

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
SAFF Championship
Final
India vs Nepal
Live from 9:00 pm
La Liga
Levante vs Getafe

Live from 11:00 pm
Real Sociedad VS
Mallorca
Live from 01:00 am
(Sunday)
STAR SPORTS HD 1
EPL

Watford vs Liverpool
Live from 05:30 pm
Leicester vs
Manchester United
Live from 08:00 pm
Brentford vs Chelsea
Live from 10:30 pm

STAR SPORTS HD 2
EPL
Manchester City vs
Burnley
Live from 08:00 pm
TEN 2
Bundesliga

Dortmund vs Mainz
Live from 07:30 pm
Monchengladbach vs
Stuttgart
Live from 10:30 pm



PHOTO: AFP

Martinez takes Argentina run to 25 unbeaten

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Peru missed a second-half penalty in a 1-0 loss to Argentina in Buenos Aires on Thursday, delivering another blow to their hopes of qualifying for the 2022 World Cup.

Trailing to a first-half goal from Lautaro Martinez, Peru had a golden opportunity to level the score when substitute Jefferson Farfan was brought down in the box 19 minutes into the second half as he attempted to round keeper Emiliano Martinez.

However, Yoshimar Yotun's penalty clipped the bar as the visitors fell to a seventh defeat in 12 qualifiers.

"Those that take penalties are the great players and the rest is luck," said Argentine goalkeeper Martinez.

Lionel Messi complained about the

refereeing of Brazilian referee Wilton Sampaio.

"Hard game, difficult to play. A lot of wind at the ground, and they [Peru] did not leave to much space behind. Whenever this referee officiates our matches, he does the same thing. It seems that he does it on purpose. But we have three important points that bring us closer to the goal," Messi wrote on Instagram.

Argentina's Christian Romero had a headed goal disallowed for offside after 10 minutes and Angel Di Maria missed two good chances while Peru's Gianluca Lapadula squandered an excellent opportunity after skilfully chesting down a cross just metres from goal.

Argentina deservedly took the lead three minutes from half time when Martinez glanced a header into the roof of the net.



'This is me fulfilling my childhood dream'

AGENCIES



Raphinha turned in another eye-catching performance for Brazil on Thursday by scoring twice in the home side's 4-1 victory over Uruguay in a World Cup qualifier.

Brazil took the lead after 10 minutes when Neymar chested down a pass from Fred and rounded the keeper before firing low between two defenders on the goal-line.

Raphinha made it 2-0 after 18 minutes when he bundled home a parried shot from close range and then made it 3-0 after 58 minutes,

completing a superb counterattack with an angled shot.

Luis Suarez scored a consolation goal for Uruguay with a 77th minute free kick before Gabriel Barbosa restored Brazil's three-goal cushion with a header seven minutes from time.

"This couldn't be more memorable for me," Raphinha said. "This is me fulfilling my childhood dream. It's so gratifying to score. 'It's going to be very difficult to forget this night.'"

Raphinha, however, praised Neymar's performance. "Playing with Ney was very easy. I am a big fan of his, I take a lot of inspiration from him, in the way he plays and dribbles the opposition," Raphinha

said. "I watch a lot of his videos. To have played alongside is a dream coming true."

With 70 international goals, Neymar is now just seven goals shy off Pele's record. "A giant by nature," Neymar said in the caption of an Instagram picture of himself celebrating.

Both Neymar and Raphinha could have scored more, with Uruguayan keeper Fernando Muslera thwarting both in quick succession early in the second half.

It was a measure of Brazil's superiority that Muslera was Uruguay's best player on a poor night for the visitors, who have now won only two of their last nine qualifiers. Brazil are now six

points clear in the South American qualifying group, ahead of second-placed Argentina who beat Peru 1-0 on Thursday.

The top four qualify automatically for Qatar 2022 and the fifth-placed side goes into an inter-regional playoff.

Also on Thursday, Chile beat Venezuela 3-0 to record their second successive win. Erick Pulgar scored twice in the first half, both off Alexis Sanchez assists, and Ben Brereton made it 3-0 17 minutes from time to lift Chile onto 13 points in sixth place.

Venezuela, who have lost nine of 12 qualifiers, are bottom of the group on seven points, four adrift of Peru.



PHOTO: TWITTER

Can Himalayan David slay neighbour Goliath?

ANISUR RAHMAN from Male



The curtain of the 13th SAFF Championship draws to a close today after the seven-time champions India take on debutant finalist Nepal in the closing match of the regional football extravaganza at Maldives' National Football Stadium in Male.

As Bangladesh and hosts Maldives have bowed out from the group stage, the enthusiasm has seemingly dropped among the local spectators and Bangladeshi expatriates, who kept the stadium bursting with energy of the deafening sounds of percussion and roar.

The turnout in the final, scheduled to get underway at 9:00 pm (Bangladesh time), is anticipated to be low with the Nepalese spectators being predicted to outnumber their Indian counterparts.

The two finalists had a contrasting start in this showcase football event of South Asia. India surprisingly struggled from the beginning with two successive draws before confirming their 12th final berth of SAFF Championship with two back-to-back victories while Nepal had a flying start, as they notched up two successive wins before crawling their way into their maiden final berth in the 28-year history of the regional competition.

