What to WATCH

TEN 1
2018 World Cup Qualifiers
Scotland v Slovakia
Live from 12:45am (Friday)
Venezuela v Uruguay
Live from 3:00 (Friday)
Colombia v Paraguay
Live from 5:30am (Friday)

TEN 2
2018 World Cup Qualifiers
Armenia v Poland
Live from 10:00pm
Bolivia v Brazil
Live from 2:00am (Friday)
Chile v Ecuador
Live from 5:30am (Friday)

TEN 3
2018 World Cup Qualifiers
England v Slovenia
Live from 12:45am (Friday)
Argentina v Peru
Live from 5:30am (Friday)

TOTTI DROPS OUT OF COACHING COURSE

Roma legend Francesco Totti has dropped out of the coaching course he was due to start, the Italian Coaches Association (AIAC) confirmed on Tuesday. Totti retired after 24 years with Roma at the end of last season, moving into a director's role with the club and signing up for a UEFA B License coaching course. However, the AIAC said that the 41-year-old has had a change of heart and decided to put his plans on hold. "Francesco Totti has shown he is a great champion off the pitch as well as on it," an AIAC statement read. "Unable to commit to attending the course regularly and out of respect to his colleagues and course organisers, he has withdrawn from the chance to become a boss. We hope that this is just temporary. Despite being disappointed with Totti's decision, we hope to see him again in the future." His place on the course will be taken by Simeone Perotta.
—AFP

Make or break for Argentina

AFP, *Montevideo*

Argentina's stumbling 2018 World Cup qualification campaign faces another awkward hurdle on Thursday as the misfiring South American giants take on in-form Peru in Buenos Aires.

The 2014 World Cup finalists have lurched from one disappointment to the next since South America's qualifiers kicked off two years ago, with the two-time champions invariably failing to add up to the sum of their talented parts.

Despite a formidable arsenal of attackers led by Lionel Messi, the Argentinians have scored just 16 goals in 16 games, the second lowest total behind already-eliminated Bolivia.

A lacklustre 1-1 home draw with Venezuela in their last outing on September 5 left Argentina's hopes of automatic qualification for next year's finals in Russia hanging by the slenderest of threads.

CONMEBOL STANDINGS

TEAM	M	W	D	L	PTS
Brazil (Q)	16	11	4	1	37
Uruguay	16	8	3	5	27
Colombia	16	7	5	4	26
Peru	16	7	3	6	24
Argentina	16	6	6	4	24
Chile	16	7	2	7	23
Paraguay	16	6	3	7	21
Ecuador	16	6	2	8	20

*Top 4 qualify
*5th goes into play-off

With just Thursday's game against Peru and next week's trip to Ecuador remaining, Argentina are in fifth place in the table, outside the top four automatic qualifying places.

While a fifth-place finish would likely still see them qualify for Russia -- with what ought to be a straight forward playoff against New Zealand awaiting -- a crowded table means Argentina can't take anything for granted.

If South American champions Chile win their home match against Ecuador, and Peru win or draw, Argentina will head into the final round of games next week outside both the automatic qualifying and playoff places.

Mario Kempes, one of the stars of Argentina's 1978 World Cup triumph, gave voice to the exasperation of fans struggling to understand why the team has failed to fire.

"When they pull the Argentina shirt on, it's like they suddenly forget how to play football," a bemused Kempes said in a recent interview.

Argentina superstar Lionel Messi (C) and his teammates take part in a training session in Ezeiza on Tuesday ahead of their 2018 World Cup qualifier against Peru tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

Organisers urged to cash in

SPORTS REPORTER

Organisers and former hockey players hoped that hosts Bangladesh will put up a good show in the upcoming Hero Asia Cup, like they did 32 years ago when the continental tournament was first held in Dhaka.

The expectation came out during a seminar titled 'Asia Cup and Bangladesh's hockey', organised by Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA), where members of the national team of 1985 Asia Cup, officials of Bangladesh Hockey Federation, umpires and former national players discussed various issues including hockey's glorious past, current state and things to do to take the game forward.

The discussion was preceded by a keynote speech by Daily Ittefaq's sports editor Motaher Hossain Masum.

"Ahead of the 1985 Asia Cup in Dhaka we didn't have the confidence to do well, but we put up a fighting show throughout the tournament after getting off to a good start against Iran. We carried the first impression right into the last match," the team's captain Shahabuddin Chaklader said at the seminar.

"I still remember [Jamail Parvez] Lulu burst into tears after losing 1-0 against Pakistan. We lost that match despite playing very well against a very strong Pakistan side. I believe the current team will play well and the first match against Pakistan is important for them."

BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque said that age-group teams have been producing good results at international tournaments but the senior team can't do the same as the rules of the game are altered frequently.

"We have some organisational weaknesses and we are trying to overcome those. We have a shortage of quality players as well as organisers," Saqeque said. "We could not capitalise on the craze of the 1985 Asia Cup but this time we have to cash in by using the infrastructures that are being developed for this tournament."

Jamail Parvez Lulu, former national player and a member of the 1985 squad, urged organisers to come under one umbrella by forgetting all conflicts and concentrate on the development of hockey.

"I remember South Korea suffered a 0-9 defeat to Pakistan, but in the following year they became champions in a tournament by beating Pakistan. It was only possible because of their organisational capacity. So we need to make a long-term plan and execute it properly, forgetting the conflicts among the organisers," said Lulu.

