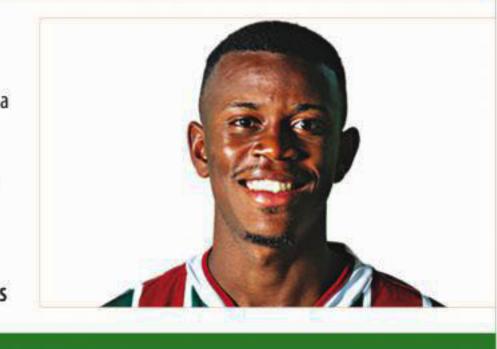
Brazilian footballer Marquinhos Calazans is set to be on the sidelines for eight months after a brutal, unprovoked attack. The Fluminese forward, 21, was enjoying a night out at a bar with with a few close friends when he was recognised by fans of rival club Flamengo. Calazans, who was only just recovering from ACL surgery that caused him to miss much of 2017, was approached by the supporters in Rio de Janeiro, clearly intent on provoking him. The youngster opted to leave the bar and headed for a snack bar next door - only to be followed by the thugs. The Flamengo-following pair reportedly became increasingly aggressive, with Calazans attempted to defuse the situation verbally. Shortly after, a fight broke out and the striker was hit cleanly on his recently surgicallyrepaired knee, with reports indicating that he will be out for most of 2018 as well. -AGENCIES





Ctg Abahani sack Titu

SPORTS REPORTER



SAIFTANT Chittagong Abahani sacked their head coach Saiful Bari Titu yesterday

following the port city outfit's late dip in form which saw them drop eight points in the last three matches, all but extinguishing their chances of winning the Bangladesh Premier League title.

Abahani were leading the points table at the end of the 17th round with 42 points. They looked on course for their first-ever professional league title with five rounds remaining, having a twopoint lead over the then second-placed Sheikh Jamal DC and a three-point lead over current leaders Dhaka Abahani. However, the charges of Titu suddenly lost their way and are in third position now with only two

games remaining. "He [Titu] could not deliver results as per our requirements. He could not motivate the players either. These are the reasons why we have sacked him," Chittagong Abahani's football committee chairman Ruhul Amin Tarafder said, adding that Titu himself was

also seeking for release from the club, which had appointed the former national footballer and AFC-A licensed coach ahead of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Championship in March last year.

Chittagong Abahani lost their 18th round fixture against lowly Muktijoddha Sangsad 2-0 and were held to a 1-1 draw by Brothers Union in the following round before suffering a 1-3 defeat to Sheikh Jamal Last year's runners-up Chittagong DC on Sunday. The latest defeat has virtu-

> ally pushed them out of the title race as they are now five points short of five-time champions Abahani, who can lift the title if they beat three-time champions Sheikh Jamal DC in their next match on Friday.

> Tarafder informed that assistant coach Julfiker Mahmud Mintu has been given the responsibility to guide the team in their last two matches.

Titu becomes the second coach to be terminated fol-

lowing the sacking of Farashganj SC coach Abu Yusuf earlier in the league. There have been a few instances of coaches leaving clubs of their own accord, though, including departures of Sheikh Jamal's Joseph Afusi and Abahani's Drago Mamic.

Szczesny is **Buffon's** heir: Allegri AGENCIES, Turin

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri is not interested in pursuing AC Milan goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with Wojciech Szczesny already in line to

replace Gianluigi Buffon.

Buffon, who turns 40 this month, has been expected to retire after this season, though he hinted at some doubts over his future in an interview with La Gazzetta dello Sport.

The goalkeeper also declined to give advice to Italy teammate Donnarumma about a potential move to the Bianconeri, though he did say "you never go wrong with Juve."

But speaking at a news conference ahead of Wednesday's Coppa Italia quarterfinal against Torino, Buffon's manager said Juventus already have a goalkeeper for the future.

"Szczesny is Buffon's heir, I've already said that and I repeat it," Allegri said of the former Arsenal and Roma man. "Juventus did good business in getting such a good player and bringing him in a year before Gigi stops at Juventus.

"I'm very happy, there's a good relationship between the two of them, they respect each other both as professionals and as men, so I don't see any problem.

"Donnarumma is a young lad who has to grow, he's at Milan and he's forging his path. But Juventus have Buffon's replacement.

'Fixture pile-up could kill us'

AFP, Manchester



Pep Guardiola claimed the fixture pile-up over the holiday season could "kill"

players after Manchester City wrapped up their fourth game in 11 days with a 3-1 win over Watford.

