

Qatar challenge awaits U-15s

SPORTS REPORTER



After the South Asian test, Bangladesh are up for a tough challenge from the Middle Eastern nations as they are scheduled to take part in the AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers starting from September 20 in Doha, Qatar. Though Bangladesh failed to defend their title in the SAFF U-15 Championship after being eliminated from the semifinals with a 4-2 defeat against Nepal, the boys in red and green had the consolation of finishing third with a massive 8-0 win over Bhutan in the place-deciding match.

They also delivered some eye-catching performances against Sri Lanka and Bhutan in group-stage matches and ended the campaign with 17 goals from four fixtures.

However, the upcoming challenge is a bit too difficult when compared to what they have faced thus far.

"We had prepared for the SAFF U-15 Championship in one system and now we prepare in another system because the level of AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers is much higher than that of South Asian competition," assistant coach Mahbub Alam Paulo said yesterday.

The young ones had earlier been prepared for only the SAFF U-15

Championship, keeping aside the AFC tournament and the coaching staff will now think about fixing a system they will adopt for the AFC Championship Qualifiers.

"UAE, Qatar and Yemen are superior sides to Bangladesh and we need to play in a different way against them. We will fix it at the meeting with technical director Paul Smalley within a few days. We may adopt a new formation if we don't want to continue with the 4-2-3-1 formation which was quite effective in the SAFF U-15 Championship," said Paulo.

Two years ago, the Bangladesh under-16 team clinched the SAFF Championship title at home, but went on to suffer heavy defeats against Saudi Arabia (1-5) and United Arab Emirates (1-6) in the 2016 AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers in Dhaka. The assistant coach is mindful of the past.

"We know that we had poor results in the last edition at home, so we will have that in mind and try to do better this time," said Paulo.

Before their preparation starts, though, the under-15 team was, on Monday, released from camp for Eid vacation. The training camp is supposed to resume on September 4 at BKSP and there will be two weeks of preparation before the team leaves for Qatar on September 18.



With the signing of Naby Keita, Liverpool now have the three most expensive African footballers of all-time -- Sadio Mane at £34m, Mohamed Salah at £37m and Keita at £48m.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Reds agree Keita deal

Midfielder will join ahead of next season

AFP, London



Guinea international midfielder Naby Keita will join Premier League giants Liverpool next year after the English outfit agreed a reported club record deal of £48 million with German side RB Leipzig.

Liverpool will also reportedly pay an undisclosed premium for the 22-year-old, who scored eight goals in 31 league appearances last term to help Leipzig finish runners-up in the title race.

"Liverpool can confirm they have reached an agreement with RB Leipzig for the future transfer of Naby Keita," read the Liverpool statement. "The Reds have agreed a deal with the German club and the midfielder that will

see the 22-year-old move to Anfield on July 1, 2018 following the conclusion of the current season." Keita, who will be a pivotal figure in Leipzig's maiden Champions League campaign this term, said his present club remained his immediate priority but he was delighted to be joining such a historic club.

"I am delighted that an agreement has been reached which will allow me to join Liverpool next summer, when I will become part of a project that excites me greatly," Keita told the Liverpool website. "My commitment to RBL remains absolute for the remainder of my time at the club. I have given my all every time I have worn the shirt -- that will be the case until the final whistle, in my final appearance.

"Having my future resolved means I can now focus on helping RBL achieve great things this season."



Russia's former World No. 1 Maria Sharapova lets out a roar of delight after defeating second seed Simona Halep on her Grand Slam return at the first round of the US Open at Flushing Meadows on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

'This girl is not going anywhere'

Sharapova booms after ousting Halep on Grand Slam return

AFP, New York



It was a performance as dazzling as the crystal-encrusted black dress she was wearing as Maria Sharapova warned her US Open rivals that behind the glamour, there's tons of grit.

The 30-year-old Russian star marked her return to Grand Slam tennis after serving a 15-month doping ban with a thrilling 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 victory over second seed Simona Halep on Monday.

