Star SPORT
DHAKA WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 1, 2023, KARTIK 16, 1430 BS

ICC MEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP INDIA 2023

What to WATCH

T SPORTS AND GTV
ICC Cricket World Cup
New Zealand vs South Africa
Live from 2:30 pm
SONY SPORTS 2
DFB Pokal
Dortmund vs Hoffenheim
Live from 11:00 pm
Saarbrucken vs
Bayern Munich
Live from 1:45 pm
(Thursday)

Tim Southee will be raring to go after sitting out the first ix matches for New Zealand, who lost the last two matches after winning the first four. Meanwhile, the likes of Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen would want to drive South Africa's scintillating form and confirm their semifinal berth in Pune today.

PHOTO: AFP

Choton's Army on brink of last 8

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army FT strengthened their prospects of reaching the Independence Cup quarterfinals as they managed to hold Bangladesh Premier League club Fortis FC to a goalless draw in their final Group C match in Dhaka yesterday.

Having held a superior Mohammedan SC to a 2-2 draw in their first meeting, Army lead the table with two points, one more than Fortis and Mohammedan.

Army, who advanced to the quarterfinals of season's curtain-raising tournament in 2021 by leaving behind Mohammedan and Muktijoddha Sangsad, will reach the knockout stage if the Mohammedan-Fortis fixture on Saturday does not conclude in a draw.

At the Bashundhara Kings Arena, Choton's charges created better chances to break the deadlock but national discard Shahriar Emon had squandered two while Imtiaz Raihan also wasted one opportunity.

In the day's other match, involving a Group D fixture, Chittagong Abahani came from behind to play out a 1-1 draw against Bangladesh Navy to keep their quarterfinal hopes alive.

The result means Bashundhara Kings have confirmed their place into the last eight on the back of Saturday's 1-0 win over Navy.

Despite the loss, Navy can seal a quarterfinals berth if Kings hand a big defeat to Ctg Abahani in the group's last match on December 1.

Sri Lanka mourns 'Uncle Percy'

AFP, *Colombo*

Sri Lanka's cricket stars and newspapers Tuesday mourned the death of a beloved "super fan" who had become a one-man cheer leader and a permanent presence at international games.

Percy Abeysekara, 87, died at a hospital outside the capital Colombo on Monday following a brief illness, according to his family.

Former Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene described Abeysekara as the "true 12th man for many generations of Sri Lankan cricketers".

"He was there throughout my entire career, cheering us on, waving his flag and always, win or lose, making us laugh," Jayawardena said. "We will all miss you dearly 'Uncle Percy'."

Another ex-skipper, Kumar Sangakkara, said Abeysekara was as much a part of the Sri Lanka cricket set-up as the players.

"From my debut till my last game Uncle Percy was a constant. His contribution to the game in Sri Lanka stands equal to any of the players that have worn the shirt," said Sangakkara.

Sanath Jayasuriya, a member of Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup winning squad, said: "It is with great sadness that I heard our beloved Uncle Percy has met his maker.

"You were the first super fan and for all of us you will always be special. RIP," Jayasuriya wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Speaking after Sri Lanka's loss to Afghanistan in the World Cup on Monday, spin bowler Maheesh Theekshana said: "He was the main guy who was there when I was a kid. I saw him waving the flag, so as a team we are disappointed to hear that news."

The Daily FT newspaper said: "Percy gave his life and soul to the sport and was a legend on his own right."

Abeysekara was a constant presence at Sri Lanka matches since their Test debut against England in 1982.

"I am Percy, cricket crazy, but I have no mercy for those cricketers, spectators and administrators who are lazy," the FT recalled him saying.

All Blacks' grit inspires Kiwis against S Africa

AFP, *Pune*

New Zealand captain Tom Latham hopes to summon the fighting spirit of the All Blacks when his side face fellow Cricket World Cup semi-final contenders South Africa in Pune.