Guardiola's side moved 15 points clear at the top of the Premier League as they bounced back from the end

of their 18-game winning streak in a draw at Crystal Palace just 48 hours earlier. Goals from Raheem

Sterling and Sergio Aguero sandwiched Christian Kabasele's own goal at Eastlands. But City boss Guardiola

was not in the mood to celebrate as the Spaniard complained about the gruelling nature of the fixture schedule for English teams, who are asked to play a host of games in quick succession from late December

until the new year. That packed programme is a stark con-

trast to most of the other top Europe leagues, who all have winter breaks. "We made five changes from the last

game but it's not our fault," he said. "I know here in England the show must

go on, but that's not normal, guys. The big bosses should reflect that. "We're going to kill the players. The feder-

ations don't think about the players but they have to. "They play 11 months in a row. They have to protect them and play with quality and

not quality. We have to think about the artists. But I know it won't happen." Guardiola's frustration had been stoked

by a knee ligament injury suffered by Gabriel Jesus against Palace that could rule the City striker out for up to six weeks.

"He will be out for between four to six weeks, or a little bit longer, but hopefully as

soon as possible," Guardiola said.

City might not have been at their best at the end of their draining schedule, but the runaway leaders were still too strong for Watford as they maintained their advantage over second-placed Manchester United.

"Watford scored because they have good players. We will review the action but people cannot expect us to win 7-0 every time," Guardiola said.

"We played really well. After dropping

two points, we spoke about our reaction because big teams drop points but not too much."

AGUERO HAPPY TO SEE OUT CONTRACT

Despite scoring, Aguero says he would like to see out his present contract with Manchester City which runs until 2020.

The 29-year-old striker had been rumoured to be unhappy at not always being a first-choice starter.

However, he looks set for a long run in the starting line-up with Brazil youngster Gabriel Jesus suffering a knee ligament injury in Sunday's 0-0 draw with Crystal Palace.

PEP GUARDIOLA

"I have until 2020, I think," said Aguero regarding his contract. "The truth is that I hope to see out my contract and I'll try to do my best from here until the end of the season, and after that we will see what happens with me," added Aguero, who is City's all-time leading scorer and netted his 185th goal for the club in Tuesday's 3-1 win over Watford.

He insists he would like to stay at the club but accepted that it was not his decision.

"The truth is I'm very happy here but, as always, as I said before, the club has the last word," said Aguero.

"They're the only ones who decide, because obviously the club is the one who makes the decisions, they are the ones who say you have to go or have to stay, so I'll respect whatever they tell me."

Raonic KO'd by wildcard De Minaur

AFP, Brisbane

Australian third seed Nick Kyrgios overcame a leg injury to reach the quarterfinals of the Brisbane International on Wednesday as fourth seed Milos Raonic was bundled out by wildcard Alex De Minaur.

Kyrgios came back against Australian Matthew Ebden to win 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, finishing the match with his leg heavily strapped.

In the late match on Pat Rafter Arena, 18-year-old De Minaur had the biggest win of his career when he stunned former champion Raonic 6-4, 6-4.

Raonic has not played since October because of calf and wrist problems and he looked rusty against De Minaur, making a host of unforced errors.

Dembele finally fit

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona's record signing Ousmane Dembele is set to return from a long injury layoff in Thursday's Copa del Rey match against Celta Vigo, the club has said.

Dembele, who joined Barcelona for a 105 million euro fee that could rise to 147 million, from Borussia Dortmund in August, made only three appearances for the side before rupturing his hamstring against Getafe on September 16.

The 20-year-old French forward, who had a surgery in Finland, returned to training in December and received his medical discharge Tuesday.



Lionel Messi returned to Barcelona yesterday after spending the Christmas and New Year holiday period back in his native Argentina and joined up with the team for training, although he is unlikely to feature in Barcelona's Copa del Rey clash against Celta Vigo tomorrow. PHOTO: COLLECTED

No intention of going into coaching: Messi

STAR SPORT DESK



Brazilian but Kaiser, wary being

found out, decided to kick all of

the balls into the stands, thanking

the fans and kissing the team's

badge on his jersey. "The fans went

crazy. And in the grass there was

the team was restricted to doing a

Without balls to practice with,

Kaiser continued to take advan-

tage of friendships with journalists

and players, signing deals with

new clubs each time someone

started to catch on to his scheme.

Despite not scoring a single goal,

the media often spoke of Kaiser's

scoring ability. When Kaiser signed

with Brazilian club Bangu, one

newspaper headline read 'Bangu

not a ball," he recalls.

physical training session.

Despite all the praise surrounding the Argentine, Lionel Messi does not believe that he is 'perfect' just yet.

The Barcelona forward explained that he felt like there remain many ares of his games which still require substantial work, despite the fact that he has performed his miracles yet again this season. Messi has scored 15 goals in just 17 La Liga games with Barcelona currently top of the table, well ahead of archrivals Real Madrid.

