

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
Indian Premier League
 Rajasthan v Bangalore
 Live from 8:30pm
English Premier League
 Wolves v Man United
 Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
English Premier League
 Watford v Fulham
 Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)
TEN 1
La Liga
 Espanyol v Getafe
 Live from 12:30am (Wednesday)

TEN 2
Serie A
 AC Milan v Udinese
 Live from 11:00pm
Cagliari v Juventus
 Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)



Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring the third goal against Huesca during their La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Benzema saves Real blushes

AFP, Madrid



Karim Benzema stopped Real Madrid's underwhelming La Liga season going from bad to worse on Sunday after firing a last-minute winner to hand the European champions a barely-deserved 3-2 winner over bottom club Huesca.

Humbled by Ajax in the Champions League and dumped out of the Copa Del Rey by deadly rivals Barca, third-placed Real showed little signs of improvement in Zinedine Zidane's second game in charge but Benzema, subject to rumours he may leave Madrid in the summer for Manchester United, struck with a fine curling finish to snatch the three points at a sparsely populated Santiago Bernabeu.

"We are happy with him and I am going to count on him, now there are nine games left and then we will see what happens. He is a Real Madrid player and I don't think this will change," Zidane said.

"You have to accept it. If the people want to come to the Bernabeu to see us so much the better, but I understand that since we are not going to win anything fewer people come."

Real move to within two points of second-placed Atletico Madrid, who hammered Champions League hopefuls Alaves 4-0 on Saturday in a match that saw Diego Costa score for the first time since

November.

However Real still lag 12 points behind leaders Barcelona, who are 10 clear of Atletico and heavy favourites to retain their La Liga after Lionel Messi fired them to their sixth league win on the bounce, 2-0 at home to local rivals Espanyol on Saturday, with a brace that took the Argentine to 31 league goals this season.

Zidane's son Luca was given his second ever start between the sticks for Real but got off to the worst possible start, picking the ball out of his own net within three minutes after Cucho Hernandez lashed home Ezequiel Avila low cross.

Isco levelled the scores in the 25th minute when he tapped home a Brahim Diaz cross after Benzema's low shot was well saved, but it was the away side -- playing their first ever La Liga game at the Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu stadium -- who went closer going into the break ahead.

Zidane junior had to be alert to stop Damian Musto from glancing home a header nine minutes before the break, while Avila punched the ground in frustration in first half stoppage time after flashing a power shot over from the edge of the box.

Real continued to disappoint in the second half but took the lead just after the hour mark thanks to Dani Ceballos, who bundled home the second after Gareth Bale's beautiful cross was headed back across goal by Benzema.

PHOTO: AFP

'Pressure will bring out best in players'

AFP, London



Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola believes the pressure of needing to win every one of their remaining Premier League matches to finish ahead of Liverpool will boost their quadruple bid.

City, with the League Cup already in the bag, are chasing an unprecedented clean sweep, with the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup also in their sights.

They can return to the top of the table if they win their game in hand against struggling Cardiff on Wednesday.

City play an out-of-orts Tottenham in the Champions League quarter-finals next week and Brighton in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday.

Liverpool, seeking their first English top-flight title since 1990, beat Spurs in a dramatic finish on Sunday to restore their two-point lead.

"For the semifinal and for the Champions League, being in the position in the Premier League where you know if you

don't win you are going to lose the Premier League, maybe that's going to help us for the other competitions," said Guardiola.

"If you are 10 points in front you can maybe be a little more selective.

"But now there's no other option, we don't have any other choice, so every game we have to win, if not you drop that competition.

"So that's why sometimes to play with that pressure is nice, it's necessary to get the best out of ourselves."

Guardiola is bidding to add a second Premier League title to go with the three he won in Germany and three in Spain with Bayern Munich and Barcelona.

He said the performance of the players in the routine 2-0 win over relegation-threatened Fulham on Saturday suggested they are in the right place mentally.

"There's no complaints about our mentality, what happened last season and this season again," said Guardiola. "The players are not stupid, about the fact we're trying something so difficult to achieve.

"The way we started to play against Fulham, they show me we want to do it."

BSPA awards ceremony on April 6

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA) is all set to hold their annual Sports Award Ceremony for 2018 at a city hotel on April 6, said a press release yesterday.

The BSPA, in association with Square Toiletries Limited, will recognize the athletes, sports organisers and sponsors, who contributed to the nation's image in 2018.

National cricketers Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, women's national cricketer Rumana Ahmed and shooter Abdullah Hel Baki have been nominated for the Popular Choice Award.

There will also be other categories for sportspersons to contest, such as best cricketer, best footballer, best shuttler, best shooter, most promising athlete, best coach, best sports personality at grassroots, best organiser best sponsor and a special recognition.

Pogba has 'big part' to play

AFP, London



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says Paul Pogba has a "big, big part" to play at Old Trafford despite speculation linking the French World Cup winner with a move to Real Madrid.

Real boss Zinedine Zidane is expected to be busy in the summer transfer market as he tries to reinvigorate a side that crashed out of the Champions League in the last 16 and are lagging 12 points behind leaders Barcelona in La Liga.

United midfielder Pogba last week described Madrid as a "dream club for every player" while on international duty with France and Zidane on Saturday hailed him as "a player who knows how to do everything".

But Solskjaer is determined that Pogba, one of the world's most marketable players, will not be a part of Zidane's rebuilding plans and believes the midfielder simply gave a straight answer to a question.

"I don't like to talk about other teams' players," the Norwegian said ahead of his side's Premier League

match against Wolves on Tuesday. "That is one of the challenges of the international break.

"Players are available all the time and it's a different environment and it's more of a general talk.

"Paul is a very nice and polite man and he answered a general question. Of course, Zidane is an icon in France. Zidane is a fantastic manager and he used to be a fantastic player and I played against him.

"So Paul has politely answered that question. But he is happy here. He is going to be a big, big part of things here.

"I have always said that you would like to build your team around him and that has not changed at all."

Solskjaer, appointed as permanent manager last week after an impressive spell as interim boss, said he would be comfortable with the appointment of a director of football to sit between himself and executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward.

"Football has changed and the structure at clubs has changed," he said. "Ed and (co-chairman) Joel (Glazer) and me are looking at how this club can be run as smoothly as

possible. "We will see what we end up with but I am happy talking football with knowledgeable people in the right positions anyway.

"A manager can't do as much as he used to do anyway. The demands of modern football mean that you have to split responsibilities."

Solskjaer is preparing his team for the rearranged league game at Wolves as the chase for a top-four spot heats up.

United will leapfrog Tottenham into third place if they win at Molineux, with Arsenal and Chelsea also fighting for the remaining two Champions League qualification spots behind Liverpool and Manchester City.

They will have to improve on their last performance against Wolves, a 2-1 FA Cup defeat two weeks ago, the worst performance during Solskjaer's spell in charge.

But the Norwegian is confident of making amends this time.

"We can learn quite a few lessons from that game and we have to," he said. "If we turn up and don't perform to our level against a good team, we will not get the result we deserve."

SHORT CORNER

Dortmund suffer double injury blow

Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund have dealt a double injury blow ahead of Saturday's crucial showdown at Bayern Munich, with defenders Achraf Hakimi and Abdou Diallo both ruled out.

The pair were injured in last Saturday's 2-0 win at home to Wolfsburg, which left Dortmund two points ahead of second-placed Bayern before this weekend's top-of-the-table clash at Munich's Allianz Arena.

Morocco international Hakimi, 20, on loan from Real Madrid, will now miss the last seven league games of Dortmund's season after breaking a bone in his right foot.

"Hakimi will be operated on in Madrid and is out for the rest of the season," said the club in a statement on Monday.

Mbappe kills off Toulouse resistance

Kylian Mbappe fired Paris Saint-Germain to their eighth straight Ligue 1 win with a stunning goal that earned the champions a 1-0 victory at Toulouse on Sunday and kept them miles clear at



PSG star Kylian Mbappe celebrates his all-important goal against Toulouse during their League 1 encounter at the Municipal Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

the top of the league.

The 20-year-old World Cup winner crashed home his 27th league goal of the season, his seventh in as many league games, with 16 minutes left as he continues to shine in the absence of the injured duo Neymar and Edinson Cavani.

"We had to wait, be patient and in the end we won with Kylian's speed," said PSG skipper Marquinhos.

"It brought a great deal of joy to our fans, I'm sure of that."

PSG now have 80 points, 20 ahead of second placed Lille with a game in hand to boot.

Zlatan scores twice to lift LA Galaxy

Zlatan Ibrahimovic returned from injury in style Sunday, converting two penalties in the Los Angeles Galaxy's 2-1 Major League Soccer victory over the Portland Timbers.

Exactly one year after the Swedish striker made his MLS debut for Los Angeles, he returned after missing two games with an Achilles tendon injury and made an immediate impact.

Denied by the post in the 14th minute, Ibrahimovic converted his first penalty in the 33rd, easily beating Timbers goalkeeper Jeff Attinella after drawing a foul in the penalty area against Timbers defender Claude Dielna.

Jeremy Ebobisse grabbed an equalizer in the 44th, but Ibrahimovic struck again in the second half.

Having beaten three defenders to reach the edge of the box, he was fouled by Attinella.

This time from the spot he lofted a perfectly timed "Panenka" spot-kick into the back of the net as Attinella moved to his left.

