

What to WATCH

Star Sports 2 and GTV
ICC Women's T20 World Cup semifinals
Australia vs India
Live from 7:00 pm
Sony Sports 2
UEFA Europa League
Nantes vs Juventus

Live from 11:45 pm
Manchester United vs Barcelona
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
Sony Sports 1
UEFA Europa League
Monaco vs Bayer Leverkusen

Live from 11:45 am
Roma vs Salzburg
Live from 2:00 am (Friday)
T Sports
Pakistan Super League
Peshawar Zalmi vs Islamabad United
Live from 8:00 pm

Papon urges locals to apply for assistant head coach gig

SPORTS REPORTER

After the recent appointment of Chandika Hathurusingha as head coach, discussions around the recruitment of an assistant coach, a post that has remained vacant for quite some time now, gathered steam.

There were rumours that the role would be taken over by Sridharan Sriram, who had been working as the Tigers' technical consultant, but things did not quite work out in the end.

After the board officially placed an advertisement for the vacant post, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon urged local coaches to apply.

"We have given an advertisement regarding the vacancy for the post of assistant head coach. We are hoping interested locals and foreigners both apply. I am pressing the issue yet again. Normally, whenever we give such an advertisement, only foreigners apply. But we want interested local coaches to also apply," Papon said.

"There were many times we felt that the locals were interested, but they never approached us or applied for the post. I think we need to bridge that gap. So, through the media, we are once again informing the local coaches that if they are interested, they can apply. Even if they are not selected for this particular post, we can definitely try to accommodate them in other posts so that they can come through in the future," Papon told the media yesterday.

Over the years, the importance of developing local coaches has been shown by providing them with a platform in the national coaching panel. Even Hathurusingha, in his first press conference, informed that there was huge potential in developing local coaches.

"I see a lot of potential in developing local coaches. I want to help set up the system. With David Moore coming before me, I want to suggest the areas of development for the next generation. It is not only me trying to win games for Bangladesh. It is my main aim. I want to give something back, and leave something behind," said Hathurusingha.



PHOTO: STAR

Transitional demands face transformed Hathurusingha

SPORTS REPORTER

There were a lot of expectations as Chandika Hathurusingha's first press conference commenced on his return to Bangladesh's head coaching role, but far from being explosive, the Sri Lankan appeared far cooler and composed than in his first stint. Even while dismissing suggestions about bad relationships with seniors, the tone he set was one of calm.

There was an instance when the Hathurusingha of old peeked through the slightly passive press conference after one journalist asserted that focusing on the home advantage had led to short-term success but not long-term assurances, especially in Tests. In that one moment at the very end of the press conference, it became apparent that Hathurusingha had not lost his edge in terms of assertiveness. But by and large, the rest of the press conference had been about some sort of new-found calmness. "I am a little bit older," he had joked when asked whether it was Hathurusingha 2.0 who had come back to the hot seat.

The Bangladesh job had been offered to him quite a few times since his departure in 2017, as he himself acknowledged. The relationship had ended rather unceremoniously

despite many glittering successes, with two years of his contract left unfulfilled and relationships with a few of the seniors strained. A more productive opportunity in his homeland and a lack of ammunition to make the team stronger were axioms built around the end of his first stint. What motivated him to come back? It brings to mind some of the arguments used to explain his departure in 2017. There is no doubt Bangladesh are a team in transition, even in their strongest format: ODIs.

The seniors are reaching the end of their journey, with many having opted out of one or two formats. Replacing those legends in the team has been a difficult idea to fathom in Bangladesh cricket. Mahmudullah Riyad had decided to retire from Tests while in Zimbabwe although he had said before the tour that he wanted to play on. This is a project that requires hand on experience, and it is what the BCB might have thought of as well.

Hathurusingha explained politely but there were some suggestions as to the change he needed to make when talking about his motivation to return. "I will answer from my point of view. I think we [Bangladesh team] will be in a transitional period for the next two or three years. A lot of the senior players have done really well for Bangladesh cricket.

They are going to be remembered as a really good generation. On the other side, really good young players are coming through. To be part of that kind of challenge has always motivated me to come back," Hathurusingha said.

It will be his task to keep the seniors happy through to the ODI World Cup in India in eight months' time. But he does not see them change their roles, as long as they are selected, which he pointed out during the press conference.

