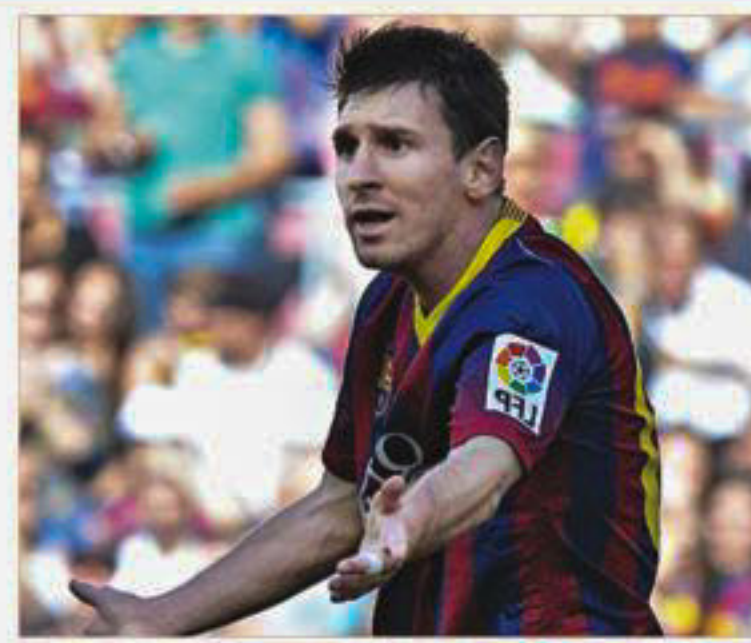


MESSI DOESN'T LOOK AT CONTRACTS

Argentina star Lionel Messi, who is due to go on trial in Barcelona for alleged tax fraud, told a judge yesterday that he never looks at the contracts he signs. The newspaper got access to Messi's September 2013 statement to a judge and published extracts just a day before the five-time World Player of the Year and his father stand trial. "I signed things, but I never look at the contracts. I don't know what I sign," he allegedly said. "This is something that my dad manages. And I trust him. I devote myself to playing football," he reportedly said. Messi and his father, Jorge Horacio Messi, are accused of using a chain of fake companies in Belize and Uruguay to avoid paying taxes on 4.16 million euros of Messi's income earned through the sale of his image rights from 2007-09. —AFP



'Couldn't sleep for three nights'

He went close to creating history by winning the Mauritius Open on the European Tour before relinquishing his pole position because of one bad shot. Even so, he stands on the cusp of being the first Bangladeshi to directly qualify for the Olympics. Unarguably the country's most elite sportsman, golfer Siddikur Rahman talks to Atique Anam of The Daily Star, about the Mauritius miss, his Olympic chances and much more.

The Daily Star (TDS): How difficult is it to accept the fact that you went so close to winning a first ever European Tour title [Mauritius Open], yet had to be content with a second-place finish?

Siddikur Rahman (SR): To be honest, it hurt a lot at that time. I didn't even think at that point [till the 15th hole on the final day] that I would lose. Maybe the excitement made me a bit too overconfident. I couldn't sleep for three consecutive nights after that -- the Sunday night in Mauritius, then the next night in Mumbai and the following night in Miami.

TDS: But your career-best finish in a European Tour event must be an achievement in itself?

SR: Yes. I see it as an experience. For starters, I didn't even expect to finish second in such a big event. My target was to finish in the top 10 so that I could get back into Olympic reckoning. So I shouldn't be disappointed at all.

If I had made the same mistake [the false tee-shot on the 16th hole] on the first day, no one might have taken notice. And no one probably talks about the improbable birdies I made earlier. The irony is that was the only bad shot I played and that probably cost me the title.

TDS: Well since you played so well for the first three days and up to the 15th hole on the last day, the failure is harder to digest.



SR: These things, or even worse things, happen to even the best golfers in the world. You have to accept it. You will also have to see how well the guy [eventual winner Jeunghun Wang] played in those closing stages. The birdies that he

made from positions that he had found himself in were exceptional. He deserved it.

TDS: If you were given a chance to take that tee-shot again now, would you do things differently?

