

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

BTV

Independence Cup

Final

Bashundhara v Sk Russel

Live from 4:30pm

SONY ESPN

South Africa v Pakistan

First Test, Day One

Live from 1:30pm

SONY SIX

Australia v India

Third Test, Day Two

Live from 5:30am (Thursday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

New Zealand v Sri Lanka

Second Test, Day Two

Live from 4:00am (Thursday)

English Premier League

Fulham v Wolves

Live from 6:30pm

Man United v Huddersfield

Live from 9:00pm

Brighton v Arsenal

Live from 11:15pm

Watford v Chelsea

Live from 1:30am (Thursday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2

English Premier League

Leicester v Man City

Live from 9:00pm

TEN 1

Serie A

Bologna v Lazio

Live from 8:00pm

TEN 2

Serie A

Frosinone v AC Milan

Live from 5:30pm

Atalanta v Juventus

Live from 8:00pm

Roma v Sassuolo

Live from 11:00pm

Inter Milan v Napoli

Live from 1:30am (Thursday)

Independence Cup

Final

Bashundhara Kings v Sheikh Russel

Time: 4:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Bangladesh Cricket League

Day Three

Time: 9:00am

South Zone v North Zone

Venue: ZACS, Chattogram

East Zone v Central Zone

Venue: SICs, Sylhet

Change in mentality the biggest takeaway

A memory of Christmas past

NABID YEASIN

2018 has been a year of fluctuating fortunes for the Bangladesh women's cricket team, with the Tigresses' Asia Cup triumph in June being a lofty peak and the disappointing show in the ICC Women's World T20 in West Indies the nadir.

Although the Tigresses' year started with a 5-0 hammering in the ODI series in South Africa, which was followed by a 3-0 thrashing in the T20Is by the hosts in May, their greatest achievement till date came the following month in June when the Tigresses defeated their mighty Indian counterparts by three wickets in the final of the Women's T20 Asia Cup and were crowned champions of Asia -- the first time that a Bangladesh cricket team, male or female, won a major trophy.

A 2-1 T20 triumph away against Ireland followed in the same month and the Tigresses then carried their good form into the ICC Women's World Twenty20 Qualifiers held in the Netherlands in July, when they qualified for the big event as champions.

However, they failed to emulate their summer successes during Pakistan's tour of Bangladesh in October as the hosts could only win the one-off ODI but ended up losing the T20I series 3-0.

It was in November that Bangladesh's performance hit rock-bottom as they were not able to register a single win in the ICC Women's World T20 in the West Indies, ending the year in the doldrums.

Most concerning was Bangladesh's disappointing showing with the bat in the World T20 as the Tigresses' highest score of the tournament was a meagre 79 for five against South Africa.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's women's cricket wing development manager Nazmul Abedin Fahim also identified batting fail-

ures as an issue, but also mentioned that it was not due to lack of practice or opportunities as they played plenty of cricket this year.

2018 was an exception in that regard, but the uncertainty about opportunities is set to return next year as only one series against Pakistan is slated, and other assignments are still in the planning stage.

"If we talk about the year overall, one thing our girls have achieved is that they showed they can play. And if we put in more effort we can bring more good results out of them. Winning the Asia Cup was a huge thing," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Fahim said that there were huge changes in mentality among the players this year.

"In 2017 they did not have much idea about themselves and did not have any high

hopes. This year their expectations increased after winning the Asia Cup. They were hurt when they could not perform in the World T20. Now they set higher goals and also get hurt if they fail to achieve them. But in 2017, they did not think like this."

"Improvement in batting is very necessary. There have been improvements in their fitness and fielding while their understanding in bowling is better now.

"One thing that I want from them [in 2019] is for them to take responsibility for their improvement. Traditionally it is seen that the players always look to management for help, but I want them to motivate themselves for their personal development. We will definitely stay by their side but their own initiative is more important."

Crisis-hit Inter tackle Napoli

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan's new CEO Giuseppe Marotta has begun to ring the changes at crisis-hit Inter Milan with the axe falling on Belgian bad boy Radja Nainggolan who has been suspended for disciplinary reasons by the club despite Wednesday's key Serie A game against Napoli looming.

Marotta arrived at the Chinese-owned Italian club from Juventus this month after an eight-year spell during which the Turin giants won seven Serie A titles and four Italian Cups.

