

'I'D HAVE TO KILL MESSI & RONALDO'

Mario Balotelli continues to harbour ambitions of one day winning the Ballon d'Or but admits that he is going to have to get creative in order to beat Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo to the prize. Upon arriving in Nice last summer, the Italy international striker said that it was not too late for him to win the game's greatest individual honour, which has now been shared by the Portuguese and the Argentine in each of the last nine editions. The striker now seems to have come to the conclusion that securing the gong will be a difficult achievement. "I'll have to kill those two [Messi, Ronaldo] to win it," he told Brescia Oggi. "What I've done since the start of my career has not been enough, I will have to do more." Balotelli's contract in Nice will expire at the end of June and his future remains unclear, though Marseille continue to be associated with a move for the 26-year-old. —AGENCIES



Rahmatganj storm into semifinals

SPORTS REPORTER



Shahran Howlader scored twice and set up another for Ismail Bangoura as Rahmatganj Muslim Friends Society stormed into the semifinals of the Walton Federation Cup with a commanding 3-1 victory over Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the fourth quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Kamal Babu's charges were last season's surprise package and going by yesterday's dominating display, this young and enterprising outfit will likely be the team to beat this season as well as at least prove to be a handful for Chittagong Abahani in the first semifinal on Friday.

Defending champions Abahani are set to slug it out against Sheikh Jamal DC in the second semifinal on the following day.

Having progressed into the quarterfinals as group champions following a 3-0 victory over Team BJMC and a goalless draw against Brothers Union, the Old Dhaka outfit were clinical in their quick build-up and pounced on opportunities. To Muktiyoddha's credit, the first half hour proved to be quite an even affair, but once the last line of defence was broken, there was hardly any stopping the marauding Rahmatganj juggernaut. If there is any criticism to be made of Kamal Babu's team, it is the fact that they seemingly took their foot off the gas during the final stages of

the game, allowing a consolation goal to the All Reds in stoppage time of the second half.

The Old Dhaka outfit took the lead in the 32nd minute when midfielder Shahran, arguably the player of the match, beat Muktiyoddha goalkeeper Uttam Barua with a powerful angular shot, after being set up with a cross from Rashedul Islam Shuvo from inside the box.

The lead should have been doubled three minutes later, but Bangoura's placing attempt from inside the box was blocked by the outstretched left leg of Uttam, who then denied the Guinean again from a similar situation in stoppage time of the first half.

Later after seeing his third attempt, a goal-bound header, cleared off the line in the 59th minute, the forward made amends, beating Uttam at his near post from inside the six-yard box after being fed with a square pass from Shahran.

As Muktiyoddha tried to salvage something from the game by putting men forward, Rahmatganj struck again on a quick counter-attack in the 69th minute, this time Shahran tapped home from in front of goal. With the fate of the game in their hands, Rahmatganj eased off a bit, allowing Muktiyoddha to have an attack or two of their own. And from such an attack in added time, substitute forward Matur Rahman scored their consolation goal, putting a minor blip on Rahmatganj's otherwise commanding performance.

RAHMATGANJ	3 - 1	MUKTIYODDHA
(Shahran 32, 69; Bangoura 63)		(Matur 90+4)



Rahmatganj MFS midfielder Shahran Howlader (2nd from R) looks up to the heavens as teammates embrace him after his second goal in a 3-1 victory over Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the fourth quarterfinal of the Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: BFF

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:

'Never thought we would lose to Bangladesh'

Legendary Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar admitted that he never imagined his side would lose to Bangladesh, something which became a reality in the 2007 World Cup.

Emery focused on Coupe de France

PSG coach Unai Emery is focused on the Coupe de France and hopes that his team can win the title for a record eleventh time.

Wenger in 7th heaven

AFP, London



Aaron Ramsey scored a 79th-minute header to earn Arsenal a stunning 2-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday and deliver embattled manager Arsene Wenger a record seventh FA Cup.

Wenger has been barracked by his own fans and failed to secure Champions League qualification for the first time in 20 years, but he ends the season by surpassing Aston Villa's George Ramsey as the FA Cup's greatest manager.

Alexis Sanchez's early opener for Arsenal, allowed to stand despite an apparent handball, was cancelled out by Diego Costa, only for Ramsey to reply immediately with the second FA Cup-winning goal of his career.

Arsenal, plagued by defensive selection issues, claimed a third FA Cup win in four seasons and 13th in total, making them the outright most successful team in the competition's history ahead of Manchester United.

