

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

Bangladesh vs Pakistan
1st Test, Day 1
Live from 10:00 am
Abu Dhabi T10

Bangla Tigers vs
Team Abu Dhabi
Live from 08:00 am
Chennai Braves vs Deccan
Gladiators

Live from 10:00 pm
La Liga
Athletic Bilbao vs
Granada
Live from 02:00 am

(Saturday)
STAR SPORTS 1
India vs New Zealand
1st Test, Day 2
Live from 10:00 am

'Guilty' Benzema shines for Real

AFP, TIRASPOL



Karim Benzema scored just hours after being found guilty by a French court in a blackmail case as Real Madrid saw off Sheriff Tiraspol 3-0 on Wednesday to reach the Champions League knockout stage.

The France striker notched his team's third goal of a confident display in Transnistria, as Real exacted revenge for their shock 2-1 loss to Sheriff in Madrid earlier this season.

The victory sends the Spanish giants back to the top of Group D, two points clear of second-placed Inter Milan, who also qualified for the last 16 after beating Shakhtar Donetsk 2-0.

Madrid now only need to avoid defeat in their final group game against Inter at the Santiago Bernabeu to finish first in the group.

Benzema got his goal in the 55th minute, finding space on the edge of the box and drilling the ball into the bottom corner to score for the 15th time this season.

It was also the 76th goal of the striker's Champions League career and according to Real coach Carlo Ancelotti, the Frenchman is keeping calm despite the verdict.

"We have not talked about it (the court verdict), he is calm, it is a subject concerning him that we have been talking about for a long time," Ancelotti said.

"We continue along the right



path. I like the way we're playing," added Ancelotti, whose side beat Inter 1-0 in their first group game in September.

"The squad is in good shape, everyone is strong physically. It's important for us to finish top and

we'll be looking to end our group campaign the way we've begun it."

Benzema, who was given a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail his former France team-mate Mathieu Valbuena, had an early effort ruled

out for offside.

Earlier, Madrid were dominant but struggled to find a way through, with Rodrygo shooting tamely at home goalkeeper Giorgos Athanasiadis in the 18th minute.

But the away side did forge ahead on the half-hour mark through David Alaba.

The Austrian defender's free-kick was deflected by the Sheriff wall and past the helpless Athanasiadis.

The hosts were struggling to get out of their own half and Dani Carvajal almost added a second for Real when he volleyed narrowly over the crossbar.

The 13-time European champions did double their advantage in first-half stoppage time, though, as a fantastic move was ended by Toni Kroos' first-time shot which flew in off the crossbar and was awarded by goalline technology.

HIGHLIGHTS

There's a lot going on as the UEFA Champions League heads into the final matchday of the group stage. But here's what's certain: Manchester City, PSG, Liverpool, Ajax, Sporting Lisbon, Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Bayern Munich, Manchester United, Chelsea and Juventus have all already qualified for the knockout stage. That leaves five spots up for grabs on the final matchday, with powerhouses like Barcelona, Atlético Madrid and AC Milan alongside Sevilla, FC Porto, Benfica, Villarreal, Atalanta and Slazburg among those fighting for their Champions League survival.



Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus and Raheem Sterling were on target during their absorbing 2-1 win at Etihad against PSG, who also made it to the last 16 despite the defeat. Meanwhile, Liverpool, who had already qualified for the last 16, strolled past Porto at Anfield, thanks to strikes from Mohamed Salah and Thiago Alcantara. It was also a memorable night for Ajax's Sebastien Haller as his double during a 2-1 win over Besiktas saw him become the player with the most goals after his first five games in the competition.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Abahani buckle up to dethrone Kings

SPORTS REPORTER



The last time the country's renowned outfit Abahani tasted glory was through the Federation Cup during the 2018-19 season, in which Bashundhara Kings, now a new powerhouse, first arrived in the top-flight domestic circuit. Since that triumph, Abahani failed to destabilise Kings, who clean-swept all five trophies in the past three seasons.

Six-time Premier League champions Abahani had previously relied on aged players, who were far from their peak to compete with Kings on level terms but this time the crowd-puller Sky Blues have banked on some proven campaigners from the national team and heavily boosted by the inclusion of a quality foreign player like Costa Rica's Daniel Colindres, who was pivotal for Kings in their successful debut season.

"The club management decided to release all senior players to replace them with the youth and proven ones. So Abahani this time formed a better squad

compared to the last season," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu told The Daily Star while informing that they signed up some national players from Bashundhara Kings, Chittagong Abahani, Saif SC, Sheikh Jamal DC and recruited a Brazilian striker, an Irani defender in their ranks and also retained Brazilian midfielder Raphael Augusto.

Meanwhile, Bashundhara Kings formed another strong squad, as expected, in a bid to seal all three trophies as they signed up approximately 15 national players including Sohel Rana from Abahani, Suman Reza of Uttar Baridhara, Mehdi Hasan of Muktijoddha Sangsad and Yeasin Arafat of Saif SC while having retained the services of Brazilian Robson Da Silva, Jonathan Da Fernandes and Iranian Khaled Shafiei and signed up Bosnian former forward Stojan Vranjes as well.

"By keeping our team combination intact, we have increased our strength by signing up new players for the reserve bench. Besides, the inclusion of a Bosnian striker strengthened our attacking line-up," said Kings technical director BA Jubair Nipu.

Iyer, Gill shine for India

REUTERS, New Delhi



Debutant Shreyas Iyer and recalled opener Shubman Gill struck half-centuries to help India overcome Kyle Jamieson's terrific display of seam bowling and post 258-4 in the opening Test against New Zealand in Kanpur yesterday.

If Gill's 52 helped India overcome the early loss of opener Mayank Agarwal, Iyer's unbeaten 75 prevented New Zealand from taking control of the contest after Jamieson had prised out three top-order wickets on the opening day. Ravindra Jadeja also helped himself to an unbeaten 50 having raised 113 runs with Iyer for the burgeoning fifth-wicket stand.

Green Park Stadium's dry, brown pitch had prompted both sides to pack three spinners but it was Jamieson who impressed the most with the ball on a slow track.

"Hopefully the new ball swings a bit in the morning and we can take a few wickets," Jamieson (3-47) told the broadcasters after the day's play.

"India are probably a fraction ahead, but we did well to have them four down."

With several frontline players, including regular captain Virat Kohli, either rested or recuperating, India



fielded a new opening pair after opting to bat on a hazy morning in the north Indian city.

Jamieson drew first blood, dismissing Agarwal caught behind for 13, but Gill had a longer, eventful stay.

The 22-year-old was wrongly adjudged lbw even before he could open his account, a decision that had to be overturned after replays confirmed an inside edge before ball hit pad.

Gill, then on six, was also lucky when Ajaz Patel's half-hearted lbw appeal against him was turned down.

New Zealand were left to rue not reviewing that decision as subsequent replays confirmed the ball would have gone on to hit the middle stump.

Gill hit Patel for a six en route to his fifty and his second-wicket stand with Cheteshwar Pujara, who made 26, was worth 61 when Jamieson struck.

The towering seamer dismissed Gill in the first over after lunch when the opener dragged a good-length ball from outside the off-stump onto his stumps.

India's stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane fell to Jamieson in similar manner after a fluent 35.

Abahani's late comeback keeps title race alive

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani conjured a late comeback with two goals in the dying minutes to down Dhaka Mariners Youngs 4-3 in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Mariners, who only needed to avoid defeat to regain the prestigious title, were leading the high-voltage match 3-2 up to 58 minutes and had one hand in the trophy they first won two editions ago in 2016. However, Abahani had other plans as Mariners are being made to wait till their Super Five final match against Mohammedan SC on Saturday.

Following the dramatic encounter, Abahani finished on 39 points from 15 matches and leveled with Mariners, who played 14 games so far. Like Abahani, another title

contender Mohammedan are still in with a chance, stationed at 33 points from 13 matches with two matches left against Sonali Bank and Mariners. If more than one team end up on equal points, then play-off matches will decide the title. If Mariners lose the next match to Mohammedan, the title race will be wide open again.

Back to the match, two early penalties saw Abahani lead through Bjorn Kellerman before Shohanur Rahman leveled the margin in the 15th minute. Shohanur struck again in the 17th minute but Mariners' lead lasted only eight minutes with Mahbub Hossain scoring a superb field goal. The first half goal-fest ended with 3-2 for Mariners as Shohanur struck through a penalty corner to complete his hat-trick. After resumption, Mariners did well to hold on to their lead but Khorshedur Rahman's brace from penalty corners in the final 60th minute gave Abahani a victory.



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Block: B, Bashundhara R/A
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nsuadmissions