

## PUYOL SHAPED RONALDINHO'S CAREER

Ronaldinho has revealed that former Barcelona teammate Carlos Puyol played an integral part in shaping his career. Gaucho, a man, who was at ease with the ball even before some of the world's deadliest defenders, cannot remember of any opposing defender that gave him a hard time than the retired Spanish central defender - Puyol. The duo played together at Barcelona after Gaucho linked up with the Catalan side in 2003 where he went ahead to make 145 appearances. During this time, the Brazilian star, who changed his boots in 2018, scored 94 goals for the Blaugrana. But when asked to pick one of the toughest defenders he ever faced in his career, the 38-year-old retired attacking-midfielder proudly bragged that he can't think of any defender, who mounted a tougher challenge to him than his Barcelona team mate Puyol but in training.

--GOAL.COM



# Higuain apologises for meltdown

AFP, Milan

On-loan AC Milan striker Gonzalo Higuain apologised for his meltdown in the 2-0 defeat to his parent club Juventus on Sunday which saw him sent off for screaming at the referee after earlier missing a penalty.

Argentine Higuain had shrugged off a back injury to take on his former teammates after being loaned to AC Milan last summer to make space for the arrival of Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.

But tensions boiled over as AC Milan struggled to find a way past the reigning seven-time champions.

Higuain was sent off after 83 minutes, two minutes after Ronaldo, the player who took his place in Turin on a 100-million-euro (\$115m) deal, fired in his eighth league goal in 12 matches since arriving from Real Madrid.

Higuain saw red after screaming at referee Paolo Mazzoleni in protest at a yellow card for a foul on Medhi Benatia.

"I know that we are an example for all children, for those who play football, for the people watching, but we are not robots, and we carry things within us," Higuain said after.

"We are human, we feel emotions, the game was not going the right way and it was one of those days.

"I think sometimes the referees should understand the situation," added Higuain, who won two Serie A titles with Juventus after joining from Napoli in 2016.

The 30-year-old was loaned to AC Milan

with a 36-million-euro option to buy with defender Leonardo Bonucci moving the other way.

He has scored five goals for Milan but could not get one past his former club, for whom he scored 16 goals in the league last season.

Croatian forward Mario Mandzukic headed in the opener in the eighth minute at the San Siro, before Higuain failed to convert his 40th-minute chance from the

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GONZALO HIGUAIN  
 AC MILAN STRIKER

spot after a Benatia handball.

Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny tipped the ball onto the post.

"Had I scored, the game would have changed," said Higuain.

"Now we have to look ahead, we will have two weeks of rest and then face Lazio for fourth place."

AC Milan's third loss this season saw them drop out of the Champions League places into fifth behind Lazio who moved back into fourth despite a 1-1 draw at Sassuolo.



AC Milan striker Gonzalo Higuain (2nd from R) is restrained by his teammate as he reacts angrily to a red card during their Serie A clash against Juventus at the San Siro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP



Homes are not only made of walls  
 But a reflection of boundless dream

Holcim  
 Strong Structure  
 স্বপ্নের সিন্থি

## Solari given permanent contract

AFP, Madrid

Interim Real Madrid manager Santiago Solari was appointed permanent coach on Monday after overseeing a startling upturn in the European champions' fortunes since he stepped in to replace Julen Lopetegui.

"Everything is in order. Real Madrid have worked out his contract and there are no problems," the Spanish football federation stated.

Solari has led Real to four wins out of four since being installed on a caretaker basis following Lopetegui's abrupt sacking last month.

And with 15 goals scored and only two conceded he has established the best ever start for a Real manager.

The upturn has left Madrid only four points adrift of league leaders Barcelona and on the brink of qualification for the last 16 in Europe.

"It's a great opportunity and it's a great club," Solari said. "I don't just say that now as coach of the first team. I've been here with other teams, I've played and sweated in the shirt of this club."

## 2020 AFC CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFIERS

# U-23 booters' camp underway

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh under-23 football team's four-day camp got underway at the Birshreshtha Mostofa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday under the guidance of head coach Jamie Day, with next year's AFC U-23 Qualifiers in Bahrain in sight.

Bangladesh have been drawn in

Group B of the qualifiers alongside Palestine, Sri Lanka and hosts Bahrain, with the matches scheduled to be held from March 22 to 26, 2019.

23 out of the 24 players took part in the first day's training, which was an hour-and-a-half long session with defenders Tutul Hossain Badshah and Shushanto Tripura missing out due to injury.

While the qualifiers are still four months away, the coach wanted to see

the players' status after two weeks of domestic football while having a first look at around 12 new faces who have been called up for the camp.

"The target for the five days is for the new boys to see how we work and get used to the environment for future matches/camps and for me to look at the young players I haven't seen before," the coach was quoted as saying by a Bangladesh Football Federation message.



Head coach Jamie Day (C) speaks to the players as they prepare for the first training session of a four-day under-23 camp at the Birshreshtha Mostofa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

## COPA LIBERTADORES

# Boca, River battle to a draw

AFP, Buenos Aires

River Plate twice came from behind to snatch a 2-2 draw with fierce Argentinian rivals Boca Juniors in the first leg of their weather-delayed 'Superclasico' Copa Libertadores final in Buenos Aires on Sunday.

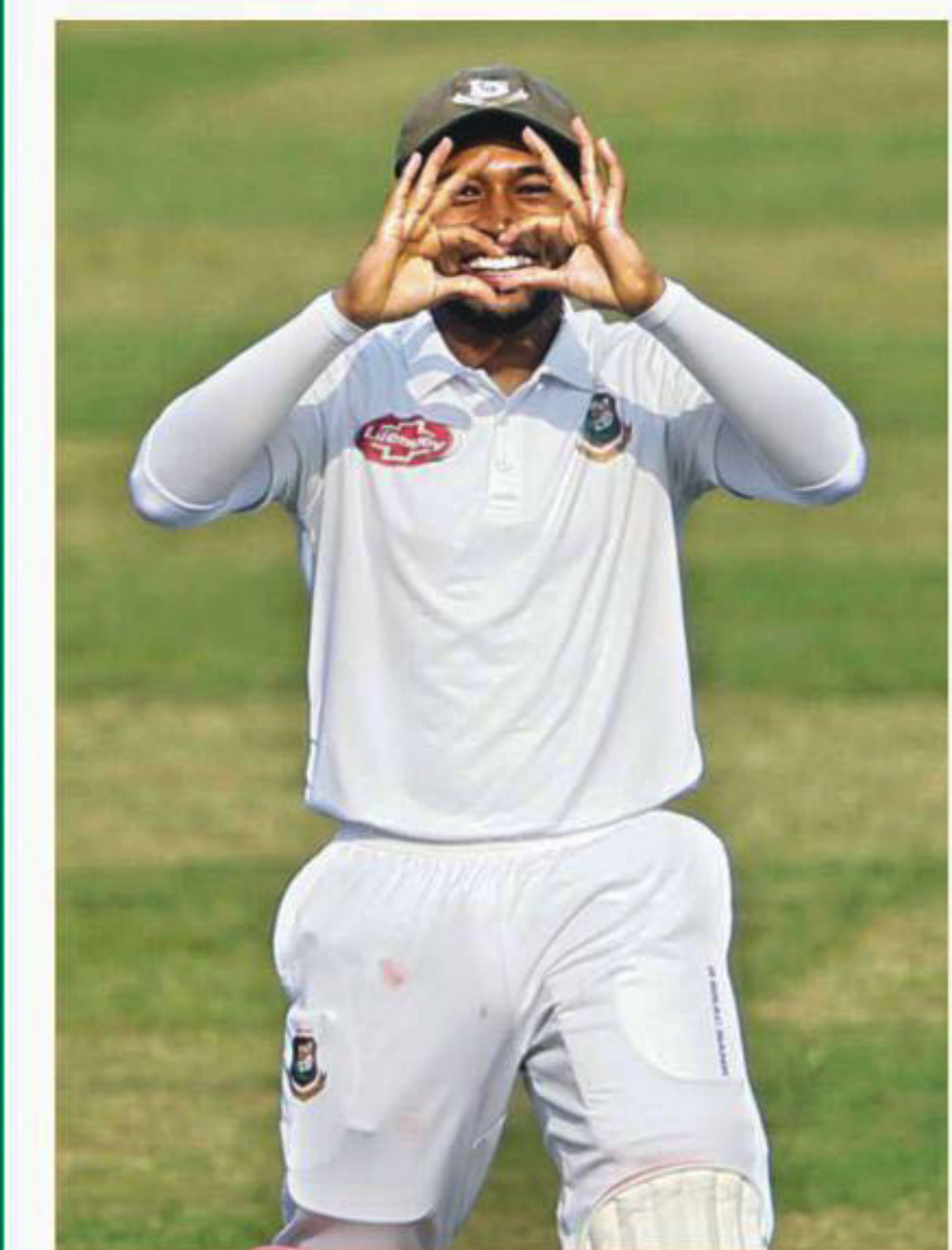
A last-minute save from River goalkeeper Franco Armani to deny Boca striker Dario Benedetto left the South American football showpiece finely balanced heading into the second leg on November 24.

Boca twice took the lead with goals from Ramon Abila and Benedetto only to see River fight back through strikes from Lucas Pratto and an own goal from Carlos Izquierdoz.

The game had been shifted to Sunday after torrential rain forced a postponement on Saturday.