Antonio Conte's Chelsea, who had Victor Moses sent off after he received a second booking for diving, were thwarted in their attempt to complete a Premier League and FA Cup Double for the second time.

It meant no glorious farewell for departing skipper John Terry, who will bow out on 717 appearances and 17 major honours after spending the match on the bench.

Victory was rich vindication for Wenger, whose Arsenal future is due to be decided by a board meeting in the coming days, and allowed him to salvage something from the most difficult season of his 21-year tenure.

He is reported to have been offered a two-year contract and while dissent against him has mounted this season, the stirring nature of his side's win will surely have won back some of his team's disgruntled fans.

The Frenchman's team took a fourth-minute lead with a goal that will be debated long after the final whistle.

After blocking N'Golo Kante's attempted clearance on the edge of Chelsea's box, Sanchez ran through to skewer a shot past Thibaut Courtois, only for an offside flag to be raised against Ramsey.

Referee Anthony Taylor consulted his assistant referee before concluding, correctly, that Ramsey had not been interfering with play, but replays showed Sanchez had handled the ball when he charged down Kante's clearance.

Arsenal's play brimmed with belief, Mesut Ozil forcing Gary Cahill to clear off his own line and Danny Welbeck and Ramsey hitting the same post in quick succession from a corner.

The absences of the suspended Laurent Koscielny, the injured Gabriel and the concussed Shkodran Mustafi brought club captain Per Mertesacker into Arsenal back three for his first start of the season.

Hayden to be laid to rest

AGENCIES, Kentucky

Nicky Hayden's funeral will be held on Monday, the family of the 2006 MotoGP champion have announced.

An obituary issued by the Hayden family confirmed the 35-year-old, who succumbed last Monday to injuries he sustained in a cycling accident, will be laid to rest at the Saint Stephen Cathedral in his hometown of Owensboro, Kentucky.

The service will take place at 12pm CT (6pm BST) on Monday May 29, and will be livestreamed on his Facebook page.

Hayden's family have also established a memorial fund to help local children in the area.

The Red Bull-backed Ten Kate World Superbike team that Hayden was racing for in 2017 has just entered one bike for Stefan Bradl at this weekend's Donington Park round, with Hayden's bike set up in the garage in tribute.

BFF looks for an amicable solution

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday asked its Professional Football League Committee (PFLC) to sit with the participating clubs of the Bangladesh Premier League in order to find an amicable solution to the issue regarding unpaid dues.

The local game's governing body held an emergency meeting of its executive committee yesterday after eight participating clubs threatened to boycott the upcoming BPL if their demands were not met by May 30.

The clubs -- Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Jamal DC, Chittagong Abahani, Brothers Union, Arambagh KS, Muktiyoddha Sangsad KC, Team BJMC and Saif Sporting Club -- had submitted a joint letter to the BFF demanding the unpaid grants they were supposed to receive last season.

According to a club official, BFF owed them around Tk 2.5 crore as participation money and prize money from the previous season. The club officials also demanded an increase in participation money from Tk 40 lakh to Tk 50 lakh and an increase in the prize money too. BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said the executive committee took the matter very seriously.

"We are very much concerned about the issue," Shohag said. "The PFLC will sit for a meeting within the next few days where it will discuss the issue with the clubs."

"We will try to convince the clubs by paying off dues from the previous year and talk about the participation money and prize money for this season. But we have to do it with the sponsorship money that we have. We have to accommodate all the expenses to run the league so the clubs need to accept the reality and our limitations."

It may be mentioned here that the BFF sold the BPL's sponsorship rights to Saif Powertec Limited for five seasons for an annual amount of Tk four crore.

Totti set to start on bench

AFP, Asiago

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti said securing a win and not giving Francesco Totti a full game on his swansong, remains the priority in their final match of the season at home to Genoa.

A sold-out Stadio Olimpico is set to bid farewell to iconic club captain Totti, 40, when he brings his 25-season career with Roma to an end on Sunday.

But with second spot up for grabs in Serie A, and third-placed Napoli only a point further behind before they travel to Sampdoria, Spalletti said Totti's needs come second.

As he has done for most of this season, Spalletti is set to start Totti on the bench and give the club legend a substitute's appearance in the second half.

"The biggest threat for us tomorrow are the distractions caused by the game," Spalletti told media on Saturday.

'China 50 years off Euro elite'

AFP, Madrid

Carlos Tevez may be reaping the rewards of China's football boom, but believes standards in his new home fall well below the level he has become accustomed to in a glittering career.

