

What to WATCH

SONY SIX
Pakistan v Sri Lanka
First ODI
Live from 4:00pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
Bundesliga
Union Berlin v Eintracht
Live from 12:30am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

Walton U-18 Football Tournament Time: 5:00pm
Semifinal Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka
Saif SC v Abahani

KEOGH SUSPENDED FOR NIGHT OUT

Derby condemned an 'alcohol-related incident' that has ruled captain Richard Keogh out of action until the end of the season because of a serious knee injury. The Championship side revealed Keogh was among those who continued drinking after a team-building dinner with staff on Tuesday evening. "As a club, we cannot, and do not, condone the actions of a small group of players on Tuesday evening," Derby said in a statement. "The players were out as part of a scheduled team-building dinner with staff and while the majority of them acted responsibly and left at around 8:00 pm and were not involved, a small group, including the team captain Richard Keogh, continued drinking into the night. As a result of an alcohol-related incident, Richard Keogh has sustained a serious knee injury that will prevent him from playing until the end of the season."



THE MORAL COLLAPSE OF CLUB PARA

ANISUR RAHMAN



Not long ago, even when the darkness of the roads in front of multi-sports clubs was illuminated by the occasional beam of light it was hard to find boards or signs bearing the names of each club. That picture changed drastically over the last few years -- the darkness was banished, the old signboards replaced by colourful neon lights displaying the clubs' names proudly and giving the impression of a thriving tourist area -- the Club Para (neighbourhood of the clubs).

Even as fans lamented the waning of the craze that once surrounded domestic sport, the brightness of Club Para seemed to be running on the rich sporting heritage that, for optimists, could yet be reprised with some effort.

Little did they know that a new darkness had descended behind the neon splashes. In one fell swoop, or one series of raids, the pride and esteem of Club Para came crashing down after the RAB busted casinos inside six clubs -- Victoria SC, Mohammedan SC, Dilkusha SC, Arambagh KS, Dhaka Wanderers Club and Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club -- situated in Arambagh, Fakirerpool and Motijheel.

The lay of Club Para Bangladesh has a rich history in sport before and after the Liberation War, and much of that tradition owes to the clubs that gave birth to many sporting legends, especially in football, cricket, hockey and in some cases chess, volleyball, table tennis, badminton and shooting. All the while, the clubs had garnered negative headlines but it is undeniable that they played key roles in the nurturing of players who have brought laurels for the country.

Initially, most of the clubs had been situated in the premises of the country's premium venue -- Bangabandhu National Stadium -- but problems arose when fighting between supporters following defeat or victory of their respective clubs took its toll on the stadium and surrounding areas.

"During the regime of President HM Ershad, National Sports Council (NSC) chairman Sadekur Rahman Chowdhury took the initiative to shift those clubs to Arambagh, Fakirerpool and Motijheel in 1987-88 and those clubs were subsequently shifted to those areas. Even some other clubs [not originally situated at the

stadium] were even accommodated in that area in 1990-91," said a former NSC official.

Today, there are 11 clubs -- Mohammedan SC, Victoria SC, Wari Club, Azad SC, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Dilkusha SC, Arambagh KS, Dhaka Wanderers Club, Dhaka District Sports Association, Azad Boys Club, Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club and Sonali Otit Club-- and the area is known as Club Para.

Activities of those clubs For sports-lovers of Bangladesh, football was the central attraction before and after independence and Club Para was abuzz with the movements of star footballers, always followed by loyal fans, be the player a representative of Mohammedan, Victoria, Arambagh or Dhaka Wanderers Club. Over time however, those clubs became disconnected with their glittering past.

Victoria and Dhaka Wanderers Club had once been forces in the country's football. Youngmen's Club was a breeding ground of

the Liberation War and the practice continued after independence. Taking permission from district commissioner, the clubs' authorities staged housie games once a week to meet day-to-day expenditures such as players' food, sports gears, running training camps and other small activities. The clubs had issued membership cards to those who played housie and bridge in a bid to avoid trouble with law enforcement. While clubs had earned some funds through gambling card games such as three-card, the introduction of games such as one-ten and rummy brought in bigger windfalls. A tale has gained much currency in the sports arena of a legendary footballer gambling away his entire transfer fee of Tk 2.5 lakh in one night.

Gambling may even have been at the centre of the murder of Dhanmondi Sporting Club president Khairul Alam Piaru who, according to news reports in 2007, made a stand against illegal activities inside the club.