SR: I would definitely make a birdie or at least a par there. In fact if my caddie takes the shot, even he would make at least a par there. This is about pressure of the moment; some people can handle it better than others.

TDS: Coming to your overall form, once you used to be the most consistent player on the Asian Tour and would have made top-10 finishes in most events. But you must admit you are not in the same comfort zone right now. This was your first top-10 finish this year. How would you analyse the drop in form?

SR: It is only because I have been injured [back injury]. My doctor says you should appreciate the fact that you are still playing golf after such an injury. And I shouldn't have any grumbles after the fact that with such an injury, I am earning crores each year.

TDS: But comparing with some of your contemporaries like Gaganjeet Bhullar or Anirban Lahiri, how would you analyse your performance, considering Bhullar has already won five Asian Tour titles while Lahiri has become one of the top golfers in the world?

SR: The difference is in the distance of the drives covered. In those golf courses, you only get to the fairway once you clear 270 yards while we get on the fairway by clearing only 150 yards on average. The first thing I'm doing is getting rid of the injury and then I will move to gain better fitness. Otherwise my short game and accuracy is better than even many PGA Tour golfers.

TDS: Coming back to the Mauritius

Open, what privileges would a European title have earned you?

SR: I would've earned a card for the rest of this season and the whole of the next. However, despite finishing second, I have made a massive leap in world rankings, made it back to the Olympics eligibility list and made it into the top 10 in the Asian Tour Order of Merit. Besides, I will be getting a few more opportunities. I've already gotten an invitation for a European Tour event in Austria next month. Then there is one on the Japan Tour and two Asian Tour events.

TDS: So you've got quite a few events to solidify your Olympic chances before the cut-off date of July 11.

SR: Yes. If I could finish in top 16 in these events, that would earn me some world ranking points, which will push me higher in Olympic standings.

TDS: How confident are you about making it to the Olympics?

SR: I think I am in a comfortable zone. There is no risk of missing out. Unless those who are behind me do something exceptional, I will be in the Olympics.

TDS: You might know the fact that no Bangladeshi athlete has ever qualified for the Olympics on his own rights, instead participating through wild cards. You could be the first Bangladeshi to qualify for the Olympics. How do you feel about it?

SR: I feel proud and I think it would be a really big achievement for me and for Bangladesh and for the country's golf if I can qualify.

Combined panel boycotts chess polls

SPORTS REPORTER

The combined panel has decided to boycott today's election of Bangladesh Chess Federation, alleging irregularities and nepotism in the voters' list. The panel has also termed the elections, which has seen a few twists and turns over the last few days, a farce.

Mokaddes Hossain, the general secretary candidate of the panel, said "the voters' list has been prepared by excluding a lot of chess organisers."

Earlier in the day, the National Sports Council, through an appeal to the supreme court, earned a stay order on the original stay order issued by the high court on the previous day to halt election procedures for three months.

Pelle fires Azzurri

AFP, Ta' Qali

Southampton striker Graziano Pelle hit a second-half winner as an injury-depleted Italy beat Scotland 1-0 in a disjointed Euro 2016 friendly in Malta on Sunday.

With his midfield decimated through injuries to Claudio Marchisio and Marco Verratti, and Thiago Motta and Riccardo Montolivo resting due to calf problems, Italy coach Antonio Conte gave Roma's Daniele De Rossi a chance to impress before announcing his 23-man Euro 2016 squad on Tuesday.

Inter Milan striker Eder was in a similar position, having failed to spark for the Nerazzurri following his move from Sampdoria.

Thankfully for both, Eder and De Rossi were involved when Pelle pounced to beat David Marshall in the 57th minute with a clinical strike from the edge of the area.

Aurier arrested

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain defender Serge Aurier, suspended last February for insulting the soccer team's coach, was arrested and placed in custody on Monday after a brush with police in the French capital, a police official said.

The incident in the Champs Elysees area shortly before dawn involved what one police official described as minor violence. It occurred as the Ivory Coast national, 23, left a nightclub, Europe 1 radio station said.

Coach Laurent Blanc briefly suspended Aurier in mid-February after he posted a video online in which he insulted Blanc and fellow PSG players, including Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Angel Di Maria.

