

INJURED DUE TO INFLAMED TATTOO

Eintracht Frankfurt full-back Guillermo Varela has been ruled out of the German Cup final after having a bad reaction to a tattoo he had done on Monday. Varela was due to start for Frankfurt against Dortmund in the DFB Pokal final this coming Saturday, but the 24-year-old disobeyed the orders of his coach, Niko Kovac, and went under the needle four days before the match. Now, the scab has become "inflamed" to the point where he won't be able to take part in Frankfurt's biggest fixture for quite some time. As per ESPN FC, Varela has been suspended by Frankfurt after sporting director Fredi Bobic described his conduct as "reckless" in a statement.

—AGENCIES



Sheikh Jamal's substitute forward Solomon King (L) places the ball past Mohammedan goalkeeper Mamun Khan during their Federation Cup quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SC upholds Messi's tax-fraud sentence

AFP, Madrid



Spain's Supreme Court on Wednesday confirmed a 21-month jail sentence and 2.09-million-euro fine imposed on Lionel Messi for tax fraud, months after the Barcelona football star lodged an appeal.

The Argentina international and his father Jorge Horacio Messi were in July 2016 found guilty of using companies in Belize, Britain, Switzerland and Uruguay to avoid paying taxes on 4.16 million euros of Messi's income earned from his image rights from 2007-09.

The income related to Messi's image rights that was hidden includes endorsement deals with Danone, Adidas, Pepsi-Cola, Procter & Gamble and the Kuwait Food Company.

Both Messi, 29, and his father were given 21 months in jail -- prison terms likely to be suspended as is common in Spain for first offences for non-violent crimes carrying a sentence of less than two years.

They appealed to the Supreme Court, which confirmed the sentence for the five-time world player of the year on Wednesday.

However, it also reduced the term to 15 months jail for his father, taking into account that his football star son had paid back the defrauded money to tax authorities.

The player and his father made a voluntary payment of 5.0 million euros -- equal to the amount of the unpaid taxes plus interest -- in August 2013 after being formally investigated.

During last year's trial, Messi had argued that he trusted his father with his finances and "knew nothing" about how his wealth was managed.

Prosecutors had asked for Messi to be absolved, arguing there was no evidence that the player was aware of how his income was managed. But the Supreme Court said Wednesday that he would have known about his obligation to pay taxes.

"It defies logic to concede that someone who earns a large income does not know that he must pay taxes on it," the court wrote in its sentence.

Messi is far from the only Barca star to find himself embroiled in problems with the Spanish authorities. Brazil star and Barcelona forward Neymar and his parents are due to stand trial for alleged corruption over his transfer from Santos in 2013.

Barca's Argentine defender Javier Mascherano also agreed a one-year suspended sentence with authorities for tax fraud last year.

And former Barcelona president Sandro Rosell was arrested on Tuesday in a money laundering investigation.

Kroos reminds me of me: Xavi

AGENCIES, Madrid

Filling the void left by Xavi in La Liga is a difficult task, but the midfielder himself pinpointed Real Madrid's Toni Kroos as the man to do so.

The Spainard believes that the former Bayern Munich man is the unsung hero of the Real Madrid side, although his admiration for him doesn't extend as far as to wishing him well in the Champions League final.

"I think that Kroos is the engine of Real Madrid," Xavi told Sportbild. "He has a way of playing that reminds me a lot of myself. He is like my successor on the field."

"In the Champions League final, I'm Barcelona and I can't go for Real because if they do well, it means Barcelona are doing poorly. I wish Juve luck because of the hard work that they have put in in recent years. They deserve it."

Xavi also touched on Pep Guardiola's first season at Manchester City, saying that the experience would only make his former manager stronger.

Mohammedan fall to Sheikh Jamal

SPORTS REPORTER



Some familiar faces rushed in front of the Mohammedan SC dugout to vent their fury soon after the Black and Whites suffered a 0-1 defeat to Sheikh Jamal DC in the first quarterfinal of the Walton Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

With the hope of putting behind the dismal performance of last season, Mohammedan SC had formed a squad with experienced players and gave charge to veteran Indian coach Syed Naeemuddin. However, their early exit from the season's curtain-raising tournament did not go down well with the supporters.

The supporters hurled abuse towards the Indian coach, grilling him as to why he did not field the right players and did not bring changes at the right time. Nayeemuddin, however, told reporters that his charges squandered scoring opportunities, which was the reason for the defeat.

From a neutral perspective, it was a lacklustre display from the Black and Whites, who were eliminated from the group stages last season. The Mohammedan players failed to have any impact on the match and could hardly expose the defence of Sheikh Jamal, who had knocked Mohammedan out from

the quarterfinals of the 2013 edition too.

In contrast, the youthful Sheikh Jamal team created a number of scoring opportunities with Nigerian striker Raphael Odovin and Gambian marksman Mamadou Bah combining well. The two exposed the Mohammedan backline time and again but could not beat goalkeeper Mamun Khan in the first half.

Bah saw his low drive at the near post brilliantly stopped by Mamun, who then denied Raphael from close range. Mamun again rescued Mohammedan by thwarting Raphael in a one-on-one situation on the half-hour mark.

Sheikh Jamal finally broke the deadlock in the 77th minute with Gambian substitute Solomon King striking with his first touch after replacing compatriot

Bah a couple of minutes earlier. Raphael darted into the box from the right and played a neat cut-back for King, who sliced the ball into the net past Mohammedan goalkeeper.

Mohammedan had a fine chance to level the margin from a goal-mouth melee but Kingsley's goal-bound volley from close range was incredibly blocked by a Sheikh Jamal defender. That was the last chance of the match as three-time champions Sheikh Jamal moved into the semifinals for the fourth time in five editions after being eliminated from the quarterfinals last season.

SHEIKH JAMAL 1-0 MOHAMMEDAN
KING 77

Ronaldinho gatecrashes training

AGENCIES, Madrid

Barcelona legend Ronaldinho surprised everyone at the Joan Gamper complex yesterday as he showed up and crashed Barcelona's training session ahead of their Copa del Rey final against Alaves on May 28.

The Brazil legend was immediately spotted by Neymar, who ran to his countryman and hugged him. Then began the round of pictures as the training session turned into more of a photoshoot, with numerous stars lining up to get a quick snap.

The smiling Brazilian duly obliged and social media was abuzz afterwards as the pictures made the rounds.

Ronaldinho has fond memories of his time at Barcelona, where he enjoyed a glittering five-season spell in Catalonia between 2003 and 2008.

The midfielder won two La Liga titles and the Champions League with the club -- also claiming the Ballon d'Or in 2005.

SWIMMING'S TALENT HUNT

Third phase ends today

SPORTS REPORTER



The nationwide swimmers' talent hunt programme titled 'Bangladesh in search of the best swimmer', organised by the Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) in financial and technical association with Bangladesh Navy, will come to an end today at the Navy headquarters in Banani.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend the programme to distribute the prize money among the winners in nine events to bring an end to the third phase of the programme, which started on February 1, with 129 swimmers including 37 female swimmers selected for the fourth phase.

The ambitious programme generated huge enthusiasm among the potential swimmers last year as hundreds of participants turned up at each of the venues in 64 districts. The first phase was held over 120 days across the country with the participation of 13,000 swimmers. Later, some 1275 swimmers were picked for different age groups (Under 11 to 12, Under 13 and 14, Under 15 to 17 and Over 17 to 20) over a four-month period.

Nine local coaches under the guidance of Korean coach Park Tae Gun conducted a four-day basic training to those selected swimmers in October last year before trimming the number to 129, who were later given four months' training for grooming.

Now, some 60 swimmers will be finalised for the fourth and final phase. The BSF will provide them three-year training for international competitions.

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:

Chelsea cancel victory parade after Manchester attack

Champions Chelsea cancelled Sunday's Premier League victory parade saying it was "inappropriate" after the Manchester suicide bombing that left 22 dead and more than 60 wounded.

Kyrgios suffers early exit in Lyon as French Open nears

Nick Kyrgios suffered a setback in his preparations for the French Open when he was sent packing from the Lyon Open by qualifier Nicolas Kicker on Tuesday.