Felix given Madrid wildcard

Canadian rising star Felix Auger-Aliassime has been handed a wildcard for next month's Madrid Masters, tournament organisers said on Monday.

The 18-year-old reached the Miami Open semifinals last week before a tight loss to John Isner.

He rose 24 places to a career-high ranking of 33 on Monday and is the youngest player in the world's top 50.

"I have great memories from my junior career at the Caja Magica, where I hope to produce some magic again," said Auger-Aliassime, who led Canada to the 2015 Junior Davis Cup in Madrid alongside Denis Shapovalov.

Spanish veteran David Ferrer had already been awarded the first of the four wildcards on offer, as the 36-year-old continues his final season before retirement.

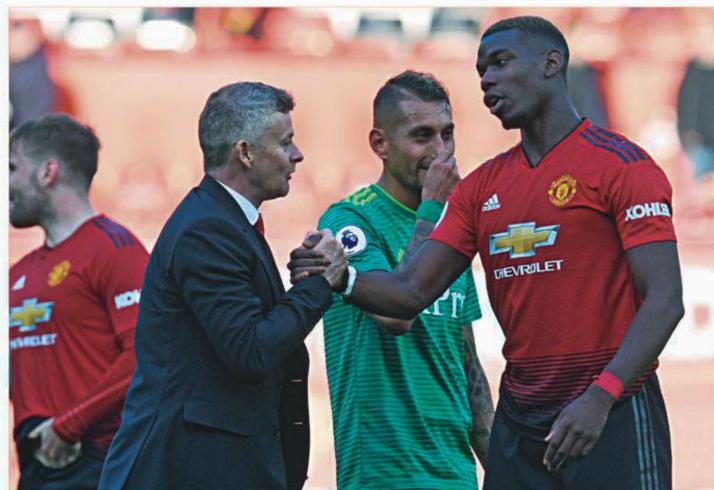
Hurray Handball begins today

The Hurray Wafer School Mini Handball (Boys and Girls) Tournament will get underway today at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium in Dhaka.

As many as 12 schools, split into four groups, will each take part in two separate tournaments with both the finals slated for April 6, informed Bangladesh Handball Federation general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinoor at a press conference yesterday.

Sponsor Pran RFL group will provide Tk one lakh out of the estimated Tk 1.7 lakh budget while the rest of the money is to be provided by the tournament committee chairman Masuma Shamim Shila, vice chairman Nasima Chowdhury Shirin and the federation.

--SPORTS REPORTER



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (L) shakes hands with midfielder Paul Pogba at the end of their Premier League clash against Watford at Old Trafford on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Poch admits reality check

AFP, London



Tottenham's alarming loss of form threatens to take the gloss off the long-anticipated opening of their flashy new stadium as they contemplate a season without Champions League football.

Mauricio Pochettino's side stayed in touch with Liverpool and Manchester City for two-thirds of the season -- as recently as February 2, Spurs were in second place in the Premier League.

But they are now 16 points adrift of City and 18 behind Liverpool and a single point separates them from Manchester United,

Arsenal and Chelsea in the race for the final two Champions League qualification spots.

"It's a little bit of a shame that we're not there fighting as well," admitted Pochettino after Tottenham's defeat at Liverpool on Sunday, courtesy of an own goal from Toby Alderweireld.

"We were but in the last few weeks we have started to find our reality, our place."

Pochettino was keen to stress that point, calling his players "heroes" for coping with the demands of a stretched squad, which has had to cope with the impact of fatigue on eight World Cup semifinalists, and the disruption of playing at Wembley while waiting for their new stadium to be ready.

Curran four-for stuns Delhi

AGENCIES, Mohali

A gutted Delhi Capitals captain Shreyas Iyer said that he was "speechless" after his team lost seven wickets for eight runs in their 14-run defeat to Kings XI Punjab in an Indian Premier League encounter yesterday.

Delhi were chasing 144 for 3 in the 17th over with two set batsmen, chasing 167 and were subsequently bowled out for 152 in 19.2 overs.

In an insane collapse the revamped Delhi team lost their last seven wickets for eight runs as Mohammed Shami and Sam Curran produced death overs that even they might never have thought could be so productive. Curran was a monster, claiming four for 11 from his 2.2 overs -- his last eight deliveries yielding all of his wickets, and only four runs. Shami, though, was the man who set the collapse in motion, uprooting Rishabh Pant's middle stump in the 17th over, then making a mess of Hanuma Vihari's stumps in the 19th.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Punjab: 166 for 9 in 20 overs (Miller 43, Khan 39, Mandeep 29 not out; Morris 3-30, Lamichhane 2-27)

Delhi: 152 all out in 19.2 overs (Pant 39, Ingram 38; Curran 4-11, Shami 2-27, Ashwin 2-31)

Result: Punjab won by 14 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Sam Curran.