

MAHREZ TIPPED FOR TOP AWARD

Algeria forward Riyad Mahrez is favourite to be crowned African Footballer of the Year for 2016 on the back of his contribution to Leicester City's shock English Premier League title win. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) title would make it a hat-trick of wins for the 25-year-old, who has already been named PFA players' player of the year and BBC African player of the year. Mahrez was a key figure for Leicester last season, which saw the English East Midlands club defy 5000-1 odds and predictions of relegation to clinch a fairytale title victory. He played in all but one of the Foxes' games in 2015-16 and scored 17 goals. The slightly-built, right-sided forward also had humble beginnings, starting out with home-town club AAS Sarcelles in 2004.



-AFP

BSSF's Vision 2020 gets off the ground

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Shooting Sports Federation (BSSF) had last November disclosed its ambitious 'Vision 2020' plan to win a medal from the Tokyo Olympics and to bring that vision closer to reality, the game's governing body is all set to start a long-term training programme at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan today.

Bangladesh have taken part in nine Olympic Games since 1984, but have failed to produce any medals from the world's biggest sporting showcase. Winning a medal from the Olympics has always remained a distant dream for Bangladesh as all of its athletes -- with the exception of golfer Siddikur Rahman -- have participated in the Olympics via wild card entries, which are provided by International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ensure the participation of all member associations.

A total of 30 rifle and pistol shooters, including 14 female shooters, have been selected for the first-phase of the training which will be a three-month camp. The number of shooters may be decreased based on performances during the camp, but new recruits are also expected to join.

The BSSF has already appointed two European coaches till 2018 and

Montenegrin pistol coach Marko Sokic already arrived here on Thursday to work with 14 pistol shooters -- seven males and as many females.

The rifle shooters are supposed to report to the camp today to start training under local coaches until Danish coach Christensen Klavs arrives on January 13 to take charge of the Rifle team.

"As per the agreement, the shooters are supposed to get at least seven to eight months training a year under two foreign coaches and we think it is enough time to build up the players," BSSF chief operations officer Mushtaque Waiz told reporters.

The game's governing body is going to hold the Youth National Championships from January 13 from which some talented shooters are expected to join the national team's training.

"We hope we will get some new talents from upcoming championship as approximately 200 budding shooters are likely to take part in the tournament which we think will help the national coach pick some young shooters for the Vision 2020," said Waiz.

As the shooting team are scheduled to take part in Shooting World Cup in New Delhi next month, it is expected that the training camp will help the coaches pick the best shooters for the meet.



Bangladesh players pose with the runners-up trophy of the just concluded SAFF Women's Championship in Siliguri upon their arrival at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

NAT'L HANDBALL C'SHIP
BGB win 21st title in a row

SPORTS REPORTER

Boarder Guard Bangladesh (BGB) retained the title of the Exim Bank 26th National Men's Handball Championship with an emphatic 31-22 win over Bangladesh Police Handball Club in the final at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday.

The title means that BGB maintained their dominance in handball since the start of the national championship in 1984. Out of the 26 national championships BGB, who had previously participated as the now-defunct Bangladesh Rifles, have won it 25 times, including 21 times on the trot since Bangladesh Air Force claimed the only other title in 1988.

BGB dominated the final from the start and took a 15-5 into the half, before Bangladesh Police provided some resistance in the second half. BGB's Khairuzzaman was adjudged the best player of the championship.

In the day's other match, Bangladesh Ansar finished third after beating Jessore 45-25.

Kool-BSJA Media Cup from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Kool-BSJA Media Cup football tournament will get underway at the artificial turf adjacent to the Bangladesh Football Federation with the participation of 24 media houses.

The participating teams, split into eight groups, will play round-robin matches and the top team from each of the eight groups will advance to the quarterfinals. The semifinals and final will be held on Tuesday.

The information was disclosed at a press conference in which Bangladesh national football team captain Mamunul Islam and sponsor Square Toiletries Ltd's senior marketing manager Dr. Jesmin Zaman unveiled the jerseys of the participating teams.

Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) acting president Aghore Mandol and BSJA general secretary Raihan Al Mughni were among others present.

Younis keeps Pak alive

AFP, Sydney



Younis Khan claimed his 34th Test century and first in Australia to keep Pakistan's first innings barely alive in the final Test in Sydney on Thursday.

The 39-year-old Pakistani great became the first batsman to score Test hundreds in 11 countries as he turned around an indifferent series with his first century since October.

He fought back from a dreadful mix-up which led to the run-out of the team's leading scorer of the series, Azhar Ali, to spearhead the Pakistan fightback on a rain-affected day three.

Younis went to stumps on 136 off 279 balls with the tourists still trailing Australia by 267 runs and 68 from avoiding the follow-on. Pakistan were 271 for eight with Yasir Shah five not out.

Younis showed Australia his undoubted quality with 15 fours and a six off spinner Nathan Lyon, with his century coming off 208 balls.

In 206 Test innings, Younis has only been dismissed once in the 90s with 91 against New Zealand in Auckland in 2001.

"Younis has been a great servant for

Pakistan cricket and scoring a hundred here as well. Now he's scored a hundred in each Test-playing country, so it's a big achievement," Azhar said.

"It's probably his last tour to Australia so it's a really happy moment for each and everyone of us."

While Younis held court, skipper Misbah-ul-Haq continued his hapless series when he holed out to deep mid-wicket off Lyon.

Tellingly, his 18 was his highest score of a series in which he has totalled just 38 runs at a paltry average of 7.60.

Azhar was run out for 71 in a poor piece of running with Younis, when he could not beat home Mitchell Starc's throw from mid-on to the striker's end.

Younis drove Lyon to a diving fielder at short midwicket and hesitated, leading to some indecision with Azhar before Starc swooped in to throw back to the 'keeper.

"Me and Younis trust each other really well when it comes to running between the wickets. Unfortunately in this innings we had some bad calls and nearly ran each other out three times," Azhar said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 538 for 8 decl
PAKISTAN: First innings 271 for 8 (Azhar 71, Younis 136 not out, Misbah 18; Hazlewood 2-53, Lyon 2-98)



Pakistan batsman Younis Khan celebrates his century against Australia during the third day of the third Test in Sydney yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rodriguez fires Real

AFP, Madrid

Zinedine Zidane celebrated a spectacular first year in charge of Real Madrid as James Rodriguez scored twice to set the European champions firmly on course for the Copa del Rey quarterfinals with a 3-0 last 16, first leg win over Sevilla.

Not even the absence of the rested Cristiano Ronaldo could halt Real's now 38-game unbeaten run as Rodriguez took full advantage of a rare start by blasting home the opener from outside the box after just 10 minutes.

Raphael Varane headed home a second and Rodriguez added Real's third from the penalty spot before half-time.

"The first 45 minutes were physically and technically almost perfect," said Zidane.

The margin of Real's win will be of particular comfort to Zidane with next week's second leg (January 12) now appearing a formality amidst a hectic schedule.

Madrid started a second consecutive home game without any of their first-choice front three as Karim Benzema was left on the bench, Ronaldo rested altogether and Gareth Bale still sidelined by a long-term ankle injury.

However, having enjoyed a rare 17-day break since their last outing in winning the Club World Cup against Japanese champions Kashima Antlers, Real started brightly.

Alli ends Chelsea run

AFP, London



Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino believes his side showed the spirit required to win the Premier League title after they ended leaders Chelsea's 13-game winning run.

Chelsea were seeking to become the first team to win 14 successive English top-flight games in the same season, but Dele Alli's headed double condemned them to a 2-0 defeat on Wednesday.

Spurs climbed to third place in the table and although they trail Chelsea by seven points, Pochettino believes they are no longer the callow team who lost out to Leicester City in last season's title race.

"I think it was a little bit tough last season to explain why in the end we don't win the title or lift a trophy," he told reporters at White Hart Lane.

