

Semifinals preview

Onus on Kanu, Kanoute



AFP, Tunis

Premiership stars Nwankwo Kanu and Frederic Kanoute aim to fire Nigeria and Mali into an African Nations Cup final showdown by breaking the hearts of Tunisia and Morocco in the semifinals on Wednesday.

Nigeria, who knocked out defending champions Cameroon 2-1 in the last eight, take on the hosts in front of 60,000 passionate Tunisian fans at the Rades Stadium aiming to take another step towards what they hope will be a third title.

They won in 1980 and followed that with a second African crown achieved here in 1994.

Arsenal star Kanu believes that after a decade of drought, Nigeria's new generation of youngsters is ready to seize a golden opportunity.

"Young players have come into the team but they have needed time to pull Nigeria back up and we needed time to get to know them. I think we have been successful in this period of transition," said the 27-year-old Kanu.

Nigeria endured a torrid start to this competition to reach the semifinals.

They lost their opening match 1-0 to Morocco and then kicked out Celestine Babayaro, Victor Agali and Yakuba Aiyegbeni for breaking a curfew but Kanu believes those setbacks have only served to bring the squad closer.

"We never envisaged such a defeat against Morocco," admitted Kanu.

"We didn't react well that day. But things have got better since and Nigeria have improved."

Nigeria will be relying for inspiration from skipper Jay Jay Okocha who has a mini-fan club inside the Tunisian team in the shape of Slim Benachour.

The Tunisian plays for Paris Saint Germain and he watched with awe Okocha's contribution when the Nigerian was also on the French club's books from 1998-2002.



PHOTO: AFP

Mali's ace forward Frederic Kanoute controls the ball during a training session in Rades on February 9 ahead of the African Nations Cup semifinal match against Morocco.

"It will be very special playing against Okocha. I rubbed shoulders with him when I was about 17 or 18 at PSG but just in training," said Benachour whose side has never won an African title but reached the last four with a controversial 1-0 win against Senegal.

"He is a genius. He can do incredible things with a ball." In Sousse, meanwhile, Tottenham striker Kanoute will be looking to add to his four-goal tally against Morocco and take Mali into the final for what would be only the second time following their runners-up finish in 1972.

"We beat them in a friendly in Morocco last year so they will be out for revenge," said Kanoute who reached the four-goal mark in the 2-

1 quarterfinal win against Guinea. "We just have to stick to our game plan. There will be a lot of pressure but we are a very close group and we are ready."

Ironically, Nigeria, Mali and Morocco all had to come from a goal down to make the last four but Morocco, champions in 1976, did it in the most dramatic fashion.

The Atlas Lions were just seconds from elimination on Sunday when Abdelmalek Cherrad put Algeria in front in the 84th minute before Marouane Chamakh equalised four minutes into stoppage time.

Youssef Hadji and Jawad Zairi then completed the rescue operation in extra-time. "We deserved the win and we

deserved a place in the semifinals," said coach Badou Zaki.

However his resources for Wednesday's semifinal could be stretched with defender Talal El Karkouri a major doubt having picked up a calf injury in the quarterfinal win.

Table with 2 columns: Semifinals, Wednesday's matches. Includes Tunisia v Nigeria (1500 GMT) and Mali v Morocco (1800 GMT).

Tyson hopes to return to ring

AFP, New York

Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson has reunited with his former manager Shelly Finkel and is looking to return to the boxing ring.

Finkel, who was sacked by Tyson a few months ago, said they are looking at dates in May and June. Finkel did not mention any possible opponents for Tyson.

The 37-year-old American's last fight was 12 months ago when he beat Clifford Etienne in 49 seconds.

The news comes just three days after British boxer Lennox Lewis announced his retirement. Lewis destroyed Tyson in eight rounds in their June 2002 bout.

Tyson is reportedly in financial trouble after declaring personal bankruptcy in August.

Hackers may attack Athens Olympics

REUTERS, Athens

Security officials for the Athens Olympics are working on plans to counter a possible hacker attack on key infrastructure during the Games in August, a Greek newspaper has reported.

