

## Real Madrid seek record 6th Super Cup

AGENCIES

Real Madrid and Atalanta will face off in the UEFA Super Cup in Warsaw on Wednesday in a bid to taste the first slice of European stardom for the 2024-25 season.

Los Blancos added Champions League title number 15 to their ever-growing collection last season, while their Italian foes unexpectedly slayed a hitherto invincible Bayer Leverkusen in the Europa League final.

The match-up also provides a chance for Real Madrid to become record six-time winners of the UEFA Super Cup, having been tied at the top with five Super Cup titles with rivals Barcelona and Italian giants AC Milan.

The UEFA Super Cup is the first step for teams to see how their tuning up for the season has gone, along with a chance to begin the season with momentum gained through silverware. However, for Real Madrid fans, this particular fixture remains a point of interest for one more reason: Kylian Mbappe.

The French forward, who was finally landed by Real Madrid as their latest number nine after years of trying to get him from PSG, could make his competitive debut for the Spanish giants in this match.

The former PSG forward has been observing Real's mixed pre-season from afar – Carlo Ancelotti's men overcame Chelsea and Albacete either side of defeats to AC Milan and Barcelona – but will now be ready to aid Los Blancos' quest for an unprecedented sixth UEFA Super Cup honour.

In customary Blancos fashion, the European champions have not undertaken a major summer overhaul of their squad – which is now without two stalwarts in Toni Kroos and Nacho Fernandez – but the addition of Mbappe and Brazilian teenage sensation Endrick now makes their forward line, also including Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo, even more fearsome.

Meanwhile, Europa League champions Atalanta are significantly less competitive at the moment compared to just a few months ago as coach Gian Piero Gasperini warned fans of the Bergamo club not to expect a strong start to the season.

"It's inevitable that it's turned out like this, but at this moment, the season has already become complicated," he told the local newspaper, l'Eco di Bergamo.

The 66-year-old coach confirmed that central midfielder Teun Koopmeiners is set to join Juventus and is no longer training with the first team.

"We've had two very serious injuries, two cruciate ligaments in practically three games with (Giorgio) Scalvini and (Gianluca) Scamacca, and then the Koopmeiners situation."

However, Gasperini was hopeful new recruits would be found before the end of the transfer window.



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior, Jude Bellingham, and the season's star signing Kylian Mbappe looked to be enjoying themselves in training ahead of their UEFA Super Cup encounter against Atalanta in Warsaw today. Real, who won a record-extending 15th Champions League and 36th LaLiga last season, will be gunning for more accolades this season, especially with the inclusion of superstar forward Mbappe in their already enviable squad.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

## Tigers look to overcome hindered preparations

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Test team reached Pakistan yesterday, five days ahead of schedule, to officially begin the final phase of their preparations for the forthcoming two-Test series against the hosts, having failed to do so at home owing to weeks of unrest.

The Tigers were slated to begin practice on August 3 but had to make do with individual sessions at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium instead as many of their foreign coaches expressed their inability to attend the sessions, citing the advisories issued by their respective embassies.

The Bangladesh Tigers' programme was the only exception as red-ball players were able to train and take part in twintra squad matches in Chattogram even as the schedules were hindered by political unrest.

Several members of the 16-member squad – Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim and Nayeem Hasan – are already in Pakistan with the 'A' team and are playing the first four-dayer against their Pakistani counterparts which began yesterday in Lahore.

The 2-0 loss in the home Test series against Sri Lanka this year sparked a debate as the players seemingly did not get enough time to prepare for red ball cricket. This time, even though the team had ample time, the situation did not allow the preparations to go through smoothly.

"There were shortcomings in preparation for the Sri Lanka series. This time we had the opportunity but the last phase of the preparation had some



lackings," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu said in a press conference on Monday before the squad's departure.

"After arriving in Dhaka, we were supposed to begin practice on August 3, but later players had to undertake individual sessions as national team coaches could not arrive [on the field]. To make up for these shortcomings we are going to Pakistan earlier than scheduled," he added.

The Tigers will begin training at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore from Tuesday before travelling to Islamabad. Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and Shoriful Islam will join the side in Islamabad, having finished their franchise league stints in Canada's Global T20 League.

Shoriful returned to the country on Monday and trained in Mirpur yesterday

with the red ball after having played only white-ball cricket since the T20 World Cup in June.

"Everyone began red-ball practice sessions after a while. I have begun a bit late so it will be a bit difficult [to adjust]. I am trying and there is time," said Shoriful, who will depart for Pakistan on Wednesday.

The pacer is also hoping that the batters would stand their ground against a potent Pakistan attack and take advantage of the flat surfaces in Rawalpindi.

"From what I have seen, Rawalpindi has batting friendly wickets. We have good batters so we will fight there."

The Tigers will have a few days to practice with the whole squad in Pakistan before the first Test in Rawalpindi begins on August 21.

## City's PL charges hearing could be fast-tracked

AFP, London

Manchester City's hearing into 115 alleged breaches of Premier League financial regulations could be brought forward to next month, according to a report in The Times.

