

## Impossible Messi

AFP, Barcelona



Argentinian superstar Lionel Messi's first ever four-goal haul saw holders Barcelona reach the Champions League semifinals here on Tuesday in a 4-1 defeat of English side Arsenal in their quarterfinal second leg clash to win 6-3 on aggregate.

The 22-year-old world player-of-the-year - who went into the match with three hattricks already in 2010 - destroyed Arsenal after Danish striker Nicklas Bendtner had briefly given the visitors hope with the opening goal.

Bendtner scored on the counter-attack after 18 minutes, but then Messi stole the show with a hattrick before half-time and a late strike two minutes before the end with Arsenal already beaten.

Following Arsenal's dramatic come-back to finish 2-2 in the first leg, the return at the Nou Camp was eagerly awaited and the anticipation ahead of the game was in no way dampened by the number of key players absent.

Barcelona were without their central defensive pairing of Carles Puyol and Gerard Pique while in attack the scorer of their two goals at the Emirates, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, was missing through injury.

Arsenal possibly had the greater cross to bear without former Barça

youth product Cesc Fabregas as well Andrey Arshavin, William Gallas and Alex Song.

The surprise news before kick-off was that Mikael Silvestre was chosen ahead of Sol Campbell to partner Thomas Vermaelen in defence while for Barcelona as expected Bojan Krkic was given the nod by coach Pep Guardiola to play in attack, ahead of former-Gunner hero Thierry Henry.

Arsenal took the lead in practically their first attack. Theo Walcott, such a danger for the Barca defence in the first-leg, burst clear down the right wing and crossed for Bendtner.

While the Danes shot was smothered at close range by keeper Victor Valdes, Bendtner was up first to slot the ball home.

The 98,000 capacity crowd was stunned into silence but they needn't have worried because in Messi they have a player with exceptional talent who rose to the occasion.

Just two minutes later with the Arsenal defence failing to clear their lines, the Argentine fired the ball past the outstretched arms of Manuel Almunia.

Messi had moved up a gear and put Barca into the lead after 36 minutes. Having been set up 12 yards out by Pedro Rodriguez he slipped past Gael Clichy before scoring from close range.

It was almost a single-handed performance as Messi latched onto a header from Seydou Keita in midfield

Barcelona 4 - 1 Arsenal
Messi 21 Bendtner 18
Messi 37
Messi 42
Messi 88
Barcelona win 6-3 on aggregate

**BARCELONA:** Victor Valdes, Daniel Alves, Rafael Marquez, Gabriel Milito, Eric Abidal (Maxwell, 53), Xavi, Seydou Keita, Sergio Busquets, Lionel Messi, Bojan (Yaya Toure, 56), Pedro (Andres Iniesta, 86)

**ARSENAL:** Manuel Almunia, Bacary Sagna, Thomas Vermaelen, Mikael Silvestre (Emmanuel Ebou, 64), Gael Clichy, Abou Diaby, Tomas Rosicky (Da Silva Eduardo, 73), Samir Nasri, Theo Walcott, Denilson, Nicklas Bendtner

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Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi (R) clips the ball over the stranded Arsenal goalkeeper Manuel Almunia (L) to score his second goal in their Champions League quarterfinal second-leg clash at the Nou Camp on Tuesday. Messi served up a rarely-before-seen cavalier display bagging all four goals as the Catalans destroyed the Gunners 4-1 for a 6-3 aggregate win.

PHOTO: AFP

## Cyclones rope in Akhter

Six franchises and their players named



PHOTO: STAR

Models add a touch of glamour to the launching ceremony of the National Cricket League T20 2009-10 at the Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

SPORTS REPORTER

While the Sultans of Sylhet grabbed the biggest local name in Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the Cyclones of Chittagong made an even bigger splash after they announced the capture of Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhter for the National Cricket League's brand new Twenty20 tournament.

Sylhet snapped up Bangladesh pacer Mashrafe when six franchises chose the players through a lottery during a marathon launching ceremony at the Sheraton

Hotel yesterday.

However, dashing opener Tamim Iqbal, the Icon of Cyclones of Chittagong, soon burst Sylhet's bubble as he disclosed that his side was all set to bring in Akhter, who has been in the wilderness of international cricket for quite a long period of time.

