

MSC ensure foes' final

SPORTS REPORTER

NITOL-TATA NAT'L FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Mohammedan Sporting Club set up a final clash with their bitter rivals Abahani Krira Chakra with a 2-0 victory over Chittagong Abahani in the semifinal of the Nitol-Tata National League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The attacking pair of the black and whites Intiaz Ahmed Nakib and Alfaz Ahmed scored the goals in the second half of a lopsided affair.

Mohammedan looked a completely different side as the first semifinal started afresh at the big bowl after it was abandoned on Wednesday due to heavy rain.

They came out firing on all their cylinders especially after the lemon break to outclass the port city team.

Nakib struck the first goal in the 69th minute with a powerful grounder after being nicely fed by his attacking partner Alfaz in the 10-yard box.

Alfaz, whose double strike in the last first round match at Rajshahi helped Mohammedan to make it into the final round, scored the second goal thirteen minutes away from the final whistle. The ace marksman drove a spectacular right-footer past a bemused reserve national custodian Biplob. If the goal was a beauty then the imaginative through from Faisal Mahmud was a class act from an always-improving midfielder.

But the score line hardly reflected Mohammedan's supreme dominance over an out of sorts Chittagong Abahani. And had Biplob not stood firmly under the bar with some brilliant saves it could have been a bigger margin

win for the popular Motijheel outfit. "It was an outstanding performance from Mohammedan. It was not that my boys played badly, but they were totally outclassed by a more impressive Mohammedan," said Chittagong coach Abu Yousuf after the match.

Mohammedan ruled the midfield with their energetic young playmaker Faisal and Anwar making their presence felt in every part of the ground.

Faisal, who started his career as a compulsory rookie for Mohammedan in the Premier League last year, has showed a tremendous improvement. The 21-year-old upstart from Khulna was latter adjudged man-of-the-match.

The star-studded Chittagong Abahani, who had four foreign players in their line-up, struggled to find space and air in the water-

tight Mohammedan defence. Mohammedan defenders Abu Faisal and Nigerian Abdullah did a commendable job in keeping the lethal duo of Moni and Nepalese Hari Khadka at bay.

The final will be held at 5.30pm today.

Yellow cards: Bijon, Masud Rana, Anwar (Mohammedan), Kennedy Singh, Mintu and Bakhtiar (Chittagong Abahani).

TEAMS

Mohammedan SC: Bijon, Jewel, Abdullah, Masud Rana (Tipu), Abu Faisal, Anwar (Gobinda), Monwar, Basudev Mondol, Faisal Mahmud, Alfaz Ahmed and Nakib Chittagong Abahani: Biplob, Shaheen (Aminur), Devjeet, Ranjan Dey, Bakhtiar Kennedy, Singh, Parvez Babu, Mintu (Kaisar), Mizanur Rahman (Liton), Hari Khadka and Moni Referee: Monsur Azad



Dhaka Mohammedan forward Alfaz Ahmed (L) tries to dodge past Chittagong Abahani's Indian recruit Ranjit during their Nitol-Tata National Football League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Henry needs not to worry

AFP, Ibusuki

Reigning champions France moved to quash doubts over Thierry Henry's World Cup fitness here Wednesday, saying the Arsenal star's participation in the tournament was not in doubt.

Henry has been struggling to shake off a knee injury since the end of the season and missed France's matches against Belgium last weekend and a friendly against Japanese side Urawa Red Diamonds on Wednesday.

Coach Roger Lemerre said earlier Wednesday Henry faced a fitness test on Sunday and that his status would be reviewed afterwards, prompting fears that he could be ruled out of the tournament.

But France moved quickly to dispel any doubts over Henry's position late Wednesday.

"It appears certain media in France and England have interpreted that Thierry Henry's participation in the World Cup could be at doubt," a statement said.

"The staff of the French team take issue with these liberal interpretations and wish to make it clear that for the moment, the presence of Thierry Henry in France's World Cup squad is not in doubt."

Earlier Lemerre revealed that the Arsenal star, scorer of 12 goals in 35 internationals, was unable to train because of a knee ligament injury and was doubtful to make the finals.

"We feel that Thierry is not capable of resuming training at the moment," Lemerre said after his side had beaten J-League outfit Urawa Red Diamonds 5-1 in a warm-up match.

"We are a little bit doubtful about his fitness."

"He has developed another problem in his knee as a result of his ligament injury, which is really bothering him."

"We will test him on Sunday as there has to be a deadline to know where we are at. It is imperative that we make the right decision with a view to how he will bear up as the finals progress."

