

Booters drop two places

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh football team dropped down two places in the latest FIFA rankings, published Thursday.

Although they did not play any games during the considered period, Guam and Indonesia both leapfrogged them, which caused the slide. Indonesia gained an impressive eight places, while Guam moved up three. Bangladesh are now 185th in the rankings, Guam 182nd and Indonesia 171st.

India moved up two places to 135th, while Iran remain the highest ranked AFC side at 29th.

Argentina end year on top

AFP, Zurich

Lionel Messi's beaten Copa America finalists Argentina end the year top of FIFA's world rankings while France were named 'mover of the year'.

Argentina finish 2016 out in front of arch rivals Brazil to inherit the 'team of the year' title from Belgium, displaced from the FIFA summit by the Albiceleste in April.

In all the Argentinians won 10 of their 15 games, with one of their three losses coming in the continental showpiece on penalties to Chile in June.

France too lost their own continental showpiece in extra time to Portugal on home soil but were named mover of the year after gaining the most ranking points with 13 wins out of 15 games.

TOP 10

1. Argentina
2. Brazil
3. Germany
4. Chile
5. Belgium
6. Colombia
7. France
8. Portugal
9. Uruguay
10. Spain

Icardi fires Inter Tough lesson for RB

AFP, Milan



Mauro Icardi took his Serie A goal tally to a league-leading 14 with a brace in a 3-0 win over Lazio that gave Inter Milan's fans some unexpected festive cheer.

Lazio travelled to the San Siro looking for a win that would have pushed Simone Inzaghi's men up to second at five points behind Juventus.

But the visitors, who won both fixtures against Inter last season, failed to make the most of a promising opening half when Ciro Immobile and Felipe Anderson came close to breaking the deadlock.

Lazio paid the price in 11 second-half minutes, first when Argentina midfielder Ever Banega pounced on a defensive mistake by Sergej Milinkovic-Savic to beat Federico Marchetti with a searing strike into the top corner.

Icardi headed Inter's second two minutes later. The Argentine moved two goals past Roma striker Edin Dzeko and Andrea Belotti of Torino in the Serie A goal standings just nine minutes later with his second of the night.

Inter remain in seventh place but their ninth win of the campaign and fourth in six games under new coach Stefano Pioli closed the gap on Juventus, who will face AC Milan in Doha for the Italian Super Cup on Friday, to 12 points.

Pioli, sacked by Lazio in April after a heavy defeat to city rivals Roma, had to reshuffle for the visit of his old club with Joao Mario and Felipe Melo both suspended and Chilean defender Gary Medel out injured.

Bayern coach Carlo Ancelotti hailed a "perfect" opening 30 minutes in which Thiago Alcantara and Xabi Alonso scored early goals before Leipzig winger Emil Forsberg was shown a red card for a dangerous tackle.

It left the visitors to play an hour on Wednesday at Munich's Allianz Arena a man down in the top-of-the-table clash.

Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi then compounded his team's problems by fouling Douglas Costa to concede a penalty which Robert Lewandowski converted on 45 minutes to make it 3-0.

The result left Munich three points clear of their battered opponents at the top of the German league table heading into the winter break.

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AFP, Berlin



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"Our system only works when everyone is in sync and we had a few players who weren't 100 percent fit.

"You can't do much to defend against Bayern when they play like that."

Any chance Leipzig had of clawing their way back from 2-0 down was ended by Forsberg's dreadful tackle on Philipp Lahm when the Sweden international trod on the Bayern captain's Achilles tendon.

"We don't need to talk about the red card by Emil," added the Leipzig boss.

"We all make mistakes, so I'm not going to demonise him, but I'm still proud of how the team has done so far."

Prior to the Munich showdown, Leipzig had kept Bayern off top spot for three weeks at the start of the month and the two teams have been in a neck-and-neck battle since.

But Ancelotti's side dominated and shut Leipzig out after the break as they used their 75 percent possession to dish out a masterclass to their young rivals, who are in their first German league season.

"We were very aggressive and quickly established control," said Bayern's Italian coach.

HUMMELS LOSES BET, GOES BLOND

Bayern Munich defender Mats Hummels dyed his hair blond for Wednesday's 3-0 top-of-the-table win over RB Leipzig after losing a bet at the Oktoberfest beer festival, he revealed. The 28-year-old World Cup winner, who normally has dark hair, went peroxide blond for the high-profile showdown at Munich's Allianz Arena which saw Bundesliga leaders Bayern open a three-point gap over second-placed Leipzig. Hummels said his striking hair change was a forfeit after losing a game of skittles during a visit to Munich's Oktoberfest, the world's most popular annual beer festival, to which the Bayern squad pay an annual visit. "After one throw, my opponent had already knocked over more than I had in my three attempts," the defender told Sky, who was careful not to name who he lost the bet to.

—AFP



Sprinter Mezbah Ahmed celebrates with the Bangladesh flag after winning the 100m sprint event of the National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mezbah's third in a row

SPORTS REPORTER



Sprinter Mezbah Ahmed survived a scare from his teammate and won the 100m sprint event of the National Athletics Championships 40th edition yesterday on the

meet's opening day at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Mezbah clocked in at 10.63 seconds (hand timing) to complete his hattrick of titles from the tournament.

The 21-year-old sprinter from Bangladesh Navy was the fastest man five times across three different events in a row—Thrice in National Athletics Championships and once each in the Summer Athletics Championship and Bangladesh Games.

