

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

CHANNEL 9 & STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

Indian Premier League Qualifier-2

Kolkata v Hyderabad

Live from 7:30pm

SONY SIX

England v Pakistan

First Test, Day-2

Live from 4:00pm

Premier Hockey League

War Club v Police SC

Time: 2:30pm

Abahani v Sonali Bank

Time: 4:30pm

Venue: Maulana Bhasani

Hockey Stadium

DOUBLE-BLOW FOR RONALDINHO

Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho is reportedly planning to marry two women at the same time. The former Barcelona player, 38, will tie the knot with his pair of 'fiancées' Priscilla Coelho and Beatriz Souza, according to reports. The trio have been living 'harmoniously' with the Brazilian star since December at his five-million-pound Rio de Janeiro mansion. Ronaldinho started dating Beatriz in 2016 but continued his relationship with Priscilla, which began several years earlier. Bigamy is illegal in Brazil, and is punishable by up to six years in prison, however it is likely that a potential 'wedding' would simply be a ceremony with the two women and not registered as two official marriages. It is claimed he always gives the two the exact same presents, including recently buying them matching perfume during a trip abroad together.

—AGENCIES





Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is back to his flying ways, diving far to his right as he showcases his fitness after over 200 days out due to injury on the first day of Germany's pre-World Cup training camp in Girtan, Italy yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

FIFA WORLD CUP 2018

AGENCIES, Undated

NEYMAR'S RETURN 'BETTER THAN EXPECTED'

Brazil's star forward Neymar is returning to training "better than expected," after more than two months out with a broken foot bone, the Brazilian team physical trainer said Wednesday.

The Paris Saint-Germain striker, who was injured in February and underwent surgery in Brazil, is in training with the national team in Teresopolis, near Rio de Janeiro, ahead of the World Cup in Russia.

"He has evolved well. He trains every day. I could even say that his development is better than expected," the trainer, Fabio Mahseredjian, told journalists.

Team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar, who led

welcome to pay us a visit," said Deschamps.

"It was a good idea and I've shown the letter to the players. There's everything in there from a man who knows what an international tournament calls for," said Deschamps.

The French Football Federation have made what Koscielny said in the letter public.

"The main thing is to get along with each other, all together, players and staff," he wrote.

"Everyone has to fight and go the extra yard for his teammates, team spirit is key."

"The whole nation is behind you and will cheer you on. This support, energy, pride and passion will carry you just as it did in Euro 2016," said Koscielny, who was part of the France side that lost the final to Portugal.

RUSSIANS TO TAKE NO PART IN DRUG TESTING

Russians will not be involved in drug testing procedures at the World Cup as FIFA looks to reassure teams that samples cannot be tampered with, the governing body's medical committee chairman Michel D'Hooghe has told the Times newspaper.

A 2016 report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and compiled by Canadian sports lawyer Richard McLaren found more than 1,000 Russian competitors were involved in a conspiracy to conceal positive tests over a five-year period.

Soccer was among the sports implicated in the probe and the sport's global governing body are taking no chances at the Russia-hosted World Cup.

"My basic condition to lead the anti-doping policy in Russia is that everything would be done from the very beginning to the last point by FIFA without Russian intervention," D'Hooghe told the Times.

"That means the chaperones, who take the players from the field, will be designated by FIFA and will not be Russian."

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:

Ireland's Ed Joyce retires from cricket

Dual international Ed Joyce announced his retirement from all forms of cricket less than a fortnight after realising his dream of playing a Test for Ireland. The 39-year-old was one of the 11 men who made history against Pakistan in Malahide earlier this month.

Quiet man Zidane bringing stability from the shadows
Cristiano Ronaldo was asked earlier this season to sum up Zinedine Zidane in a word and the one he picked was "winner". At a Real Madrid media day, half a dozen players were rolled out to answer questions ahead of their Champions League final against Liverpool.

Lee injury adds to South Korea World Cup woes

Veteran striker Lee Keun-ho was Thursday ruled out of South Korea's World Cup squad after tearing a knee ligament, the latest in a string of injuries to plague the Asian team ahead of Russia. "Lee Keun-ho has been ruled out of the World Cup," spokesman at the Korea Football Association told AFP.



Ballon d'Or on the line?

AFP, Kiev



In an age when individual awards are given ever greater importance, Saturday's Champions League final between Real Madrid and Liverpool -- and Cristiano Ronaldo and Mohamed Salah -- could determine the winner of the next Ballon d'Or.

After all, Ronaldo has won the prestigious prize on the back of helping Madrid to each of their recent European Cup triumphs, in 2014, 2016 and again last year.

It is reductionist in the extreme to bring Saturday's final down to just two players, given the strength in depth available -- especially in attack -- to Madrid and Liverpool. But this is the era of the individual, at a time when Ronaldo and Lionel Messi have dominated the Ballon d'Or for a decade.

The status of each is such that the annual prize for the world's best player generates ever fiercer debate.

