



Members of the Bangladesh hockey team celebrate after securing a thumping 5-1 victory against Fiji in their Hockey World League Round-2 encounter at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Barca target 'miracle' as Messi hits top gear

AFP, Barcelona



Ivan Rakitic believes "a miracle" is possible when Barcelona attempt to overturn a 4-0 first leg deficit against Paris Saint-Germain in their Champions League last 16 tie on Wednesday. No side in Champions League history has ever come back from four goals down, but Barca hopes were raised by the sensational form of Lionel Messi in Saturday's 5-0 rout of Celta Vigo.

"We will give everything from the first minute to the last," the Croatian international told Spanish TV station Movistar. "We will try and hopefully we can produce a miracle."

Messi scored two incredible individual goals to open and close the scoring as Barca remained one point clear at the top of La Liga.

The five-time World Player of the Year had a hand in all three other goals too as he teed up Neymar for a sensational chip and crossed for Samuel Umtiti to score his first Barca goal, whilst Rakitic was also on the scoresheet.

In their first outing since coach Luis Enrique announced he will step down at the end of the season, Barca produced arguably their best performance of the campaign.

The Catalans also smashed Sporting

Gijon 6-1 in their previous outing -- both scorelines which would be good enough when PSG visit in midweek.

And Enrique said he couldn't have wished for a better build-up to the ultimate challenge.

"That it is one of our best performances in the last few months is without doubt," he said.

"If I had to choose the way in which we would go into the Champions League game against PSG it would be very similar to these last two games: scoring lots of goals, the team gaining confidence and the players getting stronger."

"I think we are in great form for a very difficult tie, that is not lost yet."

"I am sure we are going to have opportunities to get ourselves back in it and we will try until the death."

Enrique's name was chanted by the crowd at the Camp Nou on Saturday.

Banners were also raised towards the end of the match willing Barca's players to believe in the most unlikely of comebacks against PSG.

"The fans value a lot what these players have won, the hunger they have and what they show in every game," added Enrique.

"In my time here I have never once seen a poor attitude in any of my players."

"Barca fans should be loyal and, above all, have confidence that the team can come back."



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi (L) scored two incredible solo goals against Celta Vigo in their La Liga match on Saturday and his side are hoping the Argentine ace is at the peak of his powers when they look to overturn a 4-0 deficit against PSG in their Champions League round of 16 match on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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:

Griezmann takes Atleti to 4th

A smiling Fernando Torres watched just four days on from a sickening blow to the head as Antoine Griezmann struck twice in Atletico Madrid's 3-0 win over Valencia on Sunday.



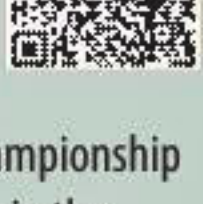
Bonucci saves Juve blushes

Leonardo Bonucci's second-half leveller saved Juventus's blushes a day after Roma virtually conceded the title as the champions were held to their first Serie A draw in over a year at Udinese.



Mclroy eyes No. 1 spot

Patience will be a virtue for Rory Mclroy as he seeks to win the WGC-Mexico Championship and possibly regain the world number one ranking.



Kohli, Smith square off in verbal clash

Tensions flared in a gripping opening hour of day two of the second Test, with rival skippers Steve Smith and Virat Kohli sharing a heated chat for several overs.



Cavani on the spot as PSG edge Nancy

Edinson Cavani's late penalty earned Paris St Germain a 1-0 home win against Nancy as the French champions put pressure on Ligue 1 rivals Monaco.



US players must stand for national anthem

The United States Soccer Federation has instituted a policy that requires players on a national team to "stand respectfully" during national anthems.



Murray claims 45th career title

Andy Murray clinched his first title of 2017 and 45th of his career as he dominated Spain's Fernando Verdasco 6-3, 6-2 to win the Dubai Tennis Championships.



Bangladesh thrash Fiji

SPORTS REPORTER



Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and Mamunur Rahaman Chayan struck two goals each to power hosts Bangladesh to a 5-1 win over lightweights Fiji in the hosts' second match of Hockey World League Round-2 at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The margin might give the impression of an emphatic win over the nation from Oceania, who had come into the match on the back of a 7-0 loss to Oman. In reality however, the home side toiled hard in the first two quarters before a strong showing in the last two quarters saw them notch up a relieving win after beginning their campaign with a 3-0 loss at the hands of Malaysia, the top-ranked side in the group.

The performance from Oliver Kurtz's charges was well below-par, especially in the attacking third and from penalty corners, evidenced by the fact that they created a lot of opportunities and won a total of 13 penalty corners.

Besides that, there was an apparent lack of cohesion among the midfielders and forwards and the backline was also exposed on occasion but any damage was contained by the poor finishing of the Fiji forwards.

As expected, Bangladesh controlled the match with the majority of possession and won four penalty corners but penalty-corner specialist Chayan failed to convert any of them, relinquishing the duties to the promising Ashraful Islam. However, Ashraful followed in the footsteps of his senior teammate.

Fiji goalkeeper Richard Eyre was one of the major reasons Bangladesh could not cash in on their penalty corners despite three players -- Khorshedur Rahman joined in later -- trying their hand. Interestingly, Chayan converted from Bangladesh's seventh penalty corner, but Fiji cashed in on their lone penalty corner to level the margin in the 32nd minute.

However, Jimmy restored the lead for the hosts five minutes later following a nice one-two with Kamruzzaman Rana, before extending the lead in the 41st minute with a

close-range strike after Milon Hossain cut the ball back to the veteran marksman. Jimmy could have made the day sweeter with a hattrick, but he squandered two opportunities.

In the last quarter, Chayan converted another penalty corner to make the margin 4-1 before Ashraful Islam also converted a penalty corner to wrap up the victory three minutes from time.

"Yes, I am satisfied the way the players played today [Sunday] and I saw nothing wrong in the penalty corners, but you have to admit that the goalkeeper of the opponents played better," said Kurtz, who believes his charges will be able to beat Oman in their next match on Tuesday.

"We can beat Oman by carrying [on with] this kind of performance but we need to improve our scoring ability," added the German, who had been Oman's head coach for a long period.

In the day's other matches, Malaysia beat Oman 6-1, Ghana beat Sri Lanka 5-4 and Egypt beat China 3-2 in a penalty shootout after the match ended in a 2-2 draw.

Unseeded Querrey upsets Nadal in final

AFP, Acapulco



Unseeded American Sam Querrey stunned second-seeded Rafael Nadal 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) on Saturday to win the ATP Mexico Open and end the Spaniard's run of perfection in Acapulco.

Querrey, ranked 40th in the world, fired 19 aces, backed up by powerful, precise groundstrokes, en route to his first career victory over Nadal in five meetings.

The Spaniard, the 2005 and 2013 champion, had never even lost a set in Acapulco.

"I'm ecstatic," Querrey said. "To do it against Rafa makes it even a little sweeter."

Querrey captured his ninth ATP title in an impressive week that saw him beat four top-10 players -- Belgian David Goffin, Austrian Dominic Thiem, Australian Nick Kyrgios and sixth-ranked Nadal.

He's projected to return to the top 30 in the world rankings on Monday.

"It's definitely a tournament that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life," Querrey said. "It's one of those weeks where I got in the zone and everything was working for me. I hope I can have more like this."

"After the match against Goffin, I knew I could go far here if I continued to play at that level," he added. "My forehand and backhand were great and my serve bailed me out of trouble when I needed it."

Nadal, playing his first tournament since falling to Roger Federer in five sets in the Australian Open final, was denied his first hard court title since Doha in 2014.

Querrey surrendered just four points on his serve in the opening set and he broke Nadal at love to seize a 5-3 advantage.

"He played very well, almost reaching perfection," Nadal said. "I played under a lot of pressure because of his serve and baseline game. He left me with very few options, and the few I had he also played good."



Spaniard Rafael Nadal was denied in the final of the ATP Mexico Open by unheralded American Sam Querrey on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

District football gets a boost

U-18 National Championship begins on Thursday

SPORTS REPORTER



With the aim of reviving district football, the Under-18 National Football Championship will get underway from

Thursday at eight separate venues with the participation of 63 district teams and Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP).

The participating teams, split into eight zones with eight teams in each zone, will play round-robin matches with the zonal champions advancing to the eight-team final round to be held from the third week of this month.

"The Under-18 National Football Championship is an event of our four-year calendar and we are all set to hold it with the hope of revitalising football at the district-level, the area which most footballers come out of," Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) senior vice president Abdus Salam Mursheedy said at a press conference yesterday.

The tournament was supposed to get underway in the later part of January but it was shifted to March to accommodate the training programme for the districts footballers. The BFF development committee conducted five to six days training with

each of the district teams and selected 30 players for each team.

"Our coaches have travelled to each of the districts to train players and have selected 30 players for each district, which will finally pick 20 players," BFF vice president Badal Roy said. "We will also select 35-40 players from this tournament to form the Under-19 team for next year's AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers."

Tournament committee chairman Mohiuddin Ahmed Modi, general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag and member Fazlur Rahman Babul were among others present on the occasion.

Ronaldo fit for Napoli match

AS

Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo, who was carrying a niggle and subsequently missed Real's trip to Eibar on Saturday, trained normally with the rest of the squad on Sunday as he looks to make a return against Napoli in Los Blancos' return leg of the last 16 Champions League.

Cristiano was joined by Dani Carvajal, Marcelo, Toni Kroos, Isco Alarcón, Mateo Kovacic and Gareth Bale, with the Portuguese marksman completing the full training session and demonstrating that he is fit enough to warrant a place in the starting line-up.

City, Spurs on the up

AFP, London



Sergio Aguero's 23rd goal of the season helped Manchester City reclaim third place in the Premier League thanks to a comfortable 2-0 win at struggling Sunderland on Sunday.

A fifth goal in three games from the inform Argentina international, whose future at the club has been clouded by the recent impact of the now injured Gabriel Jesus, paved the way for City's seventh victory in eight unbeaten games.

The win left Pep Guardiola's side a point behind second-placed Tottenham Hotspur and eight adrift of leaders Chelsea.

Not for the first time, Aguero's finishing instincts in front of goal embellished what was never more than a workmanlike display.

City's top scorer was denied a late second goal by keeper Jordan Pickford after Leroy Sane put the result beyond doubt by doubling his side's advantage just before the hour when the German midfielder rounded-off a counter-attack to score for the third consecutive game.

Sunderland's problems continued as they stretched their unwanted league run to just one victory in 10, a sequence which has seen them take just five points from the last possible 30 to leave them six points adrift of safety going into the final 10 games of the season.

Aguero struck at the end of a first half where the hosts carved out the better openings, but were made to pay for not taking their chances.

Three minutes of the opening period remained when Yaya Toure broke from the Sunderland half to feed David Silva, whose ball found Raheem Sterling wide on the right. The winger's deflected low cross should have been cleared, but Aguero beat his marker, Lamine Kone, to the ball to send a deft first-time touch into the net at Pickford's near post.

Harry Kane extended his hot streak with a blistering brace as Tottenham beat Everton 3-2 to close the gap on leaders Chelsea to seven points on Sunday.

Earlier, Kane opened the scoring with a thunderous first-half strike at White Hart Lane and netted again after the break to take his goal tally to 24 in 28 games this season.