

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

Indian Premier League
Mumbai v Chennai
Live from 8:30pm
English Premier League
Man City v Cardiff
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2

English Premier League
Chelsea v Brighton
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)
TEN 1
Serie A
Genoa v Inter Milan
Live from 1:00am (Thursday)

TEN 2

Serie A
Empoli v Napoli
Live from 11:00pm
La Liga
Valencia v Real Madrid
Live from 1:30am (Thursday)

POLAR BEAR CUB NAMED HERTHA

Berlin's latest zoo celebrity, a fluffy polar bear cub, has been named "Hertha" after the capital's football club, it was announced Tuesday. "Berlin has a new darling and we have adopted her," the Bundesliga club Hertha Berlin said on its Twitter account. Hertha was born on December 1 in the city's Tierpark zoo and is the heir to late lamented superstar Knut, who drew huge crowds to a rival zoo, Berlin's Zoological Garden, until he died suddenly in 2011. After the eagerly anticipated announcement the football club quickly unveiled posters showing off Hertha under the slogan: "In Berlin you can be everything. Even a polar bear called Hertha". The club also posted a video of its grizzly bear mascot "Herthinho" travelling from its Olympic Stadium ground in west Berlin to Tierpark in the east to meet the latest arrival. --AFP



The Abahani team take part in a training exercise ahead of their AFC Cup Group E opener against Manang Marshyangdi Club at the ANFA Complex ground in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Abahani eye winning start

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani will look to make a winning start to the AFC Cup when they take on hosts Manang Marshyangdi Club in their Group E opener at the ANFA Complex ground in Lalitpur, Nepal today.

The match is set to get underway at 3:15pm Bangladesh Standard Time. Six-time professional league champions Abahani did not win either of their opening AFC Cup fixtures in the last two editions, where they finished fourth and third in four-team groups in 2017 and 2018 respectively, notching one win and one draw from their six matches on both occasions.

This time however, the Sky Blues have high hopes of qualifying for the second round of Asia's second-tier club competition with an outright win over Manang, who previously beat Abahani 0-2 in the King's Cup in Bhutan in 2005.

"Our motivation is very high since we are trying to achieve something that has never been done before by the club by making it through

the group stages. Tomorrow [Wednesday] is just the first match and we want to start our AFC Cup journey with a win," said Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos over the phone from Nepal.

Playing against the Nepalese side is definitely not going to be an easy task for Abahani, who often struggled against Himalayan teams at both the national and club levels, however, Lemos is hopeful about turning the tide this time around.

"We know it won't be an easy match because Manang is a good team and since they will play at home, they will be confident. They will pressure us but we are ready for it. I feel that if we stick to our game plan as well as remain organised, then we can get the three points," the 34-year-old coach said.

Abahani are currently in second position in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier league with eight wins in 10 matches but they have not had any competitive matches for a month seeing as many members of the squad were tied up in last month's FIFA international friendly match between Bangladesh and Cambodia. After that, the national under-23 team was engaged with

the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers. Seven Abahani players were a part of the senior national team while two others featured for the U-23 squad during that time.

Coach Lemos had three weeks to prepare his charges, albeit with a few absentees, for the tournament where he plans to field a full-strength side with the inclusion of four foreign players.

Lemos's counterpart Chirring Lopsang Gurung is also upbeat about securing the full three points today even though he did not get much time to prepare the team due to Nepal's engagement in the AFC Cup U-23 Championship Qualifiers.

"We wanted a long-term camp but couldn't conduct it due to the national team's international schedule. However, when we have got all players, we took a good preparation within a short period of time," Chirring was quoted as saying at a pre-match press conference in Kathmandu. "Honestly speaking, our target is to go to the second round and we need to start with a win. It is going to be a 50-50 affair against Dhaka Abahani."

SHORT CORNER

Hummels demands '100 percent focus'

Bayern Munich defender Mats Hummels has warned his team not to underestimate second tier minnows FC Heidenheim in Wednesday's German Cup quarterfinal clash.

Bayern are expected to stroll into the semifinals when they host Heidenheim on Wednesday evening, just three days before their key Bundesliga meeting with title rivals Borussia Dortmund.

Yet Hummels, who follows the second tier club closely, said Bayern should not get ahead of themselves in what could be a season-defining week.

"We have to be 100 percent focused against Heidenheim because they won't be a pushover," he said on Tuesday.

"A good friend of mine is a big Heidenheim fan, so I watch them quite a lot. They play good football, particularly going forward." --AFP

Toure blasts football chiefs over racism

Four-time African footballer of the year Yaya Toure says football authorities should be more proactive when it comes to racism.

The 35-year-old former Ivory Coast great -- who also starred for Barcelona and Manchester City -- said football's governing bodies only reacted once incidents had already occurred, as in the case of the racist chanting during England's Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro last week.

The Montenegro fans directed their chants at several England players including defender Danny Rose and striker Raheem Sterling.

"They (the football authorities) sit and they have their coffee, their wine," Toure told the Daily Mirror.

"Then they hear a case like Raheem happening and they jump on the phone saying: 'We have to have a meeting! We have to do something!'

"It shouldn't work that way. We have to be

proactive. Something that is seen.

"We have to be working before that kind of situation with Raheem is happening." --AFP

Everton probe Pickford bar brawl allegations

England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford is under investigation by his club Everton about his alleged involvement in a brawl in Sunderland on Sunday.

The 25-year-old -- who shone at last year's World Cup -- is believed to have reacted when revellers in a bar directed derogatory remarks at his fiancée Megan, who recently had their first child Arlo.

A video has spread on social media in which onlookers can be heard shouting "Jordan" as a fight breaks out before the man, believed to be Pickford, is dragged away.

"The club has been made aware of an alleged incident involving one of our players and we are looking into the matter," the Premier League club said. --AFP

'Pogba wants to stay at Man United'

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says he has been assured by star midfielder Paul Pogba that the Frenchman does not want to leave Manchester United despite mounting speculation over a switch to Real Madrid.

"It doesn't really concern me because my thought of action was to sit down and speak to Paul," he said on Monday.

"I have had my chat with Paul and we're fine. He is going to do his utmost here because he knows I am very fond of him as a player and as a person. He is important for us here, so there are no issues. He is happy here."

United midfielder Pogba last week described Madrid, managed by France great Zinedine Zidane, as a "dream club for every player" while on international duty. --AFP

Maiden win for Rajasthan

AGENCIES, Jaipur

Jos Buttler struck a half-century as Rajasthan beat Bangalore by seven wickets to clinch their maiden win in the 2019 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on Tuesday.

After being asked to bat first, Parthiv Patel scored a 67-run knock before Marcus Stoinis (unbeaten at 31) and Moeen Ali (18 not out) helped Bangalore post a competitive total of 158/4.

In reply, Buttler pulled back a 43-ball 59 while Steve Smith (38) and Rahul Tripathi (34) also made significant contributions to help Rajasthan cross the mark with a ball to spare.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGALORE: 158 for 4 in 20 overs (Kohli 23, Patel 67, Stoinis 31 not out; Gopal 3-12)
RAJASTHAN: 164 for 3 in 19.5 overs (Rahane 22, Buttler 59, Smith 38, Tripathi 34 not out; Chahal 2-17)
Result: Rajasthan Royals won by 7 wickets.

Icardi set for long-awaited Inter return

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan forward Mauro Icardi will return to action on Wednesday after nearly two months out amid off-pitch drama over contract talks as the Serie A club battle for Champions League football next season, coach Luciano Spalletti confirmed on Tuesday.

The Argentina striker was stripped of the captain's armband on February 13 amid negotiations played out on social media and TV via Icardi's wife and agent Wanda Nara, and hasn't played since Inter beat Parma a few days before.

'No debate about keepers next season'

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid could sell Thibaut Courtois or Keylor Navas this summer after head coach Zinedine Zidane said on Tuesday the club will have a clear first-choice goalkeeper next season.

Zidane also defended his choice to play neither keeper against Huesca on Saturday, instead handing his 20-year-old son Luca only his second competitive start for the Spanish giants.

Courtois was signed from Chelsea last summer, despite Navas winning UEFA's best goalkeeper award after helping Madrid win the Champions League.

Santiago Solari then put faith in Courtois during his four months in charge but Navas, a favourite of Zidane's, came back in for the Frenchman's opening game against Celta Vigo last month.

"At the moment there are three good keepers and we are going to finish the season with them," Zidane said at a press conference on Tuesday.

"But I assure you that next season there will be no debate about the goalkeeper, I'll tell you that now. It's going to be very clear."

Luca Zidane's surprise promotion came after Courtois picked up a knock on international duty with Belgium while Navas had trained only once after returning from Costa Rica.

But it suggests Zidane feels his son, who joined Madrid's academy aged six when his father was playing for the club, is ready to compete for a place.

"Luca is here on his own merit," Zidane said. "He's been here for 16 years. If people who want to go on about the personal thing, I don't care."

Madrid face Valencia on Wednesday in La Liga, after needing an 89th-minute winner from Karim Benzema to beat Huesca 3-2 on Saturday and make it two wins from two since Zidane's return.

But Barcelona remain 12 points clear of them at the top of the table, with focus continuing on potential changes to Zidane's squad in the summer.

"I have spoken to the club and I have told them what we want to do," said Zidane.

"This is an institution, a club with important people. We do things together, as always," he added.

Gareth Bale is among those whose future is in doubt. The Welshman was again whistled by some of the home fans on Saturday.

"I know whistles are never good, I've been whistled at, you have to accept it. You have to have the character for it," Zidane said.



Arsenal midfielder Aaron Ramsey celebrates his opening goal against Newcastle during their Premier League encounter at the Emirates Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Arsenal climb to third place

AFP, London



Unai Emery challenged Arsenal to write their own history after they climbed to third place in the Premier League with a 2-0 win against Newcastle on Monday.

Aaron Ramsey's first half strike was followed by Alexandre Lacazette's killer second in the closing stages at the Emirates Stadium, maintaining Arsenal's impressive progress under Emery.

Emery's side climbed two points above fourth placed Tottenham and fifth placed Manchester United to bolster their chance of qualifying for the Champions League via a top-four finish with seven games to go.

It is the first time Arsenal have been as high as third place since April 2017, highlighting their improvement since former Paris Saint Germain boss Emery replaced Arsene Wenger at the end of last season.

Ramsey's fifth goal of the season

It's a new history. We are creating our own way. Our target is very clear. We have created a big atmosphere here. We are in a good moment, a good mentality with the players.

UNAI EMERY
ARSENAL MANAGER

No wonder Arsenal fans celebrated an important win by taunting their spluttering north London rivals with chants of "are you watching Tottenham".

"It's a new history. We are creating our own way. Our target is very clear," Emery said.

"We have created a big atmosphere here. We are in a good moment, a good mentality with the players.

"We are improving and making progress, but we know it is difficult. Tottenham, Chelsea and Manchester United are going to win a lot of games."

Newcastle remain seven points above the relegation zone after a 12th defeat in their last 13 meetings with Arsenal.

"If you don't take the chances and aren't precise against a good team, you know it is a matter of time until you make a mistake," Newcastle boss Rafael Benitez said, before taking a shot at owner Mike Ashley's lack of investment in new players.

"We have been speaking all season about the final third, you have to spend £50 million, £75 million (to have players to make a difference)."

Spurs bank on new stadium

AFP, London

Tottenham throw open the doors of their new 62,000 capacity stadium on Wednesday, hoping it will give them the financial firepower to compete with the Premier League and European elite.

Mauricio Pochettino's men will also banking on a short-term boost, with a dire run of results threatening to leave Spurs without Champions League football next season.

Tottenham played their final game at their old White Hart Lane stadium in May 2017 but the address is the only thing that has remained the same, with a gleaming new ground rising out of the rubble of their creaking old home in north London.

The new stadium, with a capacity of 62,062, is the biggest club ground in London and second only to Manchester United's Old Trafford in the Premier League.

Tellingly the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, built at a reported cost of £1 billion (\$1.3 billion), is marginally bigger than the home of Tottenham's great north London rivals Arsenal.

Crystal Palace are the first Premier League team to visit on Wednesday, but the stadium has ambitions beyond football -- underneath the retractable turf is an artificial surface to be used for NFL games. Spurs have an agreement to stage at least two matches a year for 10 years.

In an effort to match the atmosphere at grounds such as Borussia Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park, the stadium boasts a special single-tier stand with a capacity of 17,500, dubbed the "White Wall".



Mick Schumacher, the 20-year-old son of seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher, walks out of the garage after his first laps for Ferrari at the in-season testing at the Sakhir circuit in Manama yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP