

Bangladesh Cricket League
Four-Day Match, Day-4
Islami Bank East Zone v Walton Central Zone
Time: 9:30am
Venue: SKS, Rajshahi

Bangabandhu Int'l Volleyball
Final
Bangladesh v Turkmenistan
Time: 3:00pm
Venue: Mirpur Indoor Stadium

BOATENG'S WORLD CUP PARTICIPATION IN JEOPARDY

Jerome Boateng could miss the World Cup for Germany after suffering a thigh injury in Bayern Munich's Champions League defeat to Real Madrid, according to a report on Thursday. The world champions' goalkeeper Manuel Neuer meanwhile appears to be losing his battle to regain fitness in time for the finals in Russia, other reports said. Defensive lynchpin Boateng pulled up after a sprint in the first half of Wednesday's semifinal first leg and had to be helped off the field. According to Kicker magazine, he could be sidelined for four to six weeks. Germany's first World Cup group match is on June 17 and head coach Joachim Loew will name his squad on May 15. Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes has already ruled Boateng out of the return leg of the semifinal in Madrid next Tuesday. "It's a muscular problem for Jerome, he will drop out," said the Bayern boss, who is also waiting on news of Arjen Robben, who was injured in the opening five minutes. Having last played for Germany in October 2016, Neuer only resumed training with Bayern last week after seven months out with a metatarsal fracture.



— AFP



The Bangladesh volleyball team warm-up prior to a training session at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur on the eve of their Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship final against Turkmenistan today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Battle of the unbroken
Hosts take on Turkmenistan in final today

SPORTS REPORTER

A buoyant Bangladesh will be hoping for another improved performance as they aim to regain the Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship title. The hosts will take on tournament favourites Turkmenistan in the final at Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur today.

The match will get underway at 3:00pm.

Both Bangladesh and Turkmenistan have stormed into the final with unbeaten records, but the visiting Turkmenistan are tipped as the superior side due to their previous association with the former Soviet Union.

Besides that, the Turkmen are technically, physically and tactically superior to Bangladesh, who have never faced the Central Asian nation before. The evidence of the visitors' strength can be gauged from the way they blitzed their way to the final, losing only one set out of 10 against Uzbekistan, Nepal and Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz were the only ones who put

up a fight, but they lost all three sets by a close margin.

It is mentioned here that Kyrgyzstan beat Turkmenistan in the final of the last edition of the championship held in Maldives in 2017 and Bangladesh on Wednesday fought brilliantly against the defending champions to hand them a 3-2 defeat in the second semifinal.

The boys in red and green will also admit that Turkmenistan are better than Bangladesh, who have only played two international friendlies and six warm-up matches against Iranian clubs in the two years since lifting their first-ever international volleyball trophy in 2016.

Horosit Biswas and Co. are now waiting to give everything in a bid to keep the title of the Central Zone Volleyball Championship at home for the second time. The boys in red in green looked relieved after making it to the final although some of the players could not sleep well on Wednesday night following raucous celebrations. However they are now ready to face the challenge from the unknown Turkmenistan.

"It was really challenging for us to

reach the final, especially after beating a strong Kyrgyzstan. We are now very relieved and pressure-free after moving into the final as the home side. The semifinal was so exciting and it cost me an almost sleepless night," said captain Horosit yesterday morning, prior to starting his preparations for the final at the Indoor Stadium.

"We know well that the final is not going to be an easy one and we have to face an uphill task against Turkmenistan, who have good attackers as well as blockers. We are confident that we can beat them but we must block them perfectly as well as receive the ball well before launching attacks," said the 28-year-old spiker, whose side will definitely be getting another strong support from the gallery.

Horosit's counterpart Kalandarov Usmanbek was also optimistic of winning the title.

"Bangladesh are a very good team who beat Kyrgyzstan. We saw them in the match and analysed their performance. But, our strategy, plan and purpose for coming to this game is to be champions. We will do our best to win and be champions," said Usmanbek.

YOUTH OLYMPICS QUALIFIERS

Bangladesh suffer first loss

SPORTS REPORTER

After two massive wins in the Youth Olympic Games Qualifiers in Bangkok, the Bangladesh youth hockey team suffered a 7-4 defeat to Malaysia despite going ahead twice in the 30-minute match at the Queen Sirikit Commemorative Stadium in Pathum Thani yesterday.

Bangladesh overwhelmed Cambodia 20-0 yesterday morning and took that momentum into the afternoon match against Malaysia, taking the lead in the third minute before Malaysia hit back twice in quick succession and made it 2-1 within 10 minutes.

Sarwar Sawon then scored twice to restore the lead, but a virtuoso performance from Rosdi, who scored four goals, overwhelmed Bangladesh.

Bangladesh will play two matches today against Chinese Taipei and holders Pakistan and must post wins to move into the semifinals.

Jamal hot on Higa's heels

SPORTS REPORTER



Kazuki Higa continued his march towards the title of the BTI Open with a three-under-par (69) in the penultimate round at the Kurmitola Golf Club, but Bangladesh's Jamal Mollah was in hot pursuit after firing a four-under-par (68) of his own to eat into the Japanese's lead.

Higa, who started the tournament with an incredible 10-under-par (62) on the opening day, has seen his five-stroke lead sink to a three stroke one with an aggregate score of 15-under-par (201) in the event, jointly sanctioned by the PGTI, ADT and BPGA.

Mollah showed brilliant consistency to fire a third successive 68 in as many rounds as he searches for his first Asian Development Tour (ADT) win. Sweden's Malcolm Kokocinski was joint-third with a 10-under-par alongside Argentina's Miguel Carballo.