The eagerly anticipated final marked the first time in the 58-year history of the Copa Libertadores that River and Boca, who have one of the most ferocious rivalries in the world of club football, had met in the final.

## PERFORMER OF THE DAY



# Double ton of love

During a conversation before the start of the Test series against Zimbabwe, Mushfiqur Rahim's wife Jannatul Kifayat said all of a sudden: "I won't be surprised nor satisfied if you score a hundred, as I know you can do that. I want to see you scoring even more."

These words of confidence and aspiration from his wife worked as a tonic for Mushfiqur, who smashed his second double-hundred in the first innings of the second Test in Mirpur and celebrated the feat with a heart sign.

After the masterful innings, the batsman was asked about the celebration and Mushfiqur said that he dedicated the double hundred to his wife, who has always encouraged him. Known widely as an introvert, an unusually exuberant Mushfiqur also said that it was the contribution of his wife and also the joy of fatherhood that changed him as a person.

"I had planned that if I could reach that score, I would celebrate in this manner. I dedicate this hundred to my wife. You know that in the past I have been known to be a little bit down, so her presence is very important for me. My mobile wallpaper is my son's photo. Seeing him smiling makes me feel better every time."

After completing the press conference, he received a message from his wife with a few more encouraging words and was expected to meet her after reaching the team hotel. Knowing the importance he places on process, the inspiration may stand him in good stead for some time to come.

## SHORT CORNER

### Ribery slaps TV pundit

Former France international Franck Ribery allegedly slapped French television pundit Patrick Guillou after Bayern Munich's 3-2 defeat to Borussia Dortmund, Bild newspaper reported on Sunday.

Saturday's loss at the Signal Iduna Park left the German champions struggling in fifth place in the table, seven points behind unbeaten Dortmund who sit at the top of the Bundesliga.

Bild quoted witnesses saying the row took place between Ribery and Guillou, who works for the BeIN Sport channel, on Bayern's team bus following the match.

The accounts say 35-year-old Ribery hit Guillou three times in the face before pushing him in his chest.

The tabloid said Ribery, who is yet to score in 15 games this season, was angered by Guillou's negative comments during the match.

Ribery's wife Wahiba had sent the winger a message on Instagram saying Guillou was "very tiring and useless".

--AFP

### Lee breaks K-League record

Veteran striker Lee Dong-gook set a South Korean record for league appearances by an outfielder when he turned out for Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors in his 502nd game.

The 39-year-old -- who enjoyed stints with Werder Bremen in Germany's Bundesliga and Middlesbrough in the English Premier League -- failed to score against Jeju United on Sunday and the match finished in a goalless draw.

But it marked a milestone for Lee, who made his professional debut with Pohang Steelers in 1998 and has scored a record 215 goals in the K-

League and is the joint all-time AFC Champions League top scorer with 36. He has also earned 105 caps with the Taeguk Warriors.

"I finally did it," Lee told local media. "I've played in many games as a field player but I still want to keep playing based on merit."

"I will quit when I feel I am no longer competitive."

--AFP

### Cavani bags hatrick as PSG stay perfect

Thierry Henry's disastrous start as coach of Monaco continued on Sunday as Edinson Cavani's VAR-assisted hatrick helped Paris Saint-Germain

to an easy 4-0 win in the principality that saw them extend their perfect record in Ligue 1 this season.

Neymar netted a penalty to complete PSG's victory, as they made it 13 wins from 13 league games under Thomas Tuchel, further stretching their start to the season that is a record in France and in Europe's so-called big five leagues.

The result for them came after a week marred by revelations from French investigative website Mediapart that youth scouts at PSG had subjected potential signings to racial profiling over several years.

--AFP



Paris Saint-Germain striker Edinson Cavani (L) celebrates his hatrick against Monaco with teammate Neymar on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## AFC OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

# Women in search of a respectable finish

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh women's football team will want to regain some respectability when they end their horrific campaign in the 2020 Olympic Qualifiers (Round-1) with the last game of Group C against Nepal in Yangon today.

Golam Rabbani Choton's charges have conceded a grand total of 12 goals against one scored in the two matches against Myanmar and India, and they can expect more of the same against Nepal. With two defeats in two matches, Bangladesh are at the bottom of the group while Nepal are in third position, having forced 1-1 draws against both India and Myanmar.

This campaign has come as an eye-opener for the team management as they have gone with a team comprised mostly of under-18 and under-16 players, who were no match for the seasoned campaigners of the opposition teams.

According to a message from the team in Yangon, the Bangladesh think-tank has realised that these girls are not ready for this level of competition, yet they are looking forward to the continued work over the next few years. The coach commented, according to the message, that they need to be patient and continue to expose these players to these experiences.

While qualification from this group is a three-horse race between the three other teams, Bangladesh would ideally like to salvage some pride against a side they have never beaten before.