

# What to WATCH

SONY ESPN  
ATP Finals  
Group stage  
Nadal v Goffin  
Live from 2:00am (Tuesday)

## DAY'S EVENT

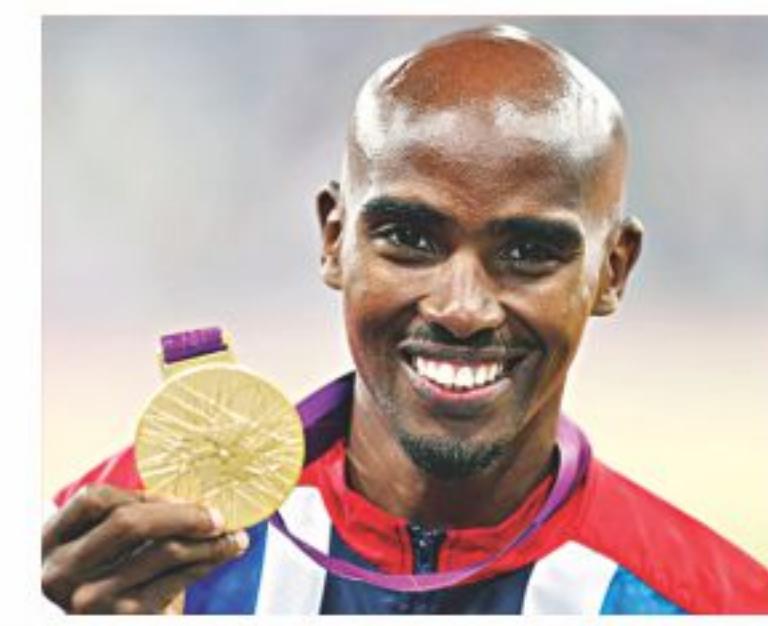
Bangladesh Premier League Football  
Saif SC v Abahani  
Time: 4:30pm

TEN 2  
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers  
Italy v Sweden  
Live from 1:45am (Tuesday)

## FAIR NOT DONE YET

Sir Mo Farah could still be eyeing Olympic marathon glory, despite announcing his retirement from track racing this summer, as he was retained on British Athletics' World Class Performance Programme for the forthcoming season. The decision should mean four-time gold medalist Farah will continue to represent his country, despite receiving limited assurances from their marquee name that he will actually be there. British Athletics performance director Neil Black confirmed the 34-year-old could pull on a British vest again during the long build-up to Tokyo 2020. "There is the possibility that he could represent the British team in the future, so we will monitor the first year and continue to support him," Black said. "The conversations I had with Mo are very positive about running the marathon in Tokyo. His words are: 'As long as I am fit, healthy and competitive I will run the marathon in Tokyo.' Farah receives no Lottery funding due to the money he makes commercially but being on the programme will give him free access to technical and medical support.

—AGENCIES



On the brink of humiliation, Italy and under-fire coach Gian Piero Ventura will be hoping to turn things around in their World Cup play-off second leg against Sweden in Milan tonight.

## Second leg beginning with new promise

SPORTS REPORTER



After a four-week gap, the second leg of the Bangladesh Premier League starts today with a promise of tough battle as the participating teams have reshuffled their squads with the inclusion and exclusion of foreign and local players.

Before the start of the 10th edition of the top-tier professional league in late July, the title race was assumed to be confined to within big clubs such as Abahani, Chittagong Abahani, Sheikh Jamal DC, Saif SC and Mohammedan SC. While these clubs were still in title race at the end of the first leg on October 15, they failed to remain consistent over the 11 matches of the first leg. The team management of the participating sides went on to make changes in crucial positions, especially in the forward positions during the mid-term transfer window.

Title contenders Chittagong Abahani, holders Abahani, Saif SC and mid-table sides Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Russel and Ramatganj MFS signed up either completely new foreign players or those who have played here before. Hence the battle in the second leg is expected to be tough among the foreign players.

Chittagong Abahani, who are on top of the 12-team league with 26 points from 11 outings, signed Haiti's Lionel Saint Preux to replace Afeez Oladipo while holders Abahani, who are in second position along with Sheikh Jamal with 24 points each, roped in Nigerian Sunday Chizoba, who scored 19 goals last season to guide Abahani to their fifth title.

Saif SC confirmed Haitian Wedson Anselme apart from Charles Sheringham, son of former England forward Teddy

Sheringham, and some other local footballers.

While Sheikh Jamal have pinned their hopes on the old guns, a rejuvenated Mohammedan SC, struggling Sheikh Russel, Muktijoddha Sangsad, Rahmatganj MFS and Farashganj increased in strength by signing up foreign recruits.

"The second phase is going to be tough for all teams that intend to win the title or avoid relegation," said Chittagong Abahani coach Saif Barri Titu, whose side made a blistering start with five straight wins but later struggled to put up consistent performances.

"Now the strengths of the teams have changed a lot after the mid-term transfer window as the teams filled up their weaknesses with the inclusion of new players. So it is going to be difficult for all teams," said Abahani captain Mamun Mia, who believes his team recovered well in the latter part of the first leg despite having a goal-scoring problem.

