

What to WATCH

SONY SIX
Australia v New Zealand
Second Test, Day One
Live from 6:00am
South Africa v England
First Test, Day One

Live from 2:00pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
English Premier League
Tottenham v Brighton
& Hove
Live from 6:30pm

Chelsea v Southampton
Live from 9:00pm
Man United v Newcastle
Live from 11:30pm
Leicester v Liverpool
Live from 2:00am (Friday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
English Premier League
Bournemouth v Arsenal
Live from 9:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Federation Cup
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka
Abahani v Arambagh
Time: 4:00pm

KLOPP TURNS DU PLESSIS INTO FAN

South Africa's cricket captain Faf du Plessis said on Tuesday that a chance meeting with Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp had turned him into a fan. Du Plessis was having dinner with Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi in a Cape Town restaurant in November when Klopp, on a private visit to South Africa, walked in. Du Plessis posted a picture on both Instagram and Twitter showing the two captains and Klopp, commenting that Kolisi had a "man-crush moment". Klopp recognised Kolisi after watching the Springboks win the Rugby World Cup final in Japan some 10 days earlier and came across to congratulate him. "Did he recognise you?" asked a journalist at Du Plessis' press conference. "No," admitted Du Plessis to laughter. — AFP



Chelsea keeping faith in Willian

AFP, London

Willian's performance at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium last weekend highlighted just why Frank Lampard is keen to see the Brazilian's future at Chelsea resolved.

While much of the focus this season has been trained on the outstanding contribution of the youngsters in Blues manager Lampard's squad, Willian's performances on the right of a front three have been consistently excellent.

The winger appeared to have lost his way in recent seasons, particularly last term when he struggled for consistency under Maurizio Sarri and appeared in danger of leaving the London club.

This campaign has been different, though, and Lampard will hope the player can inspire a return to home form when Southampton visit Stamford Bridge on Thursday following Chelsea's impressive 2-0 defeat of Jose Mourinho's Spurs.

Willian was certainly the stand-out performer in a display Lampard admitted was probably his side's best of the season after a worrying run of form that had brought four defeats in the previous five Premier League games, included home losses to Bournemouth and West Ham.

There were always going to be frustrating periods for Lampard and his players in what is a season of transition for Chelsea, who are nevertheless now fourth in the Premier League.

The task of bedding in a number of graduates from the club's academy against the backdrop of the pre-season transfer embargo has inevitably presented challenges.

Willian, though, has maintained impressively high levels, appearing rejuvenated under the club's new manager.



Certainly Lampard appears to have found the key to drawing the best out of the 31-year-old whose work on the right has contributed to striker Tammy Abraham making such a significant impact in his breakthrough season at west London club Chelsea.

Willian's work ethic had been questioned previously, with his failure to track back and support his full-back at times highlighted last season.

This time around, there can be no doubt about his willingness to put in the hard yards.

And he has strengthened his hand in his contract negotiations with the club as he seeks a new deal that will keep him at Chelsea beyond the end of this season.

Willian's existing deal runs out at the end of the current campaign, along with those of fellow thirty-somethings Pedro and Olivier Giroud.

With Chelsea's two-window transfer ban having been halved, leaving the club to bring in new recruits next month, Giroud is likely to leave in a bid to find the regular football he believes will boost his chances of being a member of hosts France's squad for Euro

2020.

Pedro has been reduced to a fringe player and is also expected to move on at the end of the season.

Willian, though, is a different matter and while Chelsea are notoriously reluctant to offer extended deals to players over the age of 30, the Brazilian could become an exception.

For his part, Lampard has made it clear he wants the South American to stay.

And while the manager has no intention of shifting his policy of promoting young players,

	P	W	D	L	G/F	G/A	Pts
Liverpool	17	16	1	0	42	14	49
Leicester	18	12	3	3	41	14	39
Man City	18	12	2	4	50	20	38
Chelsea	18	10	2	6	33	25	32
Sheff Utd	18	7	7	4	22	16	28

he knows the value of experience.

"He's a very important member of the club and of course I want it to be done but obviously both sides have to be happy for that," said Lampard when asked last month about Willian's future.

Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta faces a late fitness test following a hamstring problem sustained at Spurs.

Meanwhile the Saints, flirting with the relegation zone, could be without Shane Long for the whole of the busy Christmas programme because of a knee injury the striker suffered during last week's win at Aston Villa.

Bar lifted on three Abahani players

SPORTS REPORTER



The Supreme Court, on Tuesday, cleared the way for three Abahani footballers to play in the ongoing TVS Federation Cup after a High Court Bench had previously imposed an injunction on those players for three months following an appeal from Sheikh Russel KC, Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu informed yesterday.

Following the stay order, defender Raihan Hasan, defensive midfielder Mohammad Sohel Rana and attacking midfielder Sohel Rana are now available for selection for today's match between Abahani and Arambagh.

The chamber judge of Supreme Court stayed the High Court order for two months. Earlier, Sheikh Russel KC had filed a First Miscellaneous appeal to a High Court bench, which on December 18 restricted those three footballers from playing football under Bangladesh Football Federation for three months as those three footballers allegedly took money from Sheikh Russel during the players' transfers but signed for Abahani for the season of 2019-2020.

