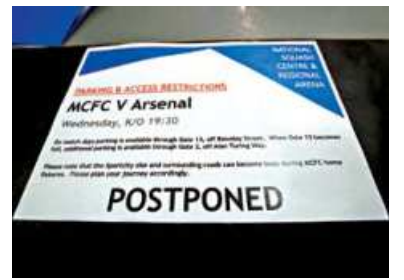


ARSENAL PLAYERS ISOLATED, MATCH POSTPONED

Arsenal placed some players under isolation and the Premier League postponed the London club's match at Manchester City on Wednesday, after the owner of Greek side Olympiakos Piraeus tested positive for the coronavirus. A number of Arsenal players had met Evangelos Marinakis following their Europa League round of 32 meeting in London on Feb. 27. Marinakis, who also owns English Championship (second tier) side Nottingham Forest, said on Tuesday he had contracted the disease. The Greek club released a statement on Wednesday saying their players and staff had been tested for the virus and that all tests came back negative. Arsenal said in a statement the risk to their players was "extremely low".

—REUTERS



'Barcos, Colindres like husband, wife'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings coach Oscar Bruzon highly praised his charges, especially Hernan Barcos and Daniel Colindres, after their 5-1 AFC Cup debut victory against TC Sports Club of Maldives at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

"This game is something that we have been waiting for a long time. Our players were really excellent today," Bruzon said at the post-match press conference, likening the performance to a combination of Bengal Tigers and Spanish Bulls.

"His [Barcos] performance is out of words. Barcos is a world class player but it is not him alone, there are the likes of Daniel Colindres, Biplu [Ahmed], [Mohammad] Ibrahim. I think all of them were really outstanding," Bruzon said. "I think today's performance is one of the best but not the best one. Yesterday I was complaining about our conversion rate. We created more chances in domestic competition but today we managed to convert those. This is

the performance we are going to produce throughout the season."

Then Bruzon brought a strange example in a bid to explain the effectiveness brought by the inclusion of Barcos.

"Colindres was like a single person without wife. I think Daniel and Barcos can be wife and husband. They understand each other, not only on the pitch but also off the pitch," said Bruzon.

Bruzon's counterpart Mohamed Shazly also admitted that Barcos made the difference.

"I said before that the difference is to have foreign players and it was not easy to stop him [Barcos]. Secondly the turning point of the match was missing our second penalty which actually made other players frustrated."

"It is not his [Barcos] height, rather his standard and skill was something that actually made the difference. Apart from his header, you might have seen how coolly he finished in his fourth goal and I feel it was because of all his quality," said Shazly.



Hernan Barcos, playing his first match for Bashundhara Kings, scored four goals as the Bangladesh Premier League champions made a flying start to the AFC Cup with a 5-1 thrashing of TC Sports Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Kings paint BNS red

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings made sure that, on their debut in Asia's second-tier club competition yesterday, the Bangabandhu National Stadium bore a refreshing new look. Along with their play during a dominant 5-1 defeat of TC Sports Club in the AFC Cup match, they also ensured that it would be an occasion for fans and players alike to remember.

As the host team, the Kings deployed some 100 stewards/guards wearing yellow vests and keeping an eye on the galleries, which may be common in the big leagues of Europe but it is something different in a football match here, and TC Sports Club players were given a VIP reception as temporary arches were formed with a red carpet laid beneath, starting from the

tunnel of the dressing rooms at BNS.

The Bashundhara management also set up some 16 food stalls at the galleries for spectators, which is also unusual for football matches in Bangladesh and more in line with international cricket matches held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. They also set up two giant screens at the northern galleries of Torch gate to show the statistics of the match and the match clock.

The Eastern and Western Galleries were interspersed with red as fans turned up in numbers wearing the home jersey and provided whole-hearted, full-throated support by beating drums and blowing whistles throughout the match. The Bashundhara Kings players repaid the fans' support after the match by waving towards them and acknowledging their applause before heading to the dressing room, reveling in a victory to cherish.

SPORTS REPORTER

The spotlight was firmly on Hernan Barcos and although fans were let down by a poor first impression from the former Albiceleste striker, but the 35-year-old striker ultimately stole the show with four effortless goals to give Bashundhara Kings a sparkling 5-1 win over TC Sports Club in the AFC Cup yesterday.

Captain Daniel Colindres struck the other to give Bashundhara an outstanding triumph against Maldivian opposition, who have had a dominant record against Bangladeshi clubs in the AFC Cup in recent years.

Barcos, who famously played alongside Lionel Messi for Argentina, initially failed to make an impact on the 5000-strong spectators who had been anticipating his debut since he signed in early February as he slipped a few times and misplaced passes during Bashundhara's maiden AFC Cup campaign yesterday. As the game wore on, he shrugged off the rust shrugged and showed emphatically why Bashundhara were willing to shell out nearly US\$20,000 per month for 'the pirate'.

Bashundhara got off to a strong start with Barcos and Colindres up front but the duo drew frustration from the gallery by wasting a nice opportunity in the 10th minute. However, Barcos did not take much time to make amends,



Bashundhara Kings players join in Hernan Barcos's 'pirate celebration'. PHOTO: COLLECTED

rising high and nodding home a Colindres lob from inside the six-yard box in the 18th minute.

That lead lasted only three minutes as defender Yeasin Khan committed a foul on Ali Ashfaq inside the box in the 21st minute. Easa Ismail stepped up and equalised from the rebound after Anisur Rahman Zico had rebuffed his strike from the spot.

