

## I'LL STOP WHEN MY BODY TELLS ME TO

Roger Federer first thought about how long his playing career would last in 2009 but a decade later the 38-year-old is still going strong and says he will keep playing until his body decides otherwise. Federer won his last Grand Slam in January 2018 when he claimed his sixth Australian Open but the Swiss has won seven ATP titles since then, taking his career tally to 103. Federer, who ended the year behind Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic in the world rankings, said he cannot predict when he will stop playing. "My retirement will depend on my health. At the moment I do not see any reason to retire," the 20-times Grand Slam champion told reporters ahead of his exhibition matches in South America.

—REUTERS



# Transfers come to an end

SPORTS REPORTER

The seven-week players' transfer window for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League closed quietly yesterday, unlike the penultimate day which had seen huge fanfare. Seven-time champions Abahani and other teams, except for Muktiyoddha Sangsad KS, submitted their final players' list to the Bangladesh Football Federation on the final day.

Even though Arambagh KS had earlier voiced their concern over taking part in the transfers, the former Independence Cup champions eventually submitted their players' list after overcoming odds which they faced following the club's involvement in illegal gambling.

Having shrugged off failure in the last edition's premier league, Abahani are looking forward to fighting for all domestic titles as well as the AFC Cup by strengthening their defence, which conceded 28 goals in 26 league matches despite scoring highest 60 goals in the league, where they eventually finished second.

National defender Tapu Barman and midfielders Atiqur Rahman Fahad and Imtiaz Sultan Jitu left the Sky Blues to join rivals Bashundhara Kings and Sheikh Jamal while Abahani roped in defender Nasir Uddin Chowdhury and Sohel Rana Jr in place of Tapu and Fahad. The Sky Blues have seven

current national team players in their squad.

They signed two foreign defenders -- Mailson Alves of Brazil and Aladdin Issa of Egypt -- along with Kyrgyz national team midfielder Edgar Bernhardt. The Dhanmondi-based outfit also retained the services of 25 players including Nigerian striker Sunday Chizoba and Haitian forward Kervens Belfort.

"Our observation of the last season is that we conceded too many goals. If we could have avoided that, we could have retained the league title. We considered this while roping in new players. We have strengthened the defence by signing two foreign defenders," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said, adding that they now have a balanced side with 18 players capable of playing in the starting eleven.

### ARAMBAGH STAY IN TOP-FLIGHT

Arambagh KS's effort to stun the established forces in the upcoming season had received a huge jolt following the club's involvement with illegal gambling which forced the club to release all high-profile players they had contacted. The club even declared that they would not participate in the players' transfers. But the club officials eventually managed to keep the outfit in top-flight football by signing up 34 players including six old ones and four foreigners.

"The local residents who were once involved

with the club have taken the responsibility to form the squad by providing financial support even though I can't mention their names at the moment," Arambagh's vice-president Ezzaz Jahangir said. "We don't know how to continue the training camp and arrange the accommodation of the players. We will seek help of administration and the football federation."

Jahangir also believes they will be able to avoid relegation.

### OTHER TEAMS

Muktiyoddha Sangad KS, Rahmatganj MFS, Uttar Baridhara Club, Chittagong Abahani and Brothers Union also completed their registration formalities on the last day.

There was concern whether Muktiyoddha Sangad could complete the transfers' following the casino scandal, but they have formed a better squad compared to the last season.

"It was possible because of the interest of the Liberation War Affairs Minister [AKM Mozammel Huq]," Muktiyoddha Sangad president Zahurul Islam Rohel said, adding that no players will be denied of regular payment.

Chittagong Abahani also formed a good squad and appointed UEFA A license coach Maruful Haque, who guided the side to runners-up finish in the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup recently.



Less than 24 hours after manager Mauricio Pochettino was sensationally sacked by Tottenham Hotspur following over five years in charge, the club unveiled Jose Mourinho, a three-time Premier League champion, as their new manager. PHOTO: SPURS TWITTER

# Jose pledges 'passion' after replacing Poch

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho promised "real passion" following his appointment as Tottenham Hotspur boss on Wednesday after Mauricio Pochettino was sacked by the struggling Premier League club.

The former Chelsea, Real Madrid and Manchester United manager was announced as the new boss at White Hart Lane hours after the Argentine was dismissed on Tuesday evening.

"I couldn't be happier and look forward to the challenge," Mourinho told Tottenham's official website. "What can I promise? Passion, real passion. Passion for my job, but also passion for my club, that's the way I have been all my career."

