

BT
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)

DAY'S EVENT

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: SICCS, Sylhet

Change in mentality the biggest takeaway

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.

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. Now they set higher goals and also get hurt if they fail to achieve them.

NAZMUL ABEDIN FAHIM
BCB women's wing development manager



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."

A memory of Christmas past

AFP, Liverpool

Premier League

Rafa Benitez's return to Anfield on Boxing Day is likely to stir memories of an unsuccessful Liverpool challenge for the Premier League title, but Jurgen Klopp is trying to focus on the present.

Klopp's Liverpool hold a four-point lead at the top of the table as Benitez, the club's manager between 2004 and 2010, visits with his relegation-threatened Newcastle United side on Wednesday.

There is a strong sense this could be the season that the English league trophy comes to Anfield for the first time since 1990, although recent history is offering mixed messages as to whether that will happen.

First, the good news for Liverpool: In eight of the past 10 seasons, the leaders on Christmas Day have gone on to win the Premier League.

Now, the bad news: On the two occasions it did not happen, the Christmas leaders were Liverpool. In 2008/09, Manchester United won the title; in 2013/14 it was Manchester City.

The late collapse to miss out in 2014 was perhaps the more immediately painful experience for Liverpool fans, but the failure of 2009, under Benitez, maybe offers more reason for regret. Both cases offer lessons that the Merseyside club, however, appear to have absorbed.

Brendan Rodgers' team of 2013/14 were not as balanced as the side current Reds boss Klopp has now.

While Rodgers had an outstanding attacking partnership, with Luis Suarez supported by a fully-fit Daniel Sturridge, his men were defensively suspect.

The then Liverpool manager had four senior centre-backs -- Martin Skrtel, Daniel Agger, Mamadou Sakho and Kolo Toure -- yet struggled to settle on a first-choice pairing. A team who scored 101 league goals conceded a whopping 50; far too many for any side with serious championship ambitions.

The class of 2018/19 should avoid that trap; they have the Premier League's best defensive record this season, with only seven goals conceded.

Virgil van Dijk's influence has been key; the centre-back, signed for £75 million (\$94.5 million) from Southampton last January, has provided the defensive leadership that Liverpool missed badly following Jamie Carragher's retirement in 2013.

Crisis-hit Inter tackle Napoli

AFP, Milan

SERIE A
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

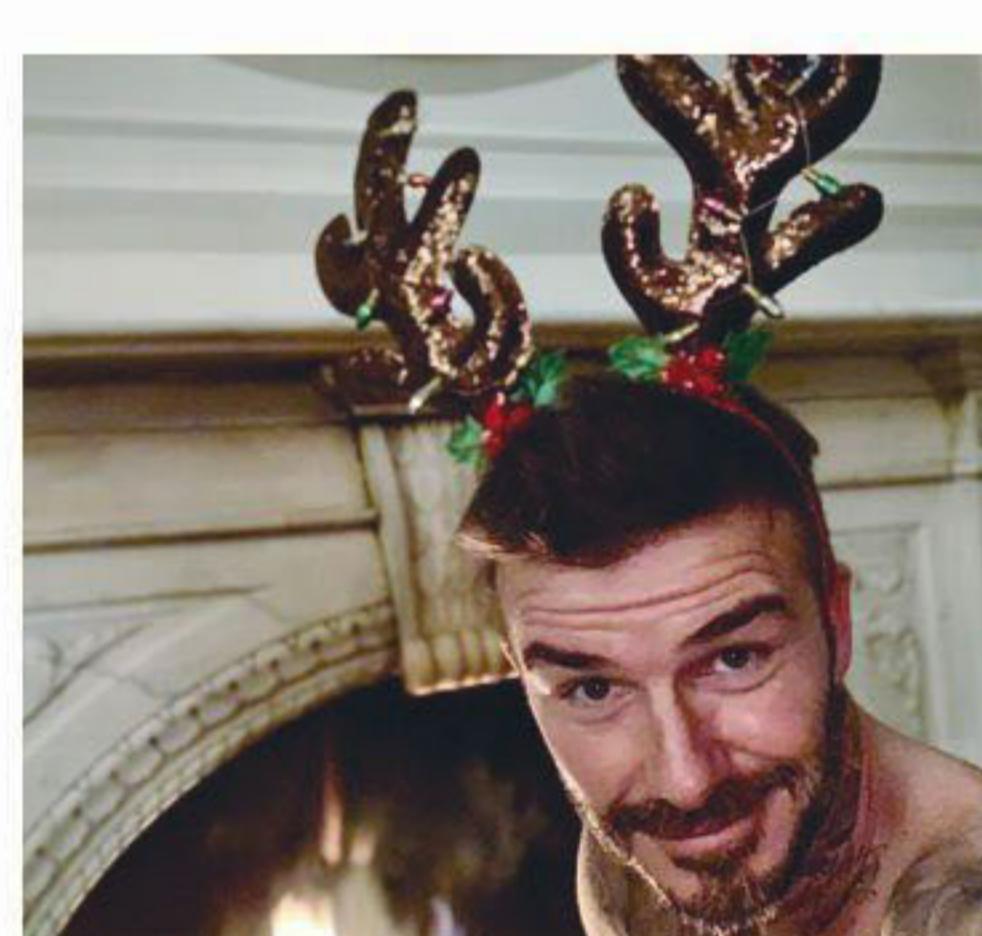
AGENCIES, Centurion

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.

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.

Pep in new territory

AFP, Manchester

Premier League
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.

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.