



It was a frustrating night for the huge fanbases of archrivals Brazil and Argentina as both teams were denied victories even after scoring first in their respective South American World Cup qualifiers away from home on Thursday. [Left] Vinicius Junior, recently snubbed for Ballon d'Or, could have earned Brazil a win over Venezuela but the Real Madrid forward saw his poorly-taken penalty saved by goalkeeper Rafael Romo before slashing the rebound wide. The five-time world champions saw Raphinha's 43rd-minute goal from a freekick cancelled out by a Segovia strike just 38 seconds into the second half as Brazil had to stay content with a 1-1 draw at the Estadio Monumental. While Brazil managed to settle for a draw, Argentina saw Lautaro Martinez's 11th-minute strike overturned by a stunning bicycle kick from Antonio Sanabria and a second-half header from Omar Alderete as Paraguay claimed a well-deserved 2-1 win over the reigning world champions at Asuncion. Argentina, however, maintained their pole position in the table with 22 points from 11 games while Brazil moved a slot up to third with 17 points from as many matches.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

China reignite World Cup hopes

AFP, Beijing

China's long-suffering football fans went from "hell to heaven" after a dramatic 1-0 win in Bahrain reignited the country's hopes of reaching the World Cup for only a second time.

Zhang Yuning prodded home in the 91st minute on Thursday, moments after Bahrain had what they thought was a winner of their own ruled out by VAR for offside.

It blew Group C wide open with Australia, Saudi Arabia, and China all on six points at the halfway stage of the third round of Asian qualifying for 2026.

Their team's second win in a row had Chinese supporters dreaming of making the World Cup again, the only previous occasion going back to 2002.

The hashtag "national team goes from hell one second to heaven the next" trended on Weibo in China, racking up at least 22 million views by Friday morning.

Branko Ivankovic's side face another crunch qualifier on Tuesday when they host Group C leaders Japan in Xiamen.

The top two teams in each of the three Asian qualifying groups go straight through to the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Captain and goalkeeper Wang Dalei told reporters in Riffa: "We had lots of chances in this game, so even though we got some luck, I'm very happy."

"We can come up short but we can't lose our unity and our fighting spirit," he added.

Bangladesh target second goal of 2024

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera's longing for a second goal from his troops this year was apparent as he hoped for "at least one goal" when they face Maldives in their second of the two FIFA friendlies at Bashundhara Kings arena today.

Bangladesh's final game of the year will kick off at 6:00 PM and telecast live by T Sports.

The men in red and green had a dry spell in front of goal in 2024, managing just a single goal in seven matches this year - Sheikh Morsalin's winner away to Bhutan in a friendly in September.

Bangladesh's initial goal was to notch up victories in both the FIFA friendlies against Maldives - a side that Cabrera's troops got the better of twice and drew once in their last three meetings - in order to secure a favourable draw in next year's Asian Cup Qualifiers.

However, those hopes were dashed when Bangladesh, despite getting a number of good chances, suffered a 1-0 defeat in the first friendly against Maldives last Wednesday at the same venue. That loss could well be attributed to the team's continuation of firing blanks in front of the goal.

"If you look at the situations, we reached the finishing zones many times when players were in advantageous positions to cross and had enough numbers in the box most of the time but it's difficult to explain why we were not able to score any goals the other day," Cabrera recounted the misses of the last game on the eve of today's encounter.

"We will try to reach the opposition box as many times as we did in the previous game and we do believe that this time we will be able to score at least one goal," the Spaniard added.



New ad-hoc committees draw mixed reactions

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Sports Council (NSC) on Thursday disclosed ad-hoc committees for nine sports federations - bridge, tennis, squash, kabaddi, athletics, billiard and snooker, basketball, chess and hockey - to mixed reactions from former and current players and organisers.

Since the fall of the Awami League government in August in the face of the student-led peoples' movement, most sports bodies have been at a standstill as many top officials, who were associated with the previous regime, went into hiding. Then on September 10, the ministry of youth and sports removed presidents of 42 sports bodies.

The ministry had formed a five-member search Committee in late August to reform the sports bodies. After holding discussions with different stakeholders, the committee sent its recommendations for nine ad-hoc committees last month, which the ministry finally approved yesterday, after scrutinising it for about three weeks.

These ad-hoc committees are supposed to reform their respective sports bodies and then hold elections down the line. However, the NSC did not mention a set time frame for the nine ad-hoc committees to hold the election, which it usually does when forming ad-hoc committees.

These ad-hoc committees are composed of 14 to 19 members with the inclusion of former players, coaches, organisers, businessmen, corporate service holders, students

and current and retired government officials.

While some stakeholders are optimistic about the new committees, some are disappointed by the appointments and unconvinced if they can help the country's sports.

