

SPORT

What to WATCH

T Sports
T20 World Cup
Sri Lanka vs New Zealand
Live from 7:30 pm
Sony Sport 1,2,5
Champions League

Atalanta vs Dortmund
Live from 11:45 pm
Live from 2:00 am (Thursday):
PSG vs Monaco
Real Madrid vs Benfica
Juventus vs Galatasaray



Now or never for Sri Lanka

Co-hosts Sri Lanka are staring at a potential Super Eights exit when they face New Zealand in the T20 World Cup in Colombo today. The Lankans have endured a mixed campaign -- a thumping win over Australia followed by defeats to Zimbabwe and England. A heavy 51-run loss to England has left them with no margin for error. Another setback against the resilient Black Caps would all but end their tournament. New Zealand, meanwhile, come in after their Super Eights clash against Pakistan was washed out.

HEAD-TO-HEAD: The sides have met 28 times in T20Is. New Zealand lead with 16 wins to Sri Lanka's nine, while two matches ended in ties and one in no result.

T20 WORLD CUPS: Sri Lanka edge the Black Caps with three wins in six meetings. New Zealand have two, while the other ended in a tie before Sri Lanka won the one-over eliminator.

IN SRI LANKA: The Black Caps lead 5-3 in 10 meetings, with one tie and one no result.

LAST MEETING: In December 2024, New Zealand beat Sri Lanka 2-1 in a three-match T20I series at home.

AT R. PREMADASA STADIUM: Sri Lanka lost both previous T20Is against New Zealand here, back in 2009.

VENUE TREND: The average first-innings total at the Premadasa in this tournament is 173 (five completed games).



PATHUM NISSANKA: He has scored 246 runs, averaging 27.33 at a strike rate of 120 against New Zealand, while Kusal Mendis has 314 runs at 132.48, averaging 26.16 in 12 matches.

MITCHELL SANTNER: The New Zealand skipper has taken 14 wickets at an average of 6.38 in 11 matches against Sri Lanka.

SCORING RATE: Across four completed games, New Zealand are striking at 10.37 runs per over -- the best in the tournament. Sri Lanka are fifth at 8.92.

BOWLING CONTRAST: Despite their batting dominance, New Zealand rank bottom for wickets taken (14 in four games). Sri Lanka have 30 in five matches, while India lead the chart with 41.

Bangladesh in strong group in Women's T20WC

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh have been drawn in a strong Group 2 at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup alongside heavyweights Australia, India, South Africa as well as Pakistan and Netherlands. The Tigresses face a demanding schedule, beginning with the Netherlands on June 14 at Edgbaston before taking on contenders in successive matches. Bangladesh meet Australia at Headingley on June 17 and India at Old Trafford on June 25, alongside fixtures against Pakistan and South Africa. Regular participants in recent editions of the tournament, Bangladesh will be aiming to build on their growing experience at the global stage and challenge higher-ranked opponents in what promises to be a highly competitive group.

GROUPS

Group 1: Australia, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Netherlands

Group 2: West Indies, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland

BANGLADESH'S FIXTURES

Date	Match	Venue
June 14	vs Netherlands	Edgbaston
June 17	vs Australia	Headingley
June 20	vs Pakistan	Hampshire Bowl
June 25	vs India	Old Trafford
June 28	vs South Africa	Lord's

District and women's football in focus

SPORTS REPORTER

Newly appointed state minister for youth and sports, Aminul Haque, has emphasised the revival of district football leagues and the expansion of regional competitions for women, calling them crucial for the overall development of the sport in Bangladesh.

"We have observed for many years that district-level leagues are often neglected... we want to make district leagues a permanent fixture," Aminul said at a meeting with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) executive committee, in the presence of BFF president Tabitha Awal, at the National Sports Council conference room yesterday.

"For our female players, we shouldn't just look at international matches; we need to focus on the regions from which these talented girls emerge," he said, adding that plans include developing high-quality coaches in every district and handing over three stadiums -- Kamalapur, Sylhet and Chittagong -- to support training and competitions.

The footballer-turned politician further announced that both men's and women's national players will be brought under a structured, government-backed pay scale.

'Great opportunity to get the show on road'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Peter Butler will treat today's closed-door friendly against A-League side Western Sydney Wanderers FC in Sydney as a final rehearsal before committing to his tactical blueprint for the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup.

"We have the opportunity to actually look at the girls tomorrow [today] in two 45-minute games," Butler said in a video message released by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

The fixture assumes added significance given the scale of what lies ahead. Led by Afeida Khandokar, Bangladesh open their campaign against nine-time champions China on March 3 -- their first appearance at the continental showpiece and the country's first since 1980.

At Valentine Sports Park, under brooding skies yesterday, Afeida and her teammates completed their fourth training session with an emphasis on tactical flexibility and sharper ball progression. Butler, still shaping the side in his image, has pushed for greater attacking intent without entirely sacrificing structure.

"The girls have worked really, really well. I can't fault their efforts," said the Bangladesh coach, who guided the team to their second SAFF Women's Championship title in 2024 before passing the Asian Cup qualifying tournament with flying colours in the following year.



"They are an honest bunch of girls, and the work rate they've put in has been great. It's a good environment to train; the pitches out there are outstanding, though it's a little bit open to the public."

Bangladesh have not played an international since the tri-nation cup at the National Stadium in Dhaka in early December, leaving a three-month competitive gap before their biggest-ever assignment. Butler's attempt to instil a more proactive style delivered encouraging returns during July's qualifying campaign in Myanmar, yet vulnerabilities resurfaced in October when Thailand scored eight times across two friendlies.

Stronger opposition now awaits, and the warm-up match offers a controlled setting to test variations in shape and personnel before the stakes rise considerably.

"I'll sit and go through the team tonight. I've just worked on a couple of options, bearing in mind whether we play a 3-4-3 or a 3-5-2 or a 4-3-3 -- it's all subjective."

"I have to say, the girls' attitude has been excellent. I just really believe it's a great opportunity for them to get the show on the road. I'm looking at it as a training-ground game in a lovely environment. And more importantly, it gives the players great competition for places, young and old."

ASIAN GAMES QUALIFIERS Axe falls on seniors as BHF cuts squad to 26

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) on Tuesday reduced the preliminary squad of the national hockey team from 36 players to 26 for the Men's Asian Games qualifiers, leaving out several experienced names.

Among the senior players dropped were Farhad Ahmed Shitul, Moinul Islam Koushik, Nayeem Uddin, Arshad Hossain and Mahabub Hossain.

The team has been training since February 5 under the guidance of coaches Mohammad Ashiquzzaman and Hedayatul Islam Razib for the competition.

Although the official reasons for the exclusions were not disclosed, a source said there had been a proposal from the federation to allow the senior players a farewell opportunity in recognition of their long service.

However, the coaching staff reportedly declined the idea, focusing instead on shaping a squad that fits their preferred playing style.

When contacted, Ashiquzzaman did not respond.

The nine-team qualifiers will be held in Oman from March 28 to April 5. Six teams will earn spots in the 12-team hockey competition at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, scheduled for September 19 to October 8.

Several senior players like Pushkor Khisha MIMO and Abed Uddin retained their places alongside several U-21 players, signaling a transition phase for the national side.

A chaotic Bernabeu return awaits Mourinho

AGENCIES

Jose Mourinho has not set foot in the Santiago Bernabeu since leaving Real Madrid in 2013, but his Champions League homecoming with Benfica on Wednesday has become far more complicated than initially anticipated.

Mourinho will not be allowed to sit in the dugout for the play-off second leg after being sent off during his team's 1-0 defeat in the first leg in Lisbon last week.

The 63-year-old also faced criticism for controversial remarks following alleged racial abuse directed at Madrid star Vinicius Junior by Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni.

The Argentine will miss the second leg after UEFA provisionally suspended him for one match while an investigation into the incident continues.

All of it sets the stage for what is expected to be a charged reception at the Bernabeu. With tensions still high following the alleged abuse of Vinicius, Benfica are likely to encounter a hostile environment, and Mourinho -- despite his past success at the club -- may not be spared either. The Portuguese coach remains a divisive figure among sections of the Madrid support, and the events surrounding the first leg have only intensified scrutiny ahead of his return. Mourinho, who won a LaLiga title with



Los Blancos during his three-year tenure, left a significant mark on the Spanish giants during a period of intense rivalry with Barcelona and a dressing room split between supporters and detractors.

Madrid president Florentino Perez is known to admire the Portuguese coach, and speculation persists that Mourinho could return next season to replace Alvaro Arbeloa if the current campaign ends poorly. However, the atmosphere surrounding this tie -- and the manner in which it unfolds -- may inevitably influence how such discussions are viewed.

Arbeloa -- one of Mourinho's disciples during his time in charge of the 15-time European champions -- faces his biggest test

yet since replacing Xabi Alonso in January, as Benfica travel to the Spanish capital.

Mourinho was dismissed in the first leg for vociferous complaints from the touchline, but he insists preparations for the high-intensity return leg are in place.

"I (won't be) sitting on the bench, I can't go to the dressing room, I can't communicate with the team," he said. "It's hard for me, but my teammates and my assistants are there -- they'll do their job."

The first leg was overshadowed by Prestianni's alleged racial slur aimed at Vinicius.

UEFA's decision to suspend the Benfica midfielder for one game has eased some of the tension ahead of the return fixture, although he could face a ban of at least 10 matches if European football's governing body finds him guilty of racial abuse.

Vinicius received support from teammates, including Kylian Mbappe and Trent Alexander-Arnold. However, Mourinho described Vinicius' goal celebration as disrespectful and questioned why such incidents continue to occur around the Brazilian.

Prestianni has denied racially abusing Vinicius, but with the controversy still unfolding, the second leg will inevitably be played under its shadow as Madrid aim to avoid a humiliating early exit and secure their place in the last 16.



PSG forward Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and midfielder Kang-in Lee appear to be in a relaxed mood ahead of their second-leg Champions League playoff tie against Monaco at home on Wednesday. However, Luis Enrique's side will be wary of Monaco, who were two goals up in the first leg before the Ligue 1 leaders fought back to secure a 3-2 win and take a slender one-goal advantage into the return leg.

PHOTO: AFP