"It is all but confirmed that [Shoaib] Akhter will join the team before the start of the tournament [on April 11]," said Tamim.

Country's leading pacer Mashrafe, who is currently with IPL side Kolkata Knight Riders, was also given the highest grade but not included in the Icon Players' list. Sylhet capitalised on this

and picked his name in their first opportunity.

In the launching ceremony of the tournament the main attraction was the players' selections through lottery after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had initially distributed four Icon Players amongst each of the six divisional teams.

The respective teams' Icon Players along with the coaching staff took part in the lottery to select the player and they got little time to think about the selection.

During the programme, which started an hour later than scheduled, the owners of the six divisional teams were introduced and the logos for the different teams were also unveiled.

BCB's director and marketing committee chairman Aziz Al Kaiser Titoo along with his three other partners came forward to buy the Barisal team to make sure that no team would remain unsold.

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### FIXTURE

DATE	MATCHES	VENUE
Apr 11	Rajshahi v Chittagong	Mirpur
Apr 12	Chittagong v Sylhet	Mirpur
	Dhaka v Barisal	Mirpur
	Rajshahi v Khulna	BKSP
Apr 13	Rajshahi v Barisal	Mirpur
	Chittagong v Khulna	Mirpur
	Sylhet v Dhaka	BKSP
Apr 15	Dhaka v Khulna	Mirpur
	Rajshahi v Sylhet	Mirpur
	Chittagong v Barisal	BKSP
Apr 16	Chittagong v Dhaka	Mirpur
	Sylhet v Barisal	Mirpur
Apr 17	Sylhet v Khulna	Mirpur
	Rajshahi v Dhaka	Mirpur
Apr 18	Barisal v Khulna	Mirpur
Apr 19	Semifinal-1	Mirpur
	Semifinal-2	Mirpur
Apr 20	Final	Mirpur

## Shoaib divorces Ayesha

PTI, Hyderabad

In a dramatic turnaround, Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik on Wednesday divorced Ayesha Siddiqui, the Hyderabad woman whom he had married seven years ago, under a compromise worked out by Muslim community leaders, paving the way for his marriage with tennis star Sania Mirza on April 15.

Under the compromise, Malik will pay Rs15,000 as maintenance to Ayesha at the rate of Rs5,000 a month for three months as per the sharia (Islamic law), Major GM Qadri announced at a press conference in the presence of Ayesha's mother Farisa and Sania's uncle Mohammad Shafi.

Qadri said all police cases against Malik, who has been maintaining that there was no valid marriage with Ayesha, will be withdrawn. The Siddiquis have already filed an application with the police in this regard, he said.

At the press conference at the residence of Andhra Pradesh Congress general secretary Abid Rasool Khan, Qadri rejected suggestions of any monetary angle to the compromise, saying, "No money is involved except the Rs15,000 under the sharia."

Today's compromise that came after night-long negotiations between the two sides, brings

to an end a bitter war of words between Ayesha Siddiqui's family and Malik, who landed here on Saturday and faced a case of cheating, intimidation, and harassment. Police questioned him on Monday and took away his passport while barring him from leaving India.

Shafi and Khan said negotiators worked through the night to work out a compromise between the families because the controversy was bringing a bad name to the community and the religion.

Farisa said that as decided by the elders of the community, a compromise had been arrived at. "I am very happy about it. All community leaders have come to him [Malik] to do the settlement and he has done it," Farisa said. "My daughter had to pass through hardships. Finally justice has been done to my daughter. She is relieved and very happy."

Farisa said the chapter was closed now and that she was very, very happy. "I only wanted this [divorce]. It has been done. I wish them [Sania and Malik] well."

Khan said, "Divorce has been settled and done and it was done after the intervention of community leaders. After hearing all three parties, we decided that divorce should happen. There was no condition and [money] involved."

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## Big two keep rolling

SPORTS REPORTER



Titanians Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club maintained their winning run in the Bangladesh League when both of giants defeated their respective rivals at different venues yesterday.