"The inclusion of Sunday will certainly increase the goal-scoring prowess but it all depends on how he plays on the pitch," said the Abahani right-back.

"My observation after the first leg was that a team that wants to become champions must perform consistently and will need a bit of luck as the second leg will be more competitive," Sheikh Russel KC coach Shafiqul Islam Manik said. "As the top four teams will try to topple each other while the mid-table teams are also desperate to catch them, it is going to be a tough competition."

Manik also felt that there were no outstanding performances from the foreign players in the first leg, so the clubs tried to reshuffle foreigners. The veteran coach also believes members of the national U-19 team will try to show their best in an effort to cement their places in the starting eleven of the clubs.

## 'We're Italy, we'll qualify'

AFP, Milan



"We're Italy and if we qualify it will be by playing football," coach Gian Piero Ventura insisted on Sunday on the eve of a crunch World Cup play-off against Sweden in Milan.

Four-time world champions Italy need to overturn a 1-0 first-leg defeat to avoid missing out on the World Cup for the first time since 1958.

"We need everything tomorrow -- tactics, heart and determination," Ventura told a press conference.

The 69-year-old remained jovial and defiant that his troops would be on the road to Russia, adding he was "amazed people are surprised we're in the play-offs".

"We knew from the moment we picked Spain in the group phase that we'd be heading for the play-offs. Nobody can be surprised we reached this point."

"I realise this is the way it works in Italy, but I didn't expect all this," he added of the reaction generated by the humiliation of an impending exit. "We started out with people talking about the apocalypse. The first leg performance shows that we are perfectly capable of overturning the 1-0 result."

Veteran captain Gianluigi Buffon admitted the team were under pressure as they carry the weight of Italian national pride.

"It is certainly a moment of high tension, considering what is at stake and the sense of responsibility each of us must bear," said Buffon. "It's an important juncture, the 'inside or out' has happened many times in my career. It is an important game for the history of our national team. The only thing that I would have would be a personal satisfaction, but in the wider scheme of things, I am irrelevant."



The men's wheelchair basketball team in training at CRP on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Siddikur 70th in Manila

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman finished in 70th position at the Resorts World Manila Masters after carding a one-under-par (71) in the last round yesterday.

The Bangladeshi golfer exchanged two birdies for a bogey on the final day at the Manila Southwoods Golf and Country Club to end with an aggregate score of one-under-par (287), 18 shots behind eventual winner Micah Lauren Shin of USA.

Shin was tied on top with Arnond Vongvanij at the end of the regulation 18 holes, and beat his Thai counterpart in play-off to grab the title.

## Wheelchair basketball teams off to Nepal

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Bangladesh men's and women's teams left for Nepal yesterday to take part in the four-nation international wheelchair basketball tournament, which gets underway today.

The four-nation tournament, with India, Nepal and Pakistan being the other teams, will conclude on November 19.

Bangladesh's head coach Basit Ali oversaw the preparation of both teams at the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Savar over the last two weeks. The finally selected 20 players include students, businessmen and

RMG workers who have been rehabilitated after getting treatment from CRP.

Taking to this correspondent yesterday at the CRP, Wasit Ali, who is also a coach of the national basketball team, said he is optimistic that Bangladesh would win titles in both categories.

Bangladesh had earlier won a men's title in a tri-nation tournament in 2014 but this will be the first international assignment for the women's team, he added.

Lutfu Akter, 27, is one of the members of the women's team who learned to play wheelchair basketball after being admitted to the CRP in 2013. A polio patient since she was three years old, Lutfu has been confined to a wheelchair all these years. However,

the physical challenge did not deter her from trying out this unique sport, which she said finally gave her a great opportunity to represent the country.

Marzana Akter Trina, 12, a student of Sher-e-Bangla Government Girls' High School and College, had an accident in 2014 which left her unable to walk. After being admitted to the CRP, she began playing wheelchair basketball and is now likely to lead the women's team.

Each of the members of both teams have similar stories of losing limbs in accidents or through diseases, but thanks to the efforts of CRP, they have now found a new way to overcome those challenges and represent the country beyond borders.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Aiming to end a sensational year as he began it, Swiss maestro Roger Federer opened his bid for a seventh ATP Finals title with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Jack Sock yesterday.

## Sock turns the other cheek

AFP, London

Roger Federer joked that he should have taken aim at Jack Sock after the American escaped unscathed despite bizarrely turning his backside towards the Wimbledon champion in their ATP Tour Finals clash.

Federer eased to a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Sock in his opening match at the prestigious season-ending tournament in London on Sunday. But the 19-time Grand Slam winner didn't have it all his own way, at one stage missing an easy forehand after being put off by Sock's unusual form of surrender.

When Sock's attempted drop volley looped harmlessly towards Federer, the 25-year-old thought his opponent would easily fire a winner, so he jokingly bent over and turned away from the net.

Federer was so bewildered by the sight of Sock's rear end unexpectedly looming into view that he dumped his shot into the net.

"It was a big distraction, I'll tell you that, because it [Sock's backside] was very big!" Federer laughed. "That's what I should have aimed for. That target was bigger than the down-the-line court that I had."



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