Wednesday's match comes just days after South Africa edged New Zealand by a point in a dramatic Rugby World Cup final in Paris, where the beaten All Blacks had to play most of the game a man down after skipper Sam Cane was sent off.

Latham's men also suffered a narrow defeat last time out, going down by five runs against Australia after just failing to chase down a huge target of 389.

"That was obviously a fantastic game of rugby," Latham told a pre-match press conference on Tuesday.

"But I guess you look at the All Blacks as a whole, they played some great rugby throughout the World Cup."

He added: "I think you look at the final and I guess the Kiwi way is we look to scrap the whole way, obviously faced with a little bit of adversity in terms of being down to 14 men.

"I guess it's something we talk about in our team as well -- we scrap right to the end regardless of the situation.

"I think we showed that the other night as well, taking the game as deep as we can and if we can do that, then hopefully that gives ourselves a good chance towards the back end of the game."

As for the match in front of his side, Latham said New Zealand would face a "really hot" South Africa, with their lone defeat so far this World Cup a shock loss to the Netherlands.

The Proteas' top order has repeatedly overwhelmed their opponents, with South Africa posting 399 in their 229-run rout of reigning champions England.

"South Africa, they're running really hot at the moment," said Latham.

"And they've got a lot of power throughout the whole line-up."

South Africa, however, looked far less assured when subjected to the pressure of chasing against Pakistan last time out, suffering several stumbles before scraping a one-wicket in pursuit of 271.

"Sometimes you could look at the opposition and what they want to do, but for us, it's always been about focusing on us and what's best for us as a team," said Latham, whose side have also lost to unbeaten World Cup hosts India.

STATS

South Africa have 41 wins to their name in 71 ODIs against New Zealand, while the Blackcaps have 25, with five encounters producing no results.

New Zealand, however, have an overwhelming 6-2 lead in World Cup meetings and are on a winning streak of five matches in the tournament against the Proteas since 1999.

The Blackcaps have lost their only match at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune when they were beaten by India in 2017. South Africa have never played at the venue.

The Blackcaps lost back-to-back matches against India and Australia respectively after winning their first four, while South Africa are on a streak of three wins following a slip against the Netherlands.

Saudi Arabia clear to host 2034 World Cup

REUTERS, *Melbourne*

Saudi Arabia was left as a shoo-in to host the 2034 World Cup after Australia confirmed it would not make a bid for soccer's global showpiece on Tuesday's deadline day.

FIFA had invited bids from Asia and Oceania for the tournament by Oct. 31.

Football Australia (FA) boss James Johnson had said the country was "exploring the possibility" of 2034, but on Tuesday the governing body said it would instead focus on bids for the 2026 Women's Asian Cup and the 2029 Club World Cup.

Australia's decision to not proceed with 2034 leaves Saudi Arabia as the only confirmed bidder.

Saudi Arabia announced it would bid only minutes after soccer's global governing body called for Asia and Oceania bids on Oct 4.

The president of the Asian Football Confederation, the sport's continental governing body to which Australia belongs, said "the entire Asian football family" would stand united in support of the Saudi bid.

A week after FIFA's invitation, Indonesia said it was in discussions with Australia about a possible joint bid along with Malaysia and Singapore - before saying a week later that it backed Saudi Arabia's bid.

Australia hosted a successful Women's World Cup this year but has never hosted a men's World Cup.

"We believe we are in a strong position to host the oldest women's international competition in the world - the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 - and then welcome the greatest teams in world football for the 2029 FIFA Club World Cup," FA said.

"Achieving this ...would represent a truly golden decade for Australian football."

FIFA awarded the 2030 World Cup to Morocco, Portugal and Spain, also adding World Cup centenary games in Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay.

Vinicius vows to continue fight against racism

REUTERS, *Paris*

Real Madrid winger Vinicius Jr will keep speaking out against racism in world soccer after receiving the Socrates Award on Monday at the Ballon d'Or ceremony for his contribution off the field.

Vinicius, who has been racially abused regularly in LaLiga games for the last two seasons, was recognised for starting a foundation that is building schools in impoverished areas and investing in education in Brazil.

"I will remain strong in the fight against racism," said the Brazilian, who received the award from the Prince of Monaco. "It is a very sad thing to talk about racism nowadays, but we have to continue in the fight so that people suffer less.

"Very happy to receive this award and to help many children in Brazil. I had little chance of getting where I have coming from where I came so it is a pleasure for me to help as many kid as I can so they can have a chance."

The 23-year-old was the only Brazilian in the top 10 of the ranking for this year's Ballon d'Or after scoring 23 goals in all competitions for Real last season.

The forward was also part of an emotional tribute to Pele, the Brazil great who died in December last year at the age of 82.

"Pele is a god for me and if I am here today, it is thanks to him. He put Brazil on a different level and people respect Brazilian players thanks to the great legacy he left," Vinicius said.

The Vini Jr. Institute, created in 2020, aims to use the popularity of football to help innovations in teaching and learning in Brazilian public schools.

'ALL OF THEM ARE SPECIAL'

REUTERS, *Paris*

Argentina captain Lionel Messi won a record eighth Ballon d'Or for the best player in the world on Monday, beating Norway's UEFA player of the year and treble winner Erling Haaland of Manchester City to the prestigious prize.

Inter Miami's Messi, who last won the award in 2021, played a pivotal role in guiding Argentina to their first World Cup title in 36 years when they beat defending champions France in the final last year.

The 36-year-old is now three Ballons d'Or clear of rival Cristiano Ronaldo, who won the last of his five trophies in 2017. Messi has now finished among the top three a record 14 times in total, finishing runner-up on five occasions.

"I couldn't imagine having the career that I've had. Everything that I've achieved. The fortune I've had playing for the best team in the world, the best team in history. It's nice to win these individual trophies. To win the Copa America and then the World Cup, to get it done is amazing," Messi said.

"All of them (Ballon d'Or awards) are special for different reasons," he added.

"I'm happy to get that recognition that I'm getting thanks to what we have achieved with the national team," Messi told Reuters.

"This (World Cup) title we had been aiming for for so many years makes it even more special."

Asked if he would carry on until the 2026 World Cup, Messi said: "I don't think about it. I'll enjoy (my career) day by day. There will first be the Copa America in the United States (in 2024). (The World Cup), I don't think about it."

Earlier, Messi's World Cup-winning team mate Emiliano Martinez won the Lev Yashin award for the world's best goalkeeper.

Spain's Women's World Cup winner and Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmati won the women's Ballon d'Or.

"It's an individual trophy but it can't exist without a team," she told reporters.

Messi, who won his first Ballon d'Or in 2009 and claimed four in a row until 2012, finished second to Haaland at the UEFA awards in August.

Haaland, 23, was one of the firm favourites for his first Ballon d'Or after scoring 52 goals in 53 matches in all competitions last season as City won the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

But Argentina's magical run at the World Cup in Qatar, where Messi earned the Golden Ball and Silver Boot, helped him pip the Norwegian striker to the award.

Bonmati hails Spain's football culture

REUTERS, *Paris*

Winning the women's Ballon d'Or is a testimony to Spain's football culture, this year's winner Aitana Bonmati said after her triumph kept the trophy in the country for the third year in a row on Monday.

Bonmati, a Champions League winner with Barcelona and World Cup winner with Spain, succeeds fellow Spaniard Alexia Putellas, who was also the 2021 winner.

"Spain has something unique. In recent years we have achieved a lot with our clubs and the national team," Bonmati told reporters.

"It says a lot that we won the Ballon d'Or three times in a row. We are a country that lives football, and we work hard every day to be the best."

While she has now won the biggest titles in the sport, Bonmati still has the sparkle and motivation to reach new heights.