

What to Watch

SONY ESPN
UEFA Champions League
Feyenoord v Man City
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN 2
UEFA Champions League
Liverpool v Sevilla
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN 3
UEFA Champions League
Tottenham v Dortmund
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

DIVY'S TV

Bangladesh Premier League
Mohammedan v Rahmatganj
Time: 5:00pm
Team: BJMC v SKR Russell

Time: 7:15pm
Venue: BNS

KIM JONG-UN-DENIABLY A UNITED FAN

North Korea's infamous leader Kim Jong-un is predicting an imminent influx of footballers from his country into the Premier League. The 33-year-old dictator is a noted fan of Manchester United, which has been confirmed by friend and Italian politician Antonio Razzi. It has also previously been reported that he ensured the rest of his country can watch United's games by ordering state TV to broadcast them. Eccentric Italian senator Razzi has told of Kim Jong-un's love for football and the Red Devils after the pair shared conversations about the beautiful game. Razzi said the DPRK leader likely is predicting an influx of players to the English top flight after Han Jwangsong's breakthrough at Perugia in Italy. Asked which team United star he would like himself to, Razzi's response, quoted by The Sun, is unsurprising: "No, Kim is Kim — he is the only one." Kim Jong-un was a regular visitor to the San Siro to watch AC Milan when he was studying in Switzerland. —AGENCIES



Scoreline a reality: Smalley

ANISUR RAHMAN from Thailand

Bangladesh Football Federation technical and strategic director Paul Smalley yesterday defended the decision to hold a training session for the U-16 women's team on the morning of their match day against holders North Korea.

The Bangladesh girls lost that AFC U-16 Women's Championship game 9-0 on Monday and many feel the morning training session ahead of the fixture contributed adversely to the team's performance.



"First let me clear it. My role is always crucial to lead the playing groups whether it is female or male teams. We did not do practice [on Monday morning], we had tactical session and it was a very easy session and it had no unnecessary impact on the game. A lot of the team had preparation on the day of the match," Smalley told reporters in the Thai city of Chonburi yesterday.

errors early in the game proved decisive.

"The girls made two errors — one from a corner and one from goalkeeping — within the first seven minutes and went two goals down and then it was very difficult to put an impact on the game," he added.

Asked if the noisy and at times confusing instructions from the dug-out by coach Golam Rabbani Choton and Smalley himself hindered the girls' natural performance, the BFF technical director said: "The information from dugout was the same and there is no confusion and there is no unnecessary reasons. The girls were not confused because we are giving the same information over a number of weeks in preparation. The only problem was the translation of English to Bengali. The message was not conflicting at all."

However, the 51-year-old said that the score-line against North Korea was a reality-check for Bangladesh, who are far away from the top level.

"The performance was realistic in that particular moment against the current world champions North Korea. We played against a very professional team, a team who have been playing successfully at international level. We are long way behind. We are yet to make the analysis of the game but I do know we made quite a few errors and were punished by a good team like North Korea. It was disappointing but a reality for Bangladesh at the moment but it is also something that will help Bangladesh develop in the future."

"It happens around the world. A lot of professional teams practice on the match day in the afternoon or evening. The performance of the girls [against North Korea] was the reality of playing against world champions," explained the British-born UEFA A licensed coach.

"Asked if he would follow the same tactic ahead of Bangladesh's next group league game against Japan tomorrow, he answered diplomatically. "Today [Tuesday] is the recovery session for the girls and tomorrow [Wednesday] is for pre-match training and watching Japan's match. On the day of the game against Japan, we might or might not — depending on the players' health, we feel we could conduct a tactical session," said Smalley.

Smalley has been working as an adviser to the U-16 women's team for nearly one year and from basically behind the scene, he prepared all the rigorous training schedules and even made positional changes for the squad. He also visited with the U-16

women's team in every preparatory tour to Japan, South Korea, China and Singapore to see the progress of the girls.

He also refused to accept fatigue from lengthy training as one of the prime reasons for the big defeat.

"They were emotionally not very tired and mentally very vexed I am sure because it was very difficult with the climate and lot of them had no experience of it. But the girls are physically capable," said Smalley, adding that



Real Madrid have sorely missed talisman Cristiano Ronaldo (C) in their last two outings, both of which ended in draws, and will be excited to welcome the Portuguese back as the holders take on APOEL Nicosia tonight. PHOTO: REUTERS

'We did not play well'

SPORTS REPORTER from Thailand

The girls in red and green were coming to terms with that massive 9-0 defeat at the hands of defending champions North Korea in their opener of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship on Monday. And the best possible way was to put up a brave face, which was aptly as the Bangladesh girls roamed around the hotel lobby cheerfully after a satisfying dinner last night.

"What happened?" one of the journalists asked a group of girls, who were moving along the lobby of Bangsena Heritage Hotel. The response was unexpectably simple.

"We lost because we did not play well," replied a player who was not in the starting eleven.

However, other crucial members of the playing eleven talked to the journalists and admitted that North Korea were a far better side.

"We were not afraid of them at all. We tried to play our natural game but they were way ahead of us physically and their running was also better than us. We simply could not match them. Let's see what we can do in the next matches taking the lessons of this game," said midfielder Maria Manda, an ethnic footballer from Mymensingh who is the only player who ran all over the field in the opening game.

Maria might be an exception as the pressure of a big match did not affect her performance. But it was not the case for others.

"Fear had played a role in our result," admitted striker Sirat Jahan Shoppa.

"We have to understand against whom opponents we are playing. We were told not to get upset and play our own way despite conceding four goals in the first half and to be honest we tried our way," added left-back Shaheen Masura.

Defender Masura Parvin had no

explanations of the defensive errors but she believes a 9-0 margin was a bit big and that they could have kept the scoreline to a more respectable margin had the backline not made a few mistakes.

Goalkeeper Ruksana Begum was chosen ahead of first-choice goalkeeper Mahmuda Khatun for her height. But the goalkeeper from Sylhet failed to do justice to her height advantage.

"I tried my best," Ruksana said with tinge of disappointment.

The North Korean girls, who were also enjoying their time at the lobby, appeared very animated when the reporter showed them some of the game's highlights. Fixtime scorer Kim Kyong Yung watched herself celebrate after that flying headed goal while Ri Su Gyong, who scored a brace, was also very happy seeing her photos.

Unfortunately though, language remained a barrier leaving a few questions to be answered.

National jr TT from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank Fourth National Junior (U-18) Table Tennis Championship gets underway tomorrow at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Wooden Floor Gymnasium in Dhaka.

A total of 180 players, including 45 girls, will take part in the four-day competition, which will feature four categories — boys' singles and doubles, girls' singles and doubles, informed Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) officials at a press conference at the Bangladesh National Stadium conference room yesterday.

The federation will provide all the accommodation, food and conveyance required by players and officials which was attended, among others, by the federation's vice-presidents Saiful Haque and Jahangir Alam.

Holders favourites again

AFP, Madrid



Such is Real Madrid's confidence in creating more Champions League history that while others have spent hundreds of millions trying to catch up, the back-to-back European champions were happy to cash in.

Real made a profit of over 75 million euros (\$90 million) in the transfer market thanks to the departures of Alvaro Morata, James Rodriguez and Danilo.

Yet they remain very much the side to beat as the Champions League returned on Tuesday having ended a near three-decade long wait for a team to retain the trophy.

"We are the champions so everyone faces us with extra motivation," warned former Real striker Emilio Butragueno, now the club's director of institutional relations.

Madrid coped with that challenge admirably last season, dismissing Bayern Munich, Atletico Madrid and Juventus in the latter stages.

Their quest to become the first side since Bayern in the mid-seventies to win three in a row starts with a more modest test in the form of APOEL Nicosia at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

Tougher tasks lie in wait in the form of Borussia Dortmund and Tottenham Hotspur in Group H.

Dortmund even beat Madrid to top spot in the group stage last season. But Real have

mastered the art of saving their best for when the competition really gets going for the contenders in the knockout stages in the new year.

"We have a stupendous squad but this is a competition that takes you to the limit in all aspects," added Butragueno.

"You can have a big squad with all the resources, but when the moment of truth arrives you need to not have injuries, for your players to be in optimum form and have luck. There are so many factors."

Real's strength in depth was used intelligently by coach Zinedine Zidane to cup the club's first La Liga and European Cup double for 59 years last season.

It is also why one of the richest clubs in the world didn't feel the need to go wild in a hyper-inflated transfer market following Neymar's world record 222 million-euro move to Paris Saint-Germain.

Instead, Real continued their policy of snapping up the best young talent in Spain in Theo Hernandez and Dani Ceballos to add to the likes of Isco and Marco Asensio.

Despite a slow start to their campaign in La Liga, Zidane already seems to be playing the long game this season.

The Frenchman rested a host of first-team regulars including Luka Modric, Isco and Gareth Bale on their return from international duty for a disappointing 1-1 draw against Levante on Saturday.

"I am not going to revolutionise what I want to do with this team due to one bad game," Zidane insisted afterwards.

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