

## ‘Sis made me support Arsenal’

REUTERS, Imola

Lewis Hamilton spoke on Friday of his excitement in joining a bid to buy Premier League side Chelsea, saying he was a lifelong soccer fan who had once wanted to be a professional player and whose sister forced him to support Arsenal as a kid.

The seven-times Formula One world champion told reporters that he had wanted to try out for fourth tier side Stevenage Borough before motor racing took over his life.

The Briton and tennis great Serena Williams have joined former Liverpool chairman Martin



Broughton’s consortium, which also includes World Athletics President Sebastian Coe and other wealthy investors, in bidding for the West Londoners.

Hamilton said it was “one of the greatest opportunities” and he wanted to help Chelsea and the local community move on from years of ownership by now-sanctioned Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

“When I was young, around the corner from where I lived I used to play football with all the kids and I really wanted to fit in,” said the Mercedes driver. “I remember switching between the teams and getting it wrong, and my sister Sam punching me several times in the arm, basically beating me and saying you have to support Arsenal.”

Hamilton’s interest in Chelsea was mocked on Thursday by Red Bull’s reigning world champion Max Verstappen, who found it a strange move for an Arsenal supporter.

“Ultimately I’m a sporting fan,” said Hamilton, who was at school with former Manchester United defender Ashley Young.

“It’s the biggest sport in the world and Chelsea is one of the biggest clubs and most successful.”



Regarded as a fertile ground for spinners, especially the left-arm ones, Bangladesh have of late found a pace battery which has been impressive both at home as well as away from home. However, injuries to key pacers, including the latest one to Ebadot Hossain, will certainly get the management thinking ahead of a two-match Test series against Sri Lanka next month.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

## The dilemma over pinning hopes on spin

SPORTS REPORTER

Historically, Bangladesh have had a difficult time in taking advantage of the home conditions where they base their strategies upon. In home Tests against the West Indies and Pakistan last year, the surfaces provided a good deal of assistance for the spinners but while West Indies’ Rahkeem Cornwall took advantage and Pakistan’s Sajid Khan tormented Bangladesh in those surfaces, Bangladesh lacked the application to counter the opposition spinners effectively.

The recent tour of South Africa further showcased Bangladesh’s tentativeness in appropriating an approach that is effective against spinners. However, with Taijul Islam and Mehedi Miraz now growing into the mould of both attacking and defending with spin, the return of ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has meant that Bangladesh could bank again on playing three spinners.

Taskin Ahmed is all but certainly ruled out of the upcoming Test series, having suffered back injury during the South Africa tour, while Shoriful Islam, who recovered from the ankle injury that saw him miss the Test series in South Africa, will be unavailable for the first Test on May 15.

“Shoriful has recovered from the ankle injury. However, he will need a small surgery on a non-sports related issue. We will try to have that surgery done by the end of this month,” the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star earlier.

With the two key pacers out, Bangladesh were also initially sweating out on other key pacer Ebadot Hossain after



he incurred an injury to the webbing of his right hand. However, Debashish later informed that the injury was superficial. A week’s rest will see Ebadot return to the field and be available for the series against Sri Lanka.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin informed The Daily Star yesterday that they have already formed the side and is waiting for BCB president Nazmul

Hassan’s approval. The team will likely be announced in a day or two.

“We have tried to form a balanced side and have already given our directives regarding the team. Taskin will not be available for the upcoming series against Sri Lanka but he will return for the series against West Indies. Shoriful will be undergoing a surgery but he is expected to join the team for the second Test,” the chief selector said yesterday.

In April-May, the wickets in Bangladesh provide the least help for the pacers. However, the Tigers will be keen to continue their trend of giving pacers belief and it was learned that along with Shohidul Islam, pacer Rejaur Rahman may likely be added to the squad. With Khaled Ahmed and Ebadot available, it provides the balance the selectors may be looking at.

Time will tell what strategy may be the best but given that the home conditions favour spin, it would not be very out of place for the Tigers to bank on spin. However, Sri Lanka’s ability to counter Bangladesh’s spin threat has already been showcased during Bangladesh’s last tour of the island nation. Without a sporting track, any idea could easily backfire if the side is either pace heavy or spin heavy. While talking to reporters yesterday during an event, Shakib perhaps hinted the same thing regarding the conditions.

“I think there is a good deal of chance of us doing well. Although the conditions of the two countries are pretty similar, I’m hopeful we can win the series,” Shakib said.

Bangladesh would be wary of Sri Lankan spin getting in their way. Thus, balance in the end will be the key.

## Asian Games faces ‘possibility’ of postponement

AFP, Kuwait City

The 2022 Asian Games in China is facing the “possibility” of being postponed, a senior official told AFP on Thursday, after a rumour that it would be moved to next year.