"A Supreme Court bench yesterday stayed the High Court injunction on our three players for two months [Tuesday] and asked to settle the matter at the regular court. We sent the copy of the stay order

to Bangladesh Football Federation after 9:00pm on the same day through e-mail," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said yesterday.

"We have received the e-mail from Abahani, but we are waiting for the hard copy. Those players won't have any bar on playing if court stayed the previous order brought," said BFF competition's manager Taher Bin Ansari.

11-time Federation Cup champions Abahani are on top of three-team Group A with three points from one match, leading on goal difference against Bangladesh Police, who have three points from two outings. Arambagh are at the bottom of the group without a point from one match.

Defending champions Abahani are all but confirmed of a quarterfinal berth, but the Sky Blues are looking forward to emerging group champions by notching a win against Arambagh today.

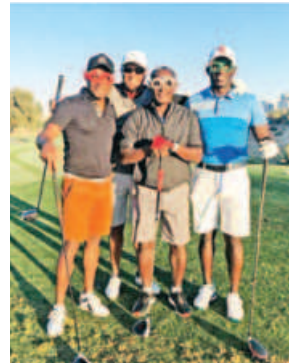
"We are likely to rest a few of players against Arambagh to check out other players, especially foreign recruits. If we don't lose by a massive margin, we will advance to the last eight despite a defeat. However, we will go there to win the match against Arambagh," the former national footballer said, adding that they arranged for Christmas Day celebrations for their Christian players at the club tent after yesterday's training session.

STARS AROUND THE WORLD CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS



Sporting icons were in jovial mood as they celebrated Christmas. From Cristiano Ronaldo to Lionel Messi, from Sachin Tendulkar to Stanislas Wawrinka -- stars from varying sports in different corners of the globe celebrated the occasion with their near ones and posted pictures on their Twitter and Instagram accounts.

PHOTO: TWITTER/INSTAGRAM



Mandzukic quits Juve for Al Duhail

AFP, Paris

Croat striker Mario Mandzukic has quit Juventus to join Al Duhail, the Qatari club announced Tuesday.

According to local media, Mandzukic signed up on a two-and-a-half year contract. No transfer details were given.

The 33-year-old forward has not played for Juve since Mauricio Sarri took over as coach in June.

Al-Duhail are currently top of the Qatari league and count Mandzukic's former Juve teammate Mehdi Benatia in their squad.

In his time with Juventus, where Mandzukic arrived in 2015, he won four league titles, three Italian cups, a Supercup and was also part of the team that lost the 2017 Champions League final.

He previously played for Dinamo Zagreb (2007-10), Wolfsburg (2010-12), Bayern Munich (2012-14) and Atletico Madrid (2014-15).

With Bayern, Mandzukic won two Bundesliga titles as well as the 2013 Champions League. Internationally, he scored 33 goals in 89 appearances for Croatia, making the final of the 2018 World Cup won by France.



Lewa tops scorers' chart

AGENCIES, undated

Robert Lewandowski will finish 2019 as the top scorer at the elite level of world football. The Bayern Munich striker has netted 54 goals in 58 matches with his club and the Polish national team since January 1.

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo have dominated this crown in the last decade, apart from when Edin Dzeko (2009) and Harry Kane (2017) led the way. This year, Messi has scored 50 goals in 58 games but has missed four matches for Argentina after getting suspended at the Copa America.

In third place is Kylian Mbappe, who has scored 44 goals in 49 games for Paris Saint-Germain and France.

Raheem Sterling is currently in fourth with 41 goals for Manchester City and England, and he could add to that tally before the year is out. Outside of Europe, Eran Zahavi (40 goals for Guangzhou R&F and Israel) and Carlos Vela (38 goals for LAFC) also make the top 10.

'MU further behind in development'

REUTERS, undated



Manchester United have not progressed as much as what manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer had hoped for as they near the halfway stage of the Premier League season, but the Norwegian said his team would become more consistent with experience.

Solskjaer, who took charge of United in December last year, has guided the team to eighth in the standings after 18 games and their tally of 25 points is four fewer than what they had collected at this stage last season.

The 2-0 loss to bottom-placed Watford on Sunday was their fifth of the campaign, with the team failing to build on wins over Tottenham Hotspur and champions Manchester City earlier this month.

"At the moment we're a little bit further behind than what I was hoping for," Solskjaer told the British media. "We knew this season was going to be a season of some ups and downs."

United have failed to win more than two league games in a row this season but Solskjaer said that they needed time to reach their best form.

"This season will be used to find a team for next season, but hopefully we can speed this process up by getting more results," the 46-year-old added.

"We want to be a team that can go and dominate and break teams down. It has taken Liverpool a few years to get to that state and we need to keep on building because that's what we want to get to."

"I expect us to be more consistent, definitely more experienced and learning from these setbacks."

United take on ninth-placed Newcastle United in the league on Thursday before visiting Burnley on Saturday.

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