



Hong Kong goalkeeper Li Jian (C) leaps above Bangladesh midfielder Zahid Hossain (number 9) during their second leg Olympic pre-qualifier in Hong Kong on Wednesday.

Natore, Sirajganj make it easy

SPORTS REPORTER

North-Bengal sides Sirajganj and Natore cruised into the final round of the 3rd JFA Cup with crushing wins yesterday.

Miraj slammed a hattrick at the Sirajganj Stadium to set the home side's 6-0 defeat of Naogaon in the zonal final. Nazim struck twice and Plabon added the other to extend the woes of the visitors.

At Natore, the hosts came back from a goal down to thrash Panchagarh 5-1 in the final. Mahbub Rana put the tourists ahead but Natore bounced back with a treble from Sumon in the first half. Sohel netted twice after the break to seal the comfortable victory.

The two teams join Dhaka, Khulna, Kishoreganj, Chaudanga and BKSP in the eight-team finals.

The remaining finalists would be decided after today's last zone final in Comilla where the hosts play Chittagong.

Italian trio track Pato

INTERNET, undated

Juventus, Inter and Milan are ready to battle it out on the transfer market for Alexandre Pato of Porto Alegre.

The 17-year-old is seen by many as the new Kaka and he's admitted that a Serie A switch is a desire of his.

"I know that Milan, Juventus and Inter are following me," said the South American starlet.

"I feel that I am ready to undertake a European adventure and therefore the interest of these important clubs flatters me."

"I always follow Italian football on television and my dream is to play in Italy."

"I would like to become the new Ronaldo -- perhaps I will follow the career of the many Brazilian players who have won so much with Milan..."

Pato is contracted to Internazionale until 2009 and is currently valued at 10 million pounds, with reports suggesting that a 7-million-pound offer from Milan has already been rejected.

Juventus are understood to be in

Bangladesh exit brightly

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Zahid Hassan Emily's 43rd minute goal ensured Bangladesh bow out of the men's Olympic football preliminaries with distinction after a 1-0 away win over Hong Kong yesterday.

The Abahani striker, who got the ball after a right-flank move towards the end of the first half was cleared by Hong Kong defenders, kept cool in a goalmouth scramble and neatly stabbed a grounder through a forest of legs to beat goalkeeper Li Jian at then Hong Kong Stadium.

"It was a brilliant finish because Emily was in a difficult situation with little space. He utilised a half chance to give us a deserved win," coach Abu Yusuf told The Daily Star from Hong Kong last night over phone.

Having lost 3-0 at home on

February 7, Yusuf's boys made the trip with no high hopes as they were staring at elimination unless a 4-0 victory in the return leg.

The victory, which put an end to the Under-23 national team's 10-match run without a win in three years, must be a morale boost for the game in decline.

Bangladesh, whose last victory at this level came against Afghanistan in the 9th SA Games in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2004, drew with India and lost to Pakistan in the first half. Sohel netted twice after the break to seal the comfortable victory.

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They created ample scoring chances with Emily and his partner

Ujjal both coming close. Emily shot just wide while Ujjal's effort was parried by goalkeeper Jian who made another good save later, informed manager Amirul Islam Babu.

"Unlike our last match, the players were following instructions. So they played a good game, just what I wanted," said Yusuf.

"May be after the home defeat, they realised the situation and showed confidence and patience to stick to the plan," added the former nation footballer, who made only one change in the starting line up from the first leg game. "There were one or two who played exceptionally but I am happy because of the total team work."

Mamun got a first-team place, replacing fellow midfielder Sharif.

The team will return home tomorrow night.

SQUAD: Himel, Aurup, Zahirul, Ariful, Waly, Zahid Hossain, Maruf (Sharif) Mamun, Zahid Parvez, Ujjal (Robin) and Emily.

"If you look at recent results then, yes, Bolton have become a difficult team for us. But I don't experience it like that," the Arsenal boss said.

"They took advantage of our weak points every time, but overall I never look at any opponents as ever being a team we cannot be successful against. I just think if you do the right things then you win. You must give them credit, because in two results this season they beat us 3-1 up there and drew 1-1 at the Emirates."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

"We had a very strong second half, and they were under a lot of pressure when we drew at home. That is what we want to do tonight. But they have changed -- they are a lot more technical now."

Arsenal went into the replay on an unbeaten match run and Wenger was determined to sustain the momentum.

"We are just on a good run in 2007 and we want to keep that going," the Frenchman said.

"We don't really choose what kind of competition we are in. We just know that if we win we have another game on Saturday. So let's have another game on Saturday."

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