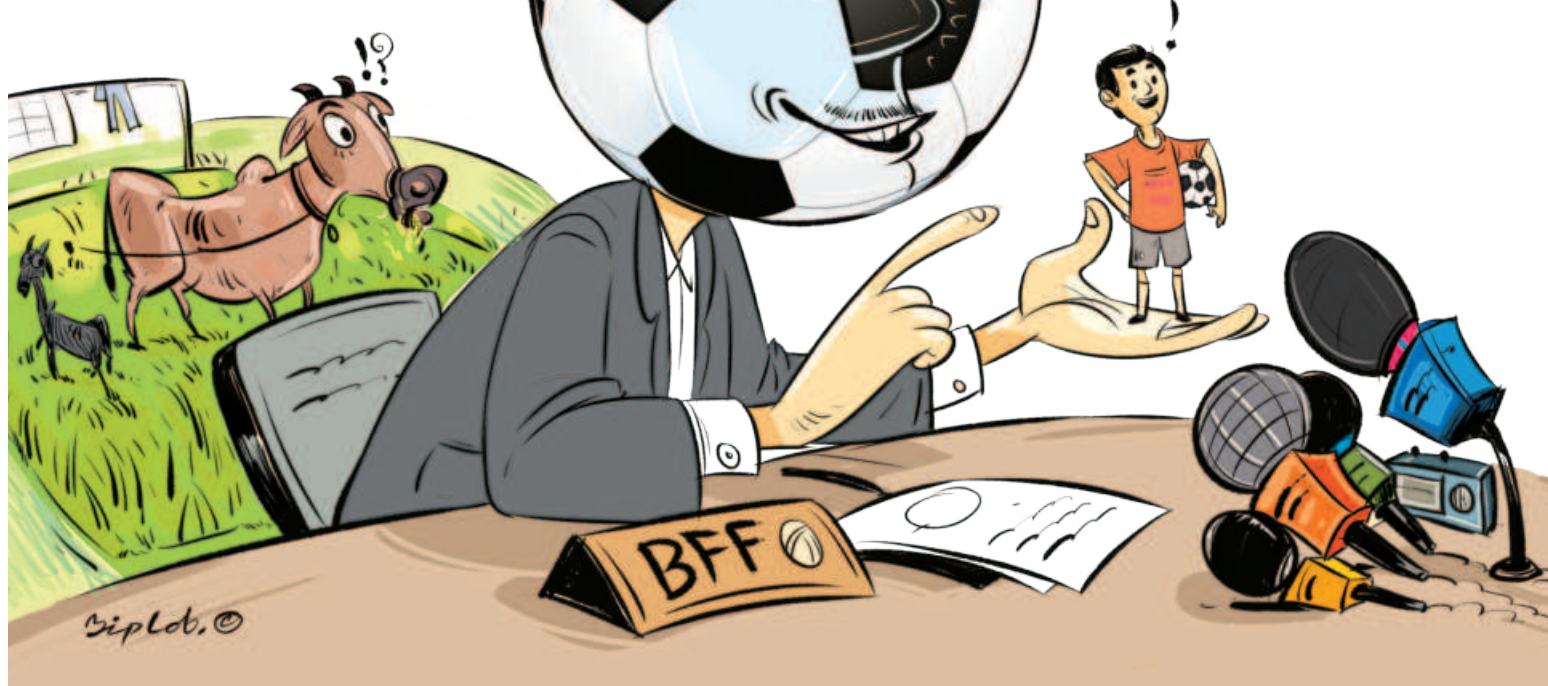


SPORT

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 1 HD
Hyderabad vs Punjab
Live from 8:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 2, 5
UEFA Champions

League
Semifinal 2nd leg
Bayern vs PSG
Live from 1:00 am
(Thursday)



Munich braces for PSG-Bayern fireworks

AGENCIES

Another classic or a full-blown blockbuster feels inevitable as PSG head to Munich to face Bayern, defending a thrilling 5-4 aggregate lead from one of the Champions League's most dramatic semifinal clashes in Paris. Under Luis Enrique, PSG are once again on the brink of history, their fearless attacking identity pushing them toward another final. Yet Vincent Kompany refuses to blink. Bayern's coach is doubling down on his high-risk, high-reward approach, demanding goals—at least three—to overturn the deficit at the Allianz Arena. Critics question Bayern's defensive fragility, but Kompany sees courage, not caution, as the path forward. Joshua Kimmich put it simply: "We're not going to change our style of play in three days and just sit back and defend." PSG, inspired by last season's dominant title run, won't retreat either. With both sides committed to relentless attacking football, Wednesday's second leg promises another unforgettable night on Europe's grandest stage.