The Nea daily said on Tuesday electronic security experts became concerned by a message in a US computer magazine asking hackers if they had found a way to interfere during the Athens Olympics.

"Theoretically, there are opportunities for us to act," the newspaper quoted a police source as saying. "We need to be alert and co-operate with other countries and with the specialist electronic crime unit."

The newspaper added that electronic scoreboards, traffic lights, utilities and air traffic networks were high on the list of possible targets that security experts would try to make hacker-proof before the Games.

Greece is spending a record 650 million euros (444 million pounds) on security for the August 13-29 Olympics, the first Summer Games since the September 11, 2001 attacks and the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

ICC tries to avoid rain



AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) hopes to minimise the role of the Duckworth-Lewis rain rule by announcing reserve days for all matches at this year's Champions Trophy in England.

"There are reserve days for all matches. This means there will be no Duckworth-Lewis recalculations (used to decide rain-affected matches) on the first scheduled match day," the ICC said in a statement on Tuesday.

"If a match cannot be completed on the scheduled day, play will continue into the following day where recalculations can be made if required," it added.

Rain played a spoilsport in the 2002 Champions Trophy in Sri Lanka where only the final match had a reserve day, but without any provision to continue the game next day.

Only one innings was completed in the final between India and Sri Lanka on the first day, but the teams started afresh the next day only to be thwarted by rain again. They

were eventually declared joint-winners.

The 12-team tournament, regarded as the mini World Cup, opens, ironically, with a match between England and Zimbabwe on September 10 at Edgbaston.

England, who, boycotted their 2003 World Cup game in Zimbabwe, appear reluctant to tour that country for a Test series later this year.

In another mouth-watering clash at the same venue, arch-rivals India will meet with Pakistan on September 19.

The teams have been divided into four groups, with the group winners qualifying for the semifinals.

World champions Australia have been placed in Group A along with New Zealand and a qualifier to be decided after a six-nation tournament in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, this month.

Canada, Holland, Namibia, Scotland, the UAE and the United States will contest the Sharjah qualifiers.

The Champions Trophy will be played at three venues in England: Edgbaston in Birmingham, the Oval in London and the Rosebowl

in Southampton. The final will be held at the Oval on September 25.

GROUPINGS

- A: Australia, New Zealand, qualifier B: South Africa, West Indies, Bangladesh C: Pakistan, India, Kenya D: Sri Lanka, England, Zimbabwe

FIXTURES

Table with 2 columns: Date, Match. Includes Sept 10: Eng v Zim at Edgbaston, Sept 11: NZ v qualifier at the Oval, etc.

Rusedski still confident



REUTERS, London

Greg Rusedski said on Tuesday he was "cautiously optimistic" about the outcome of his drugs hearing in Montreal.

Rusedski flew into London from Canada and spoke for the first time to the media since the hearing in Montreal into the drugs test he failed last July.

"I'm confident and we'll just have to wait and see," Rusedski, who was accompanied by his wife Lucy, said at Heathrow airport.

"We're cautiously optimistic so we are just hoping for the best," added the 30-year-old who tested positive for the banned steroid

androlone during a tournament in Indianapolis in July.

On Monday the British player has slipped away from a closed-door doping hearing without making comment and his tennis career and reputation hanging in the balance.

A stone-faced Rusedski, accompanied by his lawyers and wife, arrived by limousine in the morning for the hearing.

He strode purposefully into an office building without acknowledging the media.

Eight hours later, the big-serving British number two sneaked out of a back entrance, avoiding a large media contingent and speeding off behind tinted windows.

In between, however, Rusedski, who was born and raised in Montreal, likely had plenty to tell a

three-man panel appointed by the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) to investigate drugs test.

Rusedski has denied taking performance-enhancing drugs.

The tribunal, headed by prominent Montreal lawyer and former UN ambassador Yves Fortier, is expected to take up to two weeks before rendering a decision.

If found guilty, the 30-year-old Rusedski could face a ban of up to two years, effectively ending his career.

Midway through the marathon session, Fortier's executive assistant Micheline Corriveau told journalists none of the parties involved in the hearing would make a comment on the day's proceedings.

The strain of the long day was evident as Rusedski's wife snapped at reporters as she and her husband, the 1997 US Open finalist, sped away.