A big part of the criticism has been the nature of home wickets which Bangladesh management fell upon so acutely that it rendered the team unable to adjust to conditions when playing away. He noted that there was a lack of firepower and 'guerrilla' warfare was needed. Much has changed now in five-and-a-half years in terms of spin dependency.

The team will hold an intra-squad practice game and by the looks of it, a slower, flatter wicket could be used today for preparations against England. Such devices point to a keenness to not take too many risks in the very first series on return.

Will the Tigers resort to short-term benefits given that wickets may once again be conducive to slowness? Or does Hathurusingha have more under his wily belt than he cared to give away? Only time will tell.

NZ primed to 'throw some punches' at confident England

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand will "throw some punches" when they face an attacking England in the second Test starting on Friday in Wellington, as the hosts bid to rescue the two-match series.

Bowling greats James Anderson, is back on top of the ICC Test rankings for the sixth time in his illustrious career, and Stuart Broad, combined with some aggressive batting, propelled England to a thumping 267-run first Test win in a day-night encounter in Mount Maunganui.

It was England's 10th win in 11 Tests under head coach Brendon McCullum and further evidence of the success of the New Zealand's "Bazball" attacking cricket revolution.

In contrast, New Zealand are struggling for form and confidence going into the clash at Wellington's Basin Reserve, where rain could play a part on the first two days.

The hosts are winless in their last seven Tests since beating South Africa a year ago in Christchurch, including suffering a 3-0 whitewash in England last June.

"I don't think it's unfair to say we are lacking a bit of that confidence at the moment," said head coach Gary Stead, whose side were dismissed for 126 in their second innings of the first Test to lose in a little over three days.

"But I can assure you the faith is still with this group of guys. We're going to put everything behind them to make sure we go out there in Wellington and really throw some punches back at England."

Comeback kings Real at it again

REUTERS, Liverpool

Real Madrid always seem to save their best for Europe, with Liverpool the latest victims of the Champions League's comeback kings in a remarkable 5-2 defeat at Anfield on Tuesday.

Real's failure to lie down and accept their fate was key to them securing a 14th Champions League crown last season and it seems they have not lost their touch.

While Liverpool were in many respects architects of their own downfall, Real have a history of saving their best for when they are up against it and the Champions League brings out the best in them.

Trailing 1-0 from the first leg in last year's round of 16, Real came from behind to beat Paris St Germain 3-1 in the Bernabeu, before sneaking over the line in the last eight thanks to late goals against Chelsea.

Manchester City were good value for their 4-3 victory in last season's semi-final first leg, missing a host of chances to make the win more convincing, before taking the lead in the return match in Spain.

Two last-gasp goals from Rodrigo took the tie to extra time, with Karim Benzema finishing an astonishing comeback with a decisive penalty.

Having conceded two goals inside 14 minutes at Anfield on Tuesday, Liverpool fans sensed redemption for their defeat to Real in last season's Champions League final, with the visitors struggling to



With his goal against Liverpool in the first leg of the Round of 16, Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr (22 years and 7 months) became the youngest player in Champions League history to have scored in every single stage of the competition, eclipsing a record held by teammate Marco Asensio. The Brazilian's first goals in the quarterfinal and final of Europe's elite competition also came against Liverpool.

PHOTO: REUTERS

cope in a raucous atmosphere.

They clicked into gear again at Anfield having fallen 2-0 behind and two goals from Vinicius Jr. had them level by the break.

There was only going to be one winner in the second half, as Real gave a lesson in

how to kill a match and potentially the tie.

Liverpool were never allowed to cause any problems and get the crowd behind them, while Real put three of their four chances away in devastating fashion to stun their opponents, becoming the first team in Champions League history to

come from two goals down and win by a three-goal margin.

"Obviously we didn't expect to start like we did but at 2-0 down I thought about the (Manchester) City away leg last year in the hope that we could do the same -- but it turned out even better," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti said.

"We never lost confidence and little by little we won control of the ball. The experienced players helped the youngsters a lot in that situation: Karim (Benzema), (Luka) Modric and (Toni) Kroos saying 'keep calm, there's still a long way to go' and it worked out in the end."