Maria Sharapova handed wildcard for Rogers Cup

Maria Sharapova's comeback from a doping ban will include an appearance at the Rogers Cup in August after the former world number one was granted a wild card by the organisers of the Toronto tournament on Tuesday.

Chapecoense knocked out of Libertadores

Chapecoense were docked three points for fielding a suspended player and opponents Lanus awarded a 3-0 win on Tuesday, ending the Brazilian team's Copa Libertadores hopes.

Koke pens five-year extension at Atletico

Midfielder Koke has signed a contract extension to stay at Atletico Madrid until June 2024, the club confirmed on Tuesday. The star had been linked with a move away from the Vicente Calderon, but the new deal has mitigated those rumours to some extent.



Valverde quits Bilbao

Refuses to discuss Barca link

AGENCIES, Madrid



Ernesto Valverde resigned from Athletic Bilbao on Tuesday with the hope of taking over at Barcelona next season, a goal Spanish media take as a given.

"Ernesto Valverde will not continue as manager of the premier team of Athletic Club in the 2017/18 season," the Basque club said in a statement.

Valverde, who played for Barcelona between 1988 and 1990, will face the press along with club president Josu Urrutia on Wednesday.

Valverde, 53, has been Athletic coach for four seasons, bagging one trophy during his mandate -- the Supercup after victory over Barca in 2015.

Spanish media reports that Valverde should be named as successor to outgoing Barcelona coach Luis Enrique on Monday and he hinted at that in a statement.

"My next adventure has to be difficult," he claimed. "I haven't reached an agreement with any one club yet, but I do have an offer from an important club."

"I have had a lot of doubts, but my work here is done. I think my decision is for the best for everybody."

"I don't know what is being published, but I am responsible for my own honesty," he concluded. "Regarding Barcelona's supposed interest, I don't talk about teams that aren't my own and won't start doing so now."

"There is someone looking for an apartment for me in Rome, another who is looking for me a school in Barcelona..." he joked of the media reports linking him to a new job.



Legendary Barcelona midfielder Ronaldinho (C) invaded his former club's training session at the Joan Gamper complex yesterday and had his picture taken with Lionel Messi (L) and countryman Neymar. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Big Sam retires from management

AFP, London



Sam Allardyce announced Tuesday he was stepping down as Crystal Palace manager after just five months at the helm of the Premier League club for family reasons.

The 62-year-old, who was previously in charge of England for just one game, said he had "no ambitions to take another job", admitting he was turning his back on a club that had offered him a "chance of rehabilitation".

Allardyce took over at Palace from Alan Pardew in December on a two-

and-a-half year deal and led the Eagles to eight wins in 21 games. They finished 14th in the league.

"In some ways, this has been a very difficult decision to make, but in others it has been a simple one," Allardyce said in a statement following talks with club chairman Steve Parish. "I will always be grateful to Crystal Palace and Steve Parish for giving me the opportunity to go out with my head held high having helped keep the club in the Premier League."

"More than that, they gave me a chance of rebuilding my reputation after what happened with England. I felt I needed another shot at being a Premier League manager and showing that I still

had the ability to achieve something significant. As I said last weekend, Palace gave me the chance of rehabilitation."

Allardyce said his reason to depart Palace was to spend time with his family.

"It's been a privilege to have worked for them for the past five months. But there comes a time when you have to take stock of what direction you want your life to take - and that's been the simple part for me," he said.

"I want to be able to savour life while I'm still relatively young and when I'm still relatively healthy, even if I'm beginning to feel all my 62 years."

"This is the right time for me, I know that in my heart."

Ranieri ready for return

REUTERS, Monaco

Claudio Ranieri is hoping to be back in management somewhere in Europe before the start of next season and is not ruling out a return to the Premier League.

"Why not? If a good project arrives, why not?" the former Leicester City manager told Reuters on Tuesday when asked whether he might return to England.

"I look for the Premier League or another league in Europe," he added.

However, the 65-year-old refused to be drawn on who he might be talking to.

"If I have had some discussions, I don't tell you," he laughed.

"I am very stimulated to make another great season," he told reporters.

"Watford is only rumours," he added, when asked specifically about that Premier League vacancy after the departure of Italian Walter Mazzarri.

"I feel as well a European coach -- Italy, Spain, France, England for me is okay."