"High-tech gambling has been taking place

positions of Youngmen's Club and Arambagh KS respectively.

Those organisers brought sponsors through their personal connections or utilised their own wealth to run the clubs but these dedicated organisers slowly left the sports arena following the arrival of organisers who had no sporting background, and so the clubs lost their way.

"Dedicated organisers started leaving the sports arena since the Ershad regime when new organisers were accommodated to take control. The situation is now much worse as most organisers have no background in sports," said a club organiser who is also involved with the Bangladesh Football Federation.

"While once organisers came into sports to give, nowadays organisers are coming to take and there is a shortage of real organisers to run clubs," said a Mohammedan SC official, who also believes that most current organisers have no ability to rope in sponsors and are thus more reliant on gambling to meet the expenditure of the clubs.

different club officials are evidence enough that those officials were also lining their own pockets.

"We were forced to rent out spaces because of political pressure and the revenue from the space was used to meet the expenditures of the training camps. We had no involvement with the casino," Mohammedan SC director in charge Lokman Hossain said before he was also arrested by RAB yesterday.

However, a Victoria SC official said under condition of anonymity: "Ismail Hossain Samrat himself is a vice president of Victoria, and he is an influential political leader, so when he proposed to rent out the space, we had nothing to do but watch."

Fallout of Casin-gate

The casino scandal has now become the talk of the country, with many expressing shock. Many former players and organisers have expressed acute embarrassment.

"I really feel ashamed and insulted with the



many star footballers such as Enayet, Intiaz Sultan Jonny, Hasan Al Mamun, Nurul Haque Manik, Sohel Al Masum and many others while Arambagh, which also created a lot of national players including Alfaz Ahmed, was considered giant-killers. All that is now ancient history for the aforementioned clubs, and only Mohammedan and Arambagh now play top-flight football.

Apart from football, clubs like Mohammedan and Victoria had a good record in top-flight cricket but they are currently struggling. Mohammedan, Mariners Youngs, Dilkusha, Victoria and Wanderers are also involved in hockey while sports like handball and a few other indoor sports are confined to a few clubs.

Entrance of gambling and housie Having discussed with some former players and organisers, it was clear that housie (a version of bingo) was played at the club premises before

at Dilkusha SC since 1980s," said a former national footballer, seeking anonymity.

An organiser, also wishing not to be named, said: "Victoria SC first introduced three-card gambling."

"Gambling through card games has been there since the Pakistan regime. We have seen many wives come to club tents looking for their husbands who did not return home at night," said another organiser, who is involved with an indoor sports federation.

Financial constraints and lack of quality organisers

Prominent organisers like Manzoor Ahsan Mintu, Wazed Ali, SP Abdus Sattar, businessman Akbar Ali had once embraced top posts at Dhaka Wanderers Club; renowned organisers Mostafa Jaman Baby, former student leader Abul Kashem was at the helm of Arambagh SC while politician Abdus Salam, Abdur Rahim, SA Sultan have also held top

Political organisers taking advantage of ready-made club structures

With a dearth of quality organisers, top posts of some clubs such as Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club, Dhaka Wanderers Club, Arambagh, Dilkusha and Victoria were filled by leaders of the ruling Awami League's associate wings such as Jubo League and Swedchhasebak League over the last few years.

Those political leaders reportedly strengthened their grips on the respective executive committees with their political influence and capitalised on the financial crisis and ready-made structure of the clubs to use them as casinos a few years back. As gambling and housie at Club Para was a common phenomenon that made the area somewhat safe for gamblers, new organisers grabbed this opportunity to run casinos in a safe zone to make money for the clubs and for themselves.

The recent RAB raids at the houses of

issue of casinos. If I say I was once a player of Mohammedan SC, the young generation may think that I was a poker-player. Gambling at such a level was really unexpected for me," said former footballer Golam Sarwar Tipu.

"This has done great damage for sports in the country and it won't recover in the next 20 years, because no sponsor will come forward to contribute and no parent will allow their children to play football. It will not only affect football but also have impact on sports as a whole," said Youngmen's Club former general secretary Manzur Hossain Malu.

The current state of affairs may be seen to be a roadmap of the slowly disintegrating integrity of the country's sporting clubs. However, that things have reached such a stage can also be seen to be a comment of what cash-starved clubs need to do to keep their heads above water.