In a World Cup year, what happens in Russia will play a big part too -- it is impossible to imagine Messi not winning a sixth Ballon d'Or should he lead Argentina to the title. But Ronaldo can certainly make his case in Kiev, while this is also a golden opportunity for Salah before he leads Egypt into the World Cup.

RONALDO'S INSATIABLE HUNGER

Ronaldo's decline in the first half of this season was as concerning as his reawakening in 2018 has been breathtaking.

The Portuguese has scored 41 goals in all competitions this season, but an incredible 28 of those have come since late January. Despite only scoring four times before the winter break, he ended with 26 goals in La Liga, behind only Messi.

But it is the Champions League that really brings out the best in him. Ronaldo



A two-time World Cup winner, the legendary Cafu installs the Champions League trophy at the fan-zone in Khreshchatyk City Center in Kiev yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

has played a decisive role in each of the three finals won by Real since 2014.

This season, despite his poor domestic form, he had scored in every Champions League game prior to the semifinal win over Bayern Munich.

Karim Benzema's brace in the second leg against the Germans was crucial, but neither he nor Gareth Bale have been close to Ronaldo's standard this season.

SALAH ALREADY BREAKING RECORDS

This has already been a record-breaking season for the Egyptian, whose 32-goal tally was a new best in the Premier League for a 38-game campaign.

Overall, he has scored a remarkable 44 in all competitions since his arrival at Anfield from Roma, including 11 in Liverpool's memorable run to the Champions League final.

He has been ably supported by Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane, with that threesome netting 90 goals

between them in all competitions.

Nevertheless, Liverpool's hopes of winning a sixth European Cup depend to a large degree on Salah. Whether that would be enough to land the Ballon d'Or as well is something that seems to split his teammates.

"But what if Messi and Ronaldo win the World Cup? Do they deserve it? I don't know what do you have to look at to win the Ballon d'Or," said Georginio Wijnaldum this week. "If it's winning a prize, if it's scoring the more goals. We will see."

Defender Dejan Lovren was a little more optimistic.

"He can be in the top three best players in the world. He has the quality, the world-class experience already," he said.

"He is so calm, a man down to earth and he deserves every credit for every goal he scored for now and definitely we will help him achieve this dream."

Iniesta joins Vissel Kobe

AFP, Tokyo



Barcelona legend Andres Iniesta joined Japan's Vissel Kobe on Thursday, calling his J-League move an "important career challenge".

"This is a very special day for me," the 34-year-old World Cup winner said after signing his contract at a glitzy unveiling in Tokyo.

"I had a lot of offers, other clubs showed an interest in me," added Iniesta, who is reported to have agreed a three-year deal with an annual salary of \$30 million, comfortably a J-League record.

"But I chose Vissel Kobe because it was an interesting project. There was also a lot of trust and confidence in me as a person and also as a player -- that was a big reason."

Iniesta, who lifted 32 major trophies and made 674 appearances for Catalan giants Barca, was handed his trademark number eight shirt by Vissel owner Hiroshi Mikitani.

"I am confident that Iniesta's lead-



ership philosophy and his DNA will be a terrific inspiration for not only Vissel Kobe but Japanese football," said Mikitani.

"His arrival in Japan will raise the profile of Japanese football globally. Iniesta will inspire and empower us to reach new heights in football in Japan. We are very proud to see this day come."

The Spain icon's decision to choose Kobe arguably represents Japanese football's biggest transfer coup, with many top players now moving to cash-rich Chinese clubs in the twilight of their careers.

It also comes as a timely boost to the J-League, which used to attract luminaries such as Brazilian great Zico and former England star Gary Lineker when it began in 1993 but has struggled to attract marquee players in recent years.

Iniesta will join former Arsenal striker Lukas Podolski in the western port city of Kobe after he completed a move from Galatasaray last summer. Podolski was quick to send a "welcome" tweet to Iniesta on Thursday.

"I'd like to help take this club forward and help the J-League grow in Asia," said Iniesta, who is set to join his new team mates after the World Cup in Russia.

"I'm looking forward to getting to know the Kobe players as quickly as possible to be able to help with that process."

Vissel currently sit sixth in the J-League first division standings after 15 games played.

Napoli eyeing Balo

AFP, Milan

Nice striker Mario Balotelli has been linked with a move to Napoli after Wednesday's appointment of new coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The 27-year-old's contract with his French Ligue 1 club expires next month and he has been targeting a move away.

Italian Serie A runners-up Napoli are reported to be interested as they could lose forwards Dries Mertens and captain Marek Hamsik next season.

And the club fuelled speculation by starting to follow Balotelli on Instagram. Balotelli has often been linked with a move to southern Italy as his daughter Pia lives in Naples with his ex-girlfriend.

Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund, French club Marseille, and Serie A outfit Roma are also said to be interested, according to Italian press reports.

Balotelli has resurrected his career since joining Nice in 2016 after less successful spells with AC Milan and Liverpool, scoring 26 goals in all competitions this season.

He received his first call up to the national side in four years by Italy coach Roberto Mancini for upcoming friendlies against Saudi Arabia, France and the Netherlands.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis and new coach Carlo Ancelotti (L) strike the famous James Bond pose after completing the formalities.