

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
US Open Semifinal
Live from 10:00pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
England's West Indies Third Test, Day 2
Live from 4:00pm
Bundesliga
Hamburger v Leipzig
Live from 12:15am (Saturday)

U-16 girls head into uncharted territory

Leave for Thailand today to take part in AFC U-16 Women's Championship

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-16 women's team leave for Thailand today to take part in the AFC U-16 Women's Championship with the optimism of putting up competitive showings against the world's top teams as well as bringing to notice Bangladesh's progress.

The girls in red and green will now face challenges from their illustrious opponents in Group B, which comprises holders North Korea, who are also world champions at the U-17 and U-20 levels, world number six Australia and world number 8 Japan.

Since qualifying to the eight-team finals after emerging as unbeaten group champions last September, Bangladesh has been toiling for the past year to close the gap between themselves and the top sides. They have played 22 practice matches against various teams in China, Japan and North Korea have been perennial finalists in the tournament, with either side featuring in all seven

themselves to embrace the immense challenge in the final round, which begins from September 10.

"The qualifying round was a test for us and we earned the ticket to Thailand after beating all our opponents convincingly. Since then the girls have laboured in training and practice matches with the motto of putting up a good show," said head coach Golam Rabbani Choton at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"However we have been pitted against tough opponents, who are some of the top teams in the world, in the finals. The girls have improved technically, tactically and mentally and I believe they will put up competitive displays in Thailand, although we are an unknown quantity to other teams. I can say that Bangladesh will be tough opponents," he continued.

Japan and North Korea have been perennial finalists in the tournament, with either side featuring in all seven



Boostered by the experiences of relentless training and practice matches against some of Asia's finest for the past year, the Bangladesh U-16 team head to Thailand with big dreams tempered by realistic expectations. PHOTO: COLLECTED

TRIVIA

Bangladesh will be making their second ever appearance in the seventh edition of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship.

They previously played the inaugural edition in 2005, when they finished bottom of Group B, conceding 28 goals in three matches, including a 24-0 loss to eventual champions Japan.

They lost their other matches as well, suffering a 1-0 defeat to Guam and a close-fought 3-2 loss to Hong Kong.

Rouson Bola and Hasina Bagum are the only two players to have scored for Bangladesh in the tournament proper. Two other Bangladeshis have scored, albeit for the opposition.

In 10th place, the Bangladesh women's team are the second-lowest ranked team in the tournament. Australia are ranked the highest at first, followed by Japan in 8th, North Korea in 10th, China in 13th, South Korea in 15th and Thailand in 20th. Laos are unranked in the FIFA Women's Rankings.

The Japanese are the most successful side in the tournament's history. They have won three titles and finished runners-up twice. North Korea are just behind, having won twice and finished second on three occasions.

The North Koreans are the reigning champions. They defeated Japan 1-0 in the last edition's final.

Each final of the six editions so far has featured either North Korea or Japan and they have faced each other in the final four out of six times.

TOP GOALSCORER



Krishna Rani Sarkar
 The captain of the side led from the front and finished with eight goals in qualifying, the highest in their qualifying group.

THE ROAD SO FAR

M	W	D	L	GA	GF	GD	Pts
Bangladesh 3	0	0	26	2	24	15	
Bangladesh 3	0	0	Iran				
Bangladesh 3	0	0	Singapore				
Bangladesh 10	0	0	Kyrgyzstan				
Bangladesh 4	2	0	Chinese Taipei				
Bangladesh 4	0	0	United Arab Emirates				

Bangladesh also been improving. Our first target is to fight neck-and-neck and play the match to our strengths instead of defending all the time like we did in the practice matches during our tour to Japan, China and South Korea," said a hopeful Choton, who has been with this group of girls for almost four years.

Captain Krishan Rani Sarkar also promised not to give an inch, saying that they would be aiming to play competitive matches.

"We have been working hard for the past year and played some practice matches to get used to the pace of tougher opponents as well as to overcome the fear of playing against strong teams. However, we still feel a bit

draw going into the final round as the opposition are much stronger than us."

"At the same time it is also pleasing that we are going to play the tournament which is also the World Cup (U-17) Qualifiers and we are ready to take this challenge. Please pray for us," said Krishna.

