

SONY ESPN
La Liga
 Sevilla v Bilbao
 Live from 2:30am (Friday)
SONY SIX
La Liga
 Deportivo v Atletico Madrid
 Live from 1:45am (Friday)

MARIA HANDED ROME WILDCARD

Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova has been given a wildcard to play in the Italian Open in May, organisers said Wednesday. The former world number one makes her return to the circuit in Stuttgart in April after completing a 15-month ban for doping. "We officially announce the wild card for the 3-time Rome champion @MariaSharapova into the main draw..." organisers announced on Twitter. Sharapova hasn't played on tour since testing positive for meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open. An initial two-year ban by the International Tennis Federation was reduced to 15 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The Rome tournament runs from May 15 to May 21. She has also been handed a wildcard for the May 6-13 Madrid Open.



QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Infantino vows to honour African promise

FIFA president Gianni Infantino vows to honour a promise to hike Africa's World Cup final berths to nine or ten during a visit to the impoverished West African state of Mauritania this week.

Golf made simpler and faster in new rule proposals

Golf rulemakers The R&A and United States Golf Association (USGA) unveiled a radical set of new rule proposals they hope will simplify the game and also speed up play.

Herath pays tribute to mentor Hathurusingha

Sri Lanka's interim Test captain Rangana Herath paid a tribute to his mentor Chandika Hathurusingha, who invited him for Moors Sports Club when he was a 19-year-old.

Former FIFA secretary general Valcke appeals 10-year ban

Former FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke has appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport against his 10-year ban from football, the tribunal said on Tuesday.

'Ranieri will find new job immediately'

Claudio Ranieri will not have to wait long for another job following his sacking by Leicester City, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said on Tuesday.

'Real top because of performances, not referees'

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane launched a passionate defence of his team on Tuesday amid accusations the La Liga leaders have benefited from favourable refereeing decisions this season following their 3-2 win at Villarreal on Sunday.

Bangabandhu, Bangamata Gold Cup finals today

SPORTS REPORTER

The finals of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup and Bangamata Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup primary school football tournaments will be held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka today. Claimed by the organisers as the largest football tournaments in the world, these two knock-out format tournaments have produced players for the age-level national teams and those to be competing at the big bowl today are expected to be future stars.

A press conference ahead of the two finals was held at the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) House where

coaches, managers and captains of the four teams spoke about their journey so far and the targets in the finals.

The final of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup will be contested between Toitong Govt Primary School of Pekua, Cox's Bazar and Kamrangi Govt Primary School of Jointapur, Sylhet. However, the captain and the coach of the school from Cox's Bazar alleged that the school from Sylhet had fielded four over-age players in the tournament so far. While they claimed to have submitted a complaint with the BFF against the opposition, they fear that if the over-age players are fielded in the final, it will turn into a 'father against son' affair.

The representatives of the organisers, the ministry for mass and primary

education, replied that they would be working on the complaint and that they would try to enforce the age-limit, which is supposed to be 12 years or below, more rigorously from next year.

In the final of the Bangamata Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup, Borobarua Govt Primary School of Rajshahi will take on Tepurgari BK Govt. Primary School of Lalmonirhat. The coach of Tepurgari BK School hoped that they could maintain their perfect defensive record up to the final and take the trophy to North Bengal while the coach of the Barabarua school team also expressed his confidence of winning the title.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will distribute prizes among the winners after witnessing the final matches.



The captains of the four finalist teams of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup and Bangamata Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup primary school football tournaments pose for photographs during a press meet at the Bangladesh Football Federation House yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Mane extends lead

SPORTS REPORTER



Udayan Mane extended his lead to two strokes as Mohammad Nazim moved into the top ten at the end of the third round of the BTI Open yesterday.

Mane, the 26-year-old Bengalurean, carded a three-under-par (69) at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Wednesday for an aggregate of 10-under-par (206), which posted him two shots clear of compatriot Feroze Singh Garewal. Khalin Joshi occupied the third position a further shot back while Bangladesh's Nazim shared the 10th position along with Mithun Perera of Sri Lanka and Naman Dawar of India at three-under-par (213). The rest of the top ten positions were all occupied by Indian golfers.