And though it may come as a great delight to Mezbah to have established his dominance on the track, the lad from Bagerhat still falls short of the international standard. During his last international foray at the Rio Olympics, he clocked in at an unacceptable 11.34 seconds (electronic time).

Mezbah has even failed to improve on his previous result (10.60 seconds) which he posted during the last edition of the National Athletics Championship. He also fell short of Bangladesh's all time best record of 10.40 (hand timing) set by Golam

Ambia in 1991.

It was almost certain that Mezbah would be crowned champion as the other participants failed to provide a challenge. However, competition came from his own teammate MA Rouf who, participating in the national championship for the first time, finished with a timing of 10.70 seconds.

Rouf and Mezbah were neck-to-neck from the beginning but Mezbah's experience came into play during the last 15 meters as he sped ahead to reach the touch-line before Rouf who must now content himself with a second place finish.

"To be honest, I had to work hard to become first the first time. Previously, I ran in a relaxed mood and reached the touch-line but this time I had to give an extra effort in last 15 meters so you can say I beat him with experience," said Mezbah after completing the sprint.

In reply to a query, Mezbah explained that his performance is not suffering but rather they can't improve the timing due to a lack of training facilities.

"If you saw the fastest man of South Asian Games and third finisher from Sri Lanka, they had two-year training programmes in Australia while the silver winner had two-years of training in USA but we are not given such improved training and that's why we are still behind," expressed Mezbah.

Mezbah actually felt beforehand that Rouf could prove to be a threat as he did well during a 6-month training course. Rouf also came in very close during the morning heats regardless of which, Mezbah remained confident that he would retain the gold medal.

"I am happy to finish second in my first appearance as I started running only six months ago. I am used to playing football for the Navy and Rafiqe [Islam] sir brought me here after seeing my running in football," said 25-year-old Rouf, who believes he can improve further if given proper training.

Apart from the tales of Mezbah and Rouf, the overall scenario of the championship was not satisfactory in terms of participation. Due to the poor turn up from district teams and participants of other events, organisers were forced to complete events without holding heats.

"Generally the national championship is held in January-February and athletes get some time to prepare but this time they could not and that is one of major reasons for the poor turn up. Besides, there is hardly any athletics meets in district level, so how can you get new athletes?" complained Noakhali coach Rafiqullah Milon who wants a collective effort from federation and district sports association to revive athletics.

Hosts make winning start

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh made a winning start to the Bangabandhu Senior Asian Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship with a comprehensive four-set win over Afghanistan at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Bangladesh got off to a fine start, beating Afghanistan 25-15 in the first set. However, they failed to carry the momentum into the next set and lost 18-25. Bangladesh put up a strong performance in the next set to beat the touring side 25-16 and followed that by handing Afghanistan a 25-19 defeat in the fourth set to clinch the game.

Captain Saeed Al Jabir was ecstatic after making a winning start, something the team wanted ahead of five-team championship.

"I told you before that the first match against Afghanistan was very important for us as we wanted to get off to a winning start and we achieved our first target. Now we want to go forward match by match," said Jabir. "Obviously it is a good feeling to start the championship on a winning note."

"We did not lose our confidence despite losing the second game because it can happen and anyone can bounce back. However, we were confident of beating Afghanistan," said the tall lad from Satkhira.

Regarding today's match against Nepal, Jabir said: "We have played some matches against them and they are definitely a good side but our target is to reach the final. There is no alternative but to win the match against Nepal."

Earlier, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed inaugurated the championship while Bangladesh Volleyball Federation Atiqul Islam and general secretary Ashiqur Rahman Miku were among others present.



An Afghanistan player smashes the ball during their Bangabandhu International Volleyball Championship match against Bangladesh at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

BKF executive committee dissolved

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Sports Council (NSC) yesterday dissolved the executive committee of the Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation (BKF) and formed a 25-member ad-hoc committee, asking them to take the necessary steps to hold elections within the next three months.

AKM Shahidul Hoque, Inspector General of Police, has been retained as the president of the federation while Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police Habibur Rahman has been made the general secretary.

National awardee Amir Hossain Patuary and Chowdhury Emdadul Haq have been picked as the vice-presidents.

The executive committee of BKF, which expired on October 28, had failed to hold elections and the BKF president was forced to suspend the activities of federation on December 12, the day the National Kabaddi Championship was scheduled to be held.

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Barca hammer Hercules

AFP, Madrid

Turkey international Arda Turan scored a hat-trick as holders Barcelona thrashed third-division side Hercules 7-0 in the second leg of their Copa del Rey last-32 tie.

Turan struck his second hat-trick in as many weeks as Barca eased into the last 16 following an 8-1 aggregate win.

Luis Enrique rested his formidable front three of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar but the floodgates opened once Lucas Digne broke the deadlock on 37 minutes at the Camp Nou.



Lt. Col. (Retd.) Md. Faruk Khan, MP poses with the winners as chief guest of the 7th Summit Open Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Wednesday. Asif Ibrahim, president, Bangladesh Professional Golfers' Association (BPGA), Md. Farid Khan, vice-chairman, Summit Group, Bangladeshi golfing icon Siddikur Rahman and other esteemed guests were present at the occasion.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Best of luck

After 145km, cyclists are on their third & last day of the season. A 7 lap race of total 49 k.m. around Hatirjheel decides the champion today.

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