



PHOTO: STAR
Mohammedan's Nigerian striker Emeka (C) storms in a header against Oldham Athletic as Paul (R) looks on during their exhibition match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Oldham MSC-struck

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Oldham Athletic received a hostile welcome when the youth side of the English club lost their first exhibition match to Mohammedan Sporting Club yesterday.

Nigerian forwards Mwach Ukwu Paul and Emeka Christina struck first half goals in the home side's 2-1 victory at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as the visitors wilted under scorching heat.

Matt Barlow scored a consolation goal for the Latics, who were forced to make nine changes at the break and looked better under lights.

A few thousand crowds, however, enjoyed a lively start by the black and whites who went ahead after 20 minutes.

Paul and Emeka dictated the terms early and their hard work paid off after Zahid initiated the move at the right flank. Taking the ball from the midfielder, Paul got

inside the box but his shot came off a forest of legs and Emeka made no mistake to drill the ball into the bottom corner.

Six minutes later, Emeka forced a fine save by Ryan Smith, the goalkeeper who has already played for the senior side in the Coca Cola League 1.

Playing 4-3-3, the Oldham struggled for control in the middle but Adam Edwards threatened to score on the half hour, only to be denied by Nigerian Peter Odufe's brilliant tackle inside the box.

Mohammedan doubled the lead ten minutes from the break with Paul's clinical finish after a through ball by Mithu. Paul, the top-scorer of the ongoing B. League who has scored a double hattrick this season, got behind a defender at the left side and exquisitely placed a left-footer into the farpost from a tight angle.

It should have been 3-0 but Emeka, who broke an offside trap with Paul's pass, saw Smith palm away his shot from one-on-one.

In the last five minutes, Oldham made desperate attempts for a

comeback but Barlow hit the base of the sidebar after going round rival goalkeeper Himel, who held Ashley Kelly's weak header in the injury time.

The half time came as a relief for the tired booters and only Barlow and Ross Thaker returned when the game resumed. The fresh legs pushed hard and it took Latics three minutes to reduce the arrears through Barlow, who sidefooted home from the edge of the six-yard box after meeting a low cross by Deane Smalley from the right.

With the boys in blue having the edge, Smalley fluffed a series of attempts on the hour as Oldham's chances to equalise evaporated. The tall forward was set up by Kallum Higginbotham after a flowing counter attack by Edwards but the first shot went straight to Himel. Smalley hit the rebound once again to the keeper from point-blank range and the third time, his cross was defended by the backline.

Ten minutes later, Higginbotham invaded the penalty area with a ball from Owen but Himel

Cruciani leaves in good grace

SPORTS REPORTER

Diego Cruciani will cut ties with Bangladesh for the second time inside one year's time with his head high, unlike his first departure that was under controversy.

The Argentine coach, who was not paid his last month's salary by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) which extended his one-year contract to guide the national team, is going out as Abahani coach on his will.

Cruciani joined Abahani in February this year but is leaving the club midway through their B. League campaign mainly due to pressure of the fans, the 43-year-old revealed this on Monday night confirming that he was not sacked by Abahani for bad performance.

Talking to reporters at the club tent, Cruciani mentioned he was frustrated to leave Abahani like this.

"Abahani built a strong team and spent huge amounts to win the

Ctg MSC back to winning ways

SPORTS REPORTER

Just six days after a famous away victory over mighty Abahani in Dhaka, Khulna Abahani crashed 1-0 to Chittagong Mohammedan yesterday.

Towhidul Islam separated the two sides four minutes after the break in the last game of the penultimate round of the B. League at the Khulna Stadium, giving the visitors their fourth win in nine games.

With one round to go, Chittagong Mohammedan who returned to winning ways after two defeats, climbed to fifth place with 14 points while Khulna Abahani remained eighth with 10 points.

Maradona vows healthy lifestyle

THE GUARDIAN

Diego Maradona has vowed to fight his illness for the sake of his daughters after being discharged from hospital following lengthy treatment for smoking-, dietary- and alcohol-related problems.