"I know most members of hockey's ad-hoc committee. I hope they will be able to run the federation smoothly but I think there are a lot of challenges ahead of them such as holding the domestic competitions

and districts are contributing a lot to hockey but they have been ignored," said Prince.

Former joint secretary of the kabaddi federation Abdul Mannan questioned why businessmen were included in the ad-hoc committee, saying, "Proven organisers of past committees have been overlooked in the kabaddi's ad-hoc committee. Grassroot level organisers were also not considered."

However, former national captain Tuhin Tarafder felt that capable persons have been included in the ad-hoc committee and another former captain Arduzzaman Munshi believed that the new committee can deliver something positive.

Former athlete-cum-organiser Shamima Sattar Mimo welcomed the new committee in the athletics federation, as did the country's four-time fastest man Mohammad Ismail.

"Members of the new ad-hoc committee had been part of the committee prior to 2010. I hope they will arrange long term training, send athletes abroad and hold domestic competitions on time like they did before," said Ismail, requesting the new committee to hold the national meet as soon as possible.

Grandmaster Enamul Hossain Razib said the formation of the chess ad-hoc committee reflected their meeting with the search committee.

"We hope the ad-hoc committee will organise good international tournaments, provide financial help to promising players and take chess out of Dhaka, to other parts of the country," said Rajib.

“ We are working on naming ad-hoc committees for the remaining sports bodies. We expect to recommend 20-25 ad-hoc committees as soon as possible and then the rest in the final phase. ”

Search committee member
MM Kaiser

regularly and managing the funds," said former national forward Rafiqul Islam Kamal, who is also involved with Usha KC.

However, Ariful Haque Prince, former forward and former joint secretary of the now defunct hockey committee, did not share Rafiqul's optimism.

"In this committee, allies of the fascist Awami League government have been rehabilitated. The clubs

Tonali fires Italy into Nations League quarters

AFP, Brussels



Sandro Tonali fired Italy into the Nations League quarterfinals with the only goal in Thursday's 1-0 win over Belgium in Brussels.

Newcastle United midfielder Tonali tapped home his first international goal 10 minutes into a hard-fought win at the King Baudouin Stadium.

Tonali's strike was crucial as Italy were guaranteed a spot in the last eight with a draw either against the Red Devils or with France on Sunday night.

Italy lead France by three points at the top of Group A2 and will battle with Les Bleus for first place at the San Siro.

"We showed again that we give it a go and don't just sit back in matches, that's the big change," Tonali told RAI.

"There's a great atmosphere in the squad and we all look forward to getting back together again every time the international break finishes."

Luciano Spalletti's team, who have been rejuvenated over the course of the Nations League group stage, are unbeaten since the Euros and only drew with Belgium last month after having to play over half the match in Rome with 10 men.

Domenico Tedesco's Belgium meanwhile are six points behind second-placed France with one game remaining and cannot reach the quarters after winning only against Israel.

Romelu Lukaku, who wore the captain's armband, should have levelled for the hosts in the 78th minute when he glanced Timothy Castagne's deflected cross wide from close range.

Belgium were the better team after the break and were denied a result by solid goalkeeping from Gianluigi Donnarumma and the post, which with seven minutes remaining kept out Wout Faes' flicked header after a well worked set-piece.

'Representing NZ was all I ever dreamed of'

AGENCIES

Paceman Tim Southee, New Zealand's all-time top wicket-taker (770) across formats, is eyeing the third and final Test against England as his swansong in the format.

Having debuted against England as a 19-year old in Napier in March 2008, Southee will bring his career full circle when he takes on the English side next month at his home ground in Hamilton.

"Representing New Zealand was all I ever dreamed of growing up," Southee said.

"To play such a big series against the same opponent my test career began against all those years ago, and on three grounds that are incredibly special to me, seems the perfect way to end my time.

"Test cricket holds a special place in my heart," he added, mentioning that he would make himself available for selection if the Black Caps make the

World Test Championship (WTC) final next year.

Southee captained the side to six wins, six losses, and two draws after taking over from Kane Williamson in 2022 before handing over the baton last month to Tom Latham, who led them to a 3-0 Test sweep in India.

Southee's all-round skills and consistency have seen him become the only player in the world to claim more than 300 Test wickets, 200 ODI wickets, and 100 T20 wickets.

Southee has struggled for wickets in recent series and was largely ineffective during New Zealand's last home summer, taking six wickets in four Tests.

Southee was nonetheless confirmed on Friday in New Zealand's 14-man squad, which also includes star batter Kane Williamson after missing their recent India series with a groin injury, for the England series which starts next week in Christchurch.



Perseverance leads to Excellence

Proud sponsor of
BANGLADESH NATIONAL GOLF TEAM

40 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE