What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 1
England v India
5th Test, Day 2
Live from 10:00am

STAR SPORTS 2
Pakistan v Australia
1st Test, Day 3
Live from 9:00am

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD 1
English Premiership
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Live from 6:30pm
Stoke City v Leicester
Live from 9:00pm
West Brom v Man United
Live from 11:30pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD 2
English Premiership
Sunderland v Watford
Live from 9:00pm
Bundesliga
Wolfsburg v Eintracht
Live from 11:30pm

SONY ESPN
Serie A
Empoli v Cagliari
Live from 8:00pm
AC Milan v Atalanta
Live from 11:00pm
Juventus v Roma
Live from 2:00am (Sunday)

SONY SIX
La Liga
Sporting Gijon v Villarreal
Live from 6:00pm
Atletico Madrid v Las Palmas
Live from 9:00pm
Granada v Real Sociedad
Live from 11:30pm

Sevilla v Malaga
Live from 1:45am (Sunday)

Simanta, Reshma win five golds

SPORTS REPORTER

South Asian Games gold medallist Mabia Akter Simanta and Jahura Akter Reshma grabbed five gold medals in the 4th International Qatar and Asian Cup in Doha yesterday.

Simanta, who had bagged a gold medal in the SA Games with a total lift of 149 kilos in 63kg category, yesterday lifted a total of 165 kilos – 71 kilos in snatch and 94 kilos in clean & jerk -- in the same weight category to win two gold medals in total lift and clean& jerk while she had to be content with a silver medal in snatch. Simanta has improved in clean & jerk compared to her performance in SA Games where she had lifted 67 kilos, informed coach Shahria Sultana Suchi over phone.

Simanta was, however, outshone by her teammate Reshma, who won three gold medals in total lift, snatch and clean & jerk in 53kg category. Reshma lifted a total of 128 kilos – 58 kilos in snatch and 70 kilos in clean & jerk -- to win three gold medals in three segments of the event.

The coach informed that there was a low turnout of participants in the meet and most of the weightlifters were from UAE, Qatar and Bahrain.

FIFA refuses Niersbach appeal

AFP, *Zurich*

FIFA said Friday its appeal committee had rejected a bid by Wolfgang Niersbach to overturn his one-year ban from football over the 2006 World Cup scandal.

Niersbach was banned in July over misconduct surrounding Germany's successful 2006 World Cup bid for failing to report findings about possible unethical conduct and conflicts of interest during the bidding process.

Switzerland's attorney general's office last year opened an investigation last year into fraud and money laundering allegations against four members of the 2006 World Cup organising committee.

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (C) jokes with teammates during a training session at the Mitsuzawa Stadium in Yokohama yesterday ahead of tomorrow's Club World Cup final against Kashima Antlers. PHOTO: AFP

Croc alert for Ronaldo

AFP, *Yokohama*

Japan's Kashima Antlers plan to unleash a secret weapon to strike terror into Spanish giants Real Madrid when they meet in this weekend's Club World Cup final: a sharp-toothed crocodile.

Though relative minnows on the world stage, a voracious predator with a deadly bite lurks in the Kashima side in the form of defender Naomichi Ueda, who fired a warning ahead of Sunday's Yokohama clash.

"I'm a crocodile," he said. "Just as a crocodile will complete its conquest by dragging its prey into the water, I just want to bring them down -- whether it's in the air or on the ground, one on one."

Killer reptiles notwithstanding, Kashima face overwhelming odds against a Real side on a club record win streak of 36 matches.

They finished a distant third in the J-League season before capturing the championship playoff less than two weeks ago.

But Kashima became the first Japanese side to reach the Club World Cup final after stunning Colombia's Atletico Nacional 3-0 in midweek.

"If I don't score again in the final, I'll quickly be forgotten," said striker Yuma Suzuki, who celebrated scoring Kashima's third goal in Osaka by copying Ronaldo's trademark macho man goal pose.