"Everyone dreams of touching the sky and we are no different. But we have to understand the reality, which opponents we are going to play. I don't know whether we can play at the same pace as those opponents, but we have the belief that we will play good football in all three departments," said midfielder Misrat Jahan Moussumi.

"They are world-class teams and it will be a dream come true if we can secure a

draw against any of them."

After the press conference, BFF president Kazi Salahuddin briefed the girls and termed them as the lucky ones since they will be playing World Cup Qualifiers [the AFC U-16 Championship also serves as part of the qualification for the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup] directly, which no team from Bangladesh has done before.

"You should feel proud. After all, none of us could touch this milestone as those opponents, but we have the belief that we will win and defeat in matches and it will be a really tough tournament. Listen to your coach and guardians and let the world know that you can also play football," Salahuddin said.

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:

Mbappe embarks on Paris journey



Kyllian Mbappe takes centre stage on Friday as the French league returns from the international break with Paris Saint-Germain taking on Metz where they will unleash their latest marquee recruit.

PL to close transfer window before season



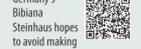
English Premier League clubs voted on Thursday to close the 2018 close-season transfer window before the start of the 2018-19 campaign.

Man City threaten Tebas with legal action



Manchester City have threatened La Liga president Javier Tebas with legal action after he said their partnership with Spanish club Girona was an attempt to "cook the books".

Female relishing historic Bundesliga debut



Germany's Bibiana Steinhaus hopes to avoid making headlines when she makes history on Sunday by becoming the first woman to referee in one of Europe's top leagues.

Bonucci, Higuita top Serie A earners



AC Milan's Leonardo Bonucci and former Juventus teammate Gonzalo Higuain are the top Serie A earners but their wages fall short of European stars Neymar and Lionel Messi, the Gazzetta dello Sport reported.



Juan Martin Del Potro downed Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal on way to winning his only Grand Slam - the 2009 US Open. Now with the former titan dispatched, the Argentine turns his attention to his Spanish counterpart. PHOTO: REUTERS

Del Potro eyes another Rafa-Roger double

REUTERS, New York

Juan Martin Del Potro has done it once so why can't he do it again?

When he won the U.S. Open title in 2009, the then 20-year-old Argentine beat Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer back-to-back to win his first grand slam title.

Now, after three wrist surgeries that almost forced him to give up the sport, Del Potro will look to do it the other way round by following up his win over Federer on Wednesday with a victory over world number one Nadal in Friday's semi-final.

"I know if I play my best tennis, I could be a danger for him," Del Potro said after his best performance of the fortnight.

"Physically I'm not in the perfect conditions, but when you play semi-finals of a grand slam, everything can happen, so you must be ready for the challenge."

"Playing against Rafa in my favourite tournament, I will try to enjoy the atmosphere and the game."

Del Potro's stunning 7-5 3-6 7-6(8) 6-4 victory was all the more impressive as he had been forced to back up after a five-set victory over Dominic Thiem in the previous round, when he was still struggling with avivus.

After thundering forehands past

Federer with regularity, the 28-year-old is growing in confidence even if he believes that beating Nadal will take an even better performance.

"Tomorrow is going to be a different match than the past," he said. "He's the number one player in the world and he's playing so confident this tournament."

"He's a lefty, so he has a chance to find easily my backhand. So I don't know what's going to be my strategy."

"But for sure I will try to make winners with my forehands and don't run too much, because my legs are tired. But it will be an interesting match to play."

"When they played in 2009, Del Potro smashed Nadal off the court with a blistering performance, dropping just six games.

"Eighty years on and after so many injuries, Del Potro's backhand is not yet back where it was but he was encouraged by the way it held up against Federer."

"I think my backhand is improving every week," he said.

"Tonight I made my best backhands on the tournament in the important moments of the match, and it was in the set point of the third set."

"Then to break his serve in the fourth, and I hit my best backhand on the tournament tonight, which is a good signal for the future."

SEMIFINAL, H2H	
NADAL (1) v DEL POTRO (3)	
8 Head to Head (Overall)	5
4 Head to Head (on Hard Courts)	4
IN US OPEN 2017	
17 Sets Played	18
2 Sets Lost	2
31 Return Games Won	19
23 Aces	68
156 Winners	189
11h 41m Hours on court	13h 20m

Poor start by Saif stumble against BJMC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman made a poor start to the Omega Everest Masters, carding a three-over-par (73) in the first round in Crans Montana yesterday.

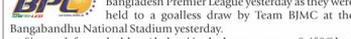
The 32-year-old gave a signal of things to come early in the day, returning a bogey on the first hole at the Crans-sur-Sierre Golf Club. He returned to par momentarily with a birdie on the fourth, before carding a bogey the very next hole on the Swiss mountains.

He added two more bogeys and birdies to stay at one-over, but a double bogey on the 16th saw him slip down to joint-111th in the leaderboard.

Miguel Angel Jimenez shared the lead with Tyrrell Hatton and Scott Hend at six-under-par (64).

The 53-year-old Spaniard is the oldest winner in European Tour history, having won at the Open de Espana in 2014 at the age of 50 years and 133 days.

SPORTS REPORTER



Newcomers Saif Sporting Club got a jolt in the Bangladesh Premier League yesterday as they were held to a goalless draw by team BJMC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Since a defeat to holders Abahani in the league opener, Saif SC had been flying high and notched up five straight wins, including a massive 5-0 victory over Brothers Union the previous match, but they stumbled against high-flights BJMC, who came into the game on the back of two successive defeats.

Saif's hopes of extending their winning streak became bleaker when they were reduced to 10 men after defender Tapu Barman, the season's highest-paid player, was given his marching orders in the 42nd minute and they had to settle for a first draw in seven matches. They remain third with 16 points, three behind joint-leaders Chittagong Abahani and Sheikh Jamal.

BJMC are in eighth position in the 12-team table with six points from seven matches.

The day's other match between Sheikh Russel and Mohammedan also produced a goalless draw and their positions in the table remained unchanged. Sheikh Russel remain sixth with eight points, while Mohammedan are just behind with seven points from as many matches.

'I didn't deserve to win'

AFP, New York



Roger Federer, foiled once again one match from a first-ever US Open match against Rafael Nadal, said he just didn't deserve to beat Juan Martin Del Potro in the rematch of their epic 2009 final.

The Swiss third seed and 19-time Grand Slam champion was sent packing by Argentine 28th seed Del Potro 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 on Wednesday in Arthur Ashe Stadium. The South American meets Spain's top-ranked Nadal Friday for a berth in Sunday's final.

"I feel I have no place in the semis and he will have a better chance to beat Rafa, to be honest," Federer said.

"The way I played or am playing right now, it's not good enough in my opinion to win this tournament. It's better I'm out and somebody else gets a chance to do better than me."

On the same court where Del Potro ended Federer's five-year title run and 40-match win streak, the reigning Australian Open and Wimbledon champion said, "Juan Martin [foiled] like a lion."

And the ruined possible first-ever New York match between Federer and Nadal, which had been a focus of attention headed into the match, was weaker than it looked, having been aided by playing three rivals in a row who are combined 0-40 against him.

"I ran into a good guy, I was going to



Roger Federer's hopes of claiming a 20th grand slam title ended on Wednesday when he was beaten 7-5, 3-6, 7-6(8), 6-4 by Juan Martin del Potro in the US Open quarterfinal. PHOTO: AFP

Federer said, "I'm dealing with just trying to understand what happened and just to overcome this in the next few hours, days, weeks, whatever it is, I'll be fine."

"Of course it is a pity, but Juan Martin deserves it more."

Federer said in some ways he wasn't disappointed because he knew his game was weaker than it looked, having been aided by playing three rivals in a row who are combined 0-40 against him.

"I ran into a good guy, I was going to lose, I felt," Federer said. "I don't want to say I was in negative mindset, but I knew going in that I'm not in a safe place."

"I tried until the very end," Federer said. "And smashing certain stuff in the net that I normally wouldn't, smashing forehand volleys into the back fence, I mean, that stuff sucked. You know, honestly, it was terrible."

"I'm out of this tournament because I wasn't good enough in my mind, my body and my game."