He made his first public appearance on Argentinian TV station Canal 13 and stated: "I am alive and I want to continue living for my two daughters. I am going to continue fighting until the end."

"I was ill, I recognise that," he continued. "There were some very hard days, I do not recommend it to anybody. I made a mistake and paid a very high price. Today I am calm, doing the diet and taking care of myself. Now I want to rest in order to be better physically. I am not a drunk."

Maradona said his family were instrumental in his recovery. "May 16 is the birthday of my daughter Giannina and I want to enjoy it because she helped me a lot," he said. "My daughters tell me 'never again dad' and I am going to endeavour to achieve it. I want to be an example for my daughters."

Lamps' point to prove

AFP, London



Frank Lampard believes Chelsea are still the best team in the Premiership and he is determined to hammer home the point by inflicting a pair of defeats on Manchester United.

Jose Mourinho's side surrendered the title to United on Sunday, but they have a chance to show they are still a match for the champions at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday and then in the FA Cup final on May 19.

Lampard will join his teammates in forming a guard of honour for United before kick-off, but his passionate defence of Chelsea's position as the English game's top dogs makes it safe to assume he will do so grudgingly.

"The best team in the country wins the league, that's what you say, especially when you win it," Lampard said. "But I think we've got the best squad."

"We've got a huge game coming up against United in the Cup final, but words don't mean much if you

start saying 'we're the best.' What matters is performance and we've had to perform against a lot of things this year.

"There are a lot of reasons we lost the league and some of them weren't in our control. We can't make excuses and have to give credit to United who've had a great season, but I believe that without the injuries to Petr and John and many, many more there wouldn't be that gap in points.

"To me that's just a fact. But it's no excuse and all credit to United for what they've achieved. But we'll be back."

Lampard insists Chelsea will return stronger than ever after learning the lessons of a traumatic season.

The most important issue to be resolved now Mourinho's future seems settled is the failure of Andriy Shevchenko and Michael Ballack to assimilate themselves into the win-at-all-costs mentality of the Chelsea dressing room.

Mourinho hinted after Sunday's match at Arsenal that he was unhappy with the efforts of a small group of his players and it seems

likely Shevchenko and Ballack were uppermost in his thoughts.

While Lampard refused to single out any of his colleagues, the England midfielder was equally vociferous in his belief that not every player was pulling in the same direction.

"We've fought against a lot of things, big injuries to big players at big times in the season and points we wouldn't have lost we lost," he said.

"There've been other problems at the club and they have to be addressed, simple as that. We cannot and have not to lose the spirit that has got us where we are, with certain people.

"You'll emphasise what I mean when you saw how we played today on the pitch, with 11 players fighting, playing and should have won the game with 10 men.

"That's who are and what we're about. Next year we have to make sure we're focussed on being champions again. If we keep saying there's things we've been battling against we have to put them right."

"It's been difficult, but you have to focus and learn through all these

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Sheva to undergo op

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Andriy Shevchenko's miserable season at Chelsea has been hit by fresh mystery after it emerged that he would have groin surgery today, meaning he will miss the FA Cup final against Manchester United.

Initially it had been stated that the Ukrainian would have his operation at the end of the season but it has been confirmed that he has played his last game of this campaign.

The Chelsea manager, Jose Mourinho, is understood to have felt that Shevchenko had exaggerated the effects of the injury, which forced him to miss last week's Champions League semi-final second leg against Liverpool.

Chelsea, though, insist that the decision to bring forward the

operation has been made by the club's medical staff, who judge that further games now could risk more serious damage.

Shevchenko's absence for the rest of the season places further strain on Mourinho's squad, who were without Didier Drogba for Sunday's 1-1 draw against Arsenal because of an ankle injury. Chelsea face Manchester United tomorrow and then complete their league season at home to Everton on Sunday.

Shevchenko has been dogged by difficulties since his £30m move from Milan last summer and has scored only 14 goals all season. His signing is widely believed to have been initiated by Roman Abramovich and Shevchenko has been frustrated by the lack of support he has received from Mourinho.

Drogba has been the Chelsea manager's preferred striker and his treatment of Shevchenko is widely

believed to have contributed to his strained relationship with the club's Russian owner. The situation became so bad in January that it emerged that Abramovich wanted the Portsmouth technical director, Avram Grant, to be brought in to work directly with Shevchenko. That idea was strongly resisted by Mourinho, although Grant may still arrive at the end of the season in the position of director of football.

Shevchenko has been linked with a move back to Milan this summer and there were reports last night that Chelsea have agreed to sign Reading's Steve Sidwell. The former Arsenal midfielder is out of contract in June and has been coveted by clubs including Newcastle United.

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PHOTO: AFP
Tottenham midfielder Didier Zokora (R) drops to one knee to celebrate after teammate Jermaine Defoe scored a late goal in their Premiership clash against Charlton at The Valley in London on Monday.

CHARLTON RELEGATED

Pardew offers no excuses

AFP, London



Alan Pardew admitted Charlton deserved to be relegated after his side crashed out of the Premiership.

The south London club's slender hopes of avoiding the drop were extinguished on Monday as Tottenham won 2-0 at the Valley thanks to goals from Dimitar Berbatov and Jermain Defoe.

Defeat confirmed Charlton's return to the Championship after seven years in English football's top division and Pardew conceded the club had only themselves to blame after a chaotic campaign.

Iain Dowie and then Les Reed presided over a dismal first half of the season. Pardew, their third boss of the season, inspired a mini-

revival after taking over at Christmas with the team deep in trouble.

But the south London team slipped back into trouble in the last month and a run of six matches without a win left them facing the unappetising prospect of trips to Scunthorpe and Colchester instead of Chelsea and Manchester United.

Pardew said: "I think in terms of where we are in the league and the politics off the pitch you end up where you deserve."

"There are a number of reasons why we have gone down, but I can't talk about the time when I wasn't here. Sometimes as a team you just don't have enough."

"Spurs' little bit of extra quality was the difference. That's been the case despite the great run we've had since I've been here."

But Pardew can take credit for

the way he galvanised a team that looked dead and buried and there is every chance they will challenge for promotion next season.

Darren Bent is likely to leave as there will be no shortage of offers for the England striker, but Pardew insisted there would be no fire sale.

"The board have been very supportive," he said. "Hopefully we can keep 90 percent of the squad and bounce back next year."

"I told the players they can walk out of here with their heads held high in terms of the time I've been here. For us it's not to be, but we have to prepare ourselves for what will be a difficult season."

"Our egos are not that big that we can't face up to the championship. The people here have been brilliant to me and I want to repay that."

Spurs move into sixth place and remain on course for a UEFA Cup

WC qualifying draw in November

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The draw for the qualifying round of the 2010 football World Cup will take place in Durban, South Africa, on November 23, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said Tuesday.

"The draw for the preliminary round of the 2010 World Cup will be held in Durban on November 23 this year," he said at the Asian Football Confederation Congress here.

The city will also play host to a series of meetings by officials from world governing body FIFA to discuss preparations for the tournament.

Around 3,000 delegates -- including FIFA senior figures and national team coaches -- are expected to attend.

Ribery wants foreign sojourn

AFP, Paris

France midfielder Franck Ribery has said that if he leaves Marseille in the close season, it will be to play abroad.

Ribery burst on to the international scene at last year's World Cup in Germany and he has been attracting attention from French champions Lyon and from several big European clubs.

Much will likely depend if his current club Marseille manage to qualify for next season's Champions League and they are currently on track to do that with just three games to go in the French first division.

But if they don't, Ribery said he would be keen to play abroad.

"It's true that last year Lyon and other clubs were very interested in me, but now it's playing abroad that attracts me," he told France Football.

"I know for sure that a country like Germany would not interest me much - I prefer the leagues in England or Spain."

"But on the other hand I would have to great problem in staying with Marseille as I like it a lot here. Maybe a few good transfers would help us."



PHOTO: AFP
Argentina legend Diego Maradona (L) is interviewed by TV presenter Marcelo Tinelli during the latter's Show Match program in Buenos Aires on Monday.

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