

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

New Zealand v Sri Lanka
Second Test, Day One
Live from 4:00am (Wednesday)

SONY SIX

Australia v India
Third Test, Day One
Live from 5:30am (Wednesday)

Bangladesh Cricket League

Time: 9:00am
South Zone v North Zone

Venue: ZACS, Chattogram
East Zone v Central Zone
Venue: SICs, Sylhet

VATICAN TO BAT IN ARGENTINA

The Vatican's cricket team sets off on its first tour outside of Europe on December 27th, travelling to Argentina at the invitation of a Buenos Aires-based sports club called 'Cricket Sin Fronteras' or Cricket Without Borders. During the 8-day 'Light of Faith' tour the Vatican side, officially known as St Peter's Cricket Club, will play against the Argentinian national team, but it will also take the sport inside a Buenos Aires prison and into the slums in some of the poorest parts of the city. In preparation for the tour, Pope Francis met the players at the end of his General Audience on Wednesday, December 12th, signing a cricket bat which will be presented as a gift to the host club. The Pope also blessed several hundred rosaries to be distributed to children and their families in the slums. -- VATICANNEWS.VA

Mbappe destined for Real: Campos

GOAL.COM

Kylian Mbappe is a "champagne" footballer destined to join Real Madrid and win more Ballons d'Or than Cristiano Ronaldo, claims former Monaco director Luis Campos.

At just 20 years of age, the Paris Saint-Germain forward has already achieved more than many do over the course of an entire career.

He is a two-time Ligue 1 title champion, World Cup winner and the inaugural recipient of the Kopa Trophy bestowed upon the best young player on the planet.

Another 16 goals have been added to an impressive club tally this season, in just 19 appearances, and even more is expected of him in the years to come.

Campos, who was at Monaco when Mbappe burst onto the scene, believes a high-profile switch to Spain beckons for the youngster at some stage, with his qualities fitting Madrid's 'Galactico' recruitment policy.

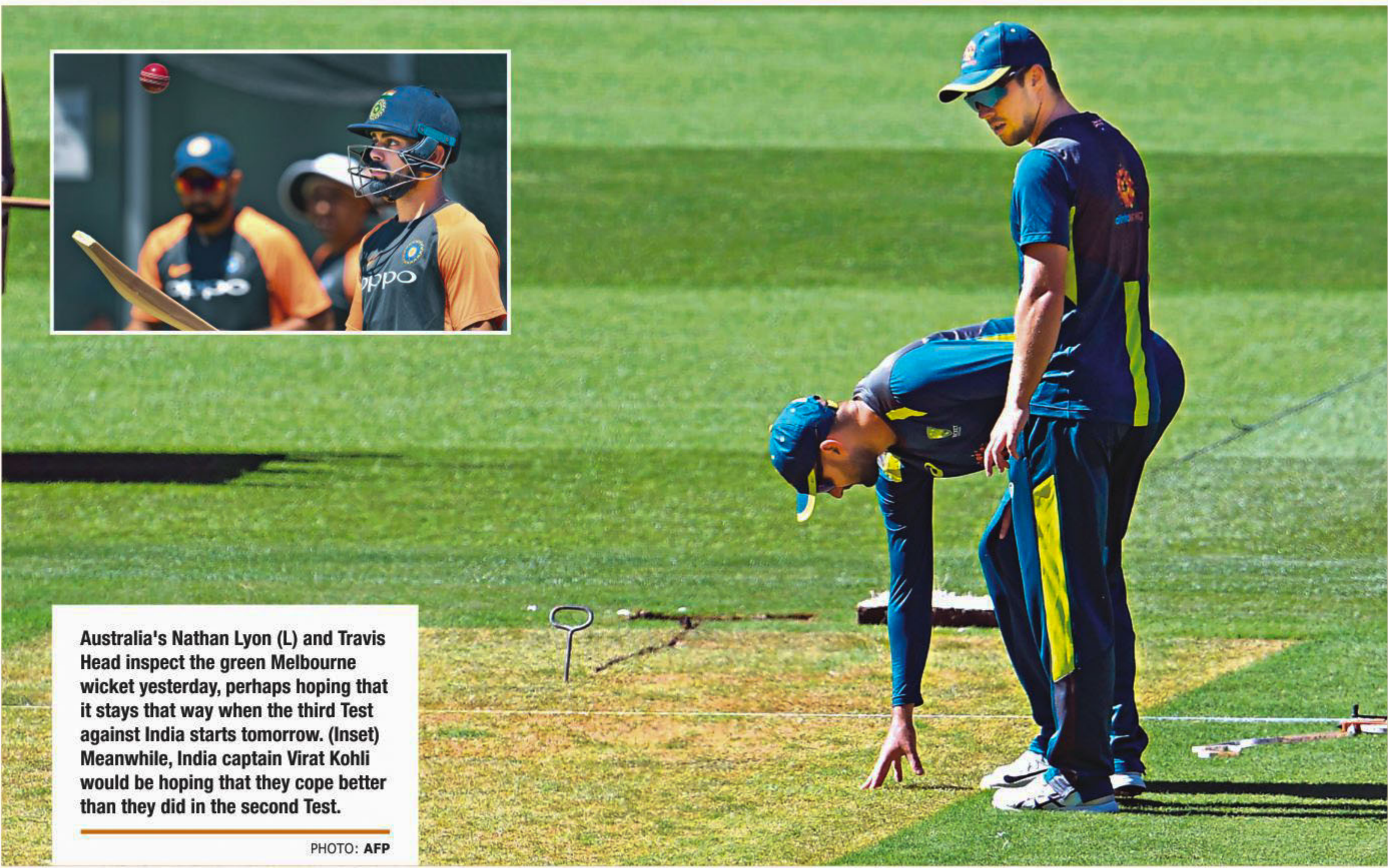
He told Telefoot: "Kylian represents champagne football, which we like to see and as a high level footballer I see him wearing the Real Madrid jersey because it is a club made to his measure, where the great players want to go.

"In the future, I imagine myself attending a match at the Santiago Bernabeu and enjoying the show that Mbappe can offer.

"Nowadays, he is more decisive than Neymar and considering his age, he'll be much better than Cristiano Ronaldo. I see him winning more Ballons d'Or."

Mbappe finished fourth in the 2018 Ballon d'Or vote, placing him one spot ahead of five-time winner Lionel Messi.

He will be hoping to land that prestigious prize at some stage, but it remains to be seen where his career path will take him.



Deadlocked teams chase historic milestones

3rd Test between India and Australia from tomorrow

AGENCIES, Melbourne



The Indian cricket team is on the verge of a historic milestone when they take on Australia in the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne tomorrow.

India are just one victory away from completing 150 Test wins -- a feat achieved only by Australia (384), England (364), West Indies (171) and South Africa (161).

It will also be an important Test encounter for Australia as they have currently won 999 matches across all formats in cricket and if they win this Test, it will be their 1,000th victory in international cricket.

However, considering the record of both teams at this venue, Australia seem better placed to ring up win number 1,000. The last time India won a Test match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground was way back in 1981 and have since lost five and drawn twice.

On the other hand, Australia last lost a Test at the MCG in 2010 against England. Since that heavy defeat, the hosts have won five matches and drawn twice.

India are currently tied 1-1 with Australia after their 146-run defeat in the second Test, where Kohli and his men were dismissed for 140 in the second innings.

Halfway into the tour, the Indian

team management continues to be in a dilemma over selection issues despite having 19 players on their roster - the largest in recent times.

According to coach Ravi Shastri, Rohit Sharma and Ravichandran Ashwin -- who missed the second Test in Perth due to injuries -- are on the mend with the former better placed to be fit.

"We will evaluate Ashwin over the next 48 hours, Rohit looks good and has made good improvement but we will see how he pulls up tomorrow," was how Shastri summed it up.

On the other hand, Australia skipper Tim Paine said Monday he is relishing his at times heated battles with animated Indian counterpart Kohli, and

promised "intense, hard" cricket.

Australian coach Justin Langer declared that all-rounder Mitch Marsh has become an "attractive commodity" and is firmly in contention for a return because of an MCG pitch he still has misgivings about.

While the under-siege deck had a good grass covering on Monday and is expected to retain that come Day One of the pivotal third Test against India, it remains doubtful whether it will provide the life curator Michael Page hopes.

Only 24 wickets fell in the corresponding "borefest" against England last year, prompting the International Cricket Council to label the wicket poor and put the venue on notice.

Defoe gets medal 10 years after win

AFP, London

Former Tottenham striker Jermain Defoe was presented with a 2008 English League Cup winners' medal yesterday, more than 10 years after Spurs beat Chelsea in the final.

The 36-year-old left White Hart Lane for Portsmouth less than a month before the game at Wembley, and had scored in the fifth-round victory over Manchester City.

"I remember contributing to help the boys get to that stage and after that it was actually nice to sit back and watch the lads go on to lift the trophy," Defoe said.

"It's obviously a nice feeling to have been a part of the history of that club, such a big club that had been used to winning competitions over the previous years. It's special."

Defoe, who now plays for Bournemouth, was given his medal at the Vitality Stadium and said that he was cheering on his former teammates as Spurs edged Chelsea 2-1 in extra time a decade ago.

"At the end of the day, they're all your friends and you still want them to win, to get your medal," he added.

Defoe returned for a second spell at Tottenham later in 2008, and made 363 appearances for the club in total, scoring 143 goals.

Mkhitaryan out for six weeks

AFP, London

Arsenal midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan will be out of action for at least six weeks because of a foot injury, the Premier League side revealed on their website yesterday.

Mkhitaryan fractured the metatarsal in his right foot in last Wednesday's Carabao Cup defeat by Tottenham and was replaced at half-time. He missed the win against Burnley at the weekend.

Arsenal said the Armenian playmaker is "expected to return to full training in six weeks".

The 29-year-old will miss key league games against Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester City as Arsenal continue their pursuit of a top-four place.

Mkhitaryan arrived at the Emirates Stadium almost a year ago as part of the swap deal that took Alexis Sanchez to Manchester United.