EURO 2016 COUNTDOWN 10 DAYS TO GO

From acorns to oaks

STAR SPORT DESK

With the Champions League over, football fans will now shift their focus on the UEFA European Championship, one of the world's biggest sporting events. The quadrennial football extravaganza involving the best of Europe is the third most viewed global event after the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics with a viewership of over 300 million when it was last staged four years ago in Poland and Ukraine.

France will host the 15th edition of the showpiece event that started its journey way back in 1960. Interestingly, the idea of a European championship was mooted in France in the 1950s. At the time that UEFA was born, in 1954, the impetus for a European championship was coming from the distinguished French sports newspaper L'Equipe, which proposed a competition with home-and-away matches to be played midweek during the evening. Adding to the French drive for such a tournament was Henri Delaunay, first UEFA general secretary and former French national association general secretary, who proposed FIFA to run concurrently with the World Cup, which would involve a qualifying competition every two years. Delaunay insisted that this competition should not lead to an infinite number of matches. Nor should it harm the World Cup, and participants should not always be forced to meet the same opponents in the same group. Following Delaunay's death in 1955, his son Pierre joined the French journalists in the drive

towards initiating the European Nations' Cup. Pierre Delaunay was subsequently appointed secretary of the European Nations' Cup organising committee, and was therefore able to observe at close quarters the blossoming of the competition that his father had wanted. After an agreement had been reached that the championship would be founded, the new competition was named the Henri Delaunay Cup in recognition of his outstanding services in the cause of European football. The inaugural tournament was entered by around half of UEFA's member associations, 17 in total, and one more than the minimum required. The first proper championship match was held on 28 September 1958 in Moscow's Central Stadium -- the Soviet Union beating Hungary 3-1, with the home side's Anatoli Ilyin scoring the first goal after four minutes -- and the inaugural competition took place over 22 months between 1958 and 1960. From small acorns do great oaks rise. The UEFA flagship event which had four teams in the inaugural edition, turned to an eight-team event in 1980, increased to a 16-team meet in 1996. This edition will feature 24 teams in six groups of four. Besides, when the tournament kicks-off on June 10, Spain's most decorated coach Vicente del Bosque, who became the first manager in history to lead sides to glory in the UEFA European Championship, FIFA World Cup and the European Cup, will perhaps get one last chance to atone for a disastrous 2014 World Cup with the golden generation of tiki-taka football.

'Gabigol' off the mark

AFP, Los Angeles

Rising teenage star Gabriel scored on his international debut as Brazil warmed up for the Copa America Centenario on Sunday with a 2-0 victory over Panama.

Gabriel -- affectionately known as "Gabigol" -- underscored his precocious talent by calmly finishing Brazil's second goal on 73 minutes soon after replacing veteran striker Jonas as a second-half substitute.

Santos forward Gabriel, 19, is regarded as the natural heir to Neymar.

The teenager, who has scored 19 goals in 74 appearances for Santos since 2013, had been called up to Brazil's senior squad in March but was an unused substitute.

However he wasted no time in making his mark after being introduced by manager Dunga for his first senior appearance at Denver's Dick's Sporting Goods Park on Sunday.

The teenager pounced on a loose ball in the area, took one touch to control and then drilled a low finish past Panama goalkeeper Jaime Penedo -- before racing to the Brazil dugout to hug manager Dunga.

First washout in 16 yrs

AFP, Paris



The French Open suffered its first complete washout since 2000 on Monday when all scheduled matches were cancelled due to heavy rain.

"Due to weather, there will be no matches played at #RG16 today," said the Roland Garros Twitter feed.

There could be more problems on Tuesday with further rain forecast throughout the day before conditions brighten on Wednesday.

Eight last-16 matches planned for Monday plus two more which had already been held over from Sunday night will now be played on Tuesday.

Three quarter-finals are also due to take place Tuesday -- Andy Murray against Richard Gasquet and defending champion Stan Wawrinka in the men's event while Shelby Rogers was to face Garbine Murguruza in the women's singles.

Play had been set to get underway at 1100 (0900GMT) on Monday but was eventually called off just before 1400 (1200GMT).

"All cancelled for today -- rain, rain go away," tweeted Czech seventh seed Tomas Berdych who was due to face former runner-up David Ferrer of Spain for a last-eight spot.

