

GRIEZMANN GETS DERBY FEVER

The Madrid derby will take centre stage in La Liga on Saturday evening, with Atletico and Real rekindling old rivalries at Vicente Calderon. Among the galaxy of stars on show could be France international forward Antoine Griezmann. He will certainly stand out from the crowd if he is able to take a place in Diego Simeone's starting XI, with Puma having presented him some custom footwear. The red and white evoSPEED Derby Fever boots are ideal for someone representing the Rojiblancos, while the 'Madrid Derby' stitching below the laces is a nice touch. Griezmann will hope that the special offerings get him back in the scoring groove, with four domestic outings having passed since he last netted in the Spanish top-flight.

—AGENCIES



Brothers Union striker Augustine Walson miscues a shot during his side's JB Bangladesh Premier League encounter against Muktijoddha Sangsad at the Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Another draw ends Mymensingh phase

SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union came from a goal down to hold Muktijoddha Sangsad to a 1-1 draw in their JB Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

Brothers Union striker Augustine Walson scored in the 75th minute, cancelling out Simon Ezeodika's 27th minute strike to snatch a valuable point for The Oranges who sit in seventh position with 18 points from 14 matches. On the other hand, Muktijoddha are fifth with 20 points from the same number of outings.

The curtains of the ongoing league's Mymensingh phase closed yesterday through the match between these two mid-table sides with the return-leg of the Chittagong phase set to start on Friday.

Despite a 0-2 drubbing at the hands of

Muktijoddha in their first meeting Brothers took the ground as favourites following their comprehensive 4-1 win over Team BJMC in the previous match. They got off to a fine start but only to see Walson narrowly miss the target in the second minute.

Muktijoddha got their noses ahead when Ezeodika danced past two defenders and struck his second goal of the league.

Walson then made a few attempts from distance but Muktijoddha Sangsad goalkeeper Mamun Khan thwarted his efforts. Later, Nkowcha Kingsley saw his goal-bound header cleared off the line by Manjur Rahman during the 51st minute.

Eventually though, the margin was equalised as Walson raced into the box, dancing past two defenders, to beat Mamun on the 75th minute with a left-footed shot. This takes the tally of stalemates in the Mymensingh venue to four out of the six fixtures.

Leaving football for a living

SPORTS REPORTER

Since promising faces of the SAFF U-16 championship's winning squad such as Sarwar Zaman Nipu, Saad Uddin and Biswanath Ghosh show signs of flourishing in the top-flight professional football league, it comes as a big surprise to all that one of them has given up on the game in search of a living.



FAISAL AHMED

The one in question is none other than Faisal Ahmed, the goalkeeper who helped Bangladesh win the title by thwarting the last penalty shot against India in August last year, who now plans to join Bangladesh Police as a constable.

Soon after their success, the members of the squad were promised long-term training by the game's governing body, but no such steps have been taken as of yet.

Even though the goalkeeper from Sunamganj could not be reached for comment, it is understood that he made the choice to change careers when left with no opportunity to play anywhere. "If football can't provide him meal [rice], why should he keep playing? I sent him to the Police to earn his bread and butter," Faisal's father Kiron Miasaid, as quoted in a media report.

Out of the 23-member squad, six players – Nipu, Saad, Biswanath, Shaown Hossain, Khalil Bhuiyan, Jahangir Alam Sajib – are with Bangladesh Premier League outfits while another member, Atiqur Rahman, plies his trade for the Bangladesh Championship League outfit Victoria SC.

After completion of the SAFF U-16 Championship, eight players returned to BKSP while the rest looked for opportunities to play at different clubs at district level as well as in Dhaka.

Carrick's United days numbered

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United midfielder Michael Carrick says this could be his last season at the club and backed world-record signing Paul Pogba to showcase his "very special" talent.

The veteran playmaker has mainly been used in cup competitions this season under Jose Mourinho, although he did start United's last league game and is in contention for only his second Premier League start of the campaign this weekend against Arsenal.

Asked if he would like to remain at Old Trafford beyond this season, the former England international told Sky Sports: "Yeah, but I'm 35 now and I have to be realistic."

"I'm not going to make predictions about what is going to be happening next season."

"We are not even at Christmas yet and I just want to play as many games as I can and see how I'm feeling, how the body is feeling."

"That is the biggest gauge to see if I can still do it, if I feel I can still do it and the

manager feels that.

"There is a lot of things to come into the equation, so I'm not going to be making any rash judgements just yet."

Put to him that at this late stage of his career he may have to accept his future lies away from United, he said: "There's always a chance of that, isn't there?"