The 56-year-old, who had been out of work since leaving United last December, signed a contract until the end of the 2022-23 season after Spurs acted to halt their slide down the table.

The club reached the Champions League final last season but are languishing in 14th spot in the Premier League. They are 11 points off the top four positions.

"I want to try, obviously, everything to bring happiness to everyone who loves the club," added the new manager, who has won domestic league titles in Portugal, England, Italy and Spain.

Mourinho was due to take training on Wednesday before his first press

conference on Thursday. His first game in charge is at West Ham on Saturday. His glittering CV includes Champions League titles with Porto and Inter Milan.

"In Jose we have one of the most successful managers in football," said chairman Daniel Levy. "He has a wealth of experience, can inspire teams and is a great tactician. We believe he will bring energy and belief to the dressing room."

Pochettino had transformed Spurs' fortunes since arriving in 2014, qualifying for the Champions League four times. Although he failed to win a trophy, Tottenham made a dramatic run to the European Cup final for the first time in their history in June, losing 2-0 to Liverpool in Madrid.

Pochettino, operating on a tight budget, nurtured a squad of young players to become household names. Tottenham and England forward Kane tweeted: "Gaffer. I'll be forever thankful to you for helping me achieve my dreams."

South Korean forward Son Heung-min said in an Instagram post that "words are powerless to express my gratitude".

The Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust released a statement expressing "concerns" and seeking clarity over how the new boss and the board would work together.

The group asked: "Is the manager solely accountable? How much has the board's line on wages and transfers contributed to player unrest and disaffection?"

# Root seeks redemption against NZ

AFP, Mount Maunganui

England captain Joe Root has declared himself free of any Ashes hangover as he looked to revive his fortunes and those of his team in the two-Test series in New Zealand starting on Thursday.

Root said he had been working on his batting shortcomings and denied the Test captaincy weighed on his performance in the drawn mid-year series against Australia, in which he suffered three ducks as England failed to regain the Ashes.

Neither England nor New Zealand were prepared to name their line-ups Thursday for what will be the maiden Test at Mount Maunganui's Bay Oval ground.

But Root said rising star Jofra Archer "would bring something different to what we had previously" in the bowling stakes, indicating the paceman will be included.

New Zealand will not be fighting fire with fire -- their genuine quick Lockie Ferguson is in the squad for the first time, but captain Kane Williamson said he would sit out the first Test.

England have had the upper hand over New Zealand this year, narrowly winning the World Cup on the boundary countback rule when the final was tied, and winning the recent Twenty20 series 3-2 when a super over was needed to separate the two sides.

But while the wins were satisfying, Root said Test cricket was another level altogether and after failing to beat Australia he fancied England could start on the road to redemption against New Zealand.

"Long term it's important that we look after Test cricket in England and we make it a priority," he said.



New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (L) and England counterpart Joe Root pose with the trophy yesterday ahead of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui today.

PHOTO: AFP

"You look at the guys in the dressing room and they're all desperate to get that right. We feel we're in a strong position to take this team forward."

Root, who averages 47.91 but was well off his best with an average of 32.50 against Australia this year, was adamant the pressure of captaincy was not an issue.

"It's very clear that I want to be leading this team moving forward," he said.

"I'm not concerned about it. I know I've not performed as I'd like to in previous series and

probably over the last year, but they're challenges you face as an international player. It could have been exactly the same if I wasn't captain.

"I've gone away and worked out a few things and feel like my game's in good order coming into this series."

Despite Root's confidence, New Zealand go into the series ranked second in the world, one spot ahead of England, and have won seven of their past eight home series including a 1-0 win in a two-match series against England 20 months ago.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to players and officials of different countries participating in the Sheikh Russell International Club Cup Tennis Tournament during a programme at her official residence Ganobhaban yesterday. PHOTO: BSS

# Government will work to popularise tennis: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that the government will undertake projects to develop tennis courts at school, college and university levels to popularise the sport alongside cricket and football.

"We're usually busy with cricket and football but tennis is also a good sport. We'll provide assistance so that universities, colleges and schools can set up tennis courts to flourish this game as the young generation is showing interest," she said.

The Prime Minister said this while speaking to the players of the participating countries in Sheikh Russell International Club Cup Tennis Tournament and diplomats of the respective countries when they called on her at her official residence Ganobhaban.

collaboration with cabinet division and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, arranged the six-day tournament marking the birth anniversary of Sheikh Russell -- the youngest son of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sheikh Hasina said the government has given importance to develop infrastructures for games and sports to attract children and young generations.

