

# What to WATCH

**STAR SPORTS SELECT 1**  
 English Premier League  
 Everton v Leicester City  
 Live from 6:30pm  
 Arsenal v Fulham  
 Live from 9:00pm

Cardiff v Tottenham  
 Live from 11:30pm  
 Wolves v Crystal Palace  
 Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

## KOHLI, SHARMA OFF TO SYDNEY

After winning the third Test against Australia, it is time to celebrate the New Year for the Indian captain Virat Kohli, who is looking forward to spending time with his 'one and only' Anushka Sharma. Kohli posted on his official Instagram account a photo with his wife and Bollywood actress Anushka, who are off to Sydney for the fourth and final Test of the series. Kohli said, "Off to Sydney. Looking forward to the new year's eve with my one and only @anushkasharma."



## Serena wins season-opener

AFP, Perth



Serena Williams overcame a sluggish start to win her opening match of the new season in Perth Monday, two weeks out from 2019's first Grand Slam.

The 37-year-old was a long way off her commanding best and was visibly frustrated with her own game early in her Hopman Cup singles match, but still did enough to beat Greece's Maria Sakkari in straight sets.

However, it was Sakkari and her team-mate Stefanos Tsitsipas who had the last laugh as Greece beat the USA 2-1 in the mixed doubles Group B tie.

In her first tournament outing since the controversial loss to Naomi Osaka in the US Open final in September, Williams struggled early and her groundstrokes were erratic in the first set.

Sakkari, ranked 41st in the world, gained an early break and served for the first set but couldn't capitalise despite several gilt-edged opportunities.

That opened the door for Williams, the bookmakers' favourite for the upcoming Australian Open in Melbourne, to power back and ultimately win 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 in an hour and 44 minutes.

Williams had her left ankle worked on at the end of the first set but it didn't stop her dominating the second, in which she looked more like the player who has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles.

## 'It's a scandal Neymar hasn't won Ballon d'Or yet'

GOAL.COM

Paris Saint-Germain goal keeper Gianluigi Buffon believes it's a "scandal" that Neymar has yet to win the Ballon d'Or and feels the Brazil international forward and teammate Kylian Mbappe can dominate the game for the next decade.

Buffon has been able to see the talented duo at close hand having moved to the French capital from Juventus in the summer.

The former Italy international insists he has no regrets as Mbappe and Neymar should be considered on a par with Ronaldo.

"I tell Ney that it's a scandal that has not yet won the Ballon d'Or and that he should be furious

"He and Kylian have a disproportionate talent and can dominate for ten years."



Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba (C) celebrates his second goal against Bournemouth during their Premier League encounter at Old Trafford on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Solskjaer tells Pogba to cut out showboating

AFP, Manchester



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer encouraged Paul Pogba to cut out

showboating from his game to recreate the "efficient" display that saw the Frenchman score twice for the second straight game in a 4-1 thrashing of Bournemouth at Old Trafford.

A third consecutive victory since Solskjaer took caretaker charge until the end of the season keeps United eight points adrift of Chelsea in the fight for a top-four finish.

Pogba has been key to all three wins, but this was arguably his best display as he also teed up Romelu Lukaku's fourth goal and struck the post late on to just miss out on a first career hat-trick.

"That is a top, top performance for a midfielder because it's all-round: work rate, dangerous in the box, no showboating. It's touch, pass, move."

That is a top, top performance for a midfielder because it's all-round: work rate, dangerous in the box, no showboating. It's touch, pass, move.

OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER

"It's an efficient game and Paul knows he's at his best when it's an efficient game."

The change in mood around United in the 12 days since Jose Mourinho was sacked is palpable, no more so in the performances of Pogba, who was discarded from the Portuguese's starting line-up for his final three league games in charge.

"We are Manchester United and we need to be at the top of the league. It is just a reaction of all of the players and every-

one is enjoying themselves," said Pogba. "It is different, we still won games with the old manager but it is just a different style of playing, we are more offensive and we are creating more chances and that is how we want to play."

United have now scored 12 times in three games under the Norwegian, but Solskjaer insisted he has just tried to instil what he learned under Alex Ferguson during 11 seasons as a player

at Old Trafford.

"This is how it was. I've just gone about the job as I experienced it as a player, and a coach," added Solskjaer.

"We want to go attacking. We've been at home two games and we have to entertain the fans. I love working with good players and good people."

Pogba played a part in four of United's five goals at Cardiff last weekend to get Solskjaer off to a flying start before scoring twice against

Huddersfield on Boxing Day.

Solskjaer has spoken of his desire to see Pogba break into the box more regularly and he had the simplest of tasks to prod the ball into an empty net after Marcus Rashford had bewildered the Bournemouth defence.

Nathan Ake and Diego Rico were left beaten by Rashford's combination of fleet-footed dribbling and pace before his cross perfectly picked out Pogba's run.

Pogba then made it 2-0 with a bullet header from Ander Herrera's cross.

Unlike Pogba, Nemanja Matic was one of Mourinho's most trusted lieutenants but the Serbian has also epitomised the change in tack orchestrated by Solskjaer with the former Chelsea midfielder much more willing to look for a forward rather than sideways pass.

And Matic began the move for United's third when he picked out Anthony Martial's run and the Frenchman's cross with the outside of his boot was turned home by Rashford.

For all the improvements of late, though, Solskjaer is still waiting for a first clean sheet since November as Ake beat Matic to power home David Brooks's cross.

Rashford should have added to his tally when put clean through by Pogba, but didn't get enough elevation on his attempted chip over Asmir Begovic before making way for Lukaku 20 minutes from time.

## Shitul, Jimmy in Malaysian league?

SPORTS REPORTER

National hockey team's captain Farhad Ahmed Shitul and former captain Rasel Mahmud Rasel are likely to play in Malaysian domestic league as former Bangladesh coach Gobinathan Krishnamurthi recently sought permission from the game's local governing body to release them.

Krishnamurthi is one of the members of the coaching staff of May Bank, a Malaysian club which has been preparing for the domestic competitions where players from Europe also join in.

"We are supposed to join the training of May Bank by January 10 as per the letter Krishnamurthi sent to the federation," Shitul said. "We have just been asked to join the training camp but we don't know whether we will be part of the main team."

Everything depends on the decision of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) as well as Bangladesh Navy, added Shitul over phone. Bangladesh Navy are the employees of the two players.

The BHF had earlier given Shitul and Ashrafal Islam permission to play in Pakistan for a franchise-based tournament in Lahore.



Novak Djokovic of Serbia dressed in a traditional Arab costume as he sampled the local culture in Doha on Sunday ahead of the ATP Qatar Open.

PHOTO: AFP

## Pep fires title warning

AFP, Southampton



Pep Guardiola has warned his Manchester City side a failure to beat Liverpool at the

Etiad Stadium on Thursday will effectively mean their title challenge is "over".

Reigning champions City revived their bid to retain the Premier League trophy with a 3-1 win away to Southampton on Sunday that followed shock defeats by Crystal Palace and Leicester.

Victory at St Mary's, however, still left City seven points behind leaders Liverpool and for a while it seemed Guardiola's side might drop more points on the south coast.

"We knew it, that with the position of Liverpool, if we drop points then it is over, it (the title race) is finished," Guardiola said.

"It would be almost impossible. Of course they are going to drop points but not too many. If you want to be there as far as possible until the end we have to remember what happened last season and this as well - apart from the last few days," the City manager added.

Guardiola was adamant he had not lost confidence in his side, despite the Palace and Leicester reverses.

"How can I doubt them?" he said. "Football is like this. We make 30 exceptional minutes again, especially without the ball we create chances to go 2-0 or 3-0, and we concede one goal."



Maria Sharapova of Russia takes a selfie with fans after winning her first round match against Timea Bacsinszky of Switzerland at the Shenzhen Open in Guangdong yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Tough start for Maria

AFP, Beijing



Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova had a tough start to her 2019 tennis season Monday at the Shenzhen Open, edging out Switzerland's Timea Bacsinszky 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

In a battle of former Top 10 players, Sharapova's serve faltered early in the match but she regained composure to take the first set, cheered on by the spirited crowd at the Shenzhen Longgang Sports Center.

Bacsinszky put up a strong fight in the second set, claiming the first two games and forcing Sharapova to step up her game.

The Russian powered through to take the match in one hour 42 minutes.

"It's been a few months since I've been out of playing competitively," Sharapova said in a post-match interview, calling Shenzhen a "warm-up tournament" for next month's Australian Open.

"Considering the opponent and everything I had to go through today I think it was a great practice for me."

## Ronaldo 'not obsessed' by individual prizes

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo has insisted that he is "not obsessed" by individual trophies, having missed on this year's Ballon d'Or after winning it five times.

The Juventus striker also missed out on FIFA and UEFA's player of the year trophies as former Real Madrid teammate Luka Modric, a World Cup runner-up with Croatia, swept all before him.

"I'm not obsessed by individual prizes," Ronaldo told Portuguese sports daily Record.

"The most important thing is to win collective trophies and help the team. The rest comes naturally."

Ronaldo added: "I don't think all the time of beating records. I work above all to help the club and be at my best level."

"The technical, tactical and physical level of all teams is better today," he said. "It's increasingly tough to win so I have to keep working hard to stay on top."



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# 2019

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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