- Paris and Bayern are the top scorers in this season's UEFA Champions League with 43 and 42 goals respectively. It is the first time in the competition's history that two different clubs have each reached 40+ goals in a single edition. Barcelona hold the single-season record with 45 (1999-2000).
- Bayern have won five of their seven previous UEFA two-legged ties against French opposition and have also won all three of their single-leg knockout meetings with French sides. They are in their fourth European Cup/Champions League semifinal against Ligue 1 opponents, having won all three of the previous ties.
- The Bavarian side have won only one of their last six Champions League semifinal ties – the 3-0 single-leg victory over Lyon in 2019-20 – meaning

- they have lost their last five two-legged semifinals in the competition.
- The German outfit have lost only one of their last 29 Champions League home matches (W23 D5), and have won all six home matches this season.
- Bayern have won only one of their last eight UEFA two-legged ties after losing the first leg by one goal.
- PSG have lost their last two UEFA two-legged ties against German opposition, though their overall record in such encounters remains positive with four wins and two defeats.
- Luis Enrique's men are aiming to become the first defending Champions League winners to reach the final since Real Madrid did so in 2016-17 and 2017-18 – seasons in which they went on to win the title.

Hollow promises, dying district leagues

ANISUR RAHMAN

How can Bangladesh football progress?

The answer to this, or similar queries, is almost always delivered by experts and even Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) authorities in a more or less identical manner – stressing the need to improve the grassroots.

The answer seems perfect, but the act of masquerading behind such big talk eventually wears thin when confronted by reality – a bleak state of the country's footballing culture that focuses only on the national team, disregarding the rot at the rudimentary level that instead needs careful nurturing to produce talent capable of enriching the national side.

For years, crores have been invested in renovating a number of district stadiums, but what use is that wealth if it cannot cater to the basic needs it was intended for?

Sherpur District Stadium was massively overhauled with a whopping sum of more than Tk 41 crore a few years ago, but the district's premier venue remains largely unused, with the dreams of budding footballers fading in the absence of competitive football.

The story is hardly unique. Jamalpur District Stadium, renovated at a cost of Tk 44 crore, has suffered a similar fate – infrastructure without activity, promise without delivery.

Since the completion of renovation works around mid-2020, Jamalpur has not hosted a local football league, while Sherpur last staged its district league in 2023 – isolated instances in an otherwise prolonged drought.

This stands in stark contrast to a not-so-distant past when district stadiums thrived as vibrant hubs of football, packed with players and fans alike. Those leagues once served as vital pipelines, consistently feeding talent into the country's top-tier football.

That pipeline, however, has nearly dried up over the past two decades, particularly after district football administration came under BFF-affiliated committees in 2008, replacing the government-backed district sports associations. Since then, the grassroots structure has steadily weakened under inconsistent planning and limited execution.

Ironically, district football now finds itself clinging to a flicker of hope – not because of structural reform, but due to the emotional lift provided by high-profile additions to the national team. The arrivals of Hamza Choudhury from England and Shamit Shome from Canada have reignited belief among young footballers across the country.

Hamza and Shamit's decisions to represent Bangladesh have elevated the national team's profile and inspired countless youngsters to dream of wearing the red and green jersey. But belief alone is not a system – and inspiration

without infrastructure rarely produces results.

That belief remains confined to the hearts of aspiring footballers, demanding to be nurtured through functioning district leagues – something the BFF has consistently failed to ensure. Of the country's 64 districts, only five managed to organise leagues last year, leaving 59 without competition, sponsors, or opportunity.

This is not an isolated failure but a systemic one spanning nearly two decades. Over the last 20 years, the BFF has provided financial assistance to district organisers only four times – in 2013, 2014, 2018, and 2020 – with support from Prime Bank, Nitol Tata, and government allocations. Notably, the last such assistance came before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are planning a budget of Tk 6.40 crore for all 64 districts in the coming fiscal year so they can run their activities, especially district leagues. Due to a busy national schedule and financial constraints, we could not hold leagues last year despite taking steps."

BFF district football committee chairman Iqbal Hossain

The end of the long-standing Kazi Salahuddin-led BFF regime in October 2024 had raised hopes for change under new president Tabith Awal. However, more than a year into his tenure, Tabith seems to be following the footsteps of his predecessor, showing little evidence of a shift in approach, particularly in terms of expanding financial support to districts.

Ground-level officials paint a familiar picture of dependency and stagnation.

"We last organised the district league in 2020 with financial help from the BFF. We could not organise it in recent years, partly due to stadium renovation worth Tk 23 crore. Still, we will need BFF's financial support to resume," said Patuakhali DFA president ANM Aminul Haque Mamun.

Rangpur DFA president Shamim Khan Miskin noted that they last held their league in 2023 and are preparing for another this year, while Sherpur DFA president Manik Datta cited scheduling conflicts with different national age-group tournaments and the inter-district national football championship as a reason for inactivity.

Jamalpur DFA member Abdullah Al Fuad Redwan, meanwhile, directly blamed both the

BFF and the previous Awami League government for the irregularity, noting that their last league was held in 2018.

Despite the existence of over 250 BFF-accredited football academies across the country, young players at the district level continue to lack a proper platform to test and develop their skills competitively.

This has allowed the rot to seep deeper over time, fostering a culture where only a handful of players with good relations with coaches and officials are referred for trials in Dhaka, whereas a merit-based progression could have ensured a far richer dataset over the years, including vital details and video footage of numerous potential talents, instead of focusing on just a select few of the 'blessed ones'.

"We see age-group players gradually progressing to the senior team, but very few actually make that step because the selection pool is too small and not diverse enough," said Miskin, adding that regular district leagues could address this imbalance.

Mamun also pointed out that while academies like Patuakhali Football Academy spend heavily to compete in Dhaka's Pioneer Football League, a functioning district league could provide a more inclusive and cost-effective platform for local players.

Yet, when confronted, the response from the BFF remains unchanged – promises of future action.

"We are planning a budget of Tk 6.40 crore for all 64 districts in the coming fiscal year so they can run their activities, especially district leagues. Due to a busy national schedule and financial constraints, we could not hold leagues last year despite taking steps," said BFF district football committee chairman Iqbal Hossain.

Whether these assurances translate into sustained action remains uncertain. Past patterns suggest otherwise.

In the absence of competitive football, young players are left to rely solely on self-training, missing out on crucial aspects of development such as tactical awareness, mental resilience, and match intelligence – elements that can only be cultivated through regular competition within a proper system featuring structured coaching and opportunities, something that remains far beyond the BFF's comprehension.

As a result, many players enter the professional circuit in their 20s with limited tactical maturity, forcing the national system to operate at a disadvantage by ignoring its own grassroots.

In such a scenario, it is not unreasonable to assume that the next Hamza Choudhury may already exist somewhere in the districts – unseen, untested, and ultimately lost in a system that continues to promise much but deliver little.

36
DAYS

GOALS

2026

Europe far ahead in quarterfinal appearances

South American teams have collectively played 36 World Cup quarterfinals. European teams top the list with 105 appearances in the last eight. Teams from North and Central America and the Caribbean have reached the quarterfinals five times, African teams four times, and Asian teams twice.

****Read The Daily Star's website to also read: "The miss that defined a career"**



Bashundhara Kings midfielder Sabbir Hossain jumps high in the air after scoring his side's fourth goal in a 4-0 thrashing of Brothers Union in the first qualifier of the Federation Cup at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday. The defending champions will play the final on May 19 at home against the winners of the second qualifier between Brothers Union and Mohammedan Sporting Club, who beat Rahmatganj MFS 3-0 in the eliminator in Cumilla yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

'Not in our hands now'

REUTERS, London

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola admitted the Premier League title race had slipped out of his team's control after they were held to a chaotic 3-3 draw at Everton on Monday.

"It's now not in our hands, before it was, now no," Guardiola said.

"Four games we have (remaining) in the Premier League. They will be quite similar and we'll see what happens."

City had the chance to draw level on points with leaders Arsenal with victories over Everton on Monday and Brentford five days later.

Instead, they find themselves five points adrift, albeit with a game in hand, and needing a wobble from Arsenal.



Guardiola was left to reflect on a point salvaged rather than three secured at Hill Dickinson Stadium.

"It's better than losing," he said. "We'd rather win. We play for that and we just showed what a team

we are. We tried everything. The players were aggressive."

Winger Jeremy Doku struck the dramatic equaliser in the 97th minute to complete a double on the night, and echoed his manager's frustration while

insisting City had not abandoned belief with four league games still to play.

"It's painful now but there's still a lot of games to go and anything can happen," Doku said. "We'll keep on fighting. We owe it to ourselves and our fans."

City striker Erling Haaland, who scored in the 83rd minute, could be heard saying "We're still in it" as he shook hands with his teammates after the final whistle.

Following Saturday's game against Brentford, City face Crystal Palace, Bournemouth and Aston Villa in their final three league games.

Arsenal have the far easier schedule, at least on paper, with games against relegation-threatened West Ham United, already-relegated Burnley and Palace.