It is believed Rusedski's defence is centred around the fact that seven other players on the men's professional tour were exonerated after an independent inquiry ruled last year that they had taken contaminated electrolyte supplements handed out by ATP trainers.



PHOTO: REUTERS

British tennis star Greg Rusedski and his wife Lucy arrive in Montreal on Monday to attend a doping hearing.

PCB chairman

FROM PAGE 13 to be confirmed before action was to be taken. Since then, no further correspondence is available with us on this issue and to the best of my knowledge, the issue did not feature at the ICC meetings."

To set to rest any further speculation Shahryar said, "Accordingly, since the matter has not been raised since March 2003, the PCB will not be taking any further action on this issue. There will be no further comment from PCB on this matter."

Security worries 'em

FROM PAGE 13 and 1984, said the upcoming tour was being rushed.

"I don't think security will be as big a concern as it being made out to be, but why such a hurry to go to Pakistan?" Amarnath asked.

"The BCCI should have waited a few more months. The Indians have just returned from a hard tour of Australia and deserve some rest."

The Indians toured Australia for two months, drawing the four-Test series 1-1 before losing the one-day finals to the world champions.

The Pakistan tour was announced in October after the Indian government

withdrew its three-year ban on bilateral cricket ties with the arch-rivals following a thaw in diplomatic relations.

Australia and the West Indies refused to play in Pakistan due to security fears after the US-led strikes in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001.

New Zealand were forced to abandon their tour of Pakistan in 2002 after a bomb blast outside the team hotel in Karachi on the morning of a Test match.

But matches by Bangladesh, South Africa and New Zealand in Pakistan this season passed off peacefully.

Ctg TT

CU CORRESPONDENT

Nabin Mela moved into the super league of CJKS-Simmin mineral water Table Tennis League at the Chittagong Jila Krira Sangstha (CJKS) Gymnasium on Monday.

They outplayed Young Star Club 3-0.

In the last match of the first round, Satadal Club defeated Quality Sports 3-0.

Meanwhile, the four-team super league will begin on February 12. The teams are City Club, Nabin Mela, Satadal Club and Quality Sports.

Diouf punished

AFP, Tunis

Senegal striker El Hadji Diouf has been banned for three matches by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) following his team's stormy African Nations Cup quarterfinal defeat to Tunisia on Saturday, a tournament spokesman said on Monday.

Diouf, who carried out a running verbal battle with officials and opposing players throughout the latter part of the game, was accused of violent conduct.

The Liverpool star had to be restrained from approaching the Tunisian bench in the match and was escorted from the pitch by two of his own staff after the final whistle.

The ban will take effect from the beginning of the qualifying campaign for the 2006 World Cup, which gets underway in June.

Spanish Cup preview

Real go for it



AFP, Madrid

The Spanish Cup may be well down Real Madrid's list of priorities for the season as they aim for a 10th European Cup and 30th league title.

But with a place in the final looming ahead of Wednesday's semifinal second leg at Seville the trophy has assumed greater importance than usual, particularly as it has not graced the Bernabeu stadium trophy room since 1993.

"I'd certainly like to win it - it's something I've never won," Spanish international striker Raul told Spanish television after the club's narrow weekend success over Malaga.

When Real last captured the trophy Raul, who has scored close on 200 league goals in almost 350 appearances and is the all-time Champions League leading marksman, was only just setting his sights on a place in the merengues' C team.

And three Champions League winners medals have not dulled his appetite for domestic fare.

Real lead 2-0 from the home leg, courtesy of strikes from Solari and Raul himself.

But they will hope Seville do not run them too ragged in chasing after that deficit given that on Sunday fellow championship contenders Valencia came calling for a crucial

league encounter. England skipper David Beckham is expected to take his place despite Real revealing he played with a slight temperature and diarrhoea against Malaga.

Beckham says he is relishing his football after settling down in Madrid six months after his arrival from Manchester United, though he hinted that one day he might respond if Peter Kenyon, Chelsea's new chief executive, sought to bring him on board at Stamford Bridge.