This year's Roland Garros was hit by rain delays on the opening Sunday when just 10 of the scheduled 32 opening round ties were completed in a little over four hours of play.

The second day was then hit by another two and a half hour delay. That in turn pushed 12 of the scheduled 66 matches back to the first Tuesday.

There was a two and a half hour stoppage

on Saturday followed by another hour on Sunday which meant that the planned last-16 programme remained unfinished.

Under the original schedule, all of the fourth round was to be completed on Monday, leaving Tuesday and Wednesday for the quarter-finals.

But if there are further delays Tuesday, world number one Novak Djokovic, who is chasing a first French Open to complete the career Grand Slam, could end up playing his last-16 tie Wednesday, quarter-final on Thursday and semi-final Friday.

Djokovic has suffered at the hands of the weather in Paris in the past.

In the 2012 final against Rafael Nadal, he had fought back from two sets to love down to take the third set and lead in the fourth when play was halted.

The final was suspended until Monday when Nadal raced to victory in just a further 50 minutes.

Roland Garros organisers are planning a roof for the showpiece Philippe Chatrier Court but that will not be ready until 2020.

Djokovic is poised to become the first man to win \$100 million in prize money if he makes the quarter-finals for the 10th time.

The top seed tackles Spain's 14th seed Roberto Bautista Agut, boasting a 4-0 career lead over the 28-year-old Spaniard.

In other men's last-16 ties still to be played, Belgian 12th seed David Goffin faces unpredictable Latvian Ernests Gulbis, a semi-finalist in 2014.

Austrian 13th seed Dominic Thiem faces Spain's Marcel Granollers with both men trying to make the last eight of a Slam for the first time.

Slovakia stun Germany

AFP, Berlin



An inexperienced Germany team suffered a self-confidence sapping 3-1 defeat to Slovakia in Sunday's storm-affected friendly as the world champions fielded four new caps ahead of Euro 2016.

Slovakia, who will make their European championships debut in Group B alongside Wales, England and Russia next month, deserved their win in Augsburg as Germany coach Joachim Loew blooded a youthful quartet.

A heavy storm in Bavaria at half-time meant the break was extended to 39 minutes and it was Slovakia who profited from the soggy second-half conditions by adding their third goal.

Loew was more relieved than one of his players picked up injuries rather than bothered by the result.

"I have never experienced such a long half-time break. The pitch wasn't

dangerous and, thank god, nothing happened (injury wise)," said Loew.

"Combinations were impossible at the start of the second-half.

"We did well in the first half hour, but we had a few problems in defence.

"You can't expect everything from the young players, but all four have the necessary quality."

Germany took an early lead when Mario Gomez converted a penalty, while goals from Marek Hamsik and Michal Duris just before half-time put Slovakia 2-1 up at the break.

A calamitous error by Germany's replacement goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen then gifted Slovakia's Juraj Kucka the only goal of the second half.

Centre-back Jerome Boateng, who was at the centre of an off-field political storm after a right-wing politician said most Germans would not want to have him as a neighbour, was the only member of the Germany team who had started the World Cup final two

years ago.

Banners reading "Jerome, move in next to us" showed the feelings of most Germany fans.

Loew gave out two new caps in each half to goalkeeper Bernd Leno, 24, and defender Joshua Kimmich, 21, then 20-year-old midfielders Julian Weigl and Julian Brandt.

Schalke's Leroy Sane, also just 20, made only his second appearance in the attacking midfield role behind Gomez.

The hosts took the lead when Mario Goetze was fouled in the area and Gomez banged home the 13th-minute penalty.

Napoli attacking midfielder Hamsik made Slovakia's first clear chance count by drilling home the equaliser on 40 minutes and his long-range shot gave Leno no chance on his debut.

The goal fired up the visitors who went ahead a minute before the break when striker Duris slipped his marker and floated his header past Leno.



Head coach Lodewijk de Kruijff instructs the players of the Bangladesh football team during their first practice session in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on Monday. The team reached the central Asian nation earlier in the day to play the first leg of the Asian Cup qualifying playoff against the hosts on June 2.

PHOTO: AFP