

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

New Zealand v Pakistan
1st ODI
Live from 4:00am (Saturday)
TEN 1 & TEN 3
South Africa v India
1st Test, Day-1
Live from 2:30pm

SONY SIX

Australia v England
5th Test, Day-3
Live from 5:30am (Saturday)
TEN 2
FA Cup
Liverpool v Everton
Live from 2:00am (Saturday)

SONY ESPN

Serie A
Chievo v Udinese
Live from 11:00pm
FA Cup
Man United v Derby County
Live from 2:00am (Saturday)

Bangladesh Premier League

Brothers Union v Farashganj
Time: 4:30pm

Abahani v Sheikh Jamal
Time: 6:45pm
Venue: BNS, Dhaka

COSTA SCORES FIVE MINUTES INTO RETURN

Diego Costa scored for Atletico Madrid just five minutes into his return as the club cruised to a 4-0 win at Lleida Esportiu in the Spanish Copa Del Rey on Wednesday. Costa, who rejoined from Chelsea in September but could not play until the transfer window opened this month, came on as a 64th-minute substitute and swept home Atletico's third goal in the 69th minute in the first leg of a last 16 tie. The Spain international started the move that led to his goal, driving forward before moving the ball wide, allowing Juanfran to whip in a low cross that Costa clipped past Lleida keeper David Oliveros. Costa appeared to have injured himself stretching to score the goal, but carried on and finished the game. "Costa's return has filled us with enthusiasm," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone. "He brings speed, strength and physicality, which is what we expected of him."

—AFP



Andy, Kei pull out

AFP, Melbourne



Former world number one Andy Murray and Japan's Kei Nishikori pulled out of the Australian Open Thursday as a host of top names battle to be fit for the year's first Grand Slam.

Murray had failed to recover from a hip injury sustained last year and has not played since losing in the Wimbledon quarterfinals last July, while Nishikori has been on the sidelines since August due to a torn tendon in his right wrist.

"Sadly I won't be playing in Melbourne this year, as I am not yet ready to compete," the three-time Grand Slam champion Murray said in a statement. "I'll be flying home shortly to assess all the options but I appreciate all the messages of support and I hope to be back playing soon."

Murray, who earlier withdrew from the Brisbane International, did fly from Queensland to Melbourne, but only to catch a connecting flight back to Europe, ABC reported.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said he respected what was a "very hard decision for Andy."

The loss of the Scot, who may now opt for surgery on his hip, came with injury clouds hanging over a who's who of stars before the Open begins on January 15

World number one Rafael Nadal and six-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic remain huge doubts having yet to play a competitive match this year.

World number eight Jack Sock joined the growing injury list when he injured his hip at the Hopman Cup in Perth on Tuesday. Former champion Stan Wawrinka and Canada's Milos Raonic are also returning from injuries but intend to play in Melbourne.

Asian number one Nishikori said his rehab had been "going well but I am just not ready 100 percent to come back yet in best of five set matches".



Murray

Nishikori



Dhaka Abahani (L) and Sheikh Jamal players went through intense practice sessions at their respective grounds in Dhanmondi yesterday ahead of the neighbours' crucial Bangladesh Premier League encounter today.



PHOTOS: STAR

Abahani today, or Sk Jamal tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The coveted title of the Bangladesh Premier League may be decided today as title contenders Abahani and Sheikh Jamal square-off in a virtual final in the penultimate round of the tournament's ninth edition at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The match will get underway at 6:45pm following the afternoon match between Brothers Union and Farashganj SC.

The battle for the title became a two-horse race Muktijoddha

Sangsad shot down high-flying Chittagong Abahani 2-0 and Saif Sporting Club held Sheikh Jamal to a 1-1 draw.

Those results combined with Dhaka Abahani's consistent performances saw the Dhanmondi-based outfit swoop in and claim pole position in the 12-team table.

The Sky Blues currently have 48 points from 20 matches, just one point more than second place Sheikh Jamal, and can take an unassailable lead and claim a sixth professional football league title with a win. On the flipside, Sheikh Jamal can climb up to first

with a win.

"We have been taking it match by match after the completion of the first leg and we are still focused on that. Since a win will confirm the title, we don't want to throw away this opportunity," said Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu.

"There is no magic to our consistent performances. The players are aware of their duties and I hope they will again do their duty on the field. The team that makes less mistakes and avails their chances will win," added Rupu, who can draw inspiration from the fact that his side

were faced with a similar predicament last season before confirming their fifth title by beating Sheikh Jamal in the penultimate round.

Despite their latest encounter ending in a 1-1 stalemate, the head-to-head statistics are in Abahani's favour with six wins, as many draws and only three losses from their previous 15 league encounters. Abahani have also not lost to Sheikh Jamal since a 2-1 loss in August 2015.

However they will have to be wary of a desperate Sheikh Jamal, who have no option other than victory if they are to have a realis-

tic shot at the title.

"It's a do-or-die situation for us," said Sheikh Jamal coach Mahbub Hossain Roxy. "But the players are pressure-free because they have nothing to lose. And they are motivated to win and give a hundred per cent."

Despite missing the services of midfielder Omar Faruque Babu and Gambian recruit Mamadou Bah, who is still recovering from a head injury, Sheikh Jamal will have to be on the offensive to keep their title hopes intact. They can also draw on their 3-1 win over Chittagong Abahani to bring down their namesakes.

Late strikes give Aussies edge

AGENCIES, Sydney

Australia stunned England with two late wickets, including that of Joe Root for 83, to leave the tourists wobbling on 233 for five at the end of the rain-disrupted opening day of the fifth and final Ashes Test on Thursday.

A day that started with rain washing out the first session had looked like ending with a packed Sydney Cricket Ground bathed in summer sunshine and England's Barmy Army of fans in full triumphant voice.

Root and Dawid Malan had combined for a 133-run partnership to help steer the tourists to 228 for three when Australia took the second new

ball with two or three overs of play remaining.

First, Mitchell Starc induced Root into a half volley to square leg where Mitchell Marsh took a superb catch. Then Jonny Bairstow was removed caught behind with what turned out to be the last ball of the day.

Malan, who survived a few scares to notch up his fifth Test half century and reached stumps unbeaten on 55, said England were obviously disappointed.

"It sort of sums up where we've been in on this tour, we've been on top for so long in games and then make a couple of mistakes and let the Aussies back in," he said. "I thought Rooty played fantastically well to get to that position, obviously he was disappointed to get out and to be five down after the

hard work we put in today is obviously not ideal."

"The second new ball is always a challenge. You don't know if it's going to swing, you don't know if it's going to skid off the wicket. We were definitely speaking about trying to get through this period. Still looking to be positive, still looking to have our scoring intent."

"Unfortunately, he clipped that to square leg and if it was two or three yards to the left or right it would have been four and everybody would have said 'great shot'."

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 233 for 5 (Cook 39, Stoneman 24, Vince 25, Root 83, Malan 55 not out; Hazlewood 2-47, Cummins 2-44)



England skipper Joe Root (C) walks off the ground after being dismissed for 83 on the first day of the fifth Ashes Test against Australia in Sydney yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Acid test for India

First Test against SA starts today

AFP, Cape Town

India's status as the world's number one Test team will face a fierce examination when they come up against second-ranked South Africa in a three-Test series which starts at Newlands on Friday.

South Africa will be banking on their formidable fast bowling attack to dismantle India's strong batting line-up but after nine successive Test series wins India are brimming with confidence -- and a belief that they can thrive in any conditions.

Six of India's winning series were played at home and the others - two in Sri Lanka and one in the West Indies -- were in conditions where fast bowling was not a major factor.

The last time India lost a series was when they were beaten 2-0 in Australia in a four-match contest in 2014/15.

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:

Shakib, Mushy make Cricinfo Test team

After the duo made the Guardian Test XI and Cricket.com.au's Test XI of the year, Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim have made it into the Espn Cricinfo's Test XI of the year.

Juventus into Italian Cup semifinals

Douglas Costa and Mario Mandzukic scored in either half as defending champions Juventus advanced to the semi-finals of the Italian Cup with a 2-0 win over city rivals Torino.

Man City top financial firepower list

Premier League leaders Manchester City have more financial muscle than any other club in world football, according to a study that sees English clubs dominate the top 10.



Wenger rages at 'farcical' penalty

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger slammed the "farcical" penalty decision that cost Arsenal in their thrilling 2-2 draw against Chelsea and vowed to fight a Football Association charge in his latest furious attack on the authorities.

Wenger was seething after referee Anthony Taylor awarded a penalty for Hector Bellerin's challenge on Eden Hazard in the second half of Wednesday's heated London derby at the Emirates Stadium.

The Arsenal manager felt there wasn't enough evidence of a foul to justify Taylor's decision and Hazard rubbed salt into the wound by converting the spot-kick to cancel out Jack Wilshere's opener.

After Marcos Alonso put Chelsea in front with six minutes left, Bellerin enjoyed a sweet moment of redemption as he blasted Arsenal's 90th-minute equaliser.

But Wenger's anger wasn't soothed by that dramatic intervention and, recalling the controversial penalty awarded for a handball by Arsenal's Calum Chambers in Sunday's draw at West Brom, he launched another broadside at the officials.

"We got again a farcical decision on the penalty, but we knew that before the game," Wenger said.

"You could give 10 penalties like that a game. Since the start of the season it is what we have to take."

"I'm fed up with that. At the moment we have to face surprising decisions."

"Nothing will change and we have to deal with that."

Wenger was hit with an FA charge for his conduct towards referee Mike Dean after the Chambers penalty incident.

But although he risked further censure with his latest outburst, the Frenchman, who could be given a touchline ban, insisted he has every intention of stating his case in front of the governing body.

"(I will contest the charge) 100 percent. You can listen to every interview and I stick to everything I said without any problem," he said.

"I am 35 years in football and I know what I said."

"What I find terrible is we just saw a great game and we talk only about this and for me it would be nice if we think about football for a change."

Wenger reserved praise for Arsenal midfielder Wilshere, who scored his first league goal for the club since May 2015.



Arsenal defender Hector Bellerin fires in the equaliser over the outstretched legs of Chelsea's N'Golo Kante during their Premier League clash on Wednesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



RICHARD COUSINS

Tragedy behind empty seats

AGENCIES, Sydney

The heartbreaking truth behind the image of three completely unremarkable empty seats at the SCG on day one of the fifth Test has been revealed.

The Australian reports three seats in the MA Noble Stand were left empty because the seats belonged to Richard Cousins and his two sons.

The British, who was the chief executive of the world's largest food catering company Compass Group and a keen cricket fan, and his two sons, William and Edward, lost their lives in the New Year's Eve seaplane crash on the Hawkesbury River.

Cousins' fiancée Emma Bowden and her 11-year-old daughter Heather were also killed in the crash.

The Australian reports the seats remained empty for the entire day of play.

Cousins' brothers, Simon and Andrew released a statement on Thursday stating: "We are fortunate and thankful for the outpouring of love and support we've received from across the world."