A 61-minute strike from Pranotosh Kumar helped holders Abahani beat Shuktara Jubo Sangsad at the Narayaganj Osmani Stadium while a second-half brace from substitute Shakil Ahmed powered Mohammedan to an emphatic 3-0 win over Muktijoddha Sangsad KS at the Bangabandhu National

Stadium.

Two-time professional league champions Abahani are still top of the pile with 44 points from 15 outings, just four points ahead of rivals Mohammedan, who lifted their tally to 40 points from 15 matches.

Muktijoddha Sangsad and Shuktara Jubo Sangsad were struck to 14 and seven points respectively having played 15 matches each.

Mohammedan coach Maruful Haq was once again forced to make his starting eleven without two Nigerian key players Alamu Bukola Olaleken and Emeka Christian following the statement over payment and the Black and Whites looked

likely to drop points against side, whom they beat 4-0 in their first meeting. The Motijheel-based outfit were poor in the first half and there was no sign of what they put up in their 7-0 win over Shuktara in the previous match. The first half was virtually a festival of missing the goals with key striker Zahid Hasan Emily squandering twice from close range to frustrate the few hundred spectators at the Big Bowl.

A new-look Muktijoddha, who suffered six successive defeats in the first league, also threatened their mighty opponents coming close twice to taking the lead though their foreign recruits Eugene Jaih Gray and Raphael Sagno could not beat goalkeeper Aminul Haque.

However, the things started to change after the resumption as coach Maruf brought three changes sending on Shakil Ahmed, Arman Aziz and Alamgir Hossain Rana.

Nasir Chowdhury, who struck a hattrick in the previous match, eased the pressure to put Mohammedan ahead in the 63rd minute with a header off an Ariful Islam right-side cross.

Four minutes later, Muktijoddha almost equalled the margin, but Ghanaian defender Fuad Ali saw his header off a Rony Islam corner go over the bar on the bounce much to the relief of Mohammedan goalkeeper Aminul.

Shakil, who came to the field in the 63rd minute substituting Zahid Hossain, lessened the tension in the Mohammedan tent by doubling the lead in the 84th

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## What to WATCH

Max & SuperSport2

Indian Premier League  
Bangalore Royal Challengers v  
Deccan Chargers  
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 8:30pm

SuperSport3

UEFA Europa League  
Liverpool v Benfica  
Live from 1:00am (Friday)

SuperSport7

UEFA Europa League  
Wolves v Fulham  
Live from 1:00am (Friday)

## KKR upstage Daredevils

PTI, Kolkata

Sourav Ganguly struck his sixth Indian Premier League half-century and remained in the thick of things as Kolkata Knight Riders upstaged Delhi Daredevils by 14 runs yesterday to stay afloat in the race for a semifinal berth.

Cheered by a chockablock Eden Gardens crowd, the home side defended their total of 181 for three with gusto, restricting the Daredevils to 167 for eight for their sixth win in 10 outings.

The 99-run stand between Virender Sehwag (64) and Gautam Gambhir (47) was the bedrock of Daredevils' chase, which wilted 14 runs short of their opponents' total.

Earlier, Ganguly (56 off 46 balls) and Chris Gayle (40 off

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PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan's African contingent (from L-R) Emeka, Dami Emanuel and Alamu Bukola sit on the sidelines during their side's victory over Muktijoddha Sangsad in their Bangladesh League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The trio is sitting out in protest of unpaid wages.

## Nigerian trio skips another match

SPORTS REPORTER



Nigerian trio Alamu Bukola Olaleken, Emeka Christian and Dami Emanuel sat out Mohammedan Sporting Club's second successive match in the Bangladesh League as their wages remained unpaid.

Like the previous match, Bukola, the highest scorer of the professional league's second edition, and Emeka and Dami watched the Mohammedan-Muktijoddha Sangsad game from the gallery at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday as they decided to opt out of the match until the management pay their dues of four months.

"They will get payment for two months not four and it is true that we have been going through a financial crisis," said Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, member secretary of Mohammedan's ad-hoc committee.

Bhuiyan said they would settle the matter as soon as possible but not before the showcase notice is discussed in the meeting. The notice was served to them following the trouble they made with the owner of the house they rented.

Coach Maruful Haq said that the Nigerians have been coming to the practice regularly, but they have been skipping the matches.