"I want to be perfect and yet there are some parts of game I have to improve to reach the maximum level," Messi said in an interview with Serbian newspaper Blic. "Which part? Penalties, I have to practice them more."

Messi also spoke a little about his future, saying that presently he does not see himself becoming a manager, although he left the door open.

"I will probably not be a coach after I retire, but there is enough time, I can still change my mind," he added.

The 30-year-old added that he tried to lead a completely normal life, but that his hordes of fans on the streets complicated things.

"I'm a person like everyone else. I lead a completely normal life with my family. Okay, I wish sometimes that I'm not so familiar and that I can walk freely."

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

Starc 'ready' to go, says Smith

Pace spearhead Mitchell Starc is in line to return to Australia's bowling line-up with second spinner Ashton Agar unlikely to play in Thursday's final Ashes Test against England.

Last season, Liverpool closed the door on Coutinho to complete his dream move to Barcelona but this season the English club are likely

Zidane, Real Madrid hoping for more glory in 2018

City back in the groove, Llorente fires Spurs

Raheem Sterling scored the fastest goal of the Premier League season as leaders Manchester City got back on track with a 3-1 win against Watford on Tuesday, while Fernando Llorente put Tottenham on course for a 2-0 victory at his former club

Manchester City's Spanish international forward David Silva missed four matches recently because his prematurely-born baby son is fighting for his life, he revealed on Wednesday.



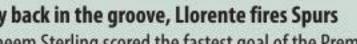
codes listed below:

Liverpool open to Coutinho negotiation?

to respond to a bid from Barca for the Brazilian midfield dynamo.

After enjoying extraordinary success in 2017, with an unprecedented haul of five trophies, Zinedine Zidane begins his third year in charge of Real Madrid with a trip to second-tier

Numancia in the Copa del Rey on Thursday. Numancia in the Copa del Rey on Thursday.



Swansea. Silva explains absence





Football's ultimate con man my family," Kaiser admitted in a

AGENCIES, Rio de Janeiro



Brazilian football star Carlos Kaiser had it all: exclusive contracts with popular teams, money and fame. The professional footballer was only missing one thing: the ability to play the game.

Arguably the greatest con man in all of sports history, Kaiser was able to maintain a career that spanned nearly two decades while playing in as few games as possible and never scoring a goal.

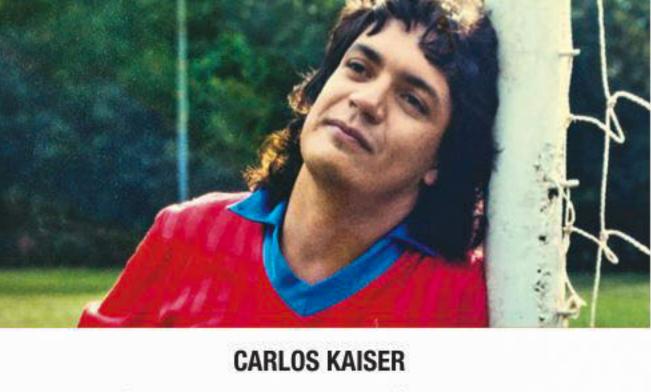
When his career began to trend dowards after the youth level, Kaiser devised a plan to keep going. He would maintain a career without ever playing.

"Like every other player, I came from a poor family, but I want to be big, have a lot of money so I could give better life conditions to

2011 interview with Globo. "I knew that the best way to make it happen was through soccer. I wanted to be a football player without having to actually play it." Kaiser was fortunate in the early

stages of his scheme to befriend stars such as Romario, Carlos Albert Torres, and Renato Gaucho, all of whom would recommend him to coaches, where they would be persuaded to sign Kaiser to a short-term contract. Coaches were not afforded the technology of today, so having footage to scout players was not an option, and Kaiser used this to his advantage. Many of Kaiser's contracts would only last for three to six months, and upon signing would state that he needed time to regain fitness, buying himself a few months to

collect without having to play. Once it was time to practice,



write fraudulent articles about his Kaiser would fall to the ground, clutching a hamstring or other body part. He would then proceed to ride out the rest of his contract while planning his next target. Kaiser worked to maintain his

reputation as a soccer star, going so far as to befriend journalists and giving them jerseys and memorabilia in an effort to get them to

ability. One article even stated that Kaiser had received an offer to become a Mexican citizen in order to play for the national team. In one season, Kaiser signed a

practice for their prestigious new

contract with French club Gazélec Ajaccio, a division II team. The team organised an open

already has its king: Carlos Kaiser'. "I do not regret anything," he told Globo. "Clubs already deceive so many players, someone had to be the avenger."