"I had no choice," added the 20-year-old, whose celebration after scoring with his first touch off the bench even set tongues wagging on Spanish television.

"It's like a dream. Now I want to do it on front of Ronaldo's very eyes."

Whether or not his childhood idol Ronaldo sees the funny side is likely to depend on the score in Yokohama but a defiant Suzuki told Japan's Nikkan Sports: "I will show Real Madrid how Japanese football has grown."

Real coach Zinedine Zidane insisted the European champions and Spanish league leaders would not underestimate the pugnacious Antlers as his side chases a second world title in three years.

"It's basically a home game for them so the conditions favour them," said the Frenchman after his side's comfortable 2-0 semi-final win over Club America.

"For us it's all about recovering properly for Sunday. We will study the Antlers between now and the final and we'll be ready."

While Real's collection of global superstars are expected to ease to victory, Suzuki already has his heart set on a consolation prize -- Ronaldo's shirt.

"Hopefully I can get to him first and get it," he said after training on Friday.

"He might be the enemy during the game but after the final whistle I'll be his greatest fan again."

Bangladesh eye title

SPORTS REPORTER

Having taken inspiration from the World Championship Zonal Qualification, Bangladesh have set their sights on clinching the title of the Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship, which begins on December 22 at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur.

Having set a similar target in the previous edition of this championship last year, Bangladesh were eliminated from the group stages after losing two of their three pool matches. However, this time the hosts are dreaming big after finishing runners-up in the Central Sub Zone Qualification of World Championship which was held in Kyrgyzstan in September.

Bangladesh team has been under the guidance of an Iranian coach, who rejoined last month after guiding them in the South Asian (SA) Games earlier this year. Bangladesh had finished fifth in that event in Guwahati, India.

Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are supposed to compete in this meet, even though it has been learnt that Uzbekistan might pull out. If they do pull out, the championship will become a five-team meet, where the top team will advance to the next round of Asian Championship.

"We have been together for nearly two years and we are now much stronger than before," said Bangladesh captain Saeed Ali Zabir. "Though we did not produce good results in the last edition due to lack of international experience, we have in the meanwhile played international matches regularly and gained some valuable experience."

"We have beaten all the other teams, except for Kyrgyzstan, before. So we are hoping to give a good fight in each match. Finishing second in the World Championship Qualifying round in Kyrgyzstan will definitely inspire us," said the 27-year-old from Titas Volleyball Team.

Bangladesh beat Maldives in 3-1 sets but suffered a 19-25, 16-25, 24-26 defeat to Kyrgyzstan in the World Championship Qualification to finish runners-up earlier this year, which helped them move into the next round to be held in Thailand next year.

Zabir believes the team has gained some valuable experience during their conditioning camp and 16 practice matches against different clubs in Iran before the SA Games. The appointment of the Iranian coach has helped them improve their style of play.

"We are now quite familiar with new tactics and techniques the top volleyball nations follow. We are learning new things every day. Each player knows his individual responsibility much better than before. In one word, we now play as a team," said the captain from Satkhira.

Bangladesh started their preparation from November 9 with the inclusion of four new players from Titas, Bangladesh Army and Boarder Guard Bangladesh. The 16-member squad will be trimmed to 12 members within a few days.

Tevez to make mega-money China move

AFP, *Buenos Aires*

Carlos Tevez looks set to pocket 40 million euros ($41.6m) a season -- 20 times what he currently earns at Boca Juniors -- with a transfer to Chinese football, Argentine media said on Thursday.

The striker is negotiating a move to Shanghai Shenhua and would be just the latest big name to be lured to Chinese football for eye-watering sums of money should he make the move early next year.

"At Boca they know that Tevez will go and is sealing a contract with Shanghai Shenhua for two years for $84 million," sports daily Ole said.

Tevez, formerly of Manchester City, Manchester United and Juventus, turns 33 in February but showed his enduring quality with two goals as Boca beat bitter rivals River Plate 4-2 on Sunday to cement his place in Boca folklore.

