

CURVY DESIGN FOR OLYMPIC MEDALS

If Rio residents think the curvy ancient Greek goddess stamped on the Olympic medals looks familiar, they wouldn't be wrong: she's modeled on Brazilian women. "Rio de Janeiro is a city full of curves in the sea and hills, just like the body of the Brazilian woman," said sculptor Nelson Carneiro, 60, who created the 5,130 bronze, silver and gold medals at the national mint, called Casa da Moeda, near Rio de Janeiro. Carneiro says the sensuous side of the city inspired his depiction on the medals of the Greek goddess Nike ahead of the Summer Games starting August 5. Nike, the goddess of victory in Greek mythology, has been the face of Olympic medals since the 2004 Athens Games, with the Parthenon temple in the background. To make the medals Carneiro sculpts the design in clay and this is copied by a 3D printer. A steel mold is used to stamp the medals in a hydraulic press and medals are then polished to remove imperfections.

-AGENCIES



Premier League only in name?

SPORTS REPORTER



With only two days left before the start of the 9th Bangladesh Premier League, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is seemingly in a mess, failing to iron out details such as the final fixtures, selection of match officials, allocation of practice grounds and not properly communicating with the clubs.

The game's governing body could not finalise the fixtures of the league till 9:00pm last night, keeping all the participants and media in the dark as well as raising questions about the federation's professionalism.

It is nothing new that the BFF has failed to provide fixtures for the entire league yet again, something that has been demanded by many clubs over the years. However, it still seems to be a distant dream for the coaching staff, who always struggle to tailor their training following the schedule's frequent changes.

The lack of strictness of the professional football league committee, led by BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy is reportedly to blame for the fixture debacle. Due to the league committee's casual approach, a joke is going around the BFF House that even if a spectator urges the league committee or its chairman to defer the league due to personal problems, he would certainly get the nod.

The poor standard of refereeing has also been a concern in both the Independence Cup and Federation Cup, which left a couple of big matches in a chaotic state. Sheikh Jamal DC claimed that the first two goals they conceded against Abahani in the Independence Cup semifinal were both offside while Brothers Union claimed that the match officials blew

the whistle for a goal in favour of Abahani in the Federation Cup quarterfinal despite Abbas Inussah clearing the ball off the goalline. The coaches of the bottom-table teams also claimed that they had always been victims of poor refereeing when facing giants.

After the completion of the Federation Cup, the game's governing body has not held any refresher courses for match officials though they organised lectures for the clubs to enhance their understanding of the new laws of the game before the start of the Federation Cup, as referees were booed by the clubs officials for their decisions in the Independence Cup.

It has been learnt that the fitness test of the match officials will take place today, just one day before the start of the league, raising obvious question about the sincerity of the referees committee which promised to do everything to reduce the mistakes of the match officials during league matches.

After the BFF elections in April, it was almost clear that Saif Global Sport Ltd was going to have the commercial rights of the Bangladesh Premier League and hold it at different venues, including Dhaka, but the league committee so far did not make any feasible study in a bid to hold the league outside the capital, thus the practice grounds of the participating teams have not been confirmed yet at all venues according to the BFF grounds committee. The rainy season also added to the organisers woes.

The game's governing body had already been forced to drop three venues out of seven according to the participating clubs' demands, who have reportedly demanded to fix their matches as per their convenience, raising questions of the necessity to have a professional football league committee.



Jamaican sprint superstar Usain Bolt poses for photographers ahead of a press conference in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bolt hails CAS ruling

AFP, London

Sprint king Usain Bolt believes the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling on Russia's drug cheats will scare athletes and send a strong message that doping won't be tolerated.

CAS on Thursday rejected an appeal by 67 Russian athletes seeking to overturn an IAAF doping ban on them competing at the Rio Olympics.

A decision on banning Russia from the Rio Games, which start on August 5, could come this weekend and Jamaican star Bolt, a six-time Olympic champion, has no doubt a strong stance is the right response as athletics tries to clean up its act.

"This will scare a lot of people, or send a strong message that the sport is serious about cleaning up," Bolt told reporters in London on Thursday.