Pogba, signed over the summer from Juventus, is among those blocking Carrick's path but the Frenchman has failed to so far justify his 89-million-pound (\$110 million, 102 million euros) price tag.

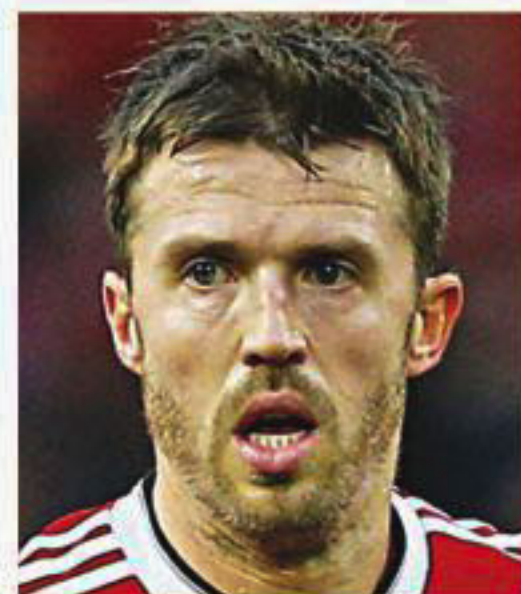
But Pogba, 23, scored a cracker against Swansea last time out and found the net again in his country's 2-1 win over Sweden on Friday.

"The attributes he has are incredible. We all saw the game against Swansea and physically he is pretty much perfect -- such a specimen," Carrick said.

"He can cover ground but the ability he has got is something very special."

"At the same time, it is not an easy thing to come into and hit the ground running, be at top form."

"Changing leagues, changing countries, there are all sorts of things that



AHF CUP SQUAD

Chayan, Rana return

SPORTS REPORTER



Defender Mamunur Rahman Chayan and midfielder Kamruzzaman Rana staged comebacks to the national hockey team when new German coach Oliver Kurtz picked an 18-member squad for the 5th Men's AHF Cup, scheduled for November 19-27 in Hong Kong.

Due to a lack of form, penalty corner specialist Chayan and midfielder Rana were dropped from the national squad during the South Asian Games earlier this year but were afforded a second chance as they performed well in domestic competitions as well as practice matches in Poland and Austria.

Kurtz seems to have pinned his hopes on the old guns, dropping some of the younger players such as Arshad Hossain, Naeem Islam and Emon who drew attention during the U-18 Asia Cup at home in September.

Meanwhile one of the selectors, seeking anonymity, stated that they have dropped four other off-form players – goalkeeper Ashim Gope, Krishna Kumar, Taposh Barman and Hasan Jubair Niloy – however, the German's coaching staff included those in question in the final squad.

And although the coach was not available to comment, team manager Ariful Islam Prince said Kurtz chose those players after evaluating their performances in Europe.

It has also come to surface that the federation appointed defender Imran Hasan Pintu as captain even though as it turns out, the coach's choice to lead the side was Rasel Mahmud Jimmy. The team will fly out for Thailand tomorrow.

Herrera backs Mourinho

AFP, London

Manchester United midfielder Ander Herrera dismissed Monday talk of Jose Mourinho 'losing' the Old Trafford dressing room and instead thanked his club manager for the prospect of a first Spain cap.

Mourinho's arrival in Manchester was supposed to herald an upturn in United's fortunes.

But United are currently six points off a top four position in the Premier League needed to secure a Champions League spot.

There are now suggestion that Mourinho, once the self-styled 'Special One', may be losing his touch amid reports that senior players are unhappy with the Portuguese's methods.

But Herrera insisted that Mourinho still had the trust of United's first-team squad.

"He really understands what a footballer needs which is 20 minutes of team talk and then you get down to it."

Aminul drives Police FC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Police FC moved up to the third position of the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League with a single-goal win over Agrani Bank at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Aminul Islam separated the sides in the 25th minute to take Bangladesh Police to eight points from five matches while Agrani Bank slipped to fourth position with seven points.

Robben fit for Dortmund encounter

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich winger Arjen Robben is expected to be fit for Saturday's Bundesliga showdown with Borussia Dortmund after an injury suffered playing for the Netherlands turned out to be less serious than feared.

Robben, 32, came off at half-time in the Netherlands' 3-1 win in Luxembourg in a World Cup qualifier on Sunday with a sore thigh after scoring in the first half.

In a statement on their website, Bayern said "a thorough examination by FCB club medic Dr Volker Braun revealed that the winger has not sustained a major injury."

"The Dutchman will be available for selection in the Bundesliga meeting with Borussia Dortmund

Thiem outlasts Monfils

AFP, London



Austria's Dominic Thiem kept alive his hopes of reaching the semifinals of the ATP Tour Finals with a 6-3, 1-6, 6-4 victory over Gael Monfils on Tuesday.

