

What to WATCH

TEN 1
Champions League last 16
Porto v Liverpool
Live from 1:45am (Thursday)

TEN 2
Champions League last 16
Real Madrid v PSG
Live from 1:45am (Thursday)

Booters' camp starts today

Qatar camp, Thailand fixtures lined up

SPORTS REPORTER

The national football team is set to get back to business today after a 16-month hiatus with a training camp at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan in Savar following Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) revelation of a programme for September's SAFF Championship, which will be held in Dhaka.

As part of buildup for the regional event, the national team will play a FIFA friendly against Laos on March 27, some 17 months since their shock defeat against Bhutan in the Asian Cup qualifying playoff.

This will be a fresh start for the team as some 15 players from the Bhutan match were excluded from the 35-member preliminary squad declared by coach Andrew Ord a few days ago. It is also the first assignment with the senior team for Ord, who was appointed in June last year but only had the chance to work with the under-23 and the under-19 teams.

"Keeping September's SAFF Championship in sight, we are going to hold activities of the national team, including training camp at BKSP from tomorrow, ahead of the friendly against Laos on March 27. The booters will also have a two-week preparation camp in Qatar as well. They will leave for Qatar on February 28 and return on March 14. Then they will have a two-day rest and two days of training before travelling to Thailand on March 19. The team will play two warm-up matches against club sides there on March 21 and 25 before heading to Laos on March 25," National Teams' Committee chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed disclosed, adding that there would be month-wise training programme till the SAFF Championship.

Ord believes it is time for action even though he does not want to make any promises at the moment.

"The President [Kazi Salahuddin] is right that the time for making excuses is over, but we can't move from terrible to well-built in one game. You have to be realistic, you need to understand where we are but we have got to improve, we have to be more passionate, we have to be built for 95 minutes, not embarrassing the nation by having players who can't continue because they are not fit," said Ord.

"We have got to crop out stupid mistakes; we have to gain self-respect back into ourselves, into football and the country. My responsibility is to make sure the tactics are right, pick the right players and put them in the right positions properly. The players also need to do their job," added Ord.

The Australian picked 35 players without naming any one from Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani. He reasoned that the Abahani players were not included for the time being due to their AFC Cup commitment.

He, however, assured that he would call up Abahani players upon the return of the national team from Qatar and those players would travel to Thailand and will be part of the squad for the Laos match.

Ord also explained that he has picked so many young players to scrutinise them not only for the senior team, but also for the under-23 team which is supposed to play in the Asian Games prior to the SAFF Championship.

Meanwhile, defender Yeasin Khan and winger Jewel Rana withdrew from the camp due to injuries after reporting to the coach, who will start the camp with 24 players. Nine other players, who played in the Independence Cup final, will join the camp on February 21.

British-born youth in nat'l boxing

SPORTS REPORTER

British-born Bangladeshi boxer Al Sapwan Uddin will take to the ring in Dhaka tomorrow when the Walton Marcel 29th National Senior Men's and 4th Senior Women's Boxing Championships get underway at the Muhammad Ali Boxing Stadium.

18-year-old Sapwan, who completed his A Levels from North London, started playing the game during his school life and won three gold medals in four tournaments in London. He will now represent a Jhalakathi club in the national championship to showcase his skills against local boxers.

Afghans take 2-1 lead

AFP, Sharjah

Leg-spin sensation Rashid Khan took five wickets as Afghanistan cruised to a six-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the third ODI at Sharjah on Tuesday.

The Afghans now lead the series 2-1 with two matches remaining.

Zimbabwe won the toss and batted first, but collapsed from 117-3 to 154 all out as 19-year-old Khan finished with figures of 5-24. Rahmat Shah and Nasir Jamal both struck half-centuries in Afghanistan's reply as they wrapped up victory with 22.3 overs remaining.



Federer hoping for return to top

AFP, Rotterdam

Roger Federer said Monday he could allow himself to dream about recapturing the world number one spot at this week's Rotterdam tournament and becoming the oldest man ever to hold the position.

To climb back to the top at the age of 36, the Swiss must at least reach the semifinals. If seedings hold up, that means he would have to defeat compatriot and friend Stan Wawrinka in what would be a high-profile quarterfinal.

"I would love to be in that position with anyone, but with Stan it would be like a Grand Slam final, a big-time match," said Federer. "I'm hoping to get to number one and hoping to do it this week. You always want to do it the tough way, it's not easy to get there."

"The achievement would be quite incredible. It's exciting to see Stan in my section and it's great to have him back."

Federer made a relatively late decision to play at the event, which he won in 2005 and 2012. He said that after winning in Melbourne a fortnight ago, he felt good enough to compete and is also considering playing in Dubai in two weeks' time.

"I didn't expect to win Australia, I played it not thinking about number one," he said. "I didn't think of the rankings at all in Melbourne. Afterwards, I thought I could always play Rotterdam, I'd love to play, give it a go and see what happens."

"I'm happy I'm here, healthy and eager to play," he said, ahead of starting his bid on Wednesday against Belgian Ruben Bemelmans.

Federer also gave some insight into his plans for the spring claycourt season, which he skipped completely last year.

"The clay season is up in the air. If I'm playing a lot during this part of the season, it would be hard to play a robust clay season. It would be light (schedule) if I do play," he said.



PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

While Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo was laser-focused as he aims to rescue Los Blancos's season when they meet Les Parisiens tonight in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 match at the Santiago Bernabeu, Neymar and his PSG teammates (R) were in an upbeat mood.

Will Neymar trump Ronaldo at Bernabeu?

AFP, Madrid



With Cristiano Ronaldo on one side and Neymar on the other, Wednesday's heavy-weight Champions League showdown between Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain sees two of the game's biggest global superstars collide.

Ronaldo, the current world player of the year, has rediscovered something like his best form just at the right time for Real. PSG, meanwhile, are placing their hopes in Neymar, the world's most expensive player, as they chase the European glory that has thus far eluded them.

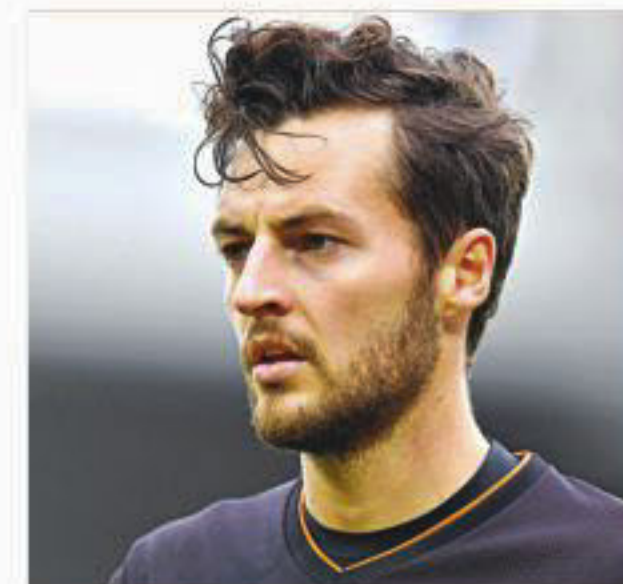
The Brazilian left Barcelona for Paris to step out of Lionel Messi's shadow. So far Neymar's route to the Ballon d'Or has been blocked by the Messi-Ronaldo duopoly -- they have won the prize five times each in the last 10 years. But if Neymar inspires PSG to victory in this tie, and then on to glory in the final in May, he will stand a good chance of ending their domination.

While Ronaldo turned 33 last Monday, he is far from finished. He scored just four times in Real's first 18 La Liga games, his slow start to the season following a summer overshadowed by accusations of tax evasion.

But a weekend hatrick in a 5-2 win over Real

MASON FORCED TO RETIRE AT 26

Hull City and England midfielder Ryan Mason on Tuesday announced his retirement from football after failing to recover from a fractured skull. The 26-year-old was involved in a sickening clash of heads with Chelsea defender Gary Cahill at Stamford Bridge in January 2017 and has not played since. "I can confirm that following specialist medical advice I am having to retire from playing professional football," Mason said in a statement. "I have worked tirelessly in order to be able to return to the pitch. Unfortunately, having taken expert medical advice I now have no option but to retire due to the risks involved given the nature of my injury. "I am and always will be eternally grateful for the incredible network of people around me who have helped me to recover from what was a life-threatening injury in January 2017." Former Tottenham player Mason was capped once for England, in a 1-1 draw with Italy in Turin in March 2015. "I am so proud to have come through the ranks to play for my club, the club I love," he said. "To have had the honour of captaining the team fills me with immense pride." "Finally, representing my country is an honour that nobody can ever take away from me and something that I am so proud to have achieved." --AFP



'We live for these moments'

AFP, Madrid



Zinedine Zidane insists he is not letting the pressure get to him as he prepares his Real Madrid side for Wednesday's huge Champions League last-16 clash with Paris Saint-Germain at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"I'm very happy. We all live for these moments. I don't feel any particular pressure," a relaxed Zidane said at a press conference on Tuesday.

"We have prepared as we usually do. Certainly tomorrow [Wednesday] there will be a bit more pressure than usual, but I'm going to enjoy it. My future does not bother me much just now."

With Real fourth in La Liga, 17 points behind leaders Barcelona, there is speculation that the Frenchman's future as coach is on the line against a feared PSG side, with the two-time defending champions putting all their hopes in the Champions League going into the first leg of this tie.

"I am just trying to get on with my work. This is my passion," said Zidane, who has won eight trophies as Real coach. "I have nothing that I need to demonstrate."

Although much of the focus is on Neymar, Zidane is wary of the threats elsewhere in a PSG side also featuring the likes of Edinson Cavani and Kylian Mbappe.

"Of course Neymar is a great player who is on top of his game, but we are not only thinking about him."



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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:

Time is now for City in Europe: Kompany

Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany insisted on Monday that the "time is now" for his team to make a serious mark in Europe, but brushed off talk of winning a quadruple this season.

Tahir posts emotional message after racial slur

Imran Tahir posted an emotional message on social media after he allegedly suffered racial abuse from fans. The cricketer said that he believes in showing love to everyone regardless of country, color or religion.

Giroud eyes Chelsea chance after bruising full debut

Olivier Giroud is focused on nailing down a first-team place at Chelsea after a dramatic full debut against West Brom, during which he was forced to have five stitches for a head wound. The France striker impressed during Monday's 3-0 win against West Brom at Stamford Bridge, where he created the first of Eden Hazard's two goals before being substituted in the second half.

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