"In different games I think we missed being more competitive like it was today. For me, what it means to be competitive is like today. Work hard, but compete in this type of game."

"You need to play, to suffer, to fight. Sometimes you need to give possession to them because they push you and in that moment you need to work hard and be strong in your mind."

"We need to be pleased and proud because we understand what it means to be competitive when maybe you cannot play in the way you normally play."

It was Spurs' fifth successive victory and gave them a measure of revenge for the 2-2 draw at Stamford Bridge in May last year that ended their title challenge.

Asked if Spurs were back in the title race, Pochettino said: "I think it was important for us to reduce the gap."

"Now the top four is very competitive. The gap still is important for Chelsea, but I think it was a perfect thing for us to arrive to third place and be close."

"That is important for us and it's a lot of games to arrive before the end of the season. A lot can happen in football."

Sachin, Sunil laud Dhoni

STAR SPORT DESK



With most of the cricketing fraternity still reeling from Mahendra Singh Dhoni's shocking decision to step down as captain of the Indian ODI and T20I teams on Wednesday night, there were few who could wrap their heads around the news fast enough to react.

Dhoni's retirement leaves big shoes to fill, presumably by heir-apparent Virat Kohli, but it will be tough to match the glittering career of the 35-year-old cricketer who is the only captain to have lifted the ICC World T20, ICC Cricket World Cup and ICC Champions Trophy while also taking his side to the number one Test ranking.

Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar was one of the first to voice his gratitude, taking to Twitter to express himself. "Congratulations to MSD on a wonderful career as a captain leading India to success in both T20 and ODI World Cups. I have seen him emerge from an aggressive player to a steady and decisive captain. It's a day to celebrate his successful captaincy and respect his decision. Wish MSD the very best as he continues entertaining us on the field with his exploits," wrote Sachin.

Another former captain, Sunil Gavaskar, said he was unsurprised by Dhoni's decision to quit the captaincy, although he admitted it came a bit earlier than anticipated.

Rabada sends SL crashing

AFP, Cape Town



Kagiso Rabada took three wickets in two overs as South Africa sent Sri Lanka crashing to a 282-run defeat on the fourth day of the second Test at Newlands on Thursday.

Fast bowler Rabada finished with six for 55 as Sri Lanka crumbled to 224 all out, giving South Africa a winning 2-0 lead in the three-match series. It took South Africa less than two hours to claim the remaining six wickets after the tourists resumed on 130 for four.

Overnight batsmen Angelo Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal played out the first five overs of the day without undue alarm before Rabada struck with the first ball of the sixth over when Chandimal (30) flicked him straight to Stephen Cook at square leg, the only fielder in a largely unmanned area of the field.

New batsman Upul Tharanga showed aggressive intent and hit Rabada for three fours, one off an edge, before flashing at a wide delivery from the first ball of the fast bowler's next over to be caught behind by Quinton de Kock.

Sri Lankan captain Mathews fell to the last ball of the over, edging a lifting delivery to De Kock after making top score of 49 off 82 balls.

Rabada struck once more when he had Suranga Lakmal caught behind. It was the fifth time in his 13-Test career that he had taken five or more wickets in an innings. He had match figures of 10 for 92, his second ten-wicket haul.

There was a flurry of strokes from Rangana Herath and Lahiru Kumara, who put on 33 for the ninth wicket before Keshav Maharaj and Vernon Philander wrapped up South Africa's win.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 392
SRI LANKA: First innings 110
SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 224 for 7 decl.
SRI LANKA: Second innings 224 (K Silva 29, de Silva 22, Mathews 49, Chandimal 30, Herath 35 not out; Philander 3-48, Rabada 6-55)
Result: South Africa won by 282 runs and lead three-match series 2-0.
Player-of-the-match: Kagiso Rabada.



South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada ran through Sri Lanka, taking six wickets as the visitors suffered a 282-run defeat inside four days in the second Test in Cape Town.

PHOTO: AFP