

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

SAFF Championship

Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka

Live from 05:00 pm

Nepal vs Maldives

Live from 10:00 pm

GTV & STAR SPORTS HD 1

IPL

Kolkata vs Punjab

Live from 08:00 pm

MTV INDIA

La Liga

Athletic Bilbao vs Alaves

Live from 01:00 am

(Saturday)

Support aplenty for men in red and green

ANISUR RAHMAN FROM MALE

“I have already bought a ticket to watch Bangladesh’s opening match against Sri Lanka after standing in a long queue on Wednesday. Many Bangladeshis living here are also waiting to buy tickets,” expatriate Mansur Ali contentedly answered ahead of the start of the SAFF Championship in Male today.

There may be less enthusiasm among locals for the SAFF Championship, but there is no shortage of excitement among Bangladeshi expatriates, especially for matches featuring Bangladesh.

Hoping for a winning start against Sri Lanka, Shakil Ahmed, a hotel employee, said: “The match between hosts the Maldives and Bangladesh will be



interesting and I want to enjoy that match from the gallery.”

Whatever Bangladesh produce on the field under the guidance of new coach Oscar Bruzon, they will undoubtedly get whole-hearted support from their supporters as they aim for a first SAFF Championship final appearance in 16 years.

Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan expects plenty of spectators to turn out and support them from the gallery throughout the tournament.

“It is good that Bangladeshi fans are here to support us. We are really happy about that. Yesterday (Wednesday), some expatriates came to watch our practice. So, that is extra motivation for us. Hopefully, we can give something back to them,” Jamal told journalists outside the press conference room, also sharing his thoughts on the match against Sri

Lanka, who Bangladesh last defeated 3-0 during the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in early 2020.

“I’m not worried about the previous matches. It is a new match and we will have a different attitude because each game is different and we have to think about the new game. Each game is like a final, so tomorrow we are going to have a good attitude and we will go forward,” Jamal said.

The 9,000-capacity stadium, situated in one part of the 8.30-square-km city, is likely to host only half of its capacity due to Covid-19 regulations and restrictions.

Although the festivity of the SAFF Championship is not widespread in Male, some streets have been decked out in national flags and taxi driver Ali Kadir Ghani was well-aware of the decorations around the city as well as at the stadium,

which was revamped ahead of the championship.

Similar to the uplift in regards to the stadium, Sri Lanka’s Bosnia-born-Australian coach Amir Algic wants to lift up his charges through a good show against Bangladesh. The Islanders feature a few overseas forwards like England-based Marvin Hamilton, Queen Park Rangers U-23 striker Dillon De Silva and German-based Ahmed Wazeem Razeek.

“The first game is very important for every team to raise their standards and expectations,” Algic said at a press conference ahead of the opening match.

However, Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan wants to remain positive till the last whistle.

“We want to start the tournament in a positive way and play 90 minutes of possession football. I hope we can do very well against Sri Lanka and the main goal is to get three points tomorrow.”

‘WELL, HE’S CRISTIANO RONALDO’

AFP, Manchester



Cristiano Ronaldo’s record 178th Champions League game had been one of his quietest for 94 minutes until the ball broke kindly for him to break Villarreal hearts at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Manchester United’s returning hero rode to the rescue just in time to salvage a 2-1 win from another performance which cast more doubt over where the Red Devils are headed under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

The Norwegian badly needed three points after a run of three defeats in four games and got it with seconds to spare.

However, Solskjaer conceded United had “got lucky” and were “saved” by goalkeeper David de Gea as Villarreal enjoyed the overwhelming majority of the chances.

The difference between the sides was in who was on the end of those opportunities. De Gea denied Arnaut Danjuma, Paco Alcacer, Moi Gomez and Boulaye Dia either side of Alcacer’s deserved opener for the visitors on 53 minutes.

Alex Telles’ spectacular strike from distance quickly restored parity, but it was not for another half an hour that the all-time top goalscorer in the Champions League took centre stage.

“Cristiano Ronaldo only got one chance and, well, he’s Cristiano Ronaldo,” said Villarreal defender Juan Foyth, who had kept United’s most expensive summer signing

Jadon Sancho quiet all night.

Sancho and Raphael Varane’s arrival in the transfer window had already raised expectations at United this season before Ronaldo’s stunning second coming in Manchester.

In Ronaldo’s five games since returning to the club, he’s scored five times. But he has also already been on the losing side twice and twice more United have needed late winners to dig themselves out of trouble.



While Robert Lewandowski made the record of scoring in 18 straight Champions League games when he netted twice in Bayern Munich’s crushing 5-0 victory over visitors Dynamo Kyiv, it was a winner from Federico Chiesa that helped a struggling Juventus to a hard-fought 1-0 win over holders Chelsea in Turin. Meanwhile, life at Barcelona for coach Ronald Koeman became much more dubious after his side were humbled 3-0 away to Benfica.

PHOTO: TWITTER



everything is open and we believe we can go through.”

United move level on three points with Young Boys, one behind Group F leaders Atalanta.

However, that there is even any doubt over United’s progress to the last 16 speaks volumes for Solskjaer’s inability so far this season to get the best out of a stellar cast.

Ronaldo, Sancho, Mason Greenwood, Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba all started in an offensive-minded team selection.

But Villarreal cut through the United midfield with ease on the counter-attack to expose a defence missing the presence of three of the first-choice back four due to injuries to Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw, and Aaron Wan-Bissaka’s suspension.

“Thankfully we had the best goalkeeper in the world tonight,” said Solskjaer. “David was fantastic. The United boss continued to unload his artillery from the bench as Edinson Cavani and Jesse Lingard were sent on in search of a winner.

And finally the home side’s depth of talent paid off as Lingard calmly rolled the ball into Ronaldo’s path to smash home his 136th Champions League goal as Old Trafford erupted. “What a game @ManUtd. Epic winner by @Cristiano,” tweeted Usain Bolt, who had been watching from the stands.

But it was a get-out-of-jail-free card for Solskjaer. And it buys him some time rather than a vindication of his credentials to lead United back to the status they enjoyed during Ronaldo’s first spell at the club under Alex Ferguson.

BCB elections take final form

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board’s (BCB’s) Election Commission yesterday released the final list of candidates to contest the upcoming elections, set for October 6.

Four candidates -- Tanvir Ahmed, Naimur Rahman, Syed Ashrafur Islam and Khalid Hossain -- will contest two spots from Dhaka Division in Category 1. From Rajshahi Division, Khaled Masud and Saiful Alam will contest one spot under Category 1.

On Thursday, the final day for withdrawals, Shawkat Aziz Russell withdrew his name.

In Category 2, comprised of club representatives, 16 candidates will contest 12 spots. BCB president Nazmul Hassan, Gazi Golam Mortaza, Nozib Ahmed, Mahbub-Ul-Alam, Masud-Uz-Zaman, Obaid Rashid Nizam, Saiful Islam, Salahuddin Chowdhury, Ismail Haider Mollick, Enayed Hossain, Fahim Sinha, Iftekhar Rahman, Manzur Kader, Mohammad Abdur Rahman, Mohammad Rofiqul Islam, Mohammad Manzur Alam are the confirmed contestants from Category 2.

In category-3, veteran coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim will contest former national captain and influential director, Khaled Mahmud Sujon, for the lone post.

Nine individuals had earlier been confirmed as uncontested in category 1 and the district and division category. Returning officer Ali Reza confirmed that the results of the elections will be published on October 6 as well.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mash’s help in expanding Taskin’s repertoire

SPORTS REPORTER



the veteran’s experience is still much sought after by the cricketers in the national side, especially when it comes to nuances of pace bowling.

Mashrafe was able to share his experience with members of the World Cup side with fast-bowling coach Otis Gibson also present alongside him at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. Mash talked in detail with Taskin regarding the grips of deliveries and it appeared there was one particular grip and wrist movement the three were honing in on.

