

IT'S A BOY FOR BASTIAN AND ANA

Former Germany football captain Bastian Schweinsteiger and one-time world tennis number one Ana Ivanovic were celebrating the birth of their first child at the weekend. "Welcome to the world our little boy! We are so happy," the footballer wrote on his Instagram account beneath a snap of the baby's feet, which look tiny beside the couple's hands. The 30-year-old, who won the French Open in 2008, posted a snap of a bedroom with the walls painted blue and featuring blue teddy bears. "Words cannot describe the joy and the happiness we feel in our hearts," she wrote beneath the photo. The pair have been married since 2016 and announced the pregnancy in November. The couple live in Chicago where 33-year-old Schweinsteiger, a former Bayern Munich and Manchester United midfielder, is playing for Major League soccer club Chicago Fire. --AFP



On a night when four-goal hauls was the norm, with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah bagging four against Watford and Inter Milan's Mauro Icardi following suit against Sampdoria, Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo filled his boots with four to his name against Girona on Sunday, taking himself to within three goals of Lionel Messi in La Liga top-scorer's chart.

PHOTO: AFP

Last chance for glory: Messi

GOAL.COM



Argentina star Lionel Messi said the upcoming World Cup in Russia is the last chance for the nation's current group of players to win a World Cup.

The football icon has lifted a plethora of global, continental and domestic titles with Barcelona, but his national team career has not consisted of the same glory.

Messi and Argentina have suffered heartbreak in three consecutive major international finals: the 2014 World Cup and the 2015 and 2016 editions of the Copa America.

"I cried many times because of games like these, for lost finals, for what they mean and for not being able to achieve the dream of a country," Messi told Argentine television program "La Cornisa."

"They [the three finals] were tough blows," Messi continued. "It seems like having reached three finals doesn't help us at all."

With Messi now 30, the Barcelona star realizes that time is ticking away on his and his teammates' chances of achieving something special together.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner turns 31 in June, and key contributors Sergio Aguero, Gonzalo Higuain, Angel Di Maria, Nicolas Otamendi and Javier Mascherano will all be 30 or over when the World Cup kicks off.

"We depend on the results, unfortunately," Messi said. "We feel that if we are not champions ... we will not have another."

The Barcelona star confessed that he dreams of lifting the trophy in Russia, after his country fell in extra-time to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final in Brazil.

Women's futsal camp next month

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national women's futsal team will embark on their maiden campaign of the AFC Women's Futsal Championship by taking on Malaysia on May 2 in Thailand.

Bangladesh, who were placed in Group-B, will play their second match on May 4 against Vietnam before facing Chinese Taipei in the final group fixture on May 6.

A total of 15 teams, split into four groups, will play the league games in round-robin format.

A 20-member preliminary squad will start their training after the completion of under-15 football team's campaign in a four-nation invitation tournament in Hong Kong in the first week of next month.

The 20 players, out of a total pool of 41, will be selected for the training camp before finally being reduced to 10 members.

Napoli stay in the hunt

APP, Rome



Spanish defender Raul Albiol headed in the winner as a 1-0 victory over Genoa on Sunday kept Napoli's Serie A title hopes alive, closing the gap on leaders Juventus to two points.

Juventus' march towards a seventh consecutive Italian title was stalled on Saturday by a goalless draw at struggling SPAL.

And Napoli seized the opportunity to revive their bid for a first league crown since 1990, after a 4-2 defeat by Roma and a goalless draw at Inter Milan in their last two games had put Juve in control.

Maurizio Sarri's side were pushed hard, with Lorenzo Insigne and Dries Mertens both hitting the woodwork before Albiol broke through after 72 minutes at the Stadio San Paolo.

"This was an important game, we were coming back from two matches without a win," said Napoli coach Sarri.

"At this stage last season, Juventus had basically already won the title, so this means we are causing them real problems."

"This is already the second-best campaign in Napoli's history in terms of points, so we'll keep pushing."

Sarri added that the international break had come at just the right time for tired Napoli captain Marek Hamsik, who limped off with a thigh injury after 20 minutes.



Napoli's Spanish defender Raul Albiol (R) celebrates after scoring the winning goal against Genoa during their Serie A fixture at the San Paolo Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

who had been sidelined for a month with injury, broke the century after scoring his first goals since January.

His four-goal haul included three in 14 minutes against his former club.

Icardi now has 103 goals in Serie A -- 93 with Inter and ten for Sampdoria.

In Calabria, Roma claimed a six win in seven games.

Stephan El Shaarawy latched onto an Aleksandar Kolarov cross to open the scoring after 39 minutes with Radja Nainggolan sealing the win on 70 minutes to condemn Crotone to their third loss in four matches.

Del Potro stuns Federer

AFP, Indian Wells



Former US Open champion Juan Martin Del Potro stunned top-ranked Roger Federer 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/2) Sunday to win his first Indian Wells title and second consecutive ATP crown.

The 29-year-old from Argentina handed Federer his first match defeat of 2018 and extended his own win streak to 11 matches, including a title run earlier this month at Acapulco.

"I'm still shaking," Del Potro said. "It's difficult to describe with words. It's like a dream."

Del Potro, nagged by wrist injuries throughout his career, survived three match points before claiming the championship in a third-set tie-breaker, ending a two hour, 42 minute marathon contest.

"I cannot believe I won this tournament, beating Roger in a great final and this level of tennis. We played great tennis today," Del Potro said.

"I just want to keep winning titles like this if I can."



Juan Martin Del Potro (R) shakes hands with Roger Federer at the trophy presentation after beating the World No. 1 in three sets in the final of Indian Wells in California on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

PREMIER LEAGUE HOCKEY TRANSFERS

Mohammedan ask for another deferral

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club on Sunday asked the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) league committee to defer the upcoming inter-club players' transfers for the Premier Hockey League for at least 25 days, citing accommodation issues at the club tent.

This is the fourth time the request has been made, following failed attempts to convince the committee from Usha KC, Wari Club and Bangladesh Sporting Club.

On February 1, all the premier league clubs unanimously agreed to participate in the transfers on March 27-29, after the national team returns from the Asian Games Qualifiers. However, the BHF executive committee's initial decision was to hold the transfers on February 20-24, before the team's departure for Oman.

"We have had problems with accommodating the players in the club tent because Mohammedan are now taking part in the Premier Cricket League and our youth football team have been in training for the Youth Championship."

"Besides, the Mohammedan hockey committee has not been formed yet, so we need time to arrange the money. That's why we asked them to defer the transfers till April 20 but we did not tell them that we will not take part in the league," said Mohammedan's hockey manager Ariful Islam Prince.

And though the federation does not seem to have taken the issue positively, it does apparently want to discuss the matter at a meeting soon.

"I have learnt that Mohammedan sent a letter requesting a deferral of the transfers. I think we should stick to the previous decision as that decision was taken with consent from all the clubs. If we accept their proposal, then they will again raise the issue of Ramadan. Plus, they will have no time [to hold the transfers] after Ramadan because the national team's camp will start by then for August's Asian Games," said BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque.

Usha KC, Wari Club and Bangladesh Sporting Club previously asked the federation to delay the transfers by two more months but the BHF replied that the transfers will take place as scheduled on March 27-29.

Raising the question on Mohammedan's plea, BHF joint secretary Ehsan Rana added: "Mohammedan used the same reasons before when they had the transfers deferred for nearly two months and fixed the current transfer date. What have they done in the last two months? Abahani are also simultaneously playing both cricket and football at the moment but they did not mention any accommodation problems for the hockey team."

Rana also hinted that the BHF is determined to hold the transfers at the agreed time, with whichever participating teams agree to take part.

Swimmers' awards being stalled

SPORTS REPORTER

It has been two years since the conclusion of the 12th South Asian Games in India but the Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) is yet to hand over the promised cash awards to the medal winners of that competition, resulting in mounting frustration among the swimmers.

Mahfuz Khatun Shila, one of the tournament's three gold medal winners, grabbed two gold medals and established herself as the first ever female swimmer to win gold at the regional extravaganza. In addition, Mahfuzir Rahman Sagar, Jewel Ahmed, Shahjahan Ali Roni, Shariful Islam, Romana Akter, Sonia Akter and the relay teams managed a total of 15 bronze medals.

"Two years have gone by but we still haven't received the cash awards the federation promised us. The financial incentive was announced to inspire the athletes. We reminded the federation about their promise several times but we still have not received the cash award," Shila told reporters yesterday.

The BSF had announced that gold, silver and bronze medal winners would receive Tk 3 lakh, Tk 2 lakh and Tk 1 lakh respectively.

"I have no interest to talk about the cash award. What I can say though is that I am still waiting for what the federation promised us," said Jewel.

On the other hand Mahfizur, who won seven bronze medals which include three in relay events, believes that the financial aspect of the game should not be so heavily considered by athletes.

"The cash award is not a big deal, rather it is honourable for an athlete to represent the nation without thinking of the monetary benefits. If an athlete doesn't understand that honour, then that person will not be inspirational in the future," she said.

However, BSF general secretary BM Saif informed that the federation has not found any documents related to that promise of cash awards but that they are trying to hand over the money regardless.

"After coming into the office, I didn't find any documents on the cash award promise but I have already notified the BSF president about it at a meeting. Besides, the federation has been in a cash crunch due to the talent hunt programme that took place year round. However, I will bring up this matter again at the next executive committee meeting," explained Saif, who was BSF's joint secretary during the 12th SA Games.