

# What to WATCH

Star Sports Select 1  
Indian Premier League  
Delhi v Hyderabad  
Live from 8:30pm

## DAY'S EVENT

Dhaka Premier League  
Time: 9:00am  
Sheikh Jamal v Legends of Rugganj  
Venue: BKSP  
Kelaghar v Uttara SC  
Venue: Fatullah  
Abahani v Doleshwar  
Venue: SBNSC

## PELE HOSPITALISED IN PARIS

Brazil soccer great Pele was hospitalised in Paris late on Tuesday with a strong fever but his condition is not life-threatening, RMC Sport reported. The 78-year-old was admitted as a precaution after attending an event in the French capital with France's World Cup winning youngster Kylian Mbappe. Pele was still in hospital on Wednesday afternoon, RMC reported, though in a possible sign he was making a recovery, he said on Twitter: "I met Kylian Mbappe and his parents last night in Paris at @Hublot event. We talked goals, World Cups and watches. Great company!" Earlier, Mbappe had written on social media: "I had the chance this evening to spend a once-in-a-lifetime moment with the living legend @Pele." Mbappe and Pele had been scheduled to meet late last year but had to postpone, again because of Pele's health, French media said. --REUTERS



Abahani's Afghan defender Masih Saighani (R) jumps for joy after scoring the all-important goal against Manang Marshyangdi during their AFC Cup match at the ANFA Complex in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday. PHOTO: AFC

## Finals of Bangabandhu, Bangamata Cup today

SPORTS REPORTER



The finals of both the Bangabandhu Gold Cup Primary School Football Tournament and Bangamata Gold Cup Primary School Football Tournament will be held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Hariapur Govt. Primary School of Sylhet will take on Dakkhin Kaniakhata Govt. Primary School of Nilphamari in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup final at 1:15pm before Pachrukhi Govt. Primary School of Mymensingh square off against Tepughari BK Govt. Primary School of Lalmonirhat in the Bangamata Gold Cup final at 3:10pm. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will attend the second final and distribute prizes among the winners.

65,795 govt. primary schools took part in Bangabandhu Gold Cup while 65,700 govt. primary schools played in Bangamata Gold Cup. No team has won the Bangabandhu Gold

Cup more than once over the past editions and this time too will see a new champion crowned.

However, the Bangamata Gold Cup is quite another story as Kalsindur Primary School of Mymensingh achieved a rare hattrick of titles. The finalists this time also have the experience of playing the final before.

Pachrukhi Govt. Primary School of Mymensingh had to be content with a runners-up trophy last edition and will be hoping to go one better, but they face a stern challenge from 2016 champions Tepughari BK Govt Primary School of Lalmonirhat.

State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Zakir Hossain briefed the media about the final while Primary and Mass Education secretary Akram Al Hossain informed that they would provide a lump sum amount to coaches and players of the champions, runners-up and third-place teams in addition to prize money for the top three teams.

## Winning start for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani got off to a winning start in the AFC Cup, withstanding huge pressure from Nepal A Division champions Manang Marshyangdi to register a single-goal win over the hosts at the ANFA Complex ground in Lalitpur yesterday.

Afghan defender Masih Saighani struck the all-important goal in the 27th minute as the Sky Blues tasted victory in an AFC Cup opener for the first time after suffering losses in the past two editions of Asia's second-tier club competition.

Abahani were under tremendous pressure from the start and it was the home side, playing the AFC Cup for the first time, who created the first chance in front of some 1,500 spectators. However, Abahani captain-cum-goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel thwarted Bishal Rai's fifth-minute effort.

Anjan Bista then came close to breaking the deadlock but Abahani were saved by the woodwork.

The hosts continued to dominate Abahani, whose choice of playing with three centrebacks -- Raihan Hasan, Wali Faisal and Tutul Hossain Badsha -- worked well and kept the Manang forwards at bay.

Having survived the initial pressure, Abahani regrouped well and realised two successive corners. From the second, Wali Faisal played the ball to Rubel Mia from the left and the winger released a nice chip for Saighani, who rose timely to nod home from very close range in the 28th minute, silencing the home crowd.

However, Abahani were again under constant pressure and struggled to build up the game, eventually opting to attack on the break in the second half.

