



PHOTO: STAR
Matiur Munna (M) celebrates his goal, Abahani's second against Mohammedan in the charity match, with Dominic (L) and Pranotosh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Abahani level series

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Guest footballer Matiur Munna set up a first-half goal for Abul Hossain and scored the other after the break to help Abahani come back in the Teletalk Best of Three Series with a 2-1 win over archrivals Mohammedan yesterday.

Abahani's win levelled the three-match charity series 1-1 after Mohammedan, who wasted one penalty and converted the other through Jumratul Islam Mithu on the night, had won Monday's opening match 5-4 in the tiebreaker after a goalless draw in regulation 90 minutes.

The target of the football series -- to raise a considerable fund for the cyclone victims -- however, hardly fulfilled as the number of spectators reduced even after the dramatic first match, where two booters were sent off, the referee was show-caused and Mohammedan coach Shaiful Islam Manik was handed a touchline ban.

Before a meagre 6,000 fans, Mohammedan looked more positive for the first half hour. The black and whites, however, wasted great chances to take the lead and seal the series even before Abahani had settled on the pitch.

Farhad sent a fine chip from the left just after two minutes but Abahani's Ugandan defender Dominic headed out the ball with Nigerian striker Charles Figo closing in on a free header.

Farhad again caught the rival backline flat-footed from a corner but Mishu failed to connect the ball from six yards.

Moni, the sky-blues' visiting striker from Muktiyoddha, limped off the ground due to a hamstring injury in the ninth minute and Abahani's miseries extended a couple of minutes later when Abul conceded a penalty, while tripping overlapping rival fullback Kamal inside the box.

Biplab proved it was not going to be Mohammedan's day when the Abahani keeper dived to his left to tip the spotkick by Arman Aziz onto his sidebar for a fellow defender to kick it out of danger.

With Pradeep, stand-in captain in absence of Joy who was red carded on Monday beside Mohammedan's Hassan Al Mamun, operating as rightback, the Abahani defence gradually regained solidity as Nazrul and Dominic finally showed some understanding.

It resulted in a few counter attacks but the lead came from a setpiece in the 33rd minute. Munna lofted a freekick from the

left and Abul's glancing header gave Aminul no chance at the Mohammedan goal as the ball slammed into the far corner.

Abahani doubled the lead just two minutes into the second session although Mohammedan players strongly appealed for an offside against Munna.

The midfielder took a corner from the right and the ball went to Robin and the Farshganj striker chipped a crossfield pass back to Munna, who flicked the ball past Aminul and toed it into an empty goal.

Figo, who twice threatened to score but failed to beat Biplab, however, had a hand when Mohammedan won the second penalty of the game as Rony -- getting inside the box with Figo's pass -- was felled by Dominic inside the box in the 73rd minute.

Mithu made no mistake to put the ball past an advancing Biplab to reduce the arrears.

The last chance of the game fell to Emily but the Abahani forward, having dribbled past two defenders, could not keep his drive under the bar five minutes from time.

Four players from each side were cautioned but tempers never got beyond control as the two archrivals headed home to prepare for the deciding third and final

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Sleepless nights for Sam

REUTERS, London

Under-pressure Newcastle United manager Sam Allardyce said his side's slump is causing him sleepless nights and admits the situation is getting desperate.

Goalkeepers Shay Given and defender Steve Harper both voiced their support of Allardyce on Tuesday after a solitary point from their last five Premier League matches has raised questions about his position.

Allardyce was the target for boos and chants of "you don't know what you're doing" in the crushing home defeat by Portsmouth and Liverpool last month. Unbeaten leaders Arsenal visit St James' Park on Wednesday.

"We are all uncomfortable with the situation and are all getting a little desperate," Allardyce told the Sun.

"It is causing me a few sleepless nights although, to be honest, I don't really sleep much anyway. Even less when I'm in a position like I am in now."

Allardyce said he hoped Newcastle's demanding fans would show some patience as he tries to turn around the team's fortunes.

"At the end of the day the judgement comes at 38 games for me, not after 14," he said. "The supporters certainly have a big role to play -- a positive one I hope."

"I hope the fans can get behind us. There are many different factors we could point to which have not helped our cause. But sooner, rather than later, we will get the victory that will settle us down."

Newcastle are 11th in the Premier League with 18 points.

Terry's choice is Mourinho

REUTERS, London

Jose Mourinho would be the best choice as England coach, national team captain John Terry said on Tuesday.

"He's one that really stands out for me and could make a big difference," Terry told Sky Sports.

England have begun the search for a new coach following Steve McClaren's sacking after their failure two weeks ago to qualify for Euro 2008 in Austria and Switzerland.

"(Mourinho) is a great guy tactically, he's very aware and he understands the game very well," added central defender Terry of his former manager at Chelsea.

"He came in and took us (Chelsea) to a new level. I'm very lucky to have been able to work with Jose, he's a fantastic manager and a fantastic guy."

The Portuguese coach, who steered Chelsea to the Premier League title in 2005 and 2006, has been enjoying a break from the game since leaving Chelsea in September over differences with club owner Roman Abramovich.

"It's down to the FA to contact him if they want to speak to him," said Terry, who was appointed England captain by McClaren in succession to David Beckham after the 2006 World Cup.

Terry, who will be 28 on Friday, said FA chief executive Brian Barwick had consulted him about a new England coach.

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L'pool under suspicion

Football

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool have been dragged into the match-fixing scandal that has rocked European football.

There are reports that the 8-0 Champions League win over Besiktas last month is considered suspicious because of irregular betting patterns. UEFA officials refused to confirm or deny the allegations.

Only last weekend UEFA president Michel Platini said the 'criminal phenomena' in sport had become a 'big problem' after confirming that the European governing body were looking into matches in Eastern Europe that may have been fixed by gangster-run betting syndicates.

UEFA are working with Europol, the pan-European police force. Platini plans to hold a conference with From Back Page European Commission vice-president Franco Frattini to look at money

laundering, match-fixing and illegal betting in football.

William Gaillard, UEFA's director of communications, said last night that an InterToto Cup game between Makedonija and Chernomorec in July was the only game being officially investigated. Others were simply considered suspicious because of irregular betting patterns.

One look at Liverpool's group is enough to raise concern.

Besiktas have a goal difference of minus nine compared to Liverpool's of plus nine but go into next week's final game against Porto still able to qualify ahead of the 2005 champions.

After losing 8-0 at Anfield on November 6, with Yossi Benayoun scoring a hat-trick, players and staff from the Turkish club said how 'ashamed' they were.

Investigators for Sueddeutsche Zeitung, a Munich daily, claim that there was 'frenzied betting on a high-score victory' prior to the game. UEFA have made no contact with

Liverpool and last night officials at Anfield said they could not comment because they had no knowledge of any controversy.

But reports in Germany suggest that Besiktas players, on a fraction of the salaries earned by Liverpool stars, could have been targeted by Asian betting syndicates.

"At this stage I can neither confirm nor deny the reports," Gaillard told Sportsmail. "There has to be a certain amount of confidentiality with these things because we could risk a source of information drying up."

Meanwhile, Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez may rest defender Jamie Carragher against Reading on Saturday ahead of crucial meetings with Marseille and Manchester United.

Carragher is still feeling the effects of a rib injury, and is also a booking away from missing the date with United on Sunday week. He seems certain to be held in reserve for Tuesday's Champions League group decider in Marseille.

TOP SCORERS IN UCL

(includes qualifiers)	
1. Raul (ESP/Real Madrid)	58
2. Ruud van Nistelrooy (NED/Real Madrid)	53
3. Andrei Shevchenko (UKR/Chelsea)	47
4. Thierry Henry (FRA/Barcelona)	44
5. Filippo Inzaghi (ITA/AC Milan)	42
6. Alessandro Del Piero (ITA/Juventus)	37

Milan, Juve in for Rafael

AFP, Rome

AC Milan and Juventus are chasing the signature of SV Hamburg's star midfielder Rafael Van der Vaart, according to the Italian media.

The Dutchman came close to quitting the Bundesliga side in the close season with Valencia seeking his signature but Hamburg refused to sell and the former Ajax man was forced to stay put.

A regular in the Dutch national team, he has had a sterling season and Italian football website Datasport.it claimed Tuesday that European champions Milan, and Juve, are ready to go head-to-head to sign him up.

It claimed Juve see him as an ideal replacement for veteran Czech playmaker Pavel Nedved while Milan feel he could form a lethal partnership with Ballon d'Or winner Kaka.