After some discussion, Mash laid down his cap and asked Taskin to land the deliveries near the cap or on it, in order to get the direction right. Slower deliveries were the focus for the men out in the middle, with Soumya Sarkar and Nurul Hasan also in attendance.

Slower cutters would be one of pacers’ pivotal tools in the World Cup in UAE and Taskin felt work needed to be done ahead of the tournament.

After every delivery that Taskin bowled in the net, Mash was seen animatedly talking to his protégé as Taskin arrived

at the run-up mark. Soumya was a keen bystander, trying to absorb the techniques behind slower.

“He [Mashrafe] actually showed me two or three grips. And he told me that it is not possible to work on a lot of things at a time. As we have a lot of matches in the near future, he asked me to keep practicing cutters for the time being. So he showed me the grip and technique for it [cutters] and said that once I get hold of it, I can try other things as well,” Taskin told reporters yesterday.

“My slower are weaker than others and the grips he showed me were different from the ones I tried previously,” said Taskin, who was looking to find some balance of length and line after getting the feel of the new grip.

Taskin had always been keen on bowling at pace but his recent resurgence is more to do with calibration of line and getting a hint of swing. But he was not going to bank wholly on cutters yet.

“I am not going to compromise with my pace. I cannot be Mustafizur [Rahman]. Mustafizur is the cutter master. What I am trying to do is add a bit of slower [variations] in my bowling,” Taskin concluded.

Having been taken for runs in recent times, Taskin and Mash will hope the variations can put that little bit of doubt in the batters mind in the upcoming World Cup.

‘Free’ Afghan girls harbour new dreams

REUTERS, LISBON

Leaving her homeland Afghanistan was painful, says 15-year-old Sarah. But now safely in Portugal, she hopes to pursue her dream of playing soccer professionally - and perhaps meeting her idol, star striker Cristiano Ronaldo.

Sarah was one of several players from Afghanistan’s national female youth soccer squad who fled their country in fear after the Taliban hardline Islamist movement seized power in August.

Portugal has granted asylum to the young footballers. “I’m free,” she said, smiling from ear-to-ear as she visited Lisbon’s landmark Belem Tower on the River Tagus with her mother and teammates. “My dream is to be a good player like Ronaldo - and I want to be a big business woman here in Portugal,” she said.

She hoped to go back home one day but only if she can live freely.

Her mother, who requested that Reuters did not use their surname, had experienced first-hand a previous era of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001. She is less optimistic they will ever be able to return.

Taliban leaders have promised to respect women’s rights but under their first government, women could not work and girls were banned from school. Women had to cover their faces and be accompanied by a male

relative when they left home.

A senior Taliban official said after the Aug. 15 takeover that women would probably not be allowed to play sport because it was “not necessary” and their bodies might be exposed. “The reason we took on this mission (to evacuate the team) was to ensure they can aspire and play the sport they love,” said Farkhunda Muhtaj, captain

rescue a total of 80 people - the female youth team and family members, including babies. They landed in Portugal on Sept. 19.

When Muhtaj showed up on Wednesday night, the girls were ecstatic. They hugged. Some could not hold back the tears. “They’ve been through so much, so many challenges,” Muhtaj said. “They were



The captain of Afghanistan’s national women football team Farkhunda Muhtaj (C) poses for a photo with teammates at the Belem Tower in Lisbon.

of the Afghanistan women’s senior national team, who flew to Lisbon on Wednesday to surprise the youth team players.

From her home in Canada, where she works as assistant soccer coach at a local university, Muhtaj has been in touch with the girls throughout the evacuation process, codenamed Operation Soccer Balls. It managed to

just resilient and they were able to make it happen.”

One relative, 25-year-old Zaki Rasa, recalled the chaos at the Kabul airport, where he spent three anguished days. He is now delighted to be in Portugal and wants to continue his studies. “There is some uncertainty about the future,” he said. “The important thing is that we are safe.”



Md. Sayum, one of the hardest hitters of the golf ball in Bangladesh, clinched the Runner Group Professional Golf Tournament 2021 at the Army Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: BPGA