It was her 50th appearance at a major but first since the quarter-finals of the 2016 Australian Open and her first at the US Open for three years.

But it was like she had never been away as she took her night-time record on the Arthur Ashe Stadium to 18 wins in 18 matches.

Fittingly, Sharapova played in a black dress, just as she had done in 2006 when she was crowned champion, one of her five Grand Slam titles.

"Behind this little black dress and the Swarovski crystals, there is a girl with a lot of grit and she's not going anywhere," Sharapova said after seeing off Halep for the seventh time in seven meetings.

Sharapova only returned to tennis in April after her ban had run its course but she was refused a wildcard into the French Open while a thigh injury put paid to her hopes of playing Wimbledon qualifying.

With her ranking down at 146, she needed another wildcard to get into the main draw of the US Open but she was in danger of missing New York after picking up an arm injury at Stanford, where she played her only hardcourt match of the year.

"You try and think it's another day, another opportunity but it was so much more," said

LATEST

Japanese teenager Naomi Osaka send defending champion Angelique Kerber crashing out of the US Open first round on Tuesday with a stunning 6-3, 6-1 victory.

Sixth seed Kerber became the first defending champion to lose in the first round in New York since Svetlana Kuznetsova in 2005.

SELECTED RESULTS (FIRST ROUND)

MEN

Sam Querrey (x17) bt Gilles Simon 6-4, 6-3, 6-4
 Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (x8) bt Marius Copil 6-3, 6-3, 6-4
 Marin Cilic (x5) bt Tennyis Sandgren 6-4, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3

WOMEN

Caroline Wozniacki (x5) bt Mihaela Buzarnescu 6-1, 7-5
 Venus Williams (x9) bt Viktoria Kuzmova 6-3, 3-6, 6-2
 Petra Kvitova (x13) bt Jelena Jankovic 7-5, 7-5
 Garbiñe Muguruza (x3) bt Varvara Lepchenko 6-0, 6-3
 Sloane Stephens bt Roberta Vinci 7-5, 6-1
 Maria Sharapova bt Simona Halep (x2) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3

Sharapova, who fell to her knees in tears after securing a thrilling triumph on Monday.

"You never know how you are going to feel until match point but you figure it's all worth it." The eye-catching crystals sewn into her black and lace number were a perfect teaser for TV cameras for the night session on Ashe.

"It's prime time baby!" she said with a smile. "When I first came to New York I was intimidated by the noise, the traffic, the people. But now I love it."

"Sometimes you wonder why you put in all

the hard work -- this is exactly why."

Sharapova ended with 60 winners and 64 unforced errors and converting just five of her 22 break opportunities.

It was the type of all-or-nothing assault that has served her well since she first burst on the scene with a 2004 Wimbledon title.

That victory, which came when she was still a giggly 17-year-old, launched her into superstardom.

However, she is aware that having passed 30 in April, there is a danger of shrinking opportunities.

"When me and my coach first scheduled my practice on centre court, actually it got moved because they had some maintenance issues," said Sharapova, who missed last year's US Open due to her suspension and the 2015 event to injury.

"I was upset about it because I really wanted that first practice. Those little things you kind of take for granted. From the moment that I've been here, I've really understood what this means to me, to be back and to be playing."

Sharapova almost missed the 2017 edition as well as she battled her left arm injury, skipping the Toronto and Cincinnati events and undergoing two MRI scans on the problem.

Last Friday, she was then drawn to play world number two Halep.

"From the second I found out I was playing Simona, I was actually getting my nails done, I got my phone out and I pulled up YouTube videos of our matches," she explained.

"The fact that I was able to come out and play that way, beat the No. 2 player in the world in the first round of the US Open, it's been a while, I think those are definitely the emotions that I was feeling."

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:

SLC selectors quit

Sri Lanka's cricket selectors resigned en masse days after fans hurled abuse and projectiles at the beleaguered national side as they suffered another humiliating thrashing on home soil. The five selectors, led by former skipper Sanath Jayasuriya, handed a joint letter of resignation to Sports Minister Dayasiri Jayasekera.



Jovetic joins Monaco

Monaco confirmed the signing of Montenegrin international striker Stevan Jovetic on a four-year deal from Inter Milan. The 27-year-old Montenegro captain is set to inherit the number 10 shirt worn by Kylian Mbappe.



Hockey federation high-ups at loggerheads

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday failed to form sub-committees for the upcoming 10th Men's Asia Cup due to arguments between followers of vice-presidents Abdur Rashid Shikdar and Khaza Rahmatullah.

The Asia Cup is scheduled to be held in Dhaka from October 11 to 21.

Shikdar and Rahmatullah were the probable general secretary candidates of the scheduled BHF polls of August 27, which was suspended due to floods.

Following the suspension of polls, the followers of those two candidates have apparently come face to face in a bid to establish control over the federation's activities and meetings.

"We were supposed to form sub-committees to make the upcoming Asia Cup a success but the meeting could not do it yesterday due to altercations between the followers of Abdur Rashid Shikdar and Khaza Rahmatullah," said general secretary Abdus Sadeque.

"Rahmatullah asked vice president [Shafiqullah Al] Munir to include one BHF member [Ehsan Rana] as the secretary of tournament committee but tournament committee chairman Munir had altercation with Rahmatullah before I intervened to stop it."

Sadeque said that the meeting could not form a single sub-committee and that he would try to complete it by September 7 once BHF president Air Chief Air Marshall Abu Esrar had returned home after performing Hajj.



Ahead of Argentina's crucial World Cup qualifier against Uruguay on Thursday, coach Jorge Sampaoli has hinted at playing a 3-4-2-1 with Lionel Messi (R) and Paulo Dybala forming a devastating duo behind Mauro Icardi (L).

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ox set to join Chelsea

AFP, London



England midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain is set to join Premier League champions Chelsea from Arsenal, according to British media reports on Monday.

The Independent claims Chelsea will part with £35million and further strain the relationship between coach Arsene Wenger and the Arsenal supporters, who have seen little improvement from the team in the early part

of the season from that of last term.

Wenger had said earlier this month that he wanted Oxlade-Chamberlain to stay.

"In the last year, he has made huge progress and personally I want him to stay here for a long time," said Wenger. "I'm convinced he will be the English player that everybody will look at in the next two years."

Arsenal will get a fee for Oxlade-Chamberlain, which would not have been the case had he seen out the final year of his contract -- the same situation Arsenal find themselves in with Mesut Ozil and Alexis Sanchez.

'I'm no Neymar'

AFP, Barcelona



French wonderkid Ousmane Dembele shrugged off comparisons with Neymar and insisted he still has much to learn, despite becoming the second most expensive player in history as he was presented by Barcelona on Monday.

The 20-year-old's 105 million-euro transfer from Borussia Dortmund could rise to 145 million with add-ons depending on his performance, as Barca splashed out to fill the gap left by Neymar's own world record 222 million-euro move to Paris Saint-Germain.

"I'm not here to replace Neymar," said the Frenchman. "I will try to make good progress. I am only 20 years old and have a lot to learn. That's why I came to this big club."

Dembele will form a fearsome forward line alongside Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez as Barca aim to wrestle the Champions League and La Liga titles back from Real Madrid.

And Dembele expects to learn firsthand from Messi, who he described as the best player in history.

"It's an honour to be a part of Lionel Messi's team," added Dembele. "He's a great player, the best player in the world, the best in the history of football and I am very happy to play in his team. I will learn, watch how he plays, and how he is on and off the field."

Dembele's Barca career got off to an inauspicious start as his presentation in front of 18,000 waiting fans at the Camp Nou was delayed for nearly two hours due to a paperwork issue in releasing his registration from Dortmund.

With the supporters' patience tested there were whistles during the delay and chants for Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu to resign.



OUSMANE DEMBELE