The newspaper said on Monday that the start of an independent commission hearing, planned for November, would now begin in mid-to-late September. The hearing is scheduled to last 10 weeks, with a verdict likely to be delivered early in 2025.

Neither the Premier League nor Manchester City have commented.

The Times report added that the outcome of a separate legal case which City have brought against league rules that regulate how clubs strike sponsorship or revenue deals with businesses linked to their owners, is now due in the next fortnight.

That in turn, said the paper, would allow the hearing into the 115 charges – all of which City deny – to be brought forward.

City are facing the charges for alleged breaches of regulations and financial rules between 2009 and 2023. If found guilty, City, who last season won an unprecedented fourth successive English top-flight title, could face points deductions and even relegation from the Premier League.

## Trans sprinter set for historic Paralympics debut

REUTERS

Valentina Petrillo is set to become the first openly transgender athlete to participate in the Paralympic Games, scheduled to run from August 28 to September 8, after the visually impaired sprinter was selected to represent Italy in the women's 200 and 400 metres races in Paris.

The 50-year-old, who transitioned in 2019, won bronze medals in both events at the World Para Athletics Championships last year in Paris. Prior to transitioning, Petrillo won 11 national titles in the men's category.

"I still find it hard to believe it and I'm keeping my feet on the ground because my chance to participate in Tokyo was missed by a whisker," Petrillo said in a statement on Monday.

"I will only start thinking about the Paris Games once I arrive in France."

Diagnosed with Stargardt's syndrome at the age of 14, Petrillo's visual abilities are limited to 1/50th of the normal range.

International Paralympic Committee (IPC) President Andrew Parsons told BBC Sport that while Petrillo is welcome in Paris under World Para Athletics policies, he wants to see the sporting world "unite" on its transgender policies.

The governing bodies of many sports including athletics, cycling and swimming have tightened their participation rules for transgender athletes in elite women's competitions over the last couple of years.

However, the IPC allows governing bodies to set their own policies and World Para Athletics permits an individual legally recognised as a woman to compete in the category for which their impairment qualifies them.



## Abahani icons plea for return of looted trophies

SPORTS REPORTER

The premises of Abahani in Dhanmondi yesterday became a rare gathering place for former star players from various sporting disciplines, including football, cricket, and hockey, united by a common plea: to return all the looted trophies the powerhouse club has achieved over the past 52 years.

Abahani officials from different eras, its fans, and some local residents joined the former stars in urging those who looted the trophies on 5 August – shortly after former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned in the face of the student-led movement – to return the cherished trophies so that their achievements can be preserved for future generations.

Before the former star players began delivering their speeches, some people were vocal about opening the Dhanmondi ground for public use, as it has been reserved exclusively for Abahani for a long time.

Former national hockey captain Abdus Sadeque said, "I first played for Abahani in 1972... and captained both the football and hockey teams during their debut seasons. I've returned here after a long time and noticed a few



trophies have been recovered.

"I can confidently say that Abahani has been the best club in the country for 52 years. They excel not only in football but also in cricket, hockey, and table tennis. The number of championships they have won is unmatched by any other club in the country... but unfortunately, all of them were taken away. I want to appeal through the media for those trophies to be returned to the club."

Former national cricket captain Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu said, "When I heard that Abahani had been vandalised and the valuable trophies looted, I was deeply disappointed because those trophies were earned through our performances... I urge everyone to return those memorable trophies. It would be the greatest

reward for us to see those trophies once again placed in Abahani's trophy cases."

Echoing the sentiments of Sadeque and Lipu, former national footballer Dewan Shafiul Alam Tutul said, "Most of us are no longer involved with the club, but we are here for one reason: we want our achievements returned because you cannot keep those trophies at home."

"I believe those trophies have little market value and could be sold as scrap... If necessary, we will provide financial compensation, but please return the achievements we earned over the years," said Tutul, adding that Abahani has no political affiliations.

Abahani director Inam Ahmed urged the administration and the interim government's advisers to "ensure security" not only for Abahani but also for other clubs that have been vandalised.

"Our achievements have been looted. This is not just a club of Bangladesh; it is a club for all players and the Dhanmondi community," said Inam, adding that Abahani will continue to form squads in all disciplines to participate in their respective sports despite the vandalism at the club.



PHOTO: PPCB

Bangladesh 'A' opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy looks dejected after being caught and bowled by Umar Amin during the opening day of the first of the two-match four-day series against Pakistan Shaheens at the Islamabad Club Ground yesterday. Joy struck 65 off 116 balls but Bangladesh 'A', who were 91-3 at one stage, suffered a massive batting collapse to get bowled out for just 122 runs in their first innings. Mushfiqur Rahim and Mominul Haque didn't have an ideal batting practice ahead of the upcoming two-match Test series as they could make 14 and 11 runs, respectively. Pakistan Shaheens reached 2-0 at stumps, trailing by 120 runs.