

Ballon d'Or to introduce gender parity

AFP, Paris

The Ballon d'Or award ceremony will take place on September 22 this year and the number of awards for women and men will be equal for the first time, organisers said on Monday.

Awards for best women's goalkeeper, best young women's player and the top women's scorer in a club or national team have been added to the list this year for the ceremony at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, France Football magazine and UEFA said.

That means there will be six awards for male players and six for female players, with an additional prize, the Socrates Award, for actions that promote solidarity, which is open to men or women.

The nominees will be announced in early August.

Last year's awards ceremony was overshadowed by a boycott by Real Madrid after they learned that their Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior had not won the best men's player award, which went to Rodri of Manchester City.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz poses with his winner's trophy after beating World No 1 Jannik Sinner of Italy in straight sets (7-6, 6-1) at Foro Italico in Rome on Sunday. The Spaniard snapped Sinner's 26-match winning run to claim his first Rome crown and seventh Masters 1000 title, denying Italy its first male champion at the tournament since Adriano Panatta in 1976.

PHOTO: AFP

WOMEN'S EMERGING TEAMS' ASIA CUP BCB waiting for ACC confirmation

SPORTS REPORTER

A women's wing official of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday said that they are expecting information regarding upcoming Women's Emerging Teams' Asia Cup from the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) by this week.

The tournament is scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka from June 6, but the recent India Pakistan conflict has cast doubts over the tournament's fate.

Recent media reports suggested that India have decided to pull out from the upcoming ACC events. However, a BCCI official on Monday denied making any such decision regarding upcoming ACC events.

"The ACC has told us that the tournament will go on as per schedule. But they have asked for a week's time," Bulbul Bashar, BCB's women's wing in-charge, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the official informed that they are facing difficulties to arrange international series of the national women's team ahead of the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup in October and may opt to play a challenge series as part of preparation.

"We may play a challenge series. There can be three teams. We may also play against the U-17 boys," he said.

Molten becomes BFF's official football partner

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday signed a three-year partnership with Japan-based Molten Corporation -- a renowned manufacturer of sports equipment and automotive parts -- naming the company as its official football partner.

The agreement comes nearly three months after BFF appointed local brand Dour as the national team's kit partner.

This marks the first time BFF has formalised such a deal, with BFF vice-president Fahad Karim and Takashi Ozaki, leader of the Molten Asian Group, signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of their respective organisations at the BFF House.

Under the deal, Bangladesh will purchase 2,000 Molten footballs annually at a discounted rate. Molten will also provide an additional 2,000 footballs free of charge each year.



In recent years, BFF has already been using Molten footballs across various competitions, purchasing 3,130 footballs last year alone.

"I'm very happy because I had a lot of discussions with Fahad and finally, I am here to support Bangladesh Football Federation so that they can strengthen the national football team," Ozaki told reporters at the BFF House.

Fahad noted that BFF usually purchases footballs for competitions using funds from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), and the new agreement with Molten will save them Tk 50 lakh annually, which will be spent on buying other equipment in line with suggestions from the technical and national teams committees.

'Difficult situation' eased as Tigers avoid return trip

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) received a welcome boost yesterday as Emirates Cricket Board confirmed an additional T20I to the ongoing series in Sharjah.

The third and final match will now be held on May 21 at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium, turning what was initially a two-match affair into a three-match series.

The decision came after a formal request from the BCB, which is currently in the final stages of discussions with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) regarding a separate T20I series in Pakistan.

Bangladesh are slated to open their campaign against Pakistan on May 27, according to the draft revised itinerary. Initially, the plan was to bring the team home after the UAE tour, which was scheduled to end yesterday. That would have meant flying the players back to Bangladesh and then again to Pakistan within a matter of days -- a costly and tiring process.

Not only did it raise concerns over player fatigue and logistical complications, it would have incurred significant travel and accommodation expenses.

The approval from UAE Cricket changed the picture. The additional fixture means the team can now stay on in the UAE before heading straight to Pakistan, avoiding the back-and-forth journey and



trimming down the overall cost.

"If we had returned home and then travelled to Pakistan again five or six days later, it would've put a lot of physical strain on the players," said Iftikhar Rahman Mithu, chairman of the BCB's media and communications committee, explaining the board's reasoning to The Daily Star.

He also pointed out the financial burden: "Secondly, the price of flight tickets would be also huge. Thirdly, if we send the team early in Pakistan, they will remain confined in the hotel room for a few days."

Highlighting the cost-effectiveness of the current arrangement, he added, "If you stay at Dubai for an additional seven days, where each room costs around 300 dollars, it will be around USD 52 to 60 thousand additional cost

for hotel rooms. "So we requested the UAE for an additional T20I and they will now bear the cost until May 22."

As for the Pakistan leg of the tour, Mithu noted that discussions are still ongoing regarding the number of matches to be played. There appears to be a split in opinion within the squad.

"A few players talked about reducing the number of matches while some players agreed to play all matches. But Pakistan are the host team. So overall, we are in a difficult situation," he admitted.

Mithu further informed that the tentative plan for Bangladesh contingent is to reach Pakistan on May 24, with the series expected to conclude by June 5 as the board is mindful of the Eid holidays and the subsequent tour of Sri Lanka.

SHORT CORNER

Miraz granted NOC to play in PSL

Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, unpicked for Bangladesh T20I series against UAE and Pakistan, received a NOC from the board (BCB) today to play for Lahore Qalandars in Pakistan Super League.

Messi urges unity as Miami face testing times

Inter Miami skipper Lionel Messi urged his teammates to "stay united" after a crushing 3-0 defeat to Orlando City on Sunday night -- the club's fifth loss in their last seven matches.

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Jamie Vardy, alongside his family members, takes a lap of appreciation from the King Power Stadium crowd after playing his last match for Leicester City following Sunday's 2-0 victory against Ipswich. On his 500th and final appearance for the club, Vardy scored his 200th goal for the Foxes, ending a remarkable spell which included a stunning Premier League title triumph in 2016.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Dembele channelling Michael Jordan in glory hunt

AGENCIES

If someone had told Ousmane Dembele at the start of the 2024/25 season that he'd be PSG's top scorer, Ligue 1's Golden Boot winner, and leading the line as a central striker -- all while largely avoiding injury -- he might've laughed it off.

But now, 33 goals later, that unthinkable script has turned into a blockbuster season for the 27-year-old Frenchman.

From a mercurial winger often plagued by fitness setbacks to a clinical, high-output centre-forward, Dembele's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable.

"I don't know if I'm in my prime," he told FIFA.com. "But I do feel like I'm playing well this season. I'm much more clinical. It's all because of my new role."

His reinvention has given Paris Saint-Germain more than just goals -- it's injected belief into a team chasing a historic treble.

With the Ligue 1 title already secured, Dembele now stares down three final hurdles: the French Cup final against Reims on May 24, the



UEFA Champions League final against Inter Milan on May 31, and the inaugural 32-team FIFA World Cup in the United States next month.

"This [Club] World Cup will be really special," Dembele said. "It comes just before the World Cup for the national teams. It's going to be massive and we can't wait to get there."

Credit, he's quick to add, also belongs to PSG coach Luis Enrique. "The coach has always believed in me

since the day I arrived," said Dembele. "He shared his plans for me as a player. He has every bit of confidence in me, and I try to pay him back on the pitch."

Now, as he prepares to lead PSG into the most crucial stretch of the season, Dembele is inspired by legends, particularly one from the basketball world.

"Michael Jordan is the greatest in my opinion," he said. "His leadership and all the trophies he has won -- I saw everything he did in The Last Dance. He was incredible."

And when asked about the footballing icon he'd dream of playing alongside, Dembele didn't hesitate: "Zinedine Zidane. He is France's greatest player of all time. Technically gifted, and I believe he would have provided me with excellent opportunities."

Much like Zidane before him, Dembele now carries French hopes -- and PSG's -- on the global stage. With silverware in sight and history within grasp, the boy who once couldn't stay fit now looks like the man made for the moment.

Most difficult season of career, says Conte

REUTERS

Napoli manager Antonio Conte laid bare the emotional toll of a gruelling title race, admitting that the season had pushed him beyond his limits as his side prepares for one final push towards the Serie A title.

Their penultimate match of the campaign was a rollercoaster, ending in a 0-0 draw at Parma on Sunday that saw them hit the woodwork and have a stoppage-time penalty overturned after a lengthy VAR check.

In the end, Napoli head into the final round with a one-point lead over second-placed Inter Milan, but 55-year-old manager Conte admitted the season was taking a toll on him.

Inter's final fixture is at Como who are finishing their first Serie A season in over two decades in great form, although Cesc Fabregas' team's winning streak ended at six matches with a 1-1 draw at safe Verona.

Napoli were saved from being overtaken by Inter thanks to a Pedro brace for Lazio, including a 90th-minute penalty.

"It is certainly the most difficult season of my career," Conte told DAZN.

"I gave everything, I went beyond my limits. I also know I am exhausted, I'm just about reaching the end of this season.

"Napoli is wonderful for the passion and

enthusiasm, but it also brings with it demands and expectations that are often higher than the realistic capabilities."

Napoli can secure their second title in three years at home against Cagliari next Friday.

"We are close to the Scudetto, but we still have to take that final step. It will be taken on our home turf, with the support of our fans," Conte told DAZN.

"It is a very difficult campaign, we have achieved what we wanted to do, which was to trouble the leaders to the end."

"We have been at the top for a long time, despite a season full of difficulties, but we never complained, we kept going and we are right there to achieve something unthinkable and historic for Napoli."

Yet due to his red card in the final minutes of the Parma match, Conte will not be on the bench against Cagliari after what looked like a scuffle with Parma coach Cristian

Chivu.

"I was annoyed by Parma's obstruction today, as I was used to English football, where there aren't all these stops for cramp, injuries, pretending to be injured, so it irritated me and that's why I was sent off," he said.

"It irritates me, because you work all year to have a decisive match. I trust the staff and these lads, I above all trust the crowd at the Stadio Maradona."