The Argentine, who had spells at Manchester United, Manchester City and Juventus, joined Shanghai Shenhua on a then world record 38-million-euro (\$40 million) salary in December.

However, despite the millions being ploughed into the Chinese game on the back of president Xi Jinping's demand for China to become a world force, Tevez hasn't been impressed with the quality of football he has seen.

"I don't think they will be able to compete with any of the big European sides," Tevez told Spanish TV station Movistar.

"Even if the best players come, I think the football is very different and the fans treat it in a completely different way as well. I don't think they will get there in 50 years."

Nadal targets his 10th title

AFP, Paris



With the world's top five occupied by players over 30 for the first time, Rafael Nadal is poised to tighten the old guard's Grand Slam grip by capturing an unprecedented 10th French Open.

The Spaniard, written off as a contender in Paris after a quarter-final loss to Novak Djokovic in 2015 and an injury-enforced pull-out before the third round last year, arrives at Roland Garros as the overwhelming favourite.

The 30-year-old has already reached the magical 10 titles this year at the clay-court events in Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

For good measure, he also won Madrid for a fifth time, ending a two-year seven-match losing streak against Djokovic in the process.

Nadal boasts a sensational career record at Roland Garros -- 72 wins and just two defeats, to Djokovic in 2015 and an injury-affected shock loss to Robin Soderling in 2009.

That defeat to the Swede opened the door for Roger Federer to win his only French Open title.

However, Federer, at 35, is skipping the French Open to save himself for an assault on an eighth Wimbledon.

Djokovic, the defending champion in Paris, and world number one Andy Murray are struggling for form ahead of the tournament which starts Sunday.

However, Nadal is desperate to keep a lid on expectations.

"You have to write what you have to do, but I don't care," said Nadal when asked about his status as favourite.

Nadal has also thrived on hard courts in 2017, reaching his first Slam final in three years when he lost in five sets to Federer in Australia despite being a break to the good in the deciding set.

He was a beaten finalist against Federer in Miami while his title triumph in Madrid gave him a record-equalling 30th Masters title to add to his 14 majors.

Nadal's record on clay against the world's top two is also heavily-weighted in his favour -- 8-2 against Murray (2-0 at Roland Garros) and 10-5 when facing Djokovic (5-1 in Paris).

The Spanish star will open his campaign against combustible Frenchman Benoit Paire, a man he described "as not the ideal opponent" first up.

Friday's draw, meanwhile, placed him on a semi-final collision course with Djokovic.

Djokovic will have US legend Andre Agassi as coach for the first time.

Djokovic completed the career Grand Slam at last year's French Open when he also held all four majors.

On clay this year, he has at least been on an upward curve -- quarterfinals in Monte Carlo, semifinals in Madrid and a runners-up spot in Rome where he was demolished by Alexander Zverev. Djokovic's relationship with the 47-

year-old Agassi, an eight-time major winner, is limited, for the moment, to just the French Open.

"Andre has been in my shoes before playing Grand Slams, being the best in the world, and facing all the challenges that are present," explained Djokovic.

Agassi said that he initially turned down Djokovic's approach, but was persuaded by his wife, Steffi Graf, to change his mind.

Murray, defeated by Djokovic in the 2016 final, has endured a wretched season with an elbow injury and bouts of illness not helping.



Medals don't matter

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger has revealed he has given away every single medal he has won during his more than 20 years as Arsenal manager.

The Frenchman has the chance to lift the FA Cup for a record seventh time at Wembley on Saturday.

No manager has won more than six finals, with Premier League champions Chelsea standing in the way of Wenger's bid for a fresh piece of football history.

Tony Adams, Wenger's captain in his first five years at the London club, wrote in his autobiography that he saw Wenger angrily throw his runners-up medal from the 2001 FA Cup final in a bin.

And while Wenger had no recollection about that he did confirm that memorabilia and nostalgia played little part in his life.

"Don't trust too much to what Tony Adams says," he said on the eve of the final. "I don't remember that. But I have no medals at home anyway - from anything. I always give them out," the 67-year-old Wenger added.

Man City sign 50m euro Silva

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City began their campaign to snatch the Premier League title from Chelsea next season when they signed Portuguese playmaker Bernardo Silva from French champions Monaco in a deal reported to be worth almost 50 million euros on Friday.

Silva's arrival, set for July 1, is the first high-profile signing by City manager Pep Guardiola ahead of the 2017/18 campaign.

City gave no indication of the length of Silva's contract nor did they specify a fee, although British media reports suggested they had paid around £43 million (\$55 million, 49 million euros) for the 22-year-old.

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