Bashundhara continued to attack and Colindres saw a close-range shot hit the side-netting in the 23rd minute before Barcos restored the lead in the 26th minute with another effortless header after a well-judged lob from Biplu Ahmed.

Although Bashundhara's frontlines put up

a dazzling performance, their defence was particularly poor, with centre-back Yeasin Khan and left-back Nurul Nayeem Faisal being exposed time and again. In one of those instances, Ishan Ibrahim danced past Nurul and Yeasin but saw his curled shot to the far post go narrowly wide, much to Zico's relief.

Bashundhara's Spanish coach, Oscar Bruzon, made one change in the second half, bringing Argentine holding midfielder Nicolas Delmote into defence in place of Yeasin, who was substituted for midfielder Alamgir Kabir Rana.

Australian referee Shaun Evans awarded an unexpected spot-kick to TC Sports in the 50th minute following an aerial tussle from a free-kick, but Zico rescued Bashundhara by stopping the penalty, which Easa had the privilege of taking twice.

Bashundhara received a penalty of their own in the 67th minute after Ahmed Farrah brought down Colindres on the goalline. The captain deferred duties to Barcos, who completed his hat-trick before Colindres nodded home a well-judged cross from Biswanath Gosh in the 76th minute.

Barcos put a bow on the win, adding a fourth with a clever chip from the edge of the box over goalkeeper Hanif, who had advanced far off his line and, in an attempt to clear the ball, found the Argentine in stoppage time.

BPL likely at single venue

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is mulling to bring the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League fixtures into one venue following the outbreak of coronavirus.

"Due to outbreak of coronavirus, we are thinking of whether to hold the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League in one venue," BFF president Kazi Salahuddin said in a briefing during the interval of AFC Cup fixture between Bashundhara Kings and TC Sports Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

"Participating clubs will face losses if we stop the league due to coronavirus. We have called for an emergency meeting on Saturday to take a decision about it," said the BFF boss, who however said that the upcoming BFF polls will be held in time.

The 12th edition of the professional league is currently being held at seven venues and the sixth round of fixtures are scheduled to get underway today when Sheikh Jamal take on Sheikh Russel while Arambagh play against Saif SC at the BNS.



Atalanta's Slovenian striker Josip Ilicic scored four goals as the Italian debutants beat Valencia 4-3 in a closed-doors Champions League fixture at the Mestalla on Wednesday to progress 8-4 on aggregate.

PHOTO: AFP

Ilicic four powers Atalanta

AFP, Valencia

Atalanta's fairytale Champions League run continued inside an empty stadium on Tuesday as Josip Ilicic scored four times in a 4-3 win over Valencia that sent his team into the quarterfinals 8-4 on aggregate.

A frantic contest inside an echoing Mestalla stadium was the first of several in the competition to be played behind closed doors due to the coronavirus, with 55,000 vacant

seats creating a surreal atmosphere that was never likely to deliver a momentous Valencia comeback.

They had been tasked with overturning a 4-1 defeat from the opening game in Italy and any hopes were all-but dashed inside 90 seconds when Mouctar Diakhaby conceded the first of two penalties, each converted by Ilicic.

In between, Kevin Gameiro had levelled for Valencia and then scored again shortly after half-time before Ferran Torres lobbied in to leave the hosts needing three in just over 20

minutes.

Yet any chance of a revival was quickly snuffed out as Ilicic completed his hat-trick and added a fourth to ensure Atalanta ended a strange evening with their names in the draw on March 20.

The Slovenia international also became the first player to score four times away from home in a Champions League knockout match. Atalanta's progress remains the greatest surprise of this year's tournament, in which they lost all three of their opening group games.

Leipzig eliminate Mourinho's Spurs

REUTERS, Leipzig

RB Leipzig's Marcel Sabitzer scored two early goals as they eased past last year's Champions League finalists Tottenham Hotspur 3-0 in their last 16 second leg tie on Tuesday to reach their first quarter-finals by 4-0 on aggregate.

Sabitzer fired the lively German side in front with a low shot from about 20 metres after 10 minutes and they never looked back, pinning the visitors, who were without injured strikers Harry Kane and Son Heung-min, in their own half.

Leipzig's captain was then given far too much space in the 21st to head home Angelino's cross at the near post after Serge Aurier's poor clearance as the Spurs' players

Nagelsmann told reporters. Leipzig had drawn their last domestic league two matches.

"The fans are moved. This is a very big deal for the club. We are now looking forward to the draw. A special moment."

Leipzig were founded by Red Bull in 2009 by acquiring a fifth division licence and started in the amateur divisions.

Injury-ravaged Tottenham, who were also missing winger Steven Bergwijn and full back Ben Davies, struggled to keep up with Leipzig's pace and were constantly exposed at the back while posing no threat up front.

Leipzig pounced on almost every sloppy pass and inaccurate clearance and could have added several more goals in a dominant first half with Timo Werner and



JULIAN NAGELSMANN



JOSE MOURINHO

heads started to drop.

Emil Forsberg completed the victory with a third goal from inside the box in the 87th as Leipzig, who only got promoted to the Bundesliga in 2016, reached their first quarter-final in Europe's premier club competition.

"We did it better than in our recent Bundesliga matches," Leipzig coach Julian

Patrik Schick coming close.

Spurs coach Jose Mourinho had warned the absence of "box sharks" Kane and Son would make it more difficult for his side to score and the Portuguese's prediction proved accurate.

"It's hard for us to score at the moment," Mourinho said.