Kenyon, who has just arrived at Chelsea after fulfilling a similar role at Old Trafford, was one of the Manchester United officials who brokered Beckham's move to Spain last July.

"I worked well with him when I was at Manchester United and would have no problem doing it again. I have always had a good relationship with him," Beckham told The Sun newspaper.

But he added: "I am enjoying my football and I don't want to move anywhere else yet."

Real lost their league match in Seville 4-1 on a disastrous evening where they swiftly found themselves three goals down.

But Raul and company insist there will be no repetition as this time they have the scent of silverware in their nostrils.

Sylhet smash Ctg

Table with 2 columns: FROM PAGE 13, Sylhet v Chittagong. Includes bowling figures for Russell, Al-Amin, Razzak, etc.

Table with 2 columns: Sylhet v Chittagong. Includes batting figures for Faisal Iqbal, Anisul, Masum, etc.

Table with 2 columns: Dhanmondi Tutorial v Maple Leaf International. Includes bowling figures for Zakwan, Rezaul, Nabil, etc.

Colourful youth

FROM PAGE 13 A tribal dance by Rangamati Cultural Institute and a presentation of the Shilpakala Academy also received warm applause from the spectators and dignitaries.

The best was however saved for last. As the lights at the BNS were switched off, fireworks organised by Bangladesh Army engulfed the night sky for ten minutes on the trot to bring a fitting end to a superb show.

The tournament proper kicks off on February 15 in four zones - Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna.

Magura soccer

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shafique Smriti Sangsad trounced Mayer Doa Sporting Club 9-0 in the Econo First Division Football League at the Magura Stadium yesterday.

The first half ended 2-0. Liton, Shahid, Lipton and Alamgir scored two goals each while Ripon netted one for the winners.

Harrapur Union Ekadosh will take on Babukhali Ekadosh today at the same venue.

Sarwar steers

FROM PAGE 13 at the Mirpur Outer Stadium while Sunrise School prevailed over National Bank Public by two wickets at the Uttara Police Lines ground.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bidyankaton Pre-Cadet v Nurpur International School Venue: UFG

BIDYANKATON: 206 for 7 in 35 overs (Ashraf 34, Sohel 34, Tarek 32; Raju 3-26, Badal 2-57)

NURPUR INTERNATIONAL: 141 all out in 27.2 overs (Khokon 35, Noor Hossain 34; Rabhani 6-27, Shamim 2-39)

Result: Bidyankaton Pre-Cadet won by 65 runs.

Keya Kindergarten School v Shapla Kindergarten Venue: MOS

SHAPLA KINDERGARTEN: 136 for 9 in 35 overs (Imam 34, Billal 3-8, Hasan 2-33, Sujon 2-20)

KEYA KINDERGARTEN: 138 for 5 in 28.2 overs (Hossain 29, Sujon; Azad 3-32)

Result: Keya Kindergarten won by 5 wickets.

Dhanmondi Tutorial v Maple Leaf International Venue: RMS

MAPLE LEAF INTERNATIONAL: 247 for 7 in 35 overs (Sarwar 131, Rizwan 33; Mohin 2-32, Rohan 2-29; Shams 2-52)

DHANMONDI TUTORIAL: 240 for 8 in 35 overs (Rohan 107, Shakib 36, Rizwan 4-26, Sarwar 2-47)

Result: Maple Leaf International won by 7 runs.

Sultan Molla High School v Mds Model Institute Venue: Kalindi ground

MDS MODEL INSTITUTE: 187 all out in 35 overs (Robin 35, Al-Amin 31; Sohagh 3-38)

SULTAN MOLLA HIGH SCHOOL: 188 for 6 in 30 overs (Moklesh 83, Aziz 18; Robin 2-24, Saiful 2-51)

Result: Sultan Molla High School won by 4 wickets.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes clues like '27 It could be sparely friendly lyricist', '3 Slim Stolen', etc.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes clues like 'LAVEX LAWL JWER', 'V MLVTLT AKJB TLDZVKT', etc.

CRYPTOQUIP FROM PAGE 13 A tribal dance by Rangamati Cultural Institute and a presentation of the Shilpakala Academy also received warm applause from the spectators and dignitaries.