However, it also claims that Van der Vaart, who has a Spanish mother, still has his sights set on a move to Spain, with Barcelona, Valencia and Atletico Madrid all tracking him.

Basten to quit after Euro

AFP, The Hague

Marco van Basten is to quit as coach of the Dutch national football team after Euro 2008 it was announced by Henk Kesler, managing director of the Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) on Tuesday.

Van Basten's assistant John van't Schip will also leave his post with the former - whose contract runs till July next year - being hotly touted to become coach of Dutch giants and one of his former clubs Ajax.

Van Basten, who has been heavily criticised in the national media, met with the directors of the KNVB earlier on Tuesday to discuss his future, though, he had already said he had made up his mind.

"By the end of Euro 2008 I will have been national coach for four years, which has given me a lot of pleasure," van Basten told Dutch agency ANP.

"John and myself have no idea what our future holds," added the 43-year-old, refusing to confirm the Ajax rumours.

Van Basten, who was three times named European Footballer of the year and once as world footballer of the year, guided The Netherlands to the 2006 World Cup finals, where they were beaten by Portugal in the second round, and now to the Euro finals.

The Dutch, though, face a tough task of emulating their coach's win as a player in the 1988 edition as they are in a group with world champions Italy, World Cup finalists France and Romania.

Inzaghi rules Europe Celtic advance

AFP, Milan



Filippo Inzaghi broke the European goal-scoring record as AC Milan defeated Celtic 1-0 though

defeat was sweetened for the Scottish side as they qualified for the Champions League knock-out stages in any case here on Tuesday.

It was the perfect scenario for all involved as Milan won, topped the group, Inzaghi made history in beating Gerd Muller's mark with his 63rd strike, and Celtic played gamely while sneaking through to the second round for the second year in a row.

That was thanks to Shakhtar Donetsk's 2-1 home defeat to Benfica in the other group D match.

At times the match resembled a training ground run-out but it finally sparked into life in the second period, culminating with Inzaghi's winning strike 20 minutes from time.

And it was a flowing move that set it up, Kaka breaking down the right and feeding the overlapping Cafu who crossed for Inzaghi to score his meat and drink, a tap-in from inside the six-yard box.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti had vowed on Monday to play his "strongest possible side" but that proved to be pie in the sky as he changed his entire back five.

Even so, there were six World Cup winners in his starting 11, but that didn't stop the first half resembling a local Sunday pub

league kick-around.

Given that a draw suited both sides, neither team seemed too keen to commit men forward, particularly Celtic.

At one point right-back Gary Caldwell moved over the half-way line with the ball and acres of space in front of him, only to panic, turn around and start heading back towards his own goal in search of a teammate.

No-one was playing well but he was having a particular shocker, at one point running the ball straight off the sideline.

Clarence Seedorf came closest to breaking the deadlock a minute from the break but blazed his shot from inside the box high and wide.

Something was clearly said at half-time as both sides came out with a bit more urgency for the second period.

Within three minutes of the restart, the European champions had twice come closer to scoring than in the entire first 45 minutes.

Andrea Pirlo hit a wicked, swerving free-kick just inches past the post and then Inzaghi latched onto a ricochet from a

Kaka shot, only to be forced wide by Stephen McManus before screwing his shot past the upright.

Up the other end Scott Brown broke clear and latched onto a long punt forward but his volleyed finish from inside the area was unimpressive.

It was turning into a real match with Milan camped out on the edge of the Celtic box. Caldwell redeemed himself on 58 minutes, flinging his body in the way of a fierce Seedorf shot before Inzaghi missed a sitter.

A minute later, and with Celtic's defence in disarray, Giuseppe Favalli crossed past Artur Boruc in the Celtic goal for Inzaghi, five yards out at the back post with an open goal to aim at.

Shockingly, he managed to direct his header into Boruc's arms, even though the keeper was actually behind him.

That would be quickly forgotten, though, as the Italian turned from villain to hero.

Milan dominated the closing stages with Boruc making a stunning double save from Cristian Brocchi and Inzaghi nine minutes from time.

Brown did force a late save from Australian goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac but Celtic never really looked like scoring.

Kaka should have added an injury time second but substitute Evander Sno blocked his effort.