The event is scheduled to be held in September in Hangzhou near Shanghai, which is grappling with a major coronavirus emergency.

“No official decision has been taken by the committee until now, but there is a possibility that it will be postponed,” said Kuwait’s Husain Al-Musallam, director-general of the Olympic Council of Asia, the Games’ governing body.

Most international sports events have been on hold in China since the Covid-19 pandemic, although Beijing hosted the Winter Olympics in a strict bio-bubble in February. Shanghai has witnessed the country’s worst Covid outbreak in two years, with weeks-long restrictions keeping most of its 25 million inhabitants confined to their homes.

All 56 competition venues for the Games have already been completed, Chinese organisers said this month, promising to publish a virus-control plan that takes its cue from the Winter Olympics.

“We’re now just making a few final adjustments and improvements to the facilities,” Lu Chunjiang, an official in charge of operations at Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre, told state broadcaster CCTV.

Hangzhou is scheduled to hold the Games from September 10-25.



## Joaquin looking to retire in style

REUTERS, Seville

When Real Betis winger Joaquin announced last November that this would be his final season after 21 consecutive years of top-flight football, he would not have dared to dream that he would have the chance to sign off by lifting the Copa del Rey.

“Sacrifice and effort lead to glory,” an emotional Joaquin, 40, told his teammates after Betis eliminated Rayo Vallecano in the semifinals last month to advance to Saturday’s decider against Valencia in his hometown Seville.

“Our fans have been suffering for years and I learned from my uncle that there is nothing more beautiful than making others happy. So let’s make it happen.”

Joaquin was referring to Betis’s 17-year trophy drought. Their last piece of silverware was Joaquin’s first, the 2005 Copa del Rey.

“I’ve already won a Cup with Betis and another with Valencia, and played a cup final with Fiorentina... I love a cup,” said Joaquin, regarded as one of the greatest characters in Spanish football, with talents stretching beyond the pitch.

## Title race heats up as Arsenal eye top-four bid

AFP, London

Premier League leaders Manchester City and their relentless challengers Liverpool will expect to stay neck and neck in the title race after this weekend’s matches. In the battle for top four places, Arsenal can deliver a hammer blow to Manchester United’s hopes, while Chelsea can’t avoid another slip against West Ham.

**No margin for error in title race**

Pep Guardiola believes Manchester City will have to hold off one of the best teams ever if they are to pip Liverpool to the title.

Guardiola’s side are one point clear of second placed Liverpool after both teams won comfortably in midweek.

With six games left, it will likely take just one slip from either team to decide the enthralling race.

If would be a major surprise if that happens this weekend as City host second bottom Watford on Saturday, while Liverpool play fourth bottom Everton in Sunday’s Merseyside derby at Anfield.

Guardiola has acknowledged City will have to win all their remaining matches to be sure of lifting the trophy, and that is a fitting tribute to the quality of quadruple chasers Liverpool.

“Liverpool are one of the best sides in the whole of football history, we are facing one of the best teams ever,” Guardiola said this week.

“They have everything, that’s why being there with them means a lot. The players know it. They’ve faced them and they know

“We don’t have any chance to drop anything, but we have been in this position and played with this pressure.”

**Arsenal can increase Man Utd’s woes**

Manchester United’s decision to announce the long-awaited appointment of Ajax boss Erik ten Hag as their new manager from next season came just two days after the Dutch coach was given a stark reminder of the massive task he faces at Old Trafford.

United’s wretched display in Tuesday’s 4-0 defeat at Liverpool underlined just how far they have fallen since Alex Ferguson led them to their last Premier League title in 2013.

Languishing in sixth place – 23 points behind Manchester City – United have been reduced to scrapping for a top four finish and even that goal could well be beyond them.

United head to Arsenal on Saturday trailing both the fifth placed Gunners and fourth placed Tottenham by three points.

Defeat against a direct rival for the Champions League places would be a fatal blow for interim boss Ralf Rangnick and his side, who were rocked by the bomb threat received by out-of-form captain Harry Maguire on Thursday.

Arsenal, behind Tottenham on goal difference, go into the clash boosted by Wednesday’s 4-2 win at Chelsea, a vital success that ended their run of three consecutive defeats.

“I said to the players, if you want to be playing Champions League football, you have to beat the top teams,” Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said.



Following the tragic death of his newborn son last week, Cristiano Ronaldo is back in the fold for Manchester United’s Premier League fixture away to Arsenal today. Ronaldo missed the 4-0 defeat at Liverpool while on compassionate leave but returned to training on Wednesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER