

AUSTRALIAN OPEN SET FOR BIG PAY-HIKE

Big pay rises are in store for players at January's Australian Open with organisers yesterday announcing a 13.6 percent boost in the total purse to Aus\$71 million (US\$49.1 million). The winners of the men's and women's titles at the first Grand Slam of the year will both take home Aus\$4.12 million, only a small increase from a year ago. But players beaten in earlier rounds do much better. Anyone crashing out in round one will receive Aus\$90,000, up 20 percent, while second round players get a 21.9 percent hike to Aus\$128,000. Tournament director Craig Tiley said every round would enjoy double digit percentage increases, bar the finalists. "This year, as we do every year, we worked with the tours to establish the weighting for prizemoney increases round-by-round, and we pushed to reward players competing early in the tournament in both singles and doubles," he said. "We strongly believe in growing prizemoney at all levels of the game and we will continue to work with the playing group to create viable career paths in the sport."

--AFP



Muktijoddha oust Uttar Baridhara

Mohammedan, Sheikh Russel stay in the hunt despite goalless draw

SPORTS REPORTER



Three former champions -- Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Russel KC and Muktijoddha Sangsad -- kept their Federation Cup's quarterfinal hopes alive after two rounds of matches of Group D at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

10-time champions Mohammedan played out a goalless draw against 2012 champions Sheikh Russel KC after three-time champions Muktijoddha Sangsad came from behind to beat Uttar Baridhara 2-1 in the day's first match.

Muktijoddha Sangsad are on top of the four-team table with four points, ahead on better goal-difference of Sheikh Russel, who have four points too. Mohammedan have two points from two matches while Uttar Baridhara are yet to open their account.

Mohammedan continued their pressing football from their previous match against Muktijoddha Sangsad and cornered Sheikh Russel in the first half, but the latter came out strongly to dominate in the second half.

Both of sides created a couple of goal-scoring chances, but neither could find the back of the net, thanks to some



Muktijoddha Sangsad forward Ismail Bandoura blows a kiss after scoring the equaliser against Uttar Baridhara Club in their Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The All Reds won the match 2-1.

PHOTO: BFF

BARIDHARA (Darboe 40')	1 - 2	MUKTIJODDHA (Bangoura 45+2', Norita 73')
MOHAMMEDAN	0 - 0	SHEIKH RUSSEL

brave performances from Sheikh Russel goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana his Mohammedan counterpart Suján Hossain.

"We are not happy with a draw because a win would have taken us to the quarterfinals," Sheikh Russel's assistant coach Masud Parvez Kaiser said. "Mohammedan were the better side in the first half as they did not allow us to build the game by packing the defence and

midfield."

"Anyone could have won the match. The boys played better than the previous match as they were good in the attacking third even though we could not score a goal. I'm happy with the result and looking forward to the next match to qualify for the quarterfinals," was the impression of Mohammedan coach Sean Lane.

Mohammedan will take on Uttar Baridhara Club while Muktijoddha Sangsad will square up against Sheikh Russel on December 28 to decide the group.

Earlier, Muktijoddha Sangsad kept last-8 chances alive with a 2-1 win against Uttar

Baridhara Club, who were ousted from the group stage with two successive defeats.

Three-time champions Muktijoddha Sangsad, who came into the match on the back of a 1-1 draw against Mohammedan, faced tough challenge from promoted the start and conceded the lead in the 40th minute. with Landing Darboe coolly placing home from inside the box after Arif Hossain had brought down a cross from Noyan Mia.

However, the lead lasted only seven minutes as Guinean forward Ismail Bangoura drove a well-judged cross from substitute Sarwar Zaman Nipu into the

back of the net two minutes into stoppage time of the first half.

After resumption, Muktijoddha Sangsad pressed for the lead and Norito Hashiguchi came close to scoring. However, the Japanese midfielder, after being set up by Bangoura, hit the ball straight at goalkeeper Azad Hossain.

The Japanese player made amends by scoring a brilliant goal in the 73rd minute as he collected a through-pass from Mehdi Hasan and ran into the box before smashing a powerful low shot to the near post, giving the Baridhara goalkeeper no chance to react.

Reds face hungry Foxes

REUTERS, London



Liverpool, newly crowned Club World Cup winners, return to their main task -- fighting for their first league title in 30 years -- when they face their closest challengers Leicester City on Thursday.

The Boxing Day clash of the top-two, at Leicester's King Power stadium, headlines a full programme of festive fixtures and despite Leicester's 3-1 reverse at Manchester City on Saturday, Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp is aware of the dangers that his side face.

Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers, who was replaced by Klopp at Anfield, has built a team that has won as many games as Pep Guardiola's City, 12 out of 18. They have lost just three times and in Jamie Vardy they have the league's top scorer with 17 goals.

"We will try (to stop Vardy). He's a massive striker, an exceptional striker. One of the top three since I've been in England," Klopp said. "He's difficult to defend, always on the shoulder... playing the offside line, really dangerous. The only thing you can do is avoid the passes to him and that's what we'll try."

Jerome faces domestic violence charges

AFP, Berlin

A German court has decided that Bayern Munich's veteran defender Jerome Boateng will face charges of domestic violence, a spokesman confirmed on Monday.

The Munich court ruled that the former international can stand trial on a charge of "slight, intentional bodily injuries", court spokesman Klaus-Peter Juengst told AFP subsidiary SID.

Boateng, 31, is accused of having attacked his ex-partner, with whom he was in relationship for 10 years during which time they had two of his three children together.

Tebas reelected as La Liga boss

AGENCIES, Madrid



Javier Tebas was reelected president of La Liga on Monday with a four-year mandate, after running unopposed.

Tebas has led the Spanish football league since 2013 and resigned earlier in December to trigger new elections.

"Following the presentation of a single candidacy for the presidency ... and this being valid, Javier Tebas is definitively named president of La Liga for a period of four years, without the need to hold an extraordinary general assembly," La Liga said in a statement.

Tebas, 57, previously stood down in 2016 before being reelected unopposed.

He was the only candidate standing for the election originally scheduled for next October.

He explained earlier this month the early poll was to "give the greatest level of



stability" to the LFP with the bidding for La Liga's TV rights for 2022-25 begin "between March and June 2021 ... too close to the original election schedule".

"I don't think it's a very good idea to have dialogue with other actors with a mandate that expires in a few months," he said.

"The person who has to do it should do so with the backing of the clubs at least for four years."

Iachini named as head coach of Fiorentina

AFP, Milan

Giuseppe Iachini has been appointed coach of struggling Fiorentina, the Serie A club confirmed on Monday. Iachini, 55, replaces Vincenzo Montella who was sacked on Saturday with the team trailing in 15th place, three points above the relegation zone.

"The current ranking has forced us to change coach," said Fiorentina owner Rocco Comisso. "We chose Iachini because he is a man of substance, tied to Florence and Fiorentina. Now we have to stay united and get back on the right track as soon as possible."

He added: "I would like to thank Vincenzo Montella for the commitment and professionalism he showed during his time at the club."



A beach marathon titled 'Run Bangladesh' was held at the Kuakata sea beach yesterday. Rapid Action Battalion 12 organised the 10-kilometre run in a bid to promote an anti-drugs campaign. About 2000 students from the Patuakhali and Barguna districts participated in the event.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Russia plans to compete in Tokyo

AFP, Moscow



The Russian Olympic Committee said yesterday it expected that Russian athletes would take part in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Games under the national flag despite a four-year doping ban.

"The Russian Olympic Committee is a rightful member of the Olympic movement," its president Stanislav Pozdnyakov told reporters after a meeting.

"Therefore we have every reason to believe that we will put together a team for Tokyo and do everything in our power for this team to perform under the Russian tricolour." The World Anti-Doping Agency on December 10 banned Russia for four years from major global events, including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, over manipulated doping data. WADA accused Moscow of falsifying data from a doping testing laboratory that was handed over to investigators earlier this year.

Russia has said it would contest the ban, with President Vladimir Putin slamming the sanctions as politically motivated.

Speaking on Tuesday, Pozdnyakov confirmed that the Russian Olympic Committee would support the decision of its supervisory board to defy the WADA ban.

Last week RUSADA anti-doping agency said it had "made a decision not to agree" with the four-year ban by the World Anti-Doping Agency's decision.

Spurs lose Son appeal

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur have failed with their appeal against Son Heung-min's red card, the Football Association announced yesterday.

The South Korean winger saw red in the second half of Spurs' 2-0 loss at home to Chelsea in a spiteful London derby on Sunday after VAR confirmed he had kicked out at Blues defender Antonio Rudiger after being fouled.

Tottenham launched an appeal but the FA upheld his red card, meaning Son will now serve a three-game ban ruling him out of the matches at home to Brighton on Boxing Day, and at Norwich and Southampton on Saturday and New Year's Day respectively.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho was unhappy with Rudiger's reaction in the build-up to Son's dismissal, saying he should "stand up and play man" but Blues boss Frank Lampard defended his player's conduct on Tuesday.

Problems aplenty for bealeaguered Sylhet

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram



From the start of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL), Sylhet Thunder have been beset by problems on and off the pitch.

It was learned that there was an argument between Sylhet's team sponsors and team director Tanjil Chowdhury, who was appointed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), over irrelevant player selection during the players' draft.

Then Sylhet's West Indian pacer Krishnar Santokie bowled a huge no-ball against Chattogram Challengers in the opening game, raising concerns about whether there was something underhanded going on.

Tanjil was even quoted in the media as saying that he was not happy after the sponsors roped in Santokie, but later clarified in a social media post that there were no such issues. Exacerbating matters is that Sylhet have lost five and won just one game against Khulna Tigers, that too courtesy of Andre Fletcher's century -- the first of the edition.

Sylhet have national players like Mosaddek Hossain, Mohammad Mithun and Ebadot Hossain, but have so far banked on West Indian recruits like Fletcher and

Johnson Charles. According to Mithun, a lack of opportunities is one of the reasons that locals are yet to perform significantly.

Mithun, who scored an unbeaten 49 against Dhaka Platoon yesterday, hinted at the dissatisfaction and distance between players and team management.

"Look, it's the team management's decision," said Mithun. "The foreign batsmen you mentioned, two of them bat at number two and three. T20 is a short game and you need to have enough opportunity to perform. If I get more overs to bat, naturally the chances are higher for me to score."

Meanwhile, Dhaka's Mahedi Hasan has been a revelation with the bat after being promoted to bat at number three as the right-hander cashed in by smashing consecutive fifties.

"Look, Dhaka's locals are scoring runs. Why? Because those who are batting up the order in their team are all locals. And it's not that our team does not have good batsmen. Obviously, if they get enough chances to bat higher they will also do well," Mithun said.

With the tournament approaching the business end, it will be interesting to see whether Sylhet will be able to make a turnaround, but with the way things are going, it seems unlikely.