However with the surprising calm Higa -- who is playing only his second tournament so far -- has shown so far, it will be an uphill task for the Bangladeshi to steal a win. His assurance has not waned throughout the event and yesterday was more of the same. The 23-year-old exchanged four birdies against one bogey, only the second time he has dropped a shot in the tournament.

The Okinawa local was hopeful of repeating his steely performances in the final round.

"I don't feel any pressure. I feel that I'm good enough to win this tournament. I'm

not surprised that I'm leading but I was surprised to shoot a 62 on the first day! Obviously that's helped me so far so I hope to stick to my game plan and continue playing well," he added.

"I will now look to repeat the same stuff in the final round. In round four, my plan will be to mix caution with aggression by grabbing my opportunities and at the same time not trying to do anything fancy," Higa said.

Jamal, who had an early bogey before finding five birdies, lamented a few missed opportunities but remained hopeful of pulling off an upset.

"I'll look to treat the last round like any other round I've played here and try and put my best foot forward. I have the advantage of local knowledge and have won at the KGC on multiple occasions in the past which also counts. The crowd support will be another factor that could help me raise my game in round four," Jamal said.

"If I play well, a round of six to seven under is very much on the cards which would in turn give me a shot at my first ever international title."

Sajib Ali, who was joint-second overnight, slipped all the way to fifth with a one-over-par (73). He is joined by another local, Shakhawat Sheh, with scores of seven-under-par. Meanwhile,

Bangladesh's two-time Asian Tour winner Siddikur Rahman fell out of the top 10 despite carding a one-under-par (71). He is 11th with an aggregate 6-under-par, one stroke ahead of Bangladesh's Dulal Hossain.



Bangladeshi golfer Jamal Mollah, who is in second place with 12-under-par, poses for a photo after the BTI Open's third round at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



With a sensational strike from outside the box, defender Marcelo brought Real Madrid back into the Champions League semifinal first leg against Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ruthless Real take the edge

AFP, Munich

Real Madrid were unspectacular and even unconvincing in their 2-1 win over Bayern Munich on Wednesday but there was nothing lucky about a victory that should ensure a fourth Champions League final in five years.

Zinedine Zidane has watched his side suffer in games away to Munich, German champions, PSG, French champions, and Juventus, top of Serie A, in Europe this season. But they won them all.

Real may not be outplaying their rivals, or even playing better than them, but Zidane's team are ruthless. They pounce on mistakes and, even under the heaviest pressure, believe absolutely they are going to win.

Bayern wrapped up a sixth straight Bundesliga title three weeks ago and reached the German Cup final on May 19. Yet an off-key Real managed to all-but-burst Bayern's treble dreams.

"It was a curious game, we had a lot of chances we didn't use, so it's no wonder we lost," fumed Heynckes. "I'm not accusing any-

one, but our defence was poor for the goals they scored -- we gave them away.

"What team has so many chances against Real and doesn't use them?"

Having suffered an almighty scare at home in the quarterfinals, when Juventus won 3-1 in Madrid after Real had beaten them 3-0 in Turin, Zidane says nothing is decided despite Real's slender advantage.

"We will have to fight in the second leg, nothing is decided, that showed in the second leg against Juventus," said Zidane. "We will have to suffer again and face Bayern in a different way at home, because if we don't, we could have a bad result," he warned. "We can be happy with the result, we had difficulties at the start of the match in imposing our game. It's not easy to come and win here, we can do better, but we're happy with the result."

Zidane pulled a surprise before kick-off by dropping Gareth Bale, but insisted he does not have a problem with the Welshman and captain Sergio Ramos backed his decision.

"When Zizou has to gamble, he does, because he is the boss," Ramos said. "We are very happy that he is steering the boat."

Abahani lose, Saif held

SPORTS REPORTER



The youth brigade of league champions Abahani were stunned 1-0 by lightweight Farashganj's youths on the opening day of the Walton U-18 Football Tournament after the tournament's best-prepared side in the form of Saif SC's U-18 team stumbled to a 1-1 draw against their Brothers Union counterparts at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Although the Bangladesh Premier League, the professional football league, has successfully completed ten editions, the youth competition for the professional clubs was not staged for the past four years due to a lack of interest from either the participating clubs or the Bangladesh Football Federation.

The first two editions of the youth football tournament were held in 2012 and 2014 without Sheikh Jamal, but this time all the clubs of the Bangladesh Premier League have sent teams to the tournament, an AFC-prescribed meet and one of the pre-conditions on the walk towards professionalism.

Although most of the clubs took shortcuts in preparing their youth teams, a few clubs like Saif SC and Arambagh maintain youth teams under their supervision and field them in the third division football league as well.

Saif SC, comprising of players from BKSP, prepared for nearly seven months and played a tournament in Noagaon with senior teams. They even clinched that tournament, named Abdul Jalil Gold Cup, as a part of their preparations but surprisingly failed to shine in the U-18 tournament, a platform for grooming players.

"I don't have any complaints about their passing, ball distribution and controlling but they squandered a lot of opportunities including a penalty. I think the pressure of being favourites got to them," said Saif SC Academy coordinator Arman Aziz.

In the day's second match, Farashganj, whose senior side were related from the top-tier league, stunned seven-time league champions Abahani with Rafiqul Islam scoring the decisive goal in stoppage time of the second half.

The beauty of the youth competition is that there are no heavyweights or lightweights as all the participating teams are of equal strength with unheralded budding footballers trying their best to impress the team management in a bid to land a contract and get called-up to the senior squad.

Our Warmest Felicitations to His Majesty King Willem-Alexander and to the Friendly People of the Netherlands on their King's Day

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