The battle between Nepal and India is analogous to the fight between David and Goliath if the head-to-head record -- that saw India defeat Nepal 15 times against a single loss and five draws -- is taken into consideration.

Moreover, India possess someone like Sunil Chhetri in their ranks, who already struck four goals in the ongoing

tournament while overtaking a 77-goal tally of the legendary Pele in the process. Thus, India has the ability to turn the tides in their favour even if they are having an off day on the field.

In the SAFF Championship's history, Nepal had the top result with a third-place finish during the inaugural edition in 1993 and since then, the Himalayan nation could not cross the hurdles of the semifinals in five attempts, during 1995, 1999, 2011, 2013 and 2018.

Leaving statistics and 'Chhetri factor' aside, there are not many striking

1-2 down in the second match. And in the group-stage match of the ongoing tournament, the Blue Tigers had to wait till the 82nd minute to ensure their victory.

For Nepal, playing the maiden final of SAFF Championship is a big motivation by itself, no doubt, however, they will definitely miss the service of their influential forward Anjan Bista, who earned a penalty kick and converted it against Bangladesh.

Having lost six times against India in the SAFF Championship so far, still,

HEAD TO HEAD IN SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

1993	India	1	-	0	Nepal
2005	India	2	-	1	Nepal
2008	India	4	-	0	Nepal
2009	India	1	-	0	Nepal
2013	India	1	-	2	Nepal
2015	India	4	-	1	Nepal
2019	India	1	-	0	Nepal

[OVERALL: INDIA PLAYED 22 MATCHES; W-15, D-6, L-1]

differences between the two sides as the recent matches have witnessed evenly balanced battles even though India had the last laughs.

Before the current SAFF Championship began, India and Nepal played two friendly matches in which Nepal held their superior opponents to a draw in the first game before going

Nepal can derive inspiration from their lone victory, which happened in 2013's edition. So now, can Nepal ride against the tides of probability and write their name alongside former champions India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan? Or will India continue to have the bragging rights over their neighbours?



PHOTO: TWITTER



Newcastle launch new era as United grapple with injuries

AFP, London



Struggling Newcastle find themselves in the unusual position of being the Premier League's headline act at the start of their Saudi-led revolution this weekend.

So often consigned to the margins during decades of underachievement, all eyes will be on the club on Sunday when they host Tottenham in their first match since the controversial takeover that has Magpies fans dreaming of joining Europe football's elite.

Manchester United must defy injury problems as they look to get back on track at Leicester, while leaders Chelsea cannot underestimate a Brentford team unfazed by big reputations.

Newcastle can suddenly look forward to a brighter future thanks to the blockbuster 305 million (\$418 million) takeover driven by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, which has taken an 80 percent stake in the club.

The departure of disliked former owner Mike Ashley and the vast financial resources provided by the Saudis could turn Newcastle into a major force in years to come.

But while they aim to emulate cash-rich Manchester City, for now they must focus on the fight for survival.

The only way is up for the Magpies, whose new owners arrive with the team languishing in the relegation zone, winless after their first seven league games.

Manager Steve Bruce is expected to make way for a high-profile replacement but Newcastle hinted at a stay of execution on Thursday when they said the beleaguered boss will handle media duties before the Spurs game.

Amnesty International has criticised the takeover, accusing Saudi Arabia of "sportswashing" its human rights record.

But Newcastle midfielder Jonjo Shelvey said it was a much-needed boost for long-suffering fans of a club that last won major silverware in 1969.

"This is unbelievable for the club. I understand what the fans want, they want (Kylian) Mbappe

and (Lionel) Messi," he said. "That won't come overnight, we have to be realistic. But this club can achieve anything it wants now. The sky is the limit."

After the adrenaline rush of Cristiano Ronaldo's return to Old Trafford, reality has started to bite for Manchester United. Ronaldo's goal spree at the start of his second spell with United following his move from Juventus papered over some cracks in Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side that threaten to derail their bid for a first major trophy since 2017.

Hampered by inconsistent attacking play and defensive blunders, United have won just two of their past six games in all competitions.

A home League Cup defeat against West Ham and a limp draw in the league with Everton raised serious questions about their title aspirations.

France defender Raphael Varane will be sidelined for several weeks with a groin injury, while fellow centre-back Harry Maguire is not certain to return against Leicester on Saturday after a calf problem. With fourth-placed United facing Liverpool, Tottenham and Manchester City over the next month, there is no time for Solskjaer and company to lick their wounds.

Chelsea face Brentford test Off the pitch, the financial gulf between European champions Chelsea and their west London neighbours Brentford is vast, but Saturday's first league match between the clubs for 74 years could be a lot closer than it appears on paper.

While Chelsea can call on some of the most expensive players in Europe, their unheralded neighbours have returned to the top flight for the first time since 1947 thanks to the shrewd use of analytics in the transfer market and manager Thomas Frank's tactics.

Brentford have already bloodied the noses of some of their more illustrious top-flight peers, beating Arsenal 2-0 and holding Liverpool to a thrilling 3-3 draw.

Chelsea's hopes of retaining their narrow lead at the top of the table rest on matching Brentford's intensity levels, with N'Golo Kante's return from the coronavirus providing a boost for Thomas Tuchel's side.