The ruthless display ensured Liverpool conceded five goals in a European game at Anfield for the first time ever while it was just third time this century they have shipped five or more goals in a home game in all competitions.

That is six defeats from the last seven clashes with Real, including in the 2018 and 2022 finals, with a second leg still to come for Jurgen Klopp's team whose season just cannot get off the ground.

"I told the boys directly after the game a defeat is a defeat if you don't learn from it," Klopp said. "If we allow this one game to be influential, we are really silly."

"Yes, we have to improve but we have to take the good things as well. We gave all five goals away. We could have done better there but they (Real) were obviously different."

"We go there and try to win the game. If that's possible or not, I don't know."

Ten Hag has a plan for Barca

REUTERS, Manchester

While keeping his cards close to his chest, Manchester United coach Erik ten Hag insisted he has an "idea" that will help his team get the better of Barcelona in their blockbuster clash in the Europa League on Thursday.

United and Barca, two of the most successful sides in world football, put on quite the show in the first leg of their knockout stage playoff last week, despite playing in a competition neither are normally found in.

The 2-2 draw was exhilarating, typifying how much both teams have improved under their respective managers. Ten Hag is not resting on his laurels and is relishing keeping United competing for four trophies, with a League Cup final to come on Sunday.

"What we do different you will see tomorrow on the pitch," Ten Hag told a news conference on Wednesday. "We have an idea."

"We all want to play big games, big matches. When we were young, we dreamed of it. We are really enjoying it, we are really looking forward and enjoying it. We have to give our best."

"It is not about (us getting) credit, it is about trophies. The next focus is always on the next game."

193 gold medals up for grabs in youth games

SPORTS REPORTER

Around 4000 athletes will compete in 193 events at 24 venues across Dhaka in the final phase of the Sheikh Kamal 2nd Bangladesh Youth Games, which will get underway at the Army Stadium on February 26, organisers at a press conference informed yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the opening ceremony while Army chief General SM Shafiqul Islam will preside over the concluding ceremony, which will be held at the same venue on March 24.

The final phase of the youth games will bring to a conclusion a sporting extravaganza which started at upazila level on January 2 and involved around 60,000 athletes, organisers, coaches and technical staff.

Bangladesh Olympic Association's secretary general Syed Shahed Reza briefed media on the details of the event at the press conference at the BOA auditorium where other BOA high-officials including Sheikh Bashir Ahmed Mamun, Ashikur Rahman Miku and AK Sarker, among others, replied to journalists' queries.

The torch relay will be held from Tungipara in Gopalganj and the games flame will be lit by sprinter Imranur Rahman and karateka Marzan Akter Priya, organisers informed.

The organisers claimed that the best performers will be selected for higher training, just like the last time around when around 300-350 young athletes were chosen following the first youth games in the country in 2017.

The athletes will get a daily accommodation fee of Tk 600, daily food diet of Tk 600 and a one-time conveyance of Tk 1600, the organisers claimed.

Replying to a query whether this amount is too little during times of high inflation, the organisers said they preferred to adopt austerity measures even though they have sponsors in the form of Bankers Association of Bangladesh alongside Saif Powertec and Walton Group as co-sponsors.

They also said that the opening and closing ceremonies will be entertaining ones but will be on a small scale due to cost-cutting measures.

Spalletti warns Napoli 'it's not done'

AFP, Frankfurt

Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti warned his side's "biggest enemy is to think it's done" after Tuesday's 2-0 last 16, first leg win at a ten-man Eintracht Frankfurt.

Napoli won their first ever Champions League away knockout match thanks to goals either side of the half from Victor Osimhen and Giovanni Di Lorenzo.

"It was an end-to-end game, which we want and thrive in. We need to stay calm, very calm," Spalletti told Sky Sports before March 15's return fixture.

"There's the second leg still. Our biggest enemy is to think it's done," he added.

Napoli are 15 points clear atop the Serie A table and look set for their first title in more than 30 years.

Mexico forward Hirving Lozano, who was named player of the match by UEFA, told Sky Sport: "We need to keep working hard to carry on like this. We have to think game by game."

"We did very well against a strong side. It was tough at first but we had a great game."

Frankfurt, who are playing their in debut Champions League season, were reduced to ten men after 58 minutes when France striker Randal Kolo Muani stepped on the shin of Napoli midfielder Frank Anguissa.