

What to WATCH

TSPORTS

Bangladesh vs Pakistan
2nd Test, Day 4
Live from 09:30 pm
Independence Cup
Abahani vs Rahmatganj
Live from 05:45 pm

Lankan Premier League
Galle Gladiators vs Kandy Warriors
Live from 08:00 pm
TEN 1
Uefa Champions League
RB Leipzig vs Manchester City
Live from 11:45 pm

Real Madrid vs Inter Milan
Live from 02:00 am
(Wednesday)
TEN 2
Uefa Champions League
Paris Saint-Germain vs Brugge
Live from 11:45 pm

AC Milan vs Liverpool
Live from 02:00 am (Wednesday)
SONY SIX
The Ashes
Australia vs England
1st Test, Day 1
Live from 06:00 am (Wednesday)



AFP, Paris

Xavi Hernandez faces his first critical test as Barcelona coach the club at risk to make the Champions League knockout stages for the first time in two decades.

A goalless draw at home to Benfica last month left Barca with their destiny in their own hands, but with a much trickier final game away to Group E winners Bayern Munich.

Spanish champions Atletico Madrid have their work cut to secure one of the five unclaimed last-16 tickets after three defeats on the spin, while all four teams remain in the hunt in an unpredictable Group G.

Here is a look at what's at stake going into the final round of Champions League group games:

BALLON D'OR BACKLASH FROM BAYERN?

Barca find themselves on the ropes ahead of Wednesday's trip to Germany, but it could have been far worse were it not for Benfica forward Haris Seferovic's glaring miss in stoppage time at Camp Nou.

Bayern are one of three teams with a perfect record in this season's competition, and Robert Lewandowski's perceived Ballon d'Or snub may give the star striker extra incentive to prove a point.

Xavi suffered his first defeat as Barca coach on Saturday against Real Betis. He rested key players with a view to the game in Munich, where victory would guarantee Barca go through as runners-up in Group E, extending their 20-year run of reaching the knockout phase.

A youthful Xavi was establishing himself as a mainstay of the midfield when Barca exited in the first group stage of the 2000-01 competition.

Failure to secure maximum points would open the door for Benfica to pip them to second place, with the Portuguese needing to beat Dynamo Kiev in Lisbon.

THREE-HORSE RACE AND FOUR-WAY SHOWDOWN

Porto, AC Milan and Atletico will battle it out for the second qualification spot behind Liverpool in Group B.

Two-time former European champions Porto hold a one-point edge over both rivals ahead of the visit of Atletico. Milan host a Liverpool side that Jurgen Klopp could rotate heavily ahead of a busy festive schedule.

Last season's Europa League winners Villarreal, beaten at home by two late Manchester United goals on matchday

five, go to Atalanta knowing they will advance at the expense of the Italians if they avoid defeat in

Bergamo. Austrian champions Salzburg appeared to be coasting through after accruing seven points in three games, but back-to-back away losses mean they could still miss out.

Lille top Group G with eight points and will progress if they get a point at Wolfsburg. The Germans are last in the section but victory would send them through instead.

Salzburg can seal a knockout berth with a draw at home to Sevilla, who in turn would qualify if they win.

ALREADY IN THE LAST-16 POT Eleven clubs are assured of their place in the last-16 draw on December 13, five of which have already clinched top spot.

Erik ten Hag's impressive Ajax will attempt to complete a perfect group stage for the first time in club history at home to Sporting, certain of second above Borussia Dortmund irrespective of Tuesday's results.

Manchester City cannot be caught by Paris Saint-Germain in Group A, while Real Madrid have a two-point lead over Inter Milan in Group D ahead of their Bernabeu showdown.

Holders Chelsea, who go to Zenit Saint Petersburg for their final Group H game, will nail down top spot if they match Juventus' result at home to Swedish outfit Malmo.

Ralf Rangnick made a winning start to his spell as United's interim manager and is safe in the knowledge his team will move on as winners of Group F come what may against Switzerland's Young Boys.



Tapu points finger at Kamalapur turf

SPORTS REPORTER



Ahead of the season's curtain-raising Independence Cup, Bashundhara Kings, Sheikh Russel and Mohammedan expressed their concern over the poor artificial turf at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, and the turf has now taken a toll by ruling Kings captain and national team defender Tapu Barman out for six weeks through a knee injury.

On Saturday, Tapu sustained the injury on his left knee in the 68th minute of their match while attempting to jump to escape a sliding tackle from onrushing Police forward Al Amin, in the process landing awkwardly outside the touchline. "I underwent MRI test after the incident. The MRI film and report were sent to Indian doctor Nando Kumar. The doctor advised our team physio to have me rested for four to six weeks as I took a hit on the bone," Tapu told The Daily Star yesterday.



Explaining the situation, Tapu said, "It happened because of the ground, which is not in playable condition. When I jumped to escape the challenge from behind, my left leg got stuck on the turf and I had to balance on the knee instead of ankle, leading to the injury."

The artificial turf was installed in 2015 under FIFA Goal-Project-4 but many raised questions over the its quality within a couple of years as many players from Bangladesh Championship League sustained injuries from stones coming out from the beneath the turf.

There was some repair job done on the turf in the past, but the safety standard has not improved much. Tapu described the issue players are facing during the ongoing tournament. "The spikes of boots get stuck on the turf. Besides, there is not enough rubber beneath the surface which could help the players balance themselves. The pitch has turned into a concrete/stone-based one," said Tapu.



Ibrahimovic 'scared to stop' playing

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said he wants to stay at the Serie A club for the rest of his career, admitting he is "scared to stop" playing due to uncertainty as to what comes next after retirement.

The 40-year-old Swede's current contract expires at the end of the season, but Ibrahimovic has no plans to hang up his boots just yet.

"I want to play as long as possible. As long as I have that adrenaline, I will continue," Ibrahimovic told Italian talk show Che Tempo Che Fa on Sunday.

"Let's put pressure on Milan here to

give me an extension and I hope to stay at Milan for life. I still have objectives that I can achieve and I want to win another Scudetto.

"I don't know what will happen after football, so I am a little scared to stop. We'll see, but I want to continue playing so that I don't have any regrets."

Ibrahimovic was on the bench as Milan beat bottom side Salernitana 2-0 on Saturday to move one point clear at the top of the Serie A standings.

Stefano Pioli's side host Liverpool in the Champions League on Tuesday, where only victory will do if they are to have any chance of reaching the last-16.



Medvedev celebrates 'best week of career'

REUTERS, Madrid



U.S. Open champion and world number two Daniil Medvedev said he had the best week of his career as he went unbeaten in the Davis Cup finals and helped the Russia Tennis Federation claim their first title in 15 years with a 2-0 win over Croatia on Sunday.

"It was an amazing two weeks because it's never easy to come here at the end of the season. I'm more happy for the team than for myself," Medvedev said after winning 7-6(7), 6-2 against Croatia's Marin Cilic. He did not lose a set in the tournament.

Earlier, world number five Andrey Rublev needed just over one-and-a-half hours to beat Borna Gojo and put Russia in the lead.

"What I love about these kinds of

tournaments, when we play as a country, is the bond we create as team. Rublev told a news conference "We do everything together and it creates this will to win for your friends, for the team."

Rublev also won the Olympic gold medal at this year's Tokyo Games in the mixed doubles with Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

Russia went unbeaten in the Davis Cup Finals, winning their group opener 3-0 against Ecuador and only struggling to beat one of their rivals, hosts Spain, who handed them their only loss in the singles when Feliciano Lopez edged Rublev in three sets.

That win created animosity between the Spanish crowd and the Russian team, with the locals rooting against Russia until the final when the fans gave them a standing ovation.

SPORTS REPORTER



Saif Sporting Club eliminated Mohammedan from Riviera Independence Cup after playing out a 1-1 draw against the Black and Whites in the final group match at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

With the first draw in three matches, Saif emerged Group C champions with seven points followed by Bangladesh Army, who finished second with a come-from-behind 1-1 stalemate against Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the day's first match at the same venue.

Both Mohammedan and Army earned equal four points from three matches but Army left the Motijheel-based outfit behind to progress to the quarterfinals with a superior head-to-head record against Mohammedan.

Mohammedan, who had no alternative but to beat Saif, fielded three foreign players for the first time but they could not improve their performance against Saif.

The group champions were

Mohammedan out; Saif, Army through



dominant from the outset and ended the first half with a 1-0 lead after Nigerian Sunday Udoh side-volleyed a cross from Faisal Ahmed Fahim in the 45th minute.

After resumption, a couple of players from both sides were shown caution as both teams fought on level terms before Rajib Hossain headed an Alamgir Molla corner home in the stoppage time of the second half. However, the

equaliser was not enough to rescue Mohammedan from elimination.

In the day's first match, Bangladesh Army needed to avoid a defeat to keep their quarterfinal berth chances before Saif and Mohammedan encountered.

Bangladesh Army, who produced the biggest surprise in the tournament by beating Mohammedan 2-1 in their second match, found it hard against

Muktijoddha on a rain-soaked artificial turf amid drizzle, whereas Muktiyoddha seemed determined to salvage a point or three following two consecutive defeats earlier.

Muktijoddha dominated the proceedings by playing long aerial passes on the water-logged turf and Egyptian forward Ahmed Ayman gave Muktiyoddha Sangsad an eight-minute lead after Army goalkeeper Alamgir Hossain parried a close-range shot from Guinean defender Camara Younoussa. Ayman then went on to rattle the crossbar in the 32nd minute.

After resumption, Army pressed hard to equalise but all three of their efforts went in vain before Japanese forward Tetsuaki Misawa missed the chance to double the lead for Muktiyoddha Sangsad, having squandered a spot kick in the 73rd minute.

Seven minutes later, it was Army's chance to miss as Mehedi Hasan could not place the spot kick home but Samiul Haque, in the 89th minute, conjured a header off a Ranju Sarkar free kick to eventually book his side's place in the quarterfinals.