And the 61-year-old Marotta wants to turn the clock back for Inter whose best decade, culminating with the treble of Champions League, Serie A and Italian Cup crowns under Jose Mourinho in 2010, has been followed by the worst.

Nainggolan was suspended after again turning up late to training on Sunday following the team's demoralising 1-1 draw against bottom club Chievo.

Inter are third, already 16 points behind

leaders Juventus, and eight adrift of second-placed Napoli, who are on a 10-game unbeaten run in Serie A.

Carlo Ancelotti is expecting a challenge against his old rival Spalletti whose side are nevertheless on a streak of six straight home league wins at the San Siro.

"I don't know, they give me the impression of being a growing club and team," said Ancelotti.

Inter's last win over Napoli was in April 2016 with captain Mauro Icardi scoring his only goal in 13 games played against the southerners.

Spalletti, meanwhile, leads eight to six in Italian league wins over Ancelotti.

Christmas break for Ronaldo
Unbeaten champions Juventus head to Atalanta, in ninth, in record-breaking form, having not conceded a league goal in nearly two months.

Cristiano Ronaldo looks set to be rested for the first time this season, with Douglas Costa likely to slip into the Portuguese star's position alongside in-form Mario Mandzukic and Paulo Dybala.

Abbas, Shadab to miss series opener

AGENCIES, Centurion

Pakistan will head into the first Test against South Africa without seamer Mohammad Abbas and leg-spinner Shadab Khan, according to the touring team management.

After assessing both unfit bowlers, the team management has agreed that the two are still not fit for the first Test that begins on Wednesday here at SuperSport Park.

Both Shadab and Abbas have made great progress recently and are improving every day. However, they will continue with their current Rehabilitation Program as well as their Return to Play Program, according to media release issued by the Pakistan Cricket Board on Monday.

Pep in new territory

AFP, Manchester

Pep Guardiola ends the calendar year with his Manchester City side embroiled in what has suddenly become a thrilling title race for the first time in his Premier League managerial career.

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss, seven times a league champion in the three countries in which he has managed, takes City to Leicester on Boxing Day trailing leaders Liverpool by four points.

There is also now unexpected pressure beneath him, with Tottenham's superb 6-2 win at Everton having hauled Mauricio Pochettino's talented side to within two points of City.

It is a far cry from last season when, after 18 games, City held a commanding 11-point lead over second-placed Manchester United and were already, in the eyes of most pundits, as good as champions.

Twelve months earlier, in Guardiola's first season in English football, City were seven points behind leaders Chelsea at the corresponding stage but in the middle of a run of poor form which would eventually see them end the season in third

place, 15 points behind Antonio Conte's title-winners.

City's shock 3-2 home defeat by struggling Crystal Palace on Saturday has certainly put a new perspective on the league table heading into the busy holiday period which culminates with current leaders Liverpool visiting the Etihad to face City a week on Thursday

(January 3).

For the first time since his days at Barcelona, Guardiola currently finds himself caught up in a potentially tense and exciting title race, with all that entails.

Former Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson, whose Palace side inflicted such an unexpected blow on City at the weekend, believes, however, that Guardiola will have all the necessary perspective to cope with a rare setback.

"Pep Guardiola is a very intelligent guy, it means that they haven't caught up those four points but he knows there are 20 matches left to play and one of those is going to be against Liverpool," said Hodgson.

"I don't think he will be concerned about that and he'll know that no matter how Liverpool play they will come up against a game like this. They will go somewhere and someone will beat them against the odds. There is a long way to go yet."

Certainly, Guardiola's three seasons in Germany offered him little in terms of preparation for a close, down to the wire title race, with Bayern winning the league by at least double digits in points in each of his three seasons -- including 2014 when Munich beat now Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund into second place by a staggering 19 points.

But his four seasons in charge of Barcelona were more competitive, given Barca's intense rivalry with Real Madrid, although in his first and last seasons he won and lost the league, respectively, by nine points.

In 2009/10, however, Barca pipped Real by just three points -- Guardiola's closest title race to date -- and retained their crown 12 months later, this time by only four.

STARS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

(Clockwise from top) Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Luis Figo and David Beckham are among the star names who have been having some festive fun. Superstars Ronaldo and Messi pose with their families while retired superstars Figo and Beckham enjoy some time out from their busy schedules.

PHOTO: COLLECTED