Anjan Bishta went close to getting the equaliser but young defender Tutul Hossain Badsha put in a brilliant tackle at the cost of a corner kick. Badsha was in the thick of things soon again, denying Nigerian striker Somide

Oluwawunmi Adelaja with a brilliant sliding tackle in the 68th minute to preserve Abahani's lead.

"It was tough. Manang Marshyangdi were more comfortable on the ball. It took some time to adjust to the surface," Abahani coach Mario Lemos said after the game. "In the first half we allowed a bit too much for their midfielders to play. We corrected it at half time and we did not allow them to create many chances thereafter.

The Portuguese also believed that it was a deserved win despite his side often being on the back foot.

"I think we deserved [the win]. We had better chances to score, Sunday hit the post and before the game I said that if we defended well and did not concede, we would have a big chance. They had a lot of possession but very far from our goal, with the game 1-0 we tried to be patient and wait for a mistake and score a second through a counter attack."

## MU have no margin for error: Solskjaer

AFP, Wolverhampton



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted Manchester United have no further margin for error in their bid to secure a top-four finish after a damaging 2-1 defeat against Wolves on Tuesday.

Ashley Young's needless dismissal and Chris Smalling's farcical own goal were the low points of a disappointing evening for Solskjaer's side at Molineux.

United had been set a target of 15 points from their remaining seven games by the manager before their visit to Molineux.

That total is now 15 points from six matches, with games to come against both Manchester City and Chelsea at Old Trafford, a target which Solskjaer admits leaves no room for mistakes.

"I'm as confident as I was three hours ago," joked Solskjaer after the defeat.

"I said we need 15 points from our last seven games and now we need 15 from our last six.

"It's difficult but then again, we're a very good team and it's going to be difficult for anybody who plays against us.

"This was a tough game but a performance that deserved a win."

Scott McTominay's first goal for United was equalised by Diogo Jota before the interval, but the game's turning point proved to be a second yellow card collected by Young with just 57 minutes gone.

Young was booked twice in the space of five minutes for fouls on Jota, the second a particularly unpleasant high challenge.

"When you're on a yellow you're always in danger of it being a yellow card again," said Solskjaer.

## Kovac hits back at critics

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovac has hit back at his critics and said that his side are the best team in Germany ahead of Saturday's Bundesliga clash with title rivals Borussia Dortmund.

Kovac is under renewed pressure after Bayern slipped two points behind Dortmund in the title race when they failed to beat Freiburg last Saturday.

Yet in an interview with Sport Bild on Wednesday, the Bayern coach said that the criticism levelled at him and his side was unjust.

Kovac said that he had been unfairly portrayed as a tactical stick-in-the-mud in comparison with more glamorous coaches such as Manchester City's Pep Guardiola and Paris Saint-Germain's Thomas Tuchel.

"When I was at Frankfurt, I was portrayed as a tactics nerd like Guardiola or Tuchel because I played with different systems," said Kovac.

"Now people say that I am unable to change my system. But that's not correct.

"When I arrived here, there was a system which had been in place since Louis van Gaal was here 10 years ago.

"The team felt comfortable in the system and there was no reason to make any drastic changes, because it would have just confused the players."

## Pep warns Mendy to control antics

AFP, London

Pep Guardiola has warned Benjamin Mendy to curb his late-night antics after the Manchester City defender was spotted in a club in the early hours of Saturday morning.

France star Mendy was reported to have been at the Manchester nightspot until 0230 GMT, according to British media on Tuesday.

Mendy had not been included in City's squad for their Premier League win at Fulham later on Saturday.

Instead, he was due to attend a training session as he battles to return to fitness following another injury-plagued season.

City boss Guardiola admitted he couldn't force Mendy to stay at home, but he made it clear he was frustrated by the player's latest high-spirited incident.

"They are old enough to know what they have to do, I'm not his father. I would prefer him to go home earlier but I don't control the players in that situation," Guardiola told reporters on Tuesday.

## Kean subject to racist abuse

AFP, Milan



Rising Italy star Moise Kean was targeted by racist abuse after he scored for Juventus on Tuesday -- but teammate Leonardo Bonucci blamed him for inciting the crowd at Cagliari.

Goals from 19-year-old Kean and Bonucci gave Juve a 2-0 victory over Cagliari that took them closer to an eighth consecutive Serie A title.

Kean slotted in his fourth goal in as many league games in the 85th minute after Bonucci nodded in the opener on 22 minutes in Sardinia.

The youngster's celebration after scoring, however, infuriated the home crowd who had jeered the teenager throughout after he was booked for diving in the first half.

Kean, along with his French teammate Blaise Matuidi and Brazilian Alex Sandro, were targeted by monkey noises throughout the match, but they increased in intensity after the second goal.

The Juventus teenager celebrated with his hands outstretched in front of the Cagliari fans after scoring, taking to Instagram later to defend his actions as "the best way to respond to racism".

But Bonucci claimed that Kean should not have provoked the home supporters and said his teammate was partly to blame.

"Kean knows that when he scores a goal, he should celebrate that with his teammates. He knows he could have done something differently too," Bonucci told Sky Sport Italia.

"There were racist jeers after the goal, Blaise heard it and was angered. I think the blame is 50-50, because Moise shouldn't have done that and the Curva (Cagliari fans) should not have reacted that way.

"We are professionals, we have to set the example and not provoke anyone."

Coach Massimiliano Allegri agreed Kean "shouldn't have celebrated in that manner".

"He is a young man and he has to learn, but certain things from the crowd also shouldn't be heard."



Juventus forward Moise Kean was target of racist abuse after opening the scoring against Empoli during their Serie A encounter in Turin on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP



Barcelona players celebrate after striker Luis Suarez (3rd from L) scored the equalising goal against Villarreal during their La Liga match at La Ceramica Stadium on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

## 'We showed we want to win this title'

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez led Barcelona to a stunning comeback against Villarreal on Tuesday and may have ensured there will be no return for Atletico Madrid in La Liga's title race.

Atletico play Barca at the Camp Nou on Saturday and were given fresh hope of a resurgence when struggling Villarreal, inspired by the brilliant Santi Cazorla, led the Catalans 4-2 going into the final minute.

But Messi, who had started on the bench, drove in a free-kick in the 90th and in the 93rd, Suarez fired in a devastating half-volley to earn Barca a 4-4 draw and an unlikely point.

Combined with Atletico's earlier 2-0 victory over Girona, the result means the gap at the top is reduced to eight points ahead of this weekend's top of the table meeting but Ernesto Valverde's side celebrated Suarez's goal like it was a winner.

"In the end it is only a point but there is a certain feeling after coming back from two goals down in the last minute," Valverde said.

Cazorla, meanwhile, sank to his knees, a chance spurned while Villarreal to pull four

points clear of the relegation zone, with Celta Vigo, now only two behind, still to play Huesca on Wednesday.

They had come from two down, as Samuel Chukwueze and Karl Toko Ekambi cancelled out early goals from Philippe Coutinho and Malcom. Vicente Iborra and Carlos Bacca looked to have sealed an incredible win, only for Messi and Suarez to intervene.

"The spirit we showed at the end, to refuse to give in, to come back in the last minute - we showed that we want to win this league," said Suarez.

Rested along with Gerard Pique and Ivan Rakitic, it seemed Barcelona would not need Messi as Coutinho tapped in a pass by Malcom, who then headed in Arturo Vidal's cross for a 2-0 lead after 16 minutes.

But Villarreal sprung into life, revived by Chukwueze, who pulled one back seven minutes later. A sumptuous flick by Iborra launched the counter-attack and Cazorla sent the striker clear. Chukwueze's shot struck the post but cannoned back to him and this time, he guided it into the far corner.

Any control Barcelona had increasingly gave

way to chaos, particularly on the break, where Villarreal broke through almost at will. Toko Ekambi's equaliser shortly after half-time looked like a fluke but perhaps he meant it.

He tore down the right wing and cut inside, with Marc-Andre ter Stegen stepping out to block what he expected to be a cutback. Instead, Toko Ekambi stabbed the ball inside the goalkeeper and into the far corner.

Messi warmed up and then came on in the 61st minute but it was Villarreal that pulled away. A minute later, Iborra nipped onto Manu Morlanes' pass and prodded it home before Bacca made it four with 10 minutes left.

Cazorla was again the instigator, his curled pass creating the chance, as Bacca skipped round Ter Stegen and slid in for what seemed like the win.

Instead, Alvaro Gonzalez was sent off for a second yellow card in the 86th minute and Messi lashed a free-kick in off the post to give Barca hope.

When Suarez drove in his thundering half-volley from the edge of the box, there were four seconds of the three added minutes remaining. Cazorla dropped down as Barca's players ran to the corner.