Shanghai Shenhua last month named former Uruguay international Gus Poyet as their new coach.

Lazovic settles tie, three months later

AFP, *Milan*

Darko Lazovic hit his maiden Serie A goal as Genoa edged Fiorentina 1-0 on Thursday to finally settle a league fixture that began in September.

Fiorentina's visit to Genoa for the third match of the season was called off after 27 minutes and 30 seconds at a rain and hail-hit Luigi Ferraris stadium on September 11.

In accordance with league rules, the match was replayed from when it was stopped, meaning Mattia Perin started the match with a goal-kick, which was what the hosts' 'keeper was about to do when officials called a halt three months ago.

Faced with the chance to move up to sixth place at 10 points behind leaders Juventus, Fiorentina instead produced an error-strewn performance that was punished in clinical fashion on 37 minutes.

Court rejects request from Benzema

AFP, *Paris*

A court on Friday rejected a request from Real Madrid and France striker Karim Benzema to drop the investigation into alleged blackmail over a sex tape featuring international teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

The case, which cost Benzema a place in France's Euro 2016 squad on home soil, is now expected to go to trial next year.

"We are pretty astonished because the decision is to reject our requests for the investigation to be cancelled," said Serge Money, who represents another suspect in the case.

The Versailles appeal court also asked the investigating magistrate to consider charging former Liverpool and Marseille striker Djibril Cisse for his alleged involvement.

Investigators suspect 28-year-old Benzema of acting as an intermediary between the presumed blackmailers -- including one of his childhood friends -- and Lyon midfielder Valbuena.

Benzema and three of the other suspects asked for the case against them to be dropped.

They say police used "dishonest" methods by posing as a friend of Valbuena's in a telephone conversation with one of the accused.

The court rejected their arguments and ruled the police's methods were permissible.

Benzema's lawyer Sylvain Cormier said his client would fight on to clear his name.

"Karim Benzema is innocent, he did nothing wrong in this case. We are going to do everything we can to prove his innocence," he said.

The prosecution says Cisse helped to further the deception by informing Valbuena that "rumours" were circulating about the existence of the tape.

Cisse, 35, was arrested as part of the investigation in 2015 but was released without charge.

He said in a TV interview at the time that he had only been arrested "so the investigators could hear my side of the story. I never swindled anyone -- Mathieu is a friend".

Valbuena's lawyer said the player was "delighted" by Friday's decision.

Arsenal face Man City test

AFP, *London*

All-too-familiar questions about courage, backbone and durability surround Arsenal ahead of their trip to Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Premier League this weekend.

Arsenal's 14-game unbeaten run had lain strong foundations for a determined tilt at the festive fixure list, only for Arsene Wenger's men to come unstuck in Tuesday's 2-1 defeat at Everton.

Wenger was left to voice time-worn complaints about an opponent's "physical" approach, after his side shrivelled amid the Goodison Park roar, but Petr Cech is desperate to show Arsenal are no pushovers.

"You have to pick yourself up," the Arsenal goalkeeper told the club website.

"There is a big period coming up now with the games coming thick and fast and there is no time to dwell on the defeat.

"Sometimes I think it is best if after a big game you play another big game. You have opportunities to win. It's a kind of a six-pointer. It's probably a perfect game for us."

Arsenal's defeat, courtesy of an 86th-minute header by Everton centre-back Ashley Williams, was their first in the league since a slapdash 4-3 loss at home to Liverpool on the season's opening weekend.

Compounding their disappointment, they now trail leaders Chelsea by six points, while all of the teams around them -- Liverpool, City, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United -- won their mid-week matches.

If there is a consolation for Arsenal it is that City are by no means firing on all cylinders themselves.

Guardiola's side went four home games without victory in the league prior to Wednesday's 2-0 defeat of Watford and recently fell to damaging losses against Chelsea (3-1) and Leicester City (4-2).

In the absence of the suspended Sergio Aguero, Nolito started up front against Watford and the Spanish forward is anticipating an open encounter at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

"It will be a hard game, but I guess Arsenal will come and try to get the three points, as that is their philosophy of football," he said.

"It is also ours, so we will have to see who gets the points."

City will be without midfielder Ilkay Gundogan after he injured his knee against Watford, with reports in Germany on Thursday suggesting he could miss the whole season with ligament damage.

Chelsea secured a 10th straight victory by winning 1-0 at Sunderland and can register 11 successive league wins within the same season for the first time if they win at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Antonio Conte's side are guaranteed to top the table on Christmas Day, but his players remain on high alert for signs of complacency.

"I know more than anyone, football goes week by week, month by month," centre-back Gary Cahill told Chelsea TV.

"We want to keep this going and continue the good spirit that's in our camp at the minute. That's the most important thing for us."

Liverpool stole past Arsenal into second place courtesy of a 3-0 win at Middlesbrough and now face the London club's conquerors, Everton, in a Monday night Merseyside derby.

Adam Lallana, who scored twice at the Riverside Stadium, said Liverpool's display was "not too far off the complete performance", but revealed manager Jurgen Klopp was not fully satisfied.

"The manager has already quickly said to us that there are things we can improve on," Lallana said.

"At times we can maybe get a little bit carried away and all of us maybe want to attack at times when we need to protect a bit more."

Sixth-place United visit seventh-place West Bromwich Albion on Saturday buoyed after snatching a 2-1 win at Palace on Wednesday via Zlatan Ibrahimovic's 88th-minute strike.

FIXTURES

Saturday
(1500 GMT unless otherwise stated):
Crystal Palace v Chelsea (1230 GMT), Stoke v Leicester, West Brom v Man Utd (1730 GMT), Middlesbrough v Swansea, Sunderland v Watford, West Ham v Hull
Sunday
(1600 GMT unless otherwise stated):
Man City v Arsenal, Tottenham v Burnley, Bournemouth v Southampton (1330 GMT)
Monday
(2000 GMT):
Everton v Liverpool

'Messi saw how sad I was'

NEYMAR

AGENCIES, *Madrid*

It can be hard for footballers to settle when switching clubs, and often with it countries, cultures, homes and languages, all away from family.

Neymar has revealed how difficult he initially found things after moving from Santos to Barcelona in a £70 million deal in the summer of 2013, crediting Lionel Messi in a big way in the process.

The 24-year-old swapped Brazil for Spain and told CNN in an interview that Messi went above and beyond to ensure that he was able to settle and come through a "sad" period early on.

"Soon after I arrived, it wasn't a great moment in my career and he [Messi] was the one who helped me.

"He saw that I was sad, with my head down, that things weren't going right for me. He told me to keep going, to be happy and to play the way I know.

"He's a person who I admire a lot. He told me this and he helped me a lot at that moment in time.

'I think it's about the care, respect, friendship and happiness that we have for being together."

Fans loved hearing what a kind and thoughtful man Messi is behind the scenes, and indeed the bond forged between two of Barcelona's biggest stars.

It's certainly paid off for Messi, Neymar and Barcelona as the pair have forged a stunning three-pronged attack for the La Liga champions.

Barry eyeing Giggs record

AFP, *London*

Former England international Gareth Barry looks set to break Ryan Giggs's Premier League appearances record after he signed an extension to his present contract with Everton on Friday.

The 35-year-old midfielder -- capped 53 times -- has 609 Premier League games under his belt, only 23 shy of Welsh legend Giggs's mark, committed himself to the club until 2018.

"Let's hope (Barry) will smash every record. He's a quiet person but a strong character. He is 35 but he is still so important for the team," Everton manager Ronald Koeman told the club website.

Another England international, defender Leighton Baines, also put pen to paper to extend his present contract to 2019.

Baines, 32 and capped 30 times, is involved in his 10th campaign for Everton having signed from Wigan Athletic in 2007.

"The majority of my career I've spent here at Everton and it's something that I hope will continue even beyond these next few years," said Baines.