"It's sad, but rules are rules. I don't make the rules, I don't make the decisions. I just have to go along with it. If you feel like banning the whole team is the right action, then I'm all for it."

Meanwhile, Bolt insists he is ready for his first 200 metres of the season in the Anniversary Games in London on Friday as the tests his fitness ahead of the Rio Olympics

Bolt faces a key stage of his fitness recovery when he races for the first time since

pulling out of the Jamaican trials with a hamstring strain.

"I'm good, I'm feeling good, been training good now, I'm happy with where I am," he said.

"My hamstring is good, I have no issue right now. I know I'm in good shape."

Bolt's outing at the Olympic Stadium, the scene of his three Olympic gold medal wins at London 2012 in the 100m, 200m and sprint relay, will be his last before the Games.

The 29-year-old has set his sights on an unprecedented 'triple triple' of Olympic crowns in what will likely be his last Games.

"I'll definitely be there, I'm excited to go," Bolt said of the Olympics, which get underway in Brazil on August 5.

"This is where history is going to be made, I'm excited to put on a show for the entire world to see. This is my final Olympics, it's a big one."

Despite doubters questioning his fitness, Bolt points to his triumph at last year's World Championships in Beijing when he trailed Justin Gatlin in the 100m and 200m world rankings, only to leave China with the complete set of gold medals.

"I'm definitely a tough competitor," Bolt said. "Last year Gatlin was just not ready, it was the first time he was being chased."

"It was hard for him, but this year is not going to be the same, I am in much better shape, so I won't leave it to the last second."

Pep's City reign starts with defeat

AFP, Munich

Pep Guardiola's reign as Manchester City boss started with a 1-0 defeat in a friendly at his former club Bayern Munich on Wednesday in a game watched by 68,000 fans.

Erdal Ozturk scored the only goal of the game in the 76th minute although both sides were under-strength and under-cooked at the Allianz Arena with many of the leading players enjoying longer summer vacations following Euro 2016 and the Copa America.

Belgian international Vincent Kompany was an unused substitute for City after recovering from the thigh surgery which kept out of the Belgium team at the Euros.

"I had a special feeling -- it was like coming home once again," said Guardiola who has been replaced at Bayern by Carlo Ancelotti.

Jose backs big Sam for England job

AFP, Shanghai

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho Thursday backed Sam Allardyce's impending appointment as England manager saying he was a "good choice" for the job.

"I think it's the right person for that job," Mourinho told a news conference in Shanghai on the eve of the International Champions Cup match against Borussia Dortmund.

"I think he's a good choice. I think Sam never had a big chance at the highest level; lots of experience in the Premier League but never that big one and now he has the big one."

"I think he's more than ready." Allardyce is set to be chosen as new England manager at a Football Association board meeting at Wembley on Thursday, FA chairman Greg Dyke said.

"Big Sam", as the Sunderland manager is known, has been selected by a three-man FA panel from a shortlist that included Hull manager Steve Bruce, Bournemouth chief

Eddie Howe and USA coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

Allardyce is also thought to have received a strong recommendation from former Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson and the new Old Trafford boss agrees.

"I think he's a good motivator. I think he can create a good team spirit with his players," said Mourinho.

"And I wish him the best from my side and not just as a friend but as a Manchester United manager."

"The only thing I can promise is that I am going to try to support him in the best way...to have English players always available in conditions to help him."

"So good luck to Sam." Dyke told the UK's Sky Sports News that the board were due to rubber-stamp Allardyce's appointment.

"Clearly the three-man group are convinced he's the right man and I go along with that, yes."

"We appointed a three-man committee to go out and look at all the candidates, come back with a recommendation who they thought was the best man."



SAM ALLARDYCE

Spain appoint Lopetegui

AGENCIES, Madrid

Julian Lopetegui has been appointed as Spain's new manager, replacing Vicente del Bosque.

Del Bosque left the role following a disappointing Euro 2016 campaign and now Lopetegui, the former Porto head coach, will look to guide the country towards qualifying for the 2018 World Cup.

Lopetegui has managed Spain at Under-19, Under-20 and Under-21 level - winning the European Championships with the Under-19s and Under-21s - and has now made the step up to the senior side.

Lopetegui guided Porto to the Champions League quarter-finals during the 2014/15 season but a poor run of form last season led him being dismissed in January.

The 49-year-old former goalkeeper, who was on the books at both Real Madrid and Barcelona during his player career, will take control of his first game in September, in a friendly against Belgium.

Raiola says no Pogba deal yet

AFP, London

Paul Pogba's potential world record transfer to Manchester United isn't finalised yet, the Juventus midfielder's agent said on Thursday.

United have reportedly had an \$86 million offer (\$113 million, 102 million euros) turned down by the Italian champions as they try to lure France international Pogba back to Old Trafford four years after allowing him to leave on a free transfer.

Jose Mourinho's side are expected to return with an improved bid that approaches Juventus's £100 million asking price after United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward met Pogba's agent Mino Raiola to thrash out personal terms this week.

But Raiola took to Twitter on Thursday to insist the deal was not concluded yet.

"There's no deal done regarding Paul Pogba, lots of bla, bla, bla," Raiola tweeted on his verified account.

'Funeral for athletics'

AFP, Moscow



The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Thursday dismissed an appeal against a ban on Russia's track and field team for the Rio Olympic Games over state-run doping.

Here are some of the star athletes who will now miss out on the Olympics starting on August 5:

ISINBAYEVA, THE POLE VAULT TSARINA
The grande dame of Russian athletics, star pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva, 34, had set her sights on ending her stellar career with a third Olympic gold medal at her fifth and final games in Rio.

The world record-holding pole vault tsarina, the first woman to clear the 5-metre bar, has not been implicated in the doping scandals that have engulfed many of her teammates during her glittering career.

Sharp-tongued Isinbayeva furiously lobbied against Russia's suspension, decrying the blanket ban as a breach of her human rights and taking a lead role in pleading Russia's case at the CAS.

"Thank you all for this funeral for athletics," Isinbayeva told TASS news agency in the wake of the ruling.

"This is a blatant political order."

She herself sparked controversy for backing a much-criticised anti-gay law in Russia at the 2013 Moscow World Championships. Her comments sent shockwaves through the athletics world and saw some Swedish track and field stars at the event paint their nails in rainbow colours.

SHUBENKOV, THE SIBERIAN SENSATION

The Rio Games could have offered redemption for 25-year-old world champion hurdler Sergey Shubenkov, who was eliminated in the semi-finals of his first Olympics last time round in London.

Shubenkov, who clocked 12.98 seconds to win gold in the 110m hurdles at the 2015 World Championships, trains mainly at a run-down facility in his Siberian hometown of Barnaul even though he has been offered to relocate to Los Angeles.

The exclusion of Russian athletes from Rio sees Shubenkov become the second member of his family to miss out on a chance of Olympic glory.

His mother, Soviet heptathlete Natalya Shubenkova, was sidelined from the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics after the Soviet Union and its Communist allies boycotted the Games -- a tit-for-tat move for the West's snub of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

KUCHINA, THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN ATHLETICS

High jumper Mariya Kuchina, 23, has an impressive medal collection -- golds from the 2015 World Championships and the 2014 World Indoor Championships, and a silver from the 2014 European championships -- but has yet to compete in an Olympic Games.

At the 2015 World Championships Kuchina defeated her more senior competitors. She is viewed as a leader in Russia's new generation of elite athletes, which the Russian government has promised to educate about the harms of doping in a bid to repair its tattered image.



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney (C) controls the ball during a training session in Shanghai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Goetze heads back to Dortmund

AFP, Berlin

Germany's World Cup winning goalscorer Mario Goetze has returned to Borussia Dortmund after a frustrating three seasons with Bayern Munich, the clubs announced Thursday.

The 24-year-old has never established himself with the German champions. The clubs did not give a transfer fee but Bild newspaper said Dortmund paid between 22 and 25 million euros (\$24-27.5 million).

That would mean Bayern have booked a loss of about 13 million euros on the price they paid for Goetze.

Bayern president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge called the deal "a good solution for all sides".

Goetze scored the winning goal in Germany's World Cup final triumph over Argentina in 2014. But under Pep Guardiola, he was often on the Bayern substitutes' bench.

He was also often among the replacements for Germany at Euro 2016.