Mane, starting the penultimate round with a one-stroke lead, looked in total control on the front-nine, having made two birdies and seven pars. He landed his wedges close enough on the seventh and ninth to make birdies.

He then had a few hiccups on the back-nine, dropping bogeys on the 10th, 12th and 15th in exchange for just two birdies on the 11th and 14th. However, he managed to pull it back with birdies on the last two holes to continue as favourite for the title.

"I made some good up and downs and par saves today. The birdies on the last two holes brought me back in the zone and lifted my confidence. The highlight of the day was probably the wedge shot from the first cut on the 18th that stopped inches from the hole and gave me a crucial two-shot advantage going into the final round," Mane said after the day's play.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's Nazim lifted himself from 29th to 10th position on the

SELECTED SCORES

1	Udayan Mane (IND)	-10 (206)
2	Feroze Garewal (IND)	-8 (208)
3	Khalin Joshi (IND)	-7 (209)
4	Harendra Gupta (IND)	-6 (210)
T5	Shamim Khan (IND)	-5 (211)
T5	Gaurav Singh (IND)	-5 (211)
T5	Aman Raj (IND)	-5 (211)
T10	Naman Dawar (IND)	-3 (213)
T10	Mithun Perera (SL)	-3 (213)
T10	Md Nazim (BAN)	-3 (213)



leaderboard with the day's best score of five-under-67. The KGC pro mixed an eagle with four birdies and a bogey to give rise to hopes of a home winner at the 48-lac-rupee event, which was won last year by Bangladesh's Siddikur Rahman.

Shakhawat Hossain Sohel was the second best placed among the locals in 13th position with an aggregate score of two-under-par (214).

'Not even Mourinho can save us'

Ashish Vadra was one of the most creative midfielders the country has produced. He represented the national football team from 1978 to 1990 and played for Dhaka Abahani between 1981 and 1990, except for the 1984 season when he turned out for Mohammedan SC. In an interview with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman, the 57-year-old former footballer goes down memory lane and talks about his playing days and the current state of the country's football after three local outfits crashed out of the ongoing Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup in Chittagong. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

The Daily Star (TDS): What is your feeling after your beloved Chittagong Abahani lost to South Korea's Pocheon Citizen FC in the semifinal of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup?

AV: Definitely, we are on a downward trend. We can't improve and the local teams were not organised because they assembled the players from other clubs. It is not a game of style to follow.

TDS: How do you view the performances of the three local outfits -- Dhaka Abahani, Mohammedan SC and Chittagong Abahani -- in the tournament?

AV: Definitely, we are on a downward trend. We can't improve and the local teams were not organised because they assembled the players from other clubs. It is not a game of style to follow.



TDS: How do you evaluate the performances of Pocheon and Chittagong Abahani?

AV: Pocheon played the same style that we faced against the South Korean team during our career. The only difference is that Pocheon players are a bit slower than their top-level footballers. The Korean players have been adopting this style from childhood but our basics are very poor and we don't have any

are players like you not emerging?

AV: I can tell you that Arman Mia [who was close to Ashish] was a good midfielder. Mamunul Islam is not bad. Jamal Bhuiyan is mediocre. There are no players in the pipeline because there is no football at the grassroots and school level. It is tougher to train kids than senior players. There is no academy. Now, football is not the popular game. It is not possible to develop football by training only 25 players at the senior level. Even if you appoint Jose Mourinho, it is not possible to do well.

TDS: What are the footballers of this generation missing?

AV: At whatever international level we played, I don't think we played good football. But I believe we could have played better football had we been provided proper facilities, which this generation of footballers get regularly. This generation of players should display much improved performance. We went to Delhi to play Asian Games from Dhaka by bus and train and then lost to India the next day but bounced back to beat Malaysia in the next match. There was no support and guidance. This genera-

tion may have an edge in achievement compared to us but we had better quality.

TDS: Did you have any lacking during your playing days?

AV: My running and chasing were poor. It was interesting to play with [Khurshid] Babul and he actually made me lazy because he provided me the cream after snatching the ball from others and I just put in the final passes.

TDS: Do you have any regrets?

AV: To be very honest, we had a misunderstanding with Chittagong Abahani when I was a player-cum-football secretary. Since then I stay away from Chittagong Abahani and that gap has not been closed with Abahani, which was dearer to me than my blood. What I did was for the team; that was not my mistake.

TDS: Do you see any hope for the country's football?

AV: I don't see any light in the near future, especially the way football is being run. The authorities concerned could have groomed the U-16 team which won the SAFF Championship but they did not. Football is not on the right track. Things must change and age-level teams have to be groomed.

Chittagong Open this month

SPORTS REPORTER



After hosting the BTI Open in Kurmitola, Bangladesh is going to host another Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) event later this month. Termed the Chittagong Open 2017, the event will be held at the picturesque Bhatiyari Golf & Country Club (BGCC) and is scheduled to begin on March 29.

A press conference in this regard was organised by the club yesterday. Co-sanctioned by PGTI and Bangladesh Professional Golfers Tour (BPGA), and promoted by Riz events, the 40-lac-rupee event is expected to feature 84 golfers from Bangladesh and the rest of the sub-continent including Siddikur Rahman, hoped the organisers.

Mirza Salman Ispahani, vice president of BGCC, Uttam Mundi, CEO of PGTI and Rizwan Bin Farouq, managing director of Riz Events, were present at the press conference.

Dybala fires Juve

AFP, Turin



Paolo Dybala's second-half penalty double put holders Juventus in control with a 3-1 win over Napoli in the first leg of their Italian Cup semifinal on Tuesday.

Spaniard Jose Callejon had given the visitors the lead after 36 minutes as the hosts looked out of sorts at home in Turin.

But Dybala's double on 47 and 69 minutes, either side of fellow Argentine Gonzalo Higuain's goal on 64 minutes gave Juventus their tenth consecutive win in all competitions.

BHF names 18-man squad as team beat Ghana

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh beat Ghana 1-0 in the third and final preparation match yesterday as the game's governing body shored up preparations for hosting the Hockey World League (Round 2) to be held in Dhaka from March 4 to 12.

Having lost the first match 2-0, the hosts drew 2-2 in the second match before finally winning against the African side, who are six places below Bangladesh in the international rankings.

"The players were a bit confused with the different strategies I tried during the warm-up matches. But they played better than the previous games today even though I don't feel three matches is enough preparation for us," Bangladesh coach Oliver Kurtz said yesterday. "We want to take the games of the Hockey World League one by one. Our first target is to finish second in the pool, and then we will try to win the quarterfinal and semifinal."

A total of eight teams, split into two

out from this event. So we have tried to ensure highest security to the teams this time. Two members of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) are already in Dhaka in this regard," Rahmatullah said, adding that Malaysia and Oman had already arrived while the rest of the teams are expected to arrive by tomorrow.

The BHF general secretary also informed that sponsors FMC Group and Index Group would provide a budget of around Tk one crore for the event with the expenses regarding the Bangladesh team's preparation, all the teams' security and transportation, and all the expenses of the technical officials being borne from this budget.

The representative of AIN Bangla, the media partners of this event, informed that seven matches of the league would be telecast live on the channel.

The press conference was attended by the representatives of FMC Group and Index Group and BHF officials among others.

Later in the day, the BHF announced an 18-member squad for event, with veteran forward Rassel Mahmud Jimmy as captain.

SQUAD

- Asim Gope, Zahid Hossain, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Khorshedur Rahman, Ashrafur Islam, Shitul Ahmed, Rezaul Karim Babu, Imran Hasan Puntu, Sarwar Hossain, Kamruzzaman Rana, Nayeem Uddin, Krishna Kumar Das, Mahbub Hossain, Rassel Mahmud Jimmy (C), Arshad Hossain, Milon Hossain, Moinul Islam Koushik, Roman Sarkar

STAR WEEKEND
 in other news...

FLYING INTO THE STORM?
 THE WOES OF BANGLADESHI FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

In our Women's Day special, we highlight the hardships female migrant workers have to overcome. We also have a piece on the only female rickshaw puller in the country, Jasmine Begum, and a photo feature by Shahria Sharmin which encompasses her extensive work with the Hijra community. Don't forget to grab your copy of the Star Weekend, tomorrow, Friday!