

WHAT TO WATCH

SONY SIX
UEFA Europa League
Ajax vs Young Boys
Live from 11:55 pm
AS Roma vs Shakhtar Donetsk
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
TEN 1
UEFA Europa League

Slavia Prague vs Rangers
Live from 11:55 pm
Dinamo Zagreb vs Tottenham
Hotspur
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
TEN 2
UEFA Europa League
Manchester United vs AC Milan

Live from 11:55 pm
Olympiacos vs Arsenal
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
T SPORTS
Road Safety World Series
England Legends vs South Africa
Legends
Live from 7:30 pm



Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal speaks to local media while Mushfiqur Rahim greets Mehedi Hasan Miraz with a warm hug prior to the team's departure from Christchurch following the completion of the mandatory 14-day quarantine yesterday.



PHOTO: BCB

Tigers' team training starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

There were incredible scenes in Christchurch yesterday as the Bangladesh cricketers greeted each other heartily after being finally free from isolation following the end of 14-day mandatory quarantine period. Having tested negative in four tests, the Tigers can now roam freely around the country without having to adhere to any bio-bubble or any other complex health protocol, thanks to the better coronavirus situation in New Zealand.

"Really feeling good as it was for the very first time that we have had such an experience. We were inside the bio-bubble in the past but never spent time isolated. To be honest they (New Zealand authorities) have taken great care of us and we can only thank New Zealand Cricket. It's not easy to go through such an experience but they tried to make us feel comfortable," Bangladesh's ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal told local media in Christchurch before leaving for Queenstown. The team was expected to reach Queenstown yesterday for a five-day training camp and a practise match as they will start training together as a team for the first time

since arriving in New Zealand on February 24. Former New Zealand spinner and Tigers' spin bowling consultant Daniel Vettori has already reached Queenstown and will join the team immediately. "He (Daniel Vettori) has already reached Queenstown and is waiting for us to arrive," Tamim said. "We will have a few training sessions there and will play a match as well. We are looking forward to it as we practised in small groups during the isolation period but from tomorrow (Thursday), we will start training as a unit." March 15 will mark the second anniversary of the horrific mosque attack in Christchurch, which

took the lives of 51 people and Bangladesh team, who were in the same city at that time, narrowly survived the fatal shoot-out. Members of the team were supposed to call their Jummah prayers in that mosque that day. "It's a very sensitive part of my life that took a long time for me to recover from. Those who lost their close ones, we have to pay our respect towards them and pray so that they can remain strong. I don't want to go deep as the feelings are not good. But New Zealand has always been fascinating to come to, again and again and in future too. Apart from that one incident, New Zealand has always been wonderful," said Tamim.

Dribbling past family and into the national team

ANISUR RAHMAN



Mehedi Hasan Royal is a student of the law department of Kushtia Islamic University but his passion since childhood has been football.

That passion has finally been rewarded as the 25-year-old won a place in the national football team on Tuesday.

"I have always been asked by my parents and elder brother to prioritise studies but I have always preferred sports, keeping education as the second option," Muktijoddha Sangad KC forward Royal told The Daily Star yesterday.

Royal, who has grown up in Mohammadpur area of Magura, started playing top-flight football in 2014-15 season with Team BJMC. The forward has been with Muktijoddha SKC for the last three seasons and made it to the final squad of the national team.

"I did not talk to my elder brother -- Khaledur Rahman Titu -- for three or four years after he directed me to achieve A-plus results by giving up football," said Royal. "My parents also supported my elder brother but I continued playing football in secret, storing my boots and jerseys outside home."

Royal however started making his family members notice his presence in football by earning money from the game, and so they eventually allowed him to continue playing.

"I was often hired to play outside my upazila in return for Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 per match and I handed that money to my parents. At times, I earned Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 per season, so my guardians did

not bar me from playing football," said the forward.

Royal trained for three months in Shamsul Huda Football Academy in Jashore before moving to Dhaka to play the Pioneer Football League in 2013.

He returned to Magura and continued training at the Asaduzzaman Football Academy before joining BJMC in the Bangladesh Premier League. He was then called up to the national U-19 squad to play the AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers in Dhaka in 2016.

The lad from Magura had make to sacrifices in terms of his education to play the Bangladesh Premier League, as he could not attend classes regularly.

"I was supposed to be admitted in the master's programme in the law department at Kushtia University this year, but I have to sit again for the fourth-year exam because I could not do well in the honours final year because of playing football in Dhaka," said Royal.

Royal, five feet and 10 inches tall, struck only two goals in the first phase of the professional football league this year. He had scored three goals and assisted four to five goals in his debut season at Muktijoddha Sangad and netted only one goal in his second season.

"I never thought that I would be selected for the national team in such manner, although there was a slim hope," said Royal. "I don't know whether I played well but I tried my best and coach Jamie Day knows how I performed in the just concluded first phase of the Bangladesh Premier League."

Royal is now eager to cement a place in the national team by working hard in the training camp.



Haaland shines on Ronaldo's day of misery

AGENCIES

On a night when Cristiano Ronaldo's hopes of winning a sixth UEFA Champions League title were dashed, Borussia Dortmund's Erling Haaland enhanced his wrecking-ball reputation with yet another goal-scoring masterclass.

While Haaland's double helped Dortmund secure a 2-2 draw against Sevilla in their second-leg match that sent them into the quarter-finals 5-4 on aggregate, Ronaldo's Juventus crashed out of the Champions League in the last 16 for the second year running on Tuesday, losing to 10-man Porto on away goals despite winning the second leg 3-2 in Turin.

Haaland became the fastest player to reach 20 goals in the Champions League, as well as the youngest, after scoring twice against Sevilla in the last 16.

He was also more than a year younger than Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe when he reached that mark just short of his 22nd birthday. He is also the top-scorer in the Champions League this season with 10 goals in just six games.

"It was a hard game -- I'm tired now, but to be in the next round feels very big," Haaland said. "It was a crazy game and a crazy win."

"We knew that they were going to come at us very hard, but when we scored they needed three -- to be 1-0 up at halftime was very good and it was a nice goal."

Haaland's first goal was a tap-in from a Marco Reus cutback but his second was a retaken penalty after his first effort was saved.



Erling Haaland is now the fastest player to score 20 goals in the UEFA Champions League, achieving this feat in just 14 matches.

The 20-year-old striker surpassed the previous record set by Harry Kane, who took 24 games to score the same number of goals.

He is now the leading scorer with ten goals in the 2020-21 Champions League as five players are tied in the second spot with six goals and has also become the youngest player to score in six consecutive Champions League appearances.

The Norwegian prodigy has become the first player to score at least twice in four consecutive games in the history of the tournament.

Haaland is now Norway's all-time top scorer in the competition, with one more goal than current Manchester United coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.



Juventus have not advanced past the quarter-finals since five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo arrived from Real Madrid in 2018, having finished runners-up in two of the previous four seasons prior to his blockbuster signing. Juve has been knocked out by Ajax, Lyon and now Porto for the past three seasons.

The penalty was controversially awarded after a lengthy VAR review involving a foul on Haaland minutes earlier.

While it was a night to boast records for Haaland, who, according to Sevilla coach Julien Lopetegui "will dominate an era", Ronaldo drew a blank, needing Juve coach Andrea Pirlo's support after an average performance.

Aside from his assist for Federico Chiesa's first goal, Ronaldo was largely subdued against Porto, but Pirlo defended the five-time Champions League winner.

"When Ronaldo plays in Champions League usually is like your team begin the game one goal ahead of your opponent. But it can happen even to an extraordinary player like him not to be able to score," Pirlo said.

Their failure to reach the quarter finals was remarkably similar to last season's away goals exit to Olympique Lyonnais, with manager Maurizio Sarri sacked at the end of the campaign despite winning a ninth-straight Serie A title for Juve.

Man Utd face Milan tonight

AFP, London

Manchester United and AC Milan meet in the Europa League last 16 tonight in a battle of European royalty, with both clubs showing signs of revival.

With 10 Champions League titles between them, United and Milan were once feared across Europe for their swashbuckling play and financial muscle. But both clubs have lost their lustre in recent years, making their first meeting since 2010 an intriguing affair. In a sign of the drop in standards at Old Trafford and the San Siro, the 11th encounter between two of the world's most historic teams will be their first outside the Champions League knockout stages.



[L] Bangladesh Green all-rounder Ritu Moni shone with ball (two wickets) and then bat (51 not out) during her team's six-wicket win against Bangladesh Red in their Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. [R] National table tennis player-turned-coach Mohammad Ali instructs his players during a training session ahead of the league and the Bangladesh Games at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB/FIROZ AHMED

Salahuddin condemns DFAs' inactivity

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin came down heavily on the leaders of District Football Associations for not holding the much-talked District Football League across the country.

"Forum [an organization of district sports associations] is very active during the election but no one is found after the competition of elections. They even don't want to hold the football leagues citing different excuses," said Salahuddin after presiding over the first meeting of the BFF District Football League Committee at the BFF House yesterday.

BFF claims to have disbursed Tk 5 lakh for each of 63 out of 64 DFAs in December, 2019. However, only 13 districts completed their respective leagues before Chattogram and Bogura leagues were suspended due to coronavirus.

At the moment, Nilphamari, Meherpur and Rangpur are conducting leagues while 12 more districts promised to start this month.

"My message is, either do politics or the league. I won't accept any excuse," said Salahuddin.

BFF also instructed DFAs, who were unable to hold the league, to provide updates on the matter within 10 days. It also asked them to start the league coordinating with the BFF calendar.

The meeting also decided to audit financial statements of a couple of DFAs while all the associations were requested to submit related documents behind every expenditure.

Salahuddin also told the reporters that FIFA sought justification regarding BFF having a total of 139 delegates.

Asghar ton puts Afghans on top

AFP, ABU DHABI

Skipper Asghar Afghan hit his maiden century to lead Afghanistan to an imposing 307-3 on the opening day of the second Test against Zimbabwe in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old right hander notched 106 not out -- the highest individual score by an Afghan in a Test -- off just 135 balls with 12 boundaries and two sixes after winning the toss and opting to bat on a flat pitch.

Asghar shared a record 186-run fourth wicket partnership with Hashmatullah Shahidi (86 not out at close) in the short six-Test history of Afghanistan.

The duo halted Zimbabwe's charge after they removed opener Javed Ahmadi (four) in the second over of the match by Nyauchi.

Ibrahim Zadran, who scored 72 with eight boundaries, added 50 with Rahmat who was run out for 23.

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