For Celtic, it was their 15th defeat in 16 Champions League group stage away matches - a sorry statistic but one that no-one cared about at the final whistle.

STANDINGS

European Champions League group table on Tuesday after final round of fixtures (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):										
Group D										
AC Milan	6	4	1	1	12	5	13			
Celtic	6	3	0	3	5	6	9			
Benfica	6	2	1	3	5	6	7			
Shakhtar	6	2	0	4	6	11	6			

Pippo sheds a tear

INTERNET, undated



Italy's football lovers on Wednesday hailed veteran Filippo Inzaghi after he became the all-time top scorer in European club competitions. The AC Milan striker was radiant after notching his 63rd Euro-goal late Tuesday in a Champions League group match that his side won by 1-0 over visiting Celtic.

Inzaghi scored the goal that pushed him one goal above German legend Gerd Mueller in his trademark raptor-like fashion, pouncing on a cross in a defenders-filled area to stun the goalkeeper from close range.

"The goal was an amazing sensation and I tried to share it with my team mates and all the fans because I think it truly is an extraordinary achievement," Inzaghi said.

"The record is mine, but also Milan's and it completes this wonderful period that began in Athens

with the Champions League title (2-1 over Liverpool), continued in Monte Carlo with the Supercup (3-1 over Sevilla) and then with the Golden Ball awarded to Kaka (at the weekend).

"Now I think above all about my family, who shared the sad moments of the injuries that blocked me. In the stands there were dad Giancarlo and my brother Simone."

"As soon as possible we will celebrate with mother Marina. Now it is not possible: it's time to think about Yokohama."

TOP SCORERS IN EUROPE

1. Filippo Inzaghi (ITA/AC Milan)	63
2. Gerd Muller (GER)	62
3. Andrei Shevchenko (UKR/Chelsea)	60
4. Raul (ESP/Real Madrid)	60
5. Ruud van Nistelrooy (NED/Real Madrid)	57
6. Eusebio (POR)	56
7. Henrik Larsson (SWE/Helsingborg)	52
8. Thierry Henry (FRA/Barcelona)	52
9. Alfredo Di Stefano (ARG-ESP)	50
10. Carlos Santillana (ESP)	47

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Ronaldinho to Blues?

Football

AFP, Madrid

Ronaldinho could be set for a move to Chelsea, according to one of the numerous reports Wednesday which suggested the embattled Brazilian is finally ready to depart Barcelona.

Ronaldinho has fallen out of favour at the Nou Camp this season, especially since his reputation was damaged by highly-publicised reports of his nocturnal party lifestyle.

Amid falling sales of his number 10 shirt, a series of substitute appearances and an apparent lack of form, the 2006 Ballon d'Or winner is now on his way to Stamford Bridge, according to Spanish sports daily Marca.

Marca cited none of its sources

but said the 27-year-old already holds an offer from the English Premier League side offering him 10 million euros a year.

British newspaper The Sun reported as far back as September that Chelsea were ready to offer Barcelona a whopping 70 million euros for Ronaldinho, who would receive an annual salary of 17 million.

But the possibility of Ronaldinho's departure from the Catalan giants has been amplified by the arrival in the city this week of his brother and agent, Roberto de Assis.

AC Milan are also said to be interested in Ronaldinho, who according to his brother appears ready to leave it Barcelona express that wish.

"He is fine at Barcelona, but if someone wants him to leave he will go for free - without having to pay

the get-out clause," Roberto de Assis told several Spanish newspapers.

De Assis appeared to deny that any deal had been done with Chelsea when he told El Mundo Deportivo: "I have not read the newspapers, but it is a big surprise for me, because I have not spoken with anybody."

"I cannot receive offers. The only one who can receive them are Barcelona."

Meanwhile Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard, whose future at the club has also been subject to speculation in recent weeks, has brushed off persistent rumours that Ronaldinho has been seeing his daughter Linsey.

"Her boyfriend is Brazilian, but it's not Ronaldinho", Rijkaard told a Dutch publication, Life after football, according to Catalan daily El Periodico.



PHOTO: AFP
SWEET 63: Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi (C) celebrates his record breaking goal with teammate Kaka during their Champions League match against Celtic at the San Siro on Tuesday. It was Inzaghi's 63rd goal in European competition pulling him clear of Gerd Mueller's record.