Thiem lost his opening group stage match against Novak Djokovic, but the Tour Finals debutant could still make the last four after seeing off flamboyant Frenchman Monfils at London's O2 Arena.

The 23-year-old will need to defeat Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic in his last group match on Thursday to reach the semi-finals.

Monfils is certain to be eliminated after losing his first two matches at the prestigious season-ending event.

"It was a very close match but luckily he helped me in the last game. Maybe I was the lucky one today," Thiem said.

"I am very happy there's still a chance for me to reach the semi-finals, but Milos Raonic is an amazing opponent."

"I can't wait to get back out here in this amazing arena."

Thiem is regarded as an emerging star after a breakthrough season and the Austrian had shown no signs of being intimidated by the Tour Finals stage when he took a set off defending champion Djokovic.

His gutsy effort and aggressive stroke-play also earned a famous fan in Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho, who met Thiem after the match and gave him an autograph.

Thiem should garner plenty more backers around the world if he continues to develop at his current rapid pace.

Thiem was too powerful for the error-prone Monfils in the first set, securing the only break in the sixth game and using his thudding serve to stay ahead.

But, after seeming to be hampered by injury in the first set, Monfils suddenly found his rhythm in a one-sided second set, while Thiem lost his way.

Monfils broke twice in the first four games with some eye-catching groundstrokes, including a majestic winner down the line from an improbable position wide behind the baseline.

Thiem folded in similar fashion against Djokovic, but he was far more focused in the final set against Monfils and clinched the win with a break in the ninth game after a string of double faults from the Frenchman.



DOMINIC THIEM

San Marino hit back at Mueller

REUTERS, Berlin

San Marino officials strongly criticised Thomas Mueller in an open letter on Monday after the German attacking midfielder made disparaging comments about the tiny European nation following Friday's World Cup qualifier.

Following the World Cup holders' 8-0 rout, Mueller had questioned the point of playing the minnows and declared the game had "nothing to do with professional football" due to the gap between the two teams, with the majority of the San Marino players being amateurs.

He also said there was increased risk of injury due to the state of the rain-drenched pitch in Serravalle.

In response to Mueller's condemnation, the country's Olympic Committee spokesman, Alan Gasperoni, offered 10 reasons for the game to be played.

"It served to show that even against lowly teams like ours you cannot score a goal and don't say you were not frustrated when (keeper Aldo) Simoncini denied you," Gasperoni said in the letter posted on Facebook.

Mueller has yet to score for Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga this season in an unusually long goal drought after netting 20 times last season.



Japan forward Genki Haraguchi (C) scores the winning goal against Saudi Arabia during their 2018 World Cup qualifier at the Saitama Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Japan boost WC hopes

AFP, Saitama



Japan beat Saudi Arabia 2-1 in a fabled qualifier Tuesday as a debatable Hiroshi Kiyotake penalty boosted their hopes of qualifying for a sixth successive World Cup in 2018.

The Blue Samurais drew level with the Group B leaders on 10 points after a tempestuous clash in Saitama, where Kiyotake's spot kick and a Genki Haraguchi effort eased the pressure on under-fire coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

Saudi Arabia pulled a late goal back through Omar Othman but it was not enough for the visitors to rescue a draw.

"Credit to the players for beating a good Saudi team," said Halilhodzic,

whose future has been plunged into doubt after a poor run of form during the Asian qualifying campaign.

"This is a big victory for us but it was a deserved one," added the Franco-Bosnian after his side improved to 10 points from five games, with five remaining.

"We have had to stay strong to come back from some difficult situations and no doubt there will be more to overcome before we get to Russia."

Kiyotake converted on the stroke of half-time after Saudi defender Abdulmalek Al Khaibri was adjudged to have handled, despite replays showing Kiyotake's initial shot had struck him in the chest.

The Saudis protested furiously to referee Muhammad bin Jahari of

Singapore and scuffles broke out across the players, which continued as they disappeared down the tunnel at the interval.

Haraguchi effectively killed off Saudi's hopes of pinching a point with a sharp finish after 80 minutes following a deft flick from substitute Shinji Kagawa.

Othman's 90th-minute strike crept across the line in a moment of cruel irony for Japan, who had a similar effort disallowed in their 2-1 defeat to UAE.

Saudi's chances of pulling off an improbable escape evaporated when captain Osama Hawsawi saw red for a clumsy challenge in injury time.

Meanwhile, Koo Ja-Cheol's late winner spared South Korea's blushes as the hosts came from behind to beat Uzbekistan 2-1 in World Cup