FEEL THE FEVER



HE FEELS THE HEAT TOO: South Korean monk Hak Pong enjoys some football in front of the Yakchunsa Temple on the Korean resort island of Seogwipo, between South Korea and Japan, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

0 7

days to go



Did U Know?

The Soccer World Cup was born 72 years ago, in 1930. Two years before that, the idea of establishing the competition was proposed by Jules Rimet, who was the third president of FIFA. The country chosen to host the historic first World Cup was Uruguay, a small South American nation then celebrating 100 years of independence. Uruguay had won back-to-back Olympic soccer titles in 1924 in Paris and 1928 in Amsterdam and secured the right to host the event through its enthusiasm, even offering to pay all the travel and other costs of the players and officials from competing countries.



What to Watch

BTV
Nitol-Tata National Football League Final
Abahani vs Mohammedan
Live at 5:30 pm
Third Place Decider
Ctg Abahani vs Sylhet Chaturanga
Live at 3:00 pm



Brian Clough
(Derby County legend)
"At last England have appointed a manager who speaks English better than the players."
On Sven Goran Eriksson's appointment as England soccer manager.

Star WHIZZ KID COMPETITION 171

Tick the correct answers, post to The Daily Star. Win attractive prizes.

Competition closes at 8 pm May 24, 2002 and draw shortly afterwards

- West Indies won the third Test against India by
8 wickets 10 wickets 19 runs
- Who will lead Bangladesh A team in the Malaysia Cricket Challenge?
Akram Aminul K Mashud
- Who won the man-of-the-match award in the first Test between Pakistan and New Zealand?
M c
- Who are the English Premiership champions?
Man United Arsenal Liverpool
- Who clinched the Hamburg...

Name

Class Roll No.

School Address

Phone: (If any)

It's a Bati-Lopez party



REUTERS, Naraha

Gabriel Batistuta scored four second half goals in 34 minutes, all laid on by Gustavo Lopez, as Argentina warmed up for the World Cup finals with a 5-1 win over Japanese champions Kashima Antlers.

Argentina showed their formidable strength in depth when a virtual reserve side overwhelmed their hosts in the second half after eight changes at the interval.

Paris St Germain defender Mauricio Pochettino scored the only goal of the first half in the seventh minute of the game at Argentina's World Cup camp on Japan's Pacific coast.

The Argentines, with Juan Sebastian Veron at the hub of their midfield and Lazio's Hernan Crespo as the central striker, lacked precision in the first half and managed to change ends only 1-0 in the lead when they should have scored more goals.

Crespo has, however, just recov-

ered from injury while club team mate Diego Simeone, Argentina's record caps holder with 104, looked rusty after only recently coming back from a long layoff following surgery on right knee ligaments.

Coach Marcelo Bielsa constantly demanded defensive rigour from his forwards, especially Claudio Lopez, shouting his name regularly to get the Lazio winger to drop back to cover.



GUSTAVO LOPEZ

Two minutes after the restart Kashima equalised when midfielder

Takuya Nozawa found a gaping hole in the left side of the defence to rifle home a low shot from the edge of the box.

Argentina made eight changes at halftime with only Simeone, Roberto Ayala and Kily Gonzalez staying on the pitch, but Batistuta's first goal, restoring their lead within two minutes, helped the side to settle.

Lopez, a left footed player playing on the right wing with Claudio Caniggia still not fully fit after recovering from a twisted knee, crossed for Batistuta to head home from inside the six-metre box.

On the hour, Batistuta received a low Lopez cross into the middle of the box and ran the ball out right before swivelling to fire it into the roof of the net from a tight angle.

He completed his hat-trick nine minutes from time with another shot at close range from a low ball by Lopez and latched on to yet another cross to head his fourth two minutes later.

Simeone looked closer to the pace in the second half while midfielder Claudio Husain had a competent time on the right.



Fabino (L) of J-League side Kashima Antlers is trying to get the better of Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta during a friendly soccer match in Naraha, northern Japan, yesterday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

CUP CORNER



AFP, Seoul

South Korean weather experts on Thursday forecast heavy rain during the second half of the World Cup finals but insisted the impact would be limited.

The annual rainy season, one of the problems warned of after South Korea and Japan were chosen to host the 2002 finals, will come earlier than usual, the Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA) said.

According to the KMA, the annual rain front would reach the southern island of Jeju in mid-June before passing over mainland cities.

The soccer tournament is to be held in South Korea and Japan from May 31 through June 30, though there were attempts made to get the dates changed because of the rainstorm risk at this time of year.

The heat and humidity has been a major worry of teams ahead of the tournament. "The annual rainy season will begin around June 15, about a week earlier than last year," Im Gyo-Sun, a KMA official, told AFP. "It will last for a month." He said there could be sporadic rainstorms during the season.