I had to beg and plead to open for India: Sachin

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Batting great Sachin Tendulkar says he had to "beg and plead" to open the innings for India in an ODI against New Zealand in 1994, recalling a major turning point of his career. The switch from middle-order to opening the innings proved to be a masterstroke as Tendulkar finished with a world record 49 hundreds in the 50-over format.

Sharing a video on LinkedIn, Tendulkar recollected the moments leading up to that one-dayer against New Zealand at Auckland.

"In 1994, when I started opening the batting for India, the strategy used by all teams was to save wickets. What I tried to do was slightly out of the box," he said.

"I thought I could go up front and take the opposition bowlers on. But I had to beg and plead to please give me a chance. If I fail, I won't come after you again," he added.

Using that move as an example, the prolific former batsman urged his fans to never shy away from taking risks because of the fear of failure.

"In that first match (against New Zealand at Auckland), I scored 82 off 49 balls, so I didn't have to ask again if I would get another chance. They were keen for me to open. But what I'm trying to say here is, don't be afraid of failure," the 46-year-old Tendulkar said.

While he may have ended with a 49 ODI centuries, Tendulkar's first ton in the format came after a long wait of five years.

It was in September 1994 that he hit his first ODI hundred, against Australia in Colombo, having made the switch from the middle-order to opening the innings.

He recorded scores of 82, 63, 40, 63 and 73 in his first five innings as an opening batsman.

Tendulkar finished his ODI career with 18426 runs in 463 matches -- the most by any in the history of the format.

Neymar faces litigation

AFP, Barcelona

After a summer of courtship, with Barcelona wooing Neymar to come back, the Brazilian star and his former club have finally agreed a date -- but in court rather than on the pitch.

Both sides will meet at a court in the Barcelona suburbs today for a multi-million-euro legal battle over a contract dispute.

Barca initially sued Neymar for breach of contract after his shock transfer to PSG in 2017, less than a year after signing a new five-year deal with the Catalan giants.

Barcelona are demanding 8.5 million euros in damages plus interest, and have refused to pay Neymar the 26 million euros which were part of his contract renewal bonus signed in 2016.



Reims players celebrate after Boulaye Dia scored the second goal during a 2-0 win over PSG at the Parc des Princes. Sidelined by injury, PSG forward (inset) Kylian Mbappe could only watch from the stands.



Reims down depleted PSG

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint-Germain fell to a shock 2-0 loss to Reims at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday as headers from Hassane Kamara and Boulaye Dia gave the visitors a famous win.

The Ligue 1 champions, depleted by a spate of injuries, remain top of the table after seven games, but have already lost twice this season after defeat at Rennes last month.

It was PSG's first home loss in the league since a 2-0 reverse at the hands of Rennes in May 2018, ending an unbeaten run of 22 matches at the Parc.

"I'm disappointed with our performance. The first 10, maybe 15, minutes went well but then every minute that passed was worse and worse," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel.

"We did not show what we are capable of doing -- so defeat is deserved."

Neymar, who had scored late winners in each of his previous two Ligue 1 games, started alongside Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting and Pablo Sarabia up front, with Edinson Cavani, Kylian Mbappe and Mauro Icardi all still injured.

But the Brazilian was a peripheral figure and was guilty of gifting Reims possession

on numerous occasions.

Tuchel was also forced to play a makeshift midfield featuring full-back Juan Bernat, with Marco Verratti suspended.

The hosts made a slow start, despite Neymar going close with a free-kick, and fell behind just before the half-hour mark.

Reims, who also beat PSG 3-1 on the final day of last season, launched a rare attack and Hassane Kamara rose to powerfully head home Zimbabwean Marshall Munetsi's right-wing cross.

PSG's injury woes intensified further shortly before half-time as Choupo-Moting hobbled off to be replaced by Angel Di Maria, who had originally been rested and named as a substitute.

Reims came agonisingly close to doubling their advantage in first-half injury-time, as centre-back Yunis Abdelhamid's header bounced narrowly past the post.

PSG dominated possession for much of the second half without posing a serious threat, and Reims again came within centimetres of making it two as substitute Remi Oudin's low, left-footed effort struck the base of the post.

And Dia entered the fray before planting another fine header past the despairing dive of home goalkeeper Kelyor Navas, sealing a richly-deserved victory.



State University of Bangladesh player Mizanur Rahman (C) scored the winner in a 1-0 victory over United International University in a Faraaz Intersports Gold Cup encounter in Kamalapur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

BARCA FINED



FIFA DENIES FOUL PLAY



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