Mamunur Rashid, former national captain, believes the stage is set for the players to become heroes as they will be playing at their home ground and in front of their own people.

"If Bangladesh regain sixth place among eight teams, it will be a big achievement as they are participating as the eighth-ranked side in the competition," Mamun said, emphasising on the need to regularise all Dhaka and district based leagues in a bid to increasing the number of players.

Kamrul Islam Kismat, Rafiqul Islam Kamal, organiser Yousuf Ali, journalist Dilu Khandokar, BSJA president Syed Saidur Rahman Shamim and general secretary Junate Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

Afghanistan pound Bangladesh U-19s

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-19 team's poor batting displays continued as they lost the fourth Youth ODI against their Afghan counterparts by 45 runs at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Off spinner Mujeeb Zadran was the wrecker-in-chief for the visitors, finishing with seven wickets for just 19 runs as the home side were sent packing for 88 in reply to 133.

The home side lost six wickets for only 11 runs and a 75-run seventh-wicket partnership between Mahidul Islam (43) and Nayeem Hasan (30) was not ultimately enough to spare the hosts' blushes.

Zadran eventually broke the partnership by removing Hasan as Bangladesh lost their last four wickets for two runs, seeing Nayeem's all-round performance -- he also picked up five wickets -- go in vain.

The visitors now hold a 2-1 lead in the five-match series and the home side, who began the series with a 145-run win before suffering a five-wicket defeat in the third game after the second match was abandoned due to rain, will need to win tomorrow's final game to save the series.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: 133 all out in 45 overs (Darwish 23, Nisar 53; Nayeem 5-38, Saif 3-7)

BANGLADESH: 88 all out in 30.3 overs (Mahidul 43, Nayeem 30; Zadran 7-19, Qais 2-22)

Result: Afghanistan won by 45 runs and lead the 5-match series 2-1.

Nazmul to lead Bangladesh A

SPORTS REPORTER

Nazmul Hossain has been named captain of a youthful Bangladesh A team which will face Ireland A in a four-day match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium from October 11.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 13-member squad for the unofficial Test, including two Under-19 players -- top order batsman Saif Hasan and spinner Nayeem Hasan. Experienced players like Naeem Islam and Shahriar Nafees were not considered as selector Habibul Bashar said yesterday that they were looking at future prospects.

"We have got an idea about our experienced players but we want to see how our young prospects take the opportunity and that's why we picked up a young team," said Bashar, who is also manager of the A team.

The Ireland A team will arrive in Bangladesh this week to play one four-day match and five one-day games against their Bangladeshi counterparts. The one-day matches are scheduled to take place in Cox's Bazar.

SQUAD: Nazmul Hossain (captain), Saif Hasan, Sadman Islam, Al-Amin, Zakir Hasan, Yasir Ali Rabbi, Nurul Hasan, Sanjamul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Ebadat Hossain, Abu Haider, Kamrul Islam and Jubair Hossain.

The Bangladesh coaching staff brief the players before a practice session under the newly-installed floodlights at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium last night. The Bangladesh team returned from their camp in BKSP yesterday ahead of the Asia Cup, which begins on October 11.

PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan pip Arambagh

SPORTS REPORTER

Saif Sporting Club fell into the trap of stalemates in the Bangladesh Premier League as they surrendered the lead in a 1-1 draw -- their third in a row -- against a struggling Sheikh Russel KC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

An outright victory would have seen the newcomers climb to second, but 10-man Saif SC had to settle for a draw and stayed in fourth with 18 points from nine outings. Sheikh Russel, with a third draw in nine matches, remained fifth with 12 points.

Saif SC came into the match following back-to-back draws and played better than their opponents, but lacked the cutting edge upfront.

Colombian forward Hember Valecia Olaya squandered an opportunity before Sheikh Russel's Gambian striker Dawda Ceesay headed wide.

Sheikh Russel came close to breaking the deadlock when Kawar Ali Rabbi whipped in a cross but Dawda was too late to react and goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Ziko gripped the ball.

Saif SC showed some promise early in the second half, but they suffered a big blow when defender Riyadul Hasan received his marching orders after being booked for the second time just three minutes into the second half.

SK RUSSEL (RABBI 69) **1 - 1** **SAIF SPORTING** (JAMAL 62)
ARAMBAGH (BAPPY 84) **1 - 3** **MOHAMMEDAN** (SAMSON 20, 65, KINGSLEY 90+1)

The sending-off, however, proved to be a boon for them as they mustered more spirit and launched attacks one after another. Al Amin was denied by the woodwork in the 49th minute before Jewel Rana's effort at the near post was brilliantly thwarted by Sheikh Russel keeper Mustakur Rahman in the 59th. In the next minute, defender Tapu Barman saw his header cleared from the goalline by defender Khalekuzzaman.

Jamal Bhuiyan broke the deadlock in the 62nd minute, heading in Hemanta Vincent's corner but Saif SC's joy lasted only eight minutes as Falze Rabbi tapped in a low header from Dawda to help Sheikh Russel leave with a point.

Meanwhile, Mohammedan Sporting Club notched an emphatic 3-1 win over Arambagh KS, thanks to a brace from Nigerian forward Samson Iliaus, in the second match of the day.

The diminutive marksman scored either side of the break before Shahriar Bappy pulled one goal back for Arambagh KS six minutes from time. Kingsley Chigozie made it 3-1 in the stoppage time for the Black and Whites, who climbed up to sixth with 11 points from nine games. Arambagh, after sixth defeat, remained in ninth with seven points.