How culpable are the referees?

ANISUR RAHMAN



Refereeing decisions often lead to controversies in football everywhere in the world, but it is perhaps more severe in Bangladesh than many other places as big clubs often raise their fingers against match officials during and after crucial encounters.

Things often get out of hand as referees and their assistants often get assaulted by club officials and players during matches. Such an incident occurred during the final of the Federation Cup, and the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) came strongly on the clubs, handing suspensions and fines to key players. It has happened before and the end result of such incidents is that the clubs often lose their way in the title race due to such punishments.

But how culpable are the referees in such cases and do the referees face any punishment for their mistakes be it intentional or unintentional?

The reality is there is a system of handing sanction on the referees even

though, according to FIFA guidelines, there is no option of making public the sanctions handed over to referees or assistant referees for their poor performance or mistakes that they make.

The referees' committee of the game's local governing body works silently on a regular basis to rectify the mistakes of the referees and hand them sanctions if they are found culpable of making major mistakes.

So far four referees have been suspended from conducting three to six matches due to their mistakes in three matches -- Federation Cup encounter between Abahani and Arambagh KS, Independence Cup encounters between Abahani and Saif SC and between Sheikh Russel KC and Brothers Union.

"Whenever we get any allegation in written form or in verbal, we analyse match videos and scrutinise report of match commissioner, who plays the role of referee-assessor. We first try to understand whether the decision that made was intentional or unintentional. If it is a minor mistake, we warn the referee and give him tips for

improvement. If the incident is big, then we take actions according to the book," informed BFF's Referees' Committee secretary Ibrahim Nesar.

In a bid to improving the standard of refereeing, the BFF is conducting 17 programmes such as seminars, fitness tests, referees' course and weekly tests round the year and it is holding refresher's course prior to the start of season with two to three instructors updating the referees about the changes of the laws of the game.

"We generally form a panel of 40 referees who conduct all the matches in a season. The referees for a specific match are appointed the day before the match but they don't know their role prior to the start of the match," said BFF's head of Competition Management System Shahidul Islam Limon.

Limon further informed that they have 3000-plus referees including five FIFA referees and seven FIFA assistant referees working under them. Each of the referees that come from outside the capital is paid nearly Tk 8000 as per match fee, conveyance and daily allowance for conducting each top-flight match.



BFF Referees' Committee secretary Ibrahim Nesar (2nd from R) conducts an assessment regarding the promotion of referees at the Bangabandhu National Stadium earlier this week.

PHOTO: BFF



Former India skipper Sourav Ganguly (L) travelled to Barcelona to watch Lionel Messi and Co play against Celta Vigo in the La Liga. He was later presented with a Barca jersey by board member Oriol Tomas Carulla.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

BPL franchises busy signing agreements

With the sixth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League T20 edging closer, the franchises are busy signing agreements with various companies. Magnito Digital signed an agreement with defending champions Rangpur Riders as digital partner. Meanwhile, Rajshahi Kings signed deals with Runner Group, ICP, First Security Islami Bank, National Bank, Paramount Group, Bengal, Maxxis Tyre, Varendra University, Bagdoo, Transom Beverage, Grimson Cup, Krual Thai, Sayem group, Raw nation, Singapore Airlines, Novo Air and Hotel Star Pacific.

--SPORTS REPORTER

MLS champions Atlanta name De Boer as coach

Major League Soccer champion Atlanta United have named retired Dutch star Frank de Boer as the club's new coach, replacing Argentina's Gerardo Martino.

The 48-year-old Dutchman guided his former club Ajax to four consecutive Dutch league titles but less successful stints followed at Inter Milan and England's Crystal Palace.

De Boer takes over on January 1 with United set for a pre-season match January 14 and a CONCACAF Champions League campaign that begins in February.

--AFP

Mooy ruled out of Socceroos' Asian Cup defence

Huddersfield Town midfielder Aaron Mooy has been ruled out of Australia's Asian Cup defence after a thor-

ough assessment of his knee ligament injury, Football Federation Australia (FFA) said on Monday.

The injury sustained by Mooy was first flagged by Huddersfield but the FFA said Mooy was desperate to feature in the January 5-February 1 tournament and had requested a second opinion.

The 28-year-old underwent an independent review of his knee injury under the supervision of the Socceroos' high performance coordinator Phil Coles before it was decided to allow the player to continue his rehabilitation at Huddersfield.

--REUTERS

Sevilla's title push slowed by draw with Leganes

A stoppage-time strike from Wissam Ben Yedder allowed 10-man Sevilla to avoid an embarrassing defeat to lowly Leganes on Sunday as they snatched a 1-1 draw but still lost ground in their chase of La Liga leaders Barcelona.

Former Athletic Bilbao midfielder Mikel Vesga headed 16th-placed Leganes in front on a cold Madrid afternoon where conditions worsened as the game progressed due to thick fog which hampered visibility on the pitch. Sevilla's chances of getting back in the game were hit when midfielder Franco Vazquez was given a straight red card at halftime for dissent following a dispute in the tunnel, just after Gabriel Mercado had been booked.

--REUTERS