"We always put emphasis on sports which provide mental strength to our children and youths. The more the young generation will be involved with sports and games, the more their mentality will be broadened and they'll be physically sound," she said.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel, Sheikh Salahuddin Jewel and Abdus Salam Murshedi were present during the programme.

# Pak prodigy to make Test debut

1st Test against Australia starts today

AFP, Brisbane

Teenage bowling sensation Naseem Shah will become one of the youngest cricketers to play a Test after Pakistan captain Azhar Ali confirmed Wednesday the 16-year-old will make his debut at the Gabba.

Shah, who opted to remain on tour after his mother died last week, made the grade for Thursday's first Test after impressing with an eight-over spell against Australia A in Perth.

"We are definitely looking to play him -- he is bowling really well," Azhar said ahead of the series opener in Brisbane.

Only handful of players have made their debut aged 16, including Sachin Tendulkar who went on to become an Indian batting legend.

The youngest Test player is listed by Cricinfo as Pakistan's Hasan Raza, who was 14 on his 1996 debut, though his date of birth was later disputed.

Azhar said he had faith in Shah's abilities through a high-pressure five-day game.

"He's very fit, I have captained him in first-class matches and he has overs under his belt," he said.

"I'm sure that he can do that in Test matches as well, I have no doubts in his fitness and his bowling skills."

"Not many players can reach that standard so early but there are exceptions and he's one of them," he added. "We are all looking forward to him having a very successful career."

Pakistan have a history of bleeding promising players early, accounting for six of the 10 youngest to play Test matches.

But Naseem, who has only played seven first-class games, is also carrying the huge extra burden of his mother passing away.

Pakistan great Wasim Akram said if someone was good enough, then age did not come into it.

"I think it's a blessing in disguise because when you're 16-17, you don't even know what the word pressure means," Akram told Fox Sports Australia. "You just want to go out and play."

# Ramsey takes Wales to Euros

AFP, Paris

Aaron Ramsey sent Wales to Euro 2020 with a brace to give them a 2-0 win over Hungary and a spot in next summer's finals, while Belgium completed their perfect qualifying campaign with a mauling of Cyprus.

Juventus midfielder Ramsey hit his decisive double either side of half-time at the Cardiff City Stadium to ensure that Ryan Giggs's side leapfrogged Tuesday's opponents into second place in Group E to snatch a spot at the multi-host tournament.

Wales also held off Slovakia, who beat Azerbaijan 2-0 but finished a point behind in third thanks to their defeat at group winners Croatia in the previous round of matches.

Ramsey's match-winning display came in his first start of qualifying and capped a superb performance that belied a characteristically injury-dogged season that term in Serie A.

"I missed a lot of this campaign but it was all worthwhile to chip in with a couple of goals tonight," Ramsey told Sky Sports.

"We had the time of our lives in France (at Euro 2016). We inspired a nation last time out so we wanted to do it again."

The 28-year-old, who played 30 minutes as a substitute in Saturday's win in Azerbaijan, made an immediate impact by charging into the box to meet Gareth Bale's inch-perfect cross to settle the home side's nerves on 15 minutes.

There was no way back for the visitors once Ramsey controlled Kieffer Moore's knockdown to smash home from close range two minutes into the second half.

The win gave Wales the final automatic place, with 20 teams ready to contest the finals and another four spots set to be decided via the playoffs in March next year.

## QUALIFIED TEAMS

Belgium, Italy, Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Spain, France, Turkey, England, Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden, Croatia, Austria, Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, Denmark, Wales.

Note: 24 teams qualify in total, final four places decided by playoffs in March 2020.

One of the favourites for the tournament which kicks off in Rome on June 12, Belgium, made it a perfect 10 wins from 10 with a 6-1 thrashing of Cyprus that saw Christian Benteke score twice.

The Crystal Palace forward is yet to score in the Premier League but opened Belgium's account in the 16th minute with a tap-in two minutes after Nicholas Loannou stunned the Group 1 winners with a superb run and shot.

He rounded off the scoring in the 68th minute when he collected a neat through ball from Kevin De Bruyne -- who also scored twice -- and slotted past Neofytos Michael.

Tuesday's stroll means Roberto Martinez's side finish the qualifying phase as top scorers with a whopping 40 goals, with an average of four goals a game.

Germany and the Netherlands thumped Northern Ireland and Belarus to close their campaigns in style.

Serge Gnabry said Germany were heading to the Euros in a positive mood after hitting a hat-trick that sank the Northern Irish 6-1 and gave them top spot in Group C.

Georginio Wijnaldum meanwhile made another stand against racism as he also scored three times in the Netherlands' 5-0 crushing of Belarus.