South Korea is hit by about two or three typhoons a year but this is normally between July and September and Im said there was little risk to the World Cup.

BECK GETS BETTER OF RON!

Hong Kong David Beckham just edges out Ronaldo as the most popular player in Asia but the Brazilian is more likely to get his hands on the World Cup trophy, according to a survey of the region's fans.

A poll of 10,000 people in ten Asian territories and countries revealed that England's Beckham was the favourite player of 21 percent of those with at least some interest in football, just ahead of Ronaldo with 19 percent. But Ronaldo and co. are still seen as the team most likely to win the tournament with 22 percent of Asian fans tipping them to lift a fifth World Cup, just ahead of defending champions France with 20 percent.

England only topped that chart in Thailand, where English football is widely watched and Beckham enjoys the status of a minor deity.

"The feeling throughout the region is that England are not actually capable of winning and most people still expect Brazil to win the Cup, despite the difficulties they faced in qualifying," said Andrew Davison, who organised the survey for Taylor Nelson Sofres.

Brazil are also the team most Asians want to win the tournament, except in Japan, South Korea and China, where the home teams are naturally favoured.

Local heroes Hidetoshi Nakata and Hong Myung-Bo were the most popular players in Japan and South Korea respectively.

The survey was carried out in Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

The survey was carried out in April in Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, and based on responses from 1,000 people in each country or territory.

Hong Kong South Korea is racing ahead of its World Cup co-host Japan in terms of interest in the tournament, according to a survey published Thursday.

The Asia-wide poll found that 89 percent of Koreans said they were interested in the World Cup, the highest level registered in the ten countries surveyed by Taylor Nelson Sofres.

In contrast only one in three (33 percent) Japanese said they were interested in the feast of football about to take place on their shores.

Only baseball-crazy Taiwan, where interest was registered at 25 percent, is less worked up about the World Cup.

The results will help to fuel many South Koreans belief that Japan is not really a football country and that they should have been given the exclusive right to host the first World Cup in Asia.

The survey was carried out in April in Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, and based on responses from 1,000 people in each country or territory.

Hong Kong World No Tobacco Day may go up in smoke in Thailand this year, with many Thais predicting they will in fact be puffing more than usual on the day, a research body said Thursday.

The international day, designated by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is on May 31, the same day as the World Cup kicks off.

Zidane Senegal wary!



REUTERS, Ibusuki

Delighted to be back amongst his football friends, France playmaker Zinedine Zidane believes the opening match of the World Cup against Senegal will be crucial for the world champions' chances.

"The first round is going to be much tougher than it was in 1998 and the first game will certainly be the most important of the whole competition," Zidane said after training.

"I'm really happy to be here with my friends and I'm ready to play. My main concern now is the match against Senegal."

"We must produce a great performance (against Senegal) to set the pace. We will do everything we can to prepare well, just like we did against South Africa four years ago." France won that game 3-0.

The inspirational midfielder arrived at France's training camp on Wednesday after attending the birth of his third son, and was greeted by dozens of fans wearing number 10 shirts.

Smiling but looking a little tired after a 17-hour flight from Paris, the Real Madrid player said he was impatient to play after going a week without a match.

Zidane scored a brilliant goal in Real's 2-1 defeat of Bayer Leverkusen in the European Cup final last week, and he said he would play in France's last warm-up against South Korea on Sunday. The Senegal match is on May 31.

"I'm going to play on Sunday. I

don't know if it's going to be the whole match but I'll be there," he said.

"I have not played for the last eight days and it was good to resume training."

Zidane had stayed with his wife Veronique, who gave birth to their third son Theo in Marseille, and missed the shock 2-1 defeat by Belgium at the Stade de France last weekend.

"It's really good to have him with us," said coach Roger Lemerre with a smile. "We feel stronger as we missed him badly. Now, everybody is here and it can start."

Zidane said the last week had been one of the greatest of his life.

"I've clinched a trophy and three days later my third son arrived.. it was just great. I would have loved to have spent more time with my wife, but honestly I'm delighted to be here."

French players will be allowed to spend time with their partners after each of the first two games but Zidane said his wife could not make it so soon after giving birth.

"It's not been planned for her to come. I think the schedule is going to be too tight."

Zidane, who scored two goals in the 3-0 defeat of Brazil in the 1998 World Cup final, turns 30 on June 23.

If France win the trophy again, it would be the first time in soccer history a nation had won two World Cups and a European title consecutively.

"It has never been done before and we can do something outstanding but it's going to be very hard," Zidane said. "Hard but not out of reach. We will have to go out for it."



France superstar Zinedine Zidane smiles while attending a press conference in Ibusuki, southern Japan, yesterday

PHOTO: INTERNET