA.

Portugal captain Ronaldo, 31, has won the accolade three times.

Looking for the defining World Cup moment

Going into his ninth world event, Tamim Iqbal has his regrets. He believes that he is yet to play an innings in a major trophy that he can savour to the fullest. Having enjoyed some good form, particularly in the Pakistan Super League recently, the left-hander hopes the ICC World Twenty20 will be different. Before leaving for India, he spoke to The Daily Star's Naimul Karim about his expectations, the change in his understanding of the game and a lot more.

The Daily Star (TDS): There is plenty of potential in this team. But the fact remains that a lot depends on how you start things off. How prepared are you for the World Cup?

Tamim Iqbal (TI): I have played a lot of T20 matches recently... the BPL [Bangladesh Premier League], was lucky enough to play in the PSL [Pakistan Super League] and also played a few international games. Preparation wise it has been fantastic. I was lucky enough to score a few runs and there's plenty of confidence as well. It's just a matter of delivering in the middle. I just HAVE to deliver big time for Bangladesh.

TDS: It seems like you're considering this World Cup as a major opportunity.

TI: The thing that I have been missing is that even though I have played seven World Cups so far my experience has not been that good. I don't have too many performances in World Cups that I should be proud of, except for one or two. There is no special performance or a performance that I can be really happy about, apart from that Scotland game [World Cup 2015]. I am going to give it everything in this competition and in order to do that I'll have to be ready mentally. Whether I'll end up scoring a lot or not is something that depends on a number of

issues. There is a bit of luck involved as well. But rest assured I am going to follow the right approach.

TDS: You seemed to have calmed down quite a bit in the last one and a half years. Is that a deliberate approach?

TI: I have definitely changed a bit. When things don't work for you, you have to talk to people, your coach, and figure out your mistakes. I realised that if I spend more time in the middle that will give me a better chance to perform rather than getting out in a hurry. That has been the plan.

TDS: You seem a lot more mature off the field as well...

TI: Maybe there was a time when I used to react very angrily to criticism. I used to shout, "Why are they doing this?" But I slowly realised that every time I did that I just managed to put more pressure on myself. I have learnt to accept the fact that people will criticise you. If you play badly, journalists will write against you; that is their job, fair enough. If I take this aspect easily and don't give it much importance, it will relieve me from that extra pressure.

TDS: How did you develop that understanding?

TI: I just talked to people. I remember one of the things an older brother of mine told me once. He called me during



ing a hard time and said, "Tamim, how do you break iron?" I replied saying, by heating it. "That's your answer," he said. So these were certain things that helped me. I am not perfect, but I am trying to follow this route.

TDS: But does this calmness have anything to do with you entering fatherhood?

TI: No, not at all. Actually fatherhood is something that I haven't understood as yet. I have seen my baby for less than 24 hours. The one change is that, before I used to miss my family and my wife. Now I miss someone new. That's it so far.

TDS: You seemed to change your approach after the barrage of criticism you faced following the dropped catch against England in the last World Cup. There was also a slight dip in form. Would you say that period was a turning point in your career?

TI: Look, I have seen a lot of bad things in my life. I have experienced a lot. I am 27 but I have experienced a lot. You can imagine what could have happened if we would have lost that match [versus England]. As a Bangladeshi you can imagine what could have happened. It went from professional to personal attacks. I know that such a situation

will come again in my life because a cricket career is like a circle. When that happens again, I'll know how to react then. I'll be better prepared to battle against the pressure. That's one thing I have learned from that period.

TDS: You played some great shots in the PSL. Are you doing anything new in practice?

TI: Honestly speaking, T20 is one format that I never enjoyed because I was never successful in it. But the way the T20 tournaments are coming up, I decided to talk to coaches and address the problem. I figured that maybe I needed to develop one or two more shots in order to score more runs. And secondly, you need to spend some time in the wicket. That's what I did in the PSL. Apart from one or two games, I didn't get a flying start in any of them. I was just batting normally and made it up towards the end. That's the approach that I am going to take.

TDS: India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand. Those are the big names you might face if you qualify to the Super 10s. But having played so well recently, does the reputation of your opponent make a difference?

TI: Now we don't think about the opposition's names. We think oppositions. Five years back we used to think, "Oh! South Africa. God knows

what will happen!" Today we have a more practical approach. We say, "Oh, okay, Dale Steyn, he is going to bowl this. AB de Villiers does that, and Hashim Amla does this." So we think on those lines rather than the name. The best part is, if we follow the process right, the opposition struggles.

TDS: So, overall, the team is very confident then?

TI: Well, we are not a giant in this format. We are still improving. But I feel that for us, the most important thing will be to win the first three matches. The pressure will be on us, because the other teams have nothing to lose. If we can qualify to the second round, anything can happen. On the whole, we are confident. You know, during the training sessions in Khulna and Chittagong, we were made to go outside our comfort zones and work hard and that's the only reason we did well in the Asia Cup.

TDS: Do you want to give out a number on your expected performance this time?

TI: There's no number [Laughs]. I had previously said how much I wanted to score and that didn't happen. I have decided to not give any numbers this year. I just want to go out there and do my best, no matter how much I score.