

What to WATCH

Star Sports 3

Lanka Premier League

Kandy vs Dambulla

Live from 3:00 pm

Galle vs Jaffna

Live from 7:30 pm

Sony Sports 2

Durand Cup

North East United vs Lajong

Live from 6:30 pm

Star Sports 2

GT20 Canada

Surrey vs Vancouver

Live from 9:00 pm

Brampton vs Montreal

Live from 1:30 am (Saturday)

Africa exceeds expectations at Women’s World Cup

REUTERS, Cape Town

Africa’s run at the Women’s World Cup has been nothing short of extraordinary at the end of the group phase on Thursday as debutants Morocco joined Nigeria and South Africa in the last 16.

Morocco had been thrashed 6-0 by twice champions Germany in their opening match of the finals but bounced back to beat South Korea and Colombia to secure their passage into the knockout stage of the tournament.

Their surprise run of results led to the group stage elimination of the highly fancied Germans in one of the biggest shocks of the tournament.

The upset came some 24 hours after South Africa had snatched a dramatic stoppage time winner to oust Italy, and also after Nigeria had advanced from Group B following two draws and a win over co-hosts Australia.

Even Zambia, who had been eliminated after two successive five goal thrashings, were able to depart with a win, overcoming Costa Rica in their last group game.

Africa’s chances of getting a team through to the knockout phase were always going to be better with the expansion of the finals’ field to 32 teams and the continent’s representation increased to four.

But even then, there was little expectation for the quartet of African teams as they travelled to Australia and New Zealand.

Nigeria have not missed out of any of the nine Women’s World Cups but their dominance in Africa had been ended as they struggled at last year’s Africa Women’s Cup of Nations and only finished fourth.



Morocco fans celebrate after qualifying for the knockout stages of the Women’s World Cup at a fan park in Melbourne on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

South Africa won the continental title but their preparations were dogged by arguments over money as the players went on strike last month.

As for Morocco, the first Arab nation to compete, they looked out of the depth as they produced a horror defensive display and looked every bit the 70 places they were ranked below Germany in a rude World Cup welcome.

But they showed inspiring resolve to come back and win a top two place in Group H, albeit with some assistance as Germany failed to beat South Korea on Thursday.

“You’ve always got to factor in the magic of the World Cup,” their coach Reynald Pedros had predicted before the game.

Morocco shook up the traditional order when finishing fourth in Qatar last December in Africa’s best showing at the men’s World Cup and the women now have a chance to also break new ground.

No African team has ever won a knockout game at a previous Women’s World Cup but there will be high hopes now that the continent’s mazy run can continue, even if the odds are stacked against them.

In the last 16, South Africa face the Netherlands, Morocco will be up against France while Nigeria will take on Euro 2022 champions England.

“They’ve shown that nothing can stop them if they put their mind to it and they play for each other,” South Africa coach Desire Ellis said of her players ahead of Sunday’s tie in Sydney against the in-form Netherlands.



Morocco’s goalkeeper Khadija Er-Rmichi revels in joy as they stunned Colombia 1-0 in their final group match in Perth on Thursday to reach the last 16 of the Women’s World Cup at the first attempt. Morocco’s historic run to the semifinal in the 2022 FIFA Men’s World Cup, as they became the first African nation to do so, was one to savour for football fanatics around the world and their female compatriots could now add more to the country’s football folklore. [Inset] Meanwhile, In a tournament full of shocks, two-time world champions Germany suffered their earliest exit in Women’s World Cup history after being held to a shock 1-1 draw by South Korea in their final Group H match.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Abahani bank on new foreigners in AFC Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani were the first Bangladeshi club to progress into the inter-zonal semifinals of AFC Cup in 2019 but struggled in Asia’s second-tier club competition ever since.

In last three editions, six-time Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) winners failed to get out of the preliminary round or play-off stage after falling prey to either Maldivian or Indian outfits.

Bashundhara Kings had booked a spot in the group stage of South Asian zone on virtue of being BPL champions. Abahani, meanwhile, as the Federation Cup champions or league runners-up, got a chance to compete in the group-stage qualifiers.

Maldivian outfit Club Eagles stand in the way of Abahani in the second preliminary round. If the Sky Blues cross that hurdle, they could face Mohun Bagan in the play-off match.

A new rule which allows six foreign players in an AFC Cup match is providing optimism for Abahani to fare better this time around. Coach Mario Lemos, however, sees the down side as well.

“New signing does help the club. We are getting five new foreign players but not much time because all of them are from different clubs,” Lemos told The Daily Star yesterday.

“They now need to adapt to the

way we want to play and build the connection with new players. It is about me getting to know the players and trying to use them in the best possible ways.”

With last season’s Daniel Colindres, Peter Norah, and Raphael Augusto unavailable, the Abahani retained the services of two foreigners: Syrian defender

Danilo Augusto (Fortis FC) for the preliminary round.

Abahani started their preparation for the AFC Cup on July 29 in Dhaka as the match was billed for August 16 in Sylhet.

Forward Nabib Newaj Jibon believes they “have an advantage of playing on home ground amid familiar conditions”.



Yousef Mohammad and Nigerian Emeka Ogbogh.

The Sky Blues have five new signings in Caribbean forward Stuart Cornelius from Sheikh Jamal DC, Uzbek midfielder Muzaffar Muzaffarov (Mohammedan SC), Nigerian forward Ifeagwu Ojukwu David (Chittagong Abahani), Egyptian midfielder Mostofa Mahmoud Kahraba (Chittagong Abahani) and Brazilian defender

Asked whether they would struggle to adjust with new foreign players, Jibon reckons they would gel easily because of the familiarity of having played against each other in the league.

Lemos, who guided Abahani in 2019, said: “I think this time we have an advantage of playing six foreigners since Maldivian players are slightly better than Bangladeshi players, technique-wise.”

Saudi League ‘determined’ to succeed

AFP, London

The Saudi Pro League is “determined to be a success” and will keep splashing the cash to attract some of the biggest names in football, according to one of its top executives.

Clubs in the oil-rich Gulf state have lured global stars, with Karim Benzema, Jordan Henderson and Sadio Mane among those following in Cristiano Ronaldo’s footsteps.

Last month Al-Hilal made a 300-million-euro (\$328 million) bid for Kylian Mbappe, though the Paris Saint-Germain striker reportedly refused to meet with officials from the club.

The influx has taken place despite frequent criticism that Saudi Arabia’s lavish spending amounts to “sportswashing” -- an attempt to shift the focus from its record on human rights.

British director Peter Hutton, who sits on the league’s board, told the BBC: “I think the budgets are in place for a number of years -- you know, I don’t see this slowing down.”

He added: “I’ve worked in sport for 40 years and I’ve never seen a project as big, as ambitious and as determined to be a success.”

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp fears the late closure of the transfer window in Middle East nation could have a detrimental effect on European clubs.

But Hutton said: “It’s good that football has strength around the world.”

‘Born to be referee’

REUTERS, El Alto

Erick Callejas may be just 10 years old -- and a lot shorter than the other participants on the football pitch -- but he has no qualms enforcing the rules as one of the few referees his age.

In high-altitude El Alto, Bolivia’s second-largest city and neighbor to capital La Paz, Callejas can be found on weekends blowing his whistle and calling the shots at local games, inspired by his referee father Ramiro.

“On Saturdays and Sundays, I go out to referee with my little colleague, my son, Erick,” Ramiro said. “I am very proud, I’m filled with emotion because refereeing runs in his blood.”

Callejas refereed his first match in a women’s league after his dad signed him up for the job.

“He runs. He moves. He is not intimidated by people, even if the public shouts,” player Beimar Tancara said. “I think he was born to be a referee.”

Callejas also dreams big. “My dream is to referee the Bolivian Derby, to be a FIFA referee so I can go to World Cup, America Cup, Libertadores Cup and Champions League,” he said.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal enters Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon’s residence for a meeting with board officials to reportedly discuss his captaincy, Asia Cup and World Cup plans yesterday evening as speculations about who would lead the Tigers in the upcoming tournaments intensified. The 34-year-old returned to the country from the UK following medical treatment on July 31.

Taskin, Sabina, Ziarul among NSC awardees

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women’s football team captain Sabina Khatun, cricketer Taskin Ahmed and SA Games gold medalist weightlifter Ziarul Islam were named among winners of the Sheikh Kamal National Sports Council (NSC) Awards 2023 in sportsperson category.

State Minister for Youth and Sports, Zahid Ahsan Russel, on Thursday revealed the names of 12 awardees from eight categories.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to hand over the awards on August 5, on the occasion of the 74th birth anniversary of Shaheed Captain Sheikh Kamal who is eldest son of Bangababdh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and founder of Abahani Limited.

“In a quest to inspire budding and upcoming players, we have emphasised on the current players. The committee also emphasised on other disciplines beyond football and cricket,” sports minister Russel told reporters at the NSC conference room.

Table tennis player Muhtasin Ahmed Ridoy and hockey player Amirul Islam were named in the emerging athlete category.

“In 2022, we gave away nine awards under seven categories but this time we have inserted one more category, of sports commentators, because they have also been contributing to sports like you sports journalists,” added Russel.

Abdus Sadek, legendary hockey player and former general secretary of Bangladesh Hockey Federation, will receive the prestigious “lifetime achievement” award -- won by Kazi Salahuddin and Harun Ur Rashid in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Mala Rani Sarker, headmistress of Kalsindur Primary School, who enormously contributed to the rise of a group of footballers in the national women’s team from the remote village under Dhobaura upazilla, and Fazlul Islam, a hockey coach from Old Dhaka who had groomed a lot of national players, were the two nominated organisers from grassroots.

Bangladesh Archery Federation got recognition as the best sports federation while Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB) bagged the sports sponsor award.

Photojournalist and freedom fighter Khandoker Tareq Mohammad Nurullah and Athar Ali Khan have been nominated under sports journalists and sports commentator categories, respectively.



Lionel Messi scored two more goals on Wednesday, giving him five in three matches for Inter Miami, as he led the Herons to a 3-1 win over Orlando City in a Leagues Cup round-of-32 match at Fort Lauderdale. Messi scored twice from close range -- a left-footed volley followed up by a right-footed volley -- to maintain his 100 percent winning record with Miami, who were winless in 11 league games before his arrival but have now set up last 16 Leagues Cup clash against FC Dallas.

PHOTO: REUTERS