

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

Independence Cup
Rahmatganj v Sheikh Jamal
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: BNS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Cricket League
Four-Day Match, Day-4
Time: 9:30am
North Zone v South Zone

Venue: SKS, Rajshahi
East Zone v Central Zone
Venue: SANS, Khulna

STAR SPORTS 1
ICC U-19 World Cup
New Zealand v Afghanistan
Live from 3:30am (Thursday)

TEN 1
South Africa v India
3rd Test, Day-1

Live from 2:00pm
TEN 2 & SONY SIX
Australian Open
Quarterfinal
Berdych v Federer
Live from 2:30pm



World No. 1 Rafael Nadal is being helped onto his feet by a physio after he picked up a leg injury, forcing him to forfeit his Australian Open quarterfinal against Marin Cilic during the fifth set.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Devastated Nadal down and out

AFP, Melbourne

Rafael Nadal's drive towards a second Australian Open title came to a shuddering injury-induced halt Tuesday on a day of upsets that saw unseeded Kyle Edmund and Elise Mertens make the semi-finals.

The world number one retired against Marin Cilic after an upper right leg problem began troubling him the fourth set on Rod Laver Arena, with the Spaniard wincing in pain and limping as he struggled to continue.

His 3-6, 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 2-0 exit set up a last-four clash for the former US Open champion against Britain's Edmund, who stunned third seed Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Mertens, who is yet to drop a set, was equally convincing in blasting past world number four Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-0 to become the first Belgian to make the semis since Kim Clijsters in 2012.

She will play second seeded Dane Caroline Wozniacki or veteran Spaniard Carla Suarez Navarro for a place in Saturday's final.

Little separated Nadal and big-hitting Cilic until the injury struck, as they traded ferocious groundstrokes in an intense battle.

But the Spaniard called the physio at 1-4 in the fourth set and again at the changeover when two sets apiece and the writing was on the wall.

"Tough moments. Is not the first time an opportunity that is gone for me," Nadal told reporters. "I am a positive person, but today is an

opportunity lost to be in the semi-finals of a Grand Slam and fight for an important title for me.

"This has already happened to me a couple of times in this tournament and it's really tough to accept, especially after a tough December when I missed starting the season in Abu Dhabi and then Brisbane."

Nadal went into the year's opening Grand Slam tournament with knee concerns, but ironically that wasn't the problem that finally brought him undone.

"I was playing okay. I was playing a match that anything could happen: could win, could lose. He was playing good, too," Nadal said.

"But I was fighting for it. I was two sets to one up. Yeah, just have to accept, recover, go back home, stay with my people and keep

going. That's all."

Nadal said his problem was not hip-related, more a muscle issue high up on his right leg.

"It was an unbelievable performance from both us," said Croat Cilic, the sixth seed. "It is really unfortunate for Rafa to finish this way."

Nadal's retirement follows the departure on Monday of Novak Djokovic, with his immediate playing future uncertain after an elbow injury flared. He also appeared to have a hip problem.

There were no such troubles for Edmund against Dimitrov, as he became only the fourth British man to reach the Australian Open semi-finals in the post-1968 Open Era.

"It's an amazing feeling. I'm very happy," said the overwhelmed 23-year-old, ranked 49.

'Thrilled to be at biggest club in the world'

AFP, London

Alexis Sanchez said Monday he was "thrilled to be joining the biggest club in the world" as he moved to Manchester United from Arsenal in a swap deal with Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

The 29-year-old Chile striker, who came close to joining Manchester City last summer, has signed what is believed to be a four-and-a-half-year contract that will make him the highest-paid player in the Premier League.

It has been widely reported that Sanchez will earn a pre-tax salary of £500,000 a week.

Armenia international Mkhitaryan, also 29, will head to the Emirates after he fell out of favour with United manager Jose Mourinho during 18 months at Old Trafford.

Sanchez joined Arsenal for £31.7 million in 2014 after three years at Barcelona but his relationship with the Gunners soured after he tried to orchestrate a move to City last year.

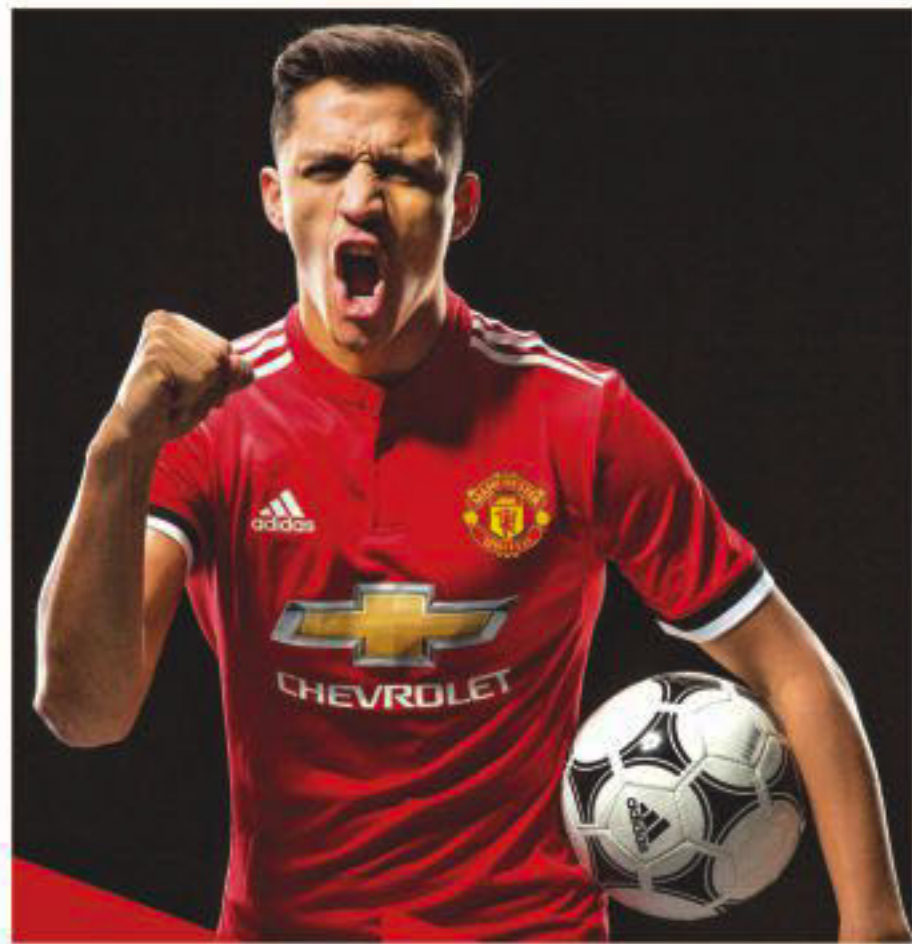
In an Instagram post, he took a parting shot at ex-Arsenal players who have criticised his attitude.

"There are people [former club players] who have spoken with no knowledge of what happens inside the club and cause damage," Sanchez wrote. "I must say I always gave 100%, until the last day, when I asked to the Mister [Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger] to be in the team, because I wanted to be a contribution."

Last week, former Arsenal defender Martin Keown called Sanchez "football's biggest mercenary".

In a statement issued by United, Sanchez said he had spent "three-and-a-half wonderful years" at Arsenal "and I bring with me very positive memories of that great club and its fans".

Referring to Old Trafford, he said: "The chance to play in this historic stadium and to work with Jose Mourinho was something I could not turn down."



ALEXIS SANCHEZ

"I am very proud to be the first Chilean player ever to play for United's first team and I hope I can show our fans all around the world why the club wanted to bring me here."

His move to United was celebrated in his homeland, where fans on social media lauded the Red Devils' "winning" mentality, in contrast to the paucity of recent success at Arsenal.

"The golden destiny of Alexis," said daily newspaper La Tercera.

Mkhitaryan joined United for around £30 million in 2016 after three years at Borussia Dortmund. The highlight of his stay in Manchester was scoring in the Europa League final victory over Ajax last season and he also helped United win the League Cup.

"I would like to wish Henrikh all the success and happiness that I am sure he is going to get. He is a player that we will not forget, especially for his contribution to our Europa League victory," added Mourinho.

Mkhitaryan told the Arsenal website he had "always dreamed of playing for Arsenal".

"Now that I'm here, I'll do my best for this club to create history," he said.

Arsenal boss Wenger said he was happy to acquire Mkhitaryan in the deal.

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:

- Wenger rules out spending spree**
Arsene Wenger insisted Tuesday there was no chance he would jeopardise Arsenal's financial stability with lavish spending on new players during the rest of the January transfer window.

Mascherano to leave Barca after 8 years
Barcelona confirm that defender Javier Mascherano will leave the club this month, with Spanish media reporting the Argentinian is heading to Hebei China Fortune.

World Cup boost for VAR after 'positive' tests
Video assistant referees (VAR) could be used at the World Cup in Russia later this year after the committee responsible for the laws of football pronounced itself "encouraged" by tests.

Bale form boosting confidence
Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane singled out fit again Gareth Bale for praise on Tuesday as he prepares his side for a Copa Del Rey quarter-final return leg against Leganes.



ROAR EMBARRASSED IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

A-League side Brisbane Roar suffered humiliation after slumping to a 3-2 defeat in their Asian Champions League clash with Filipino minnows Ceres-Negros. The Australian outfit exited the tournament despite taking an early lead through ex-Middlesbrough hero Massimo Maccarone, as the visitors countered with three goals that laid the foundation for the unlikely victory.

Eric Bouteac pulled one back for the hosts late on, but it wasn't enough and the indignity was further compounded when the numbers on the back of three Brisbane Roar players' shirts began to peel and fall off. Roar staff tried desperately to salvage the situation with a few bits of carefully positioned orange tape but, in truth, they were merely papering over the cracks.

At one point, No. 22 Bouteac left the pitch with his own number hanging off and, after a few minutes, re-entered the fray with the No. 77 taped to his back -- because apparently there were no other No. 22 shirts available. Teammate Ivan Franjic was supposed to already be playing in the No. 77 shirt, but one of the digits had fallen off leaving the winger inadvertently sporting the No. 7.



--AGENCIES

Siddikur eyes Dhaka Open title

First tri-sanctioned event to tee off today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman will be looking to stoke some old memories when he embarks on the tri-sanctioned City Bank American Express Dhaka Open teeing off at the Kurmitola Golf Club in Dhaka today.

The 33-year-old golfer won the first and only Asian Development Tour (ADT) event held at home soil seven years ago, by a massive margin of 12 strokes. The two-time Asian Tour winner had also won the last Professional Golf Tour India (PGTI) event held in Bangladesh last year in the Chittagong Open 2017, by six strokes. Hence he is full of confidence as he takes the field as the highest-profile local golfer in the season opener, which has been tri-sanctioned by the ADT, PGTI and Bangladesh Professional Golfers' Association (BPGA).

"I always play for victory. I didn't have any practice here, but I know the course well. So I'm confident about winning," said the 33-year-old.

Just back from the Singapore Open,

Siddikur opted to play at his home event disregarding a much more lucrative Asian Tour event in Myanmar starting on Thursday. He said it is his prerogative to be present at the home event.

"I always like to play at home, especially on my home course. I won my first ADT title here seven years ago and I also had a good finish when the Asian Tour held an event there last year. I am excited to compete on my home course once again," added Siddikur.

However, Siddikur is expected to face some challenge from a 113-strong field from 13 countries including an ever-improving local contingent led by Jamal Hossain Mollah as well as a host of stars from PGTI featuring Shamim Khan, Mithun Perera, Sujjan Singh and promising ADT talents like Mathiam Keyser of South Africa and Wisut Artjanawat of Thailand.

The four-day event has a prize purse of 50 lac taka. The tournament trophy was unveiled at the KGC yesterday where the three leading players from the three tours, as well as organisers and sponsors, were present.



Siddikur Rahman, Shamim Khan and Wisut Artjanawat hold the trophy of the City Bank American Express Dhaka Open as organisers, sponsors and representatives pose alongside them ahead of the event at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Wasteful Saif beaten

SPORTS REPORTER



A wasteful Saif Sporting Club suffered a 1-0 defeat against TC Sports Club of Maldives in the first leg of the AFC Cup playoff qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A 23rd-minute strike from Kyrgyz forward Anatoliy Vlasichev was good enough for the visitors to take home all three points, making Saif SC's job difficult for the away match in Male on January 30.

Saif looked like they were playing without purpose in the first half but came back strong after the break, creating numerous chances even though they failed to find an equaliser against the Maldivian outfit, who had won the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup

in Chittagong last year.

Newcomers Saif had strengthened their squad with players from Chittagong Abahani and Mohammedan, and five of those players were drafted in the playing eleven, who however frustrated the 5,000-plus crowd at the big bowl.

However, it can be said that luck was not with Saif, who were denied by the woodwork three times within the first 15 minutes of the second half after having put on a scrappy performance in the first half, where they seemed short of confidence and could hardly complete five passes despite being boosted by the presence of four foreign players.

TC Sports Club, on the other hand, played with a compact defence, led by Egyptian defender Alaaeldin Nasr Emagraby, and frus-

trated the hosts by foiling a lot of scoring chances.

The visitors grabbed the lead when forward Vlasichev collected a through-ball from Ishan Ibrahim and rounded off defender Sushanta Tripura inside the box to drive a low shot past goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana.

Despite conceding the lead, Saif looked ordinary before bouncing back in the second half after winger Zahid Hossain was replaced by midfielder Mohammad Abdullah while TC Sports Club's goalkeeper Asnin Dzmitry was taken off due to a wrist injury.

Within the first 15 minutes, Saif created at least six scoring opportunities, of which three attempts by Abdullah and Kingsley came off the crossbar.

"The team worked very hard but unfortunately luck was not with us today [Tuesday]. We created a lot of chances and hit the bar a few times, but at the end of the day its only goals that count," said Saif coach Ryan Northmore, who is however confident about turning the tables in the away fixture.

"I am confident to win the away match because we created a lot of scoring chances against one or two chances they created, but the forwards need to be clinical in finishing and we will work on it in the coming days," said Northmore.

"We expected a tough game and it was a tough contest, the pitch was not in good condition but the game was good. We won the game which is more important than anything even though the home side tired their best to win on their home ground," said TC Sports Club coach Mohamed Nizam.



TC Sports goalkeeper snatches the ball away from Saif SC striker Charlie Sheringham during their AFC Cup preliminary round (first leg) fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The visitors won the match 1-0.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON



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