

Bahrain thrash India

REUTERS, Doha

Striker Ismaeel Abdulatif scored four goals as Bahrain swept past India 5-2 at the Al Sadd Stadium on Friday to end the Bhangra Boys's interest in the Asian Cup.

Bahrain now need to beat Australia in their final Group C match to qualify for the quarterfinals.

Australia and South Korea lead the group on four points after their 1-1 draw at the Al Gharafa Stadium, with Bahrain third on three and India without a point.

The only sour note for Salman Shareedah's side was the needless red card for goal-scoring midfielder Faouzi Aaish who was cautioned twice in quick succession, the second for diving in the penalty area after 62 minutes.

Despite the defeat India, 144th in FIFA's world rankings, the lowest of the 16 sides here, will take a lot of heart from their display in an entertaining game full of defensive mistakes.

Bahrain opened the scoring after eight minutes from the penalty spot when Indian captain Climax Lawrence brought down Aaish, who stepped up to convert his second penalty of the tournament.

The Indians did not drop their heads and were level with their next attack when Gouramangi Singh was on hand at the back post to convert striker Abhishek Yadav's knockdown.

Bahrain regained the lead through Abdulatif's simple tap-in after 16 minutes following a mistake by goalkeeper Subrata Paul.

Abdulatif scored his second three minutes later when he converted Nigerian-born strike partner Jaycee John's cross. He completed his hat-trick 10 minutes before halftime when he chested the ball down before slotting a left-foot shot past Paul.



Bahrain forward Ismail Abdulatif (R) celebrates one of his four goals against India during their Asian Cup encounter at the Al-Sadd Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Dortmund extend lead Ruud demands Real return

REUTERS, Berlin



Borussia Dortmund struck three goals in six minutes to ease past Bayer Leverkusen 3-1 on Friday to extend their lead to 13 points as the Bundesliga restarted after a winter break.

Germany international Kevin Grosskreutz twice took advantage of poor defending to score in the 49th and 53rd minutes and Mario Goetze added another in the 55th to give visiting Dortmund their 15th win in 18 league games.

Leverkusen, who had captain Michael Ballack on the bench after more than four months out injured, pulled one back through Stefan Kiessling 10 minutes from time.

Juergen Klopp's team, who avenged their season-opening defeat by Bayer, have 46 points, 13 ahead of second-placed Mainz 05 and Leverkusen.

"These were big points for us," said a delighted Klopp who earlier this week

brushed aside suggestions Dortmund could struggle with the pressure in the second half of the season.

"We picked up where we left off and fully deserved the win but it is still going to be hard for us," he told reporters.

Confident Dortmund sent out an early warning they had lost none of their edge during the four-week winter break when Sven Bender rattled the post with a clever header after three minutes.

Despite missing Japanese Shinji Kagawa, who is on international duty, and having top striker Lucas Barrios on the bench, Dortmund again went close through Robert Lewandowski in the 22nd minute.

Kiessling headed just over for Leverkusen in the 40th minute but the home team capitulated after the restart with Grosskreutz taking full advantage of a defensive blunder to slot home.

The midfielder doubled the lead when he raced clear to beat keeper Rene Adler before Germany international Goetze, with national coach Joachim Loew watching in the stands, grabbed the third goal.

AFP, Berlin

Harry eyes MU win

AFP, London

Harry Redknapp believes Manchester United will face the biggest threat to their unbeaten record when the Premier League leaders visit Tottenham on Sunday.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side have gone undefeated throughout the first half of the league season and the table-toppers can extend that impressive run to 21 matches at White Hart Lane.

Yet Redknapp is convinced United will slip up before the end of the season and he is bullish about fourth-placed Tottenham's chances of becoming the first team to beat Wayne Rooney and company this term.

Although United are unbeaten, they have shown defensive frailties away from Old Trafford which Redknapp believes Spurs midfielders Rafael van der Vaart and Gareth Bale can exploit.

"We're probably better opposition than a lot of teams they've played away from home," Redknapp said. "I feel we have people that can cause them problems for sure."

"We believe in ourselves at home against anybody. I don't think we fear anybody. We have players that Alex would love to have in his team, I am sure."

"They will be worried about how they can contain Gareth Bale, (Aaron) Lennon and how they deal with van der Vaart."

Only a win will do for Tottenham as they try to make up an eight-point gap between themselves and United, so Redknapp is certain to send out an attacking line-up.

Tottenham's dynamic approach should test United's error-prone defence and Ferguson agrees with Redknapp's belief that the leaders have little chance of remaining undefeated.

"There is nothing exceptional in that comment," he said. "Harry is just echoing what I have said all along. There will be a blip. But can you tell him I don't want it to be on Sunday?"

After making an impressive mark in the Champions League, Tottenham are on the verge of becoming a major force and a win against United could be the defining moment that transforms them from pretenders to serious contenders.

Spurs have failed to win any of their last 23 matches against United - a woeful sequence stretching back to 2001 - but Redknapp's current group are a far more formidable outfit than their predecessors.

"It's a game we need to win to close the gap on them. If they beat us they've run away really. You're not going to claw back that title lead on them," Redknapp said.



Borussia Dortmund striker Kevin Grosskreutz (front) is challenged by Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Renato Augusto during their Bundesliga clash in Leverkusen on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

O'Neill in, Grant out?

AFP, London

West Ham are preparing to sack manager Avram Grant and will replace him with former Aston Villa boss Martin O'Neill, Sky Sports television reported Saturday.

The network cited unidentified sources as saying Grant would be axed regardless of the outcome of the club's match against Arsenal later Saturday, following the Hammers' poor start to the season.

Although West Ham have slipped to the bottom of the Premier League in recent weeks, Grant was believed to have eased some of the pressure surrounding his position after losing just one match in his past seven games.

However intense speculation this week has suggested that O'Neill, who surprisingly quit Aston Villa on the eve of the season, has been lined up to replace the Israeli coach, who was appointed on a four-year deal last June.

Bookmakers late Friday cut the odds on O'Neill becoming the next manager

at Upton Park, with one slashing their price from 20-1 on Thursday to 2-1.

On Friday Grant refused to be drawn on the speculation, insisting he was focused only on ensuring West Ham's Premier League survival.

"It doesn't concern me. I have a job here and I have to focus on that. I love the vision of the club. It's a big, big challenge," he said.

"We have made progress on the football side. We are at the bottom but we are not worse than any of the seven teams down there."

IN brief

Bob wants minute's silence

AFP, Doha

India's English coach Bob Houghton on Saturday called for a minute's silence at the Asian Cup for the more than 100 people killed in a stampede in Kerala.

The Hindu devotees died on Friday after a road accident triggered a rush among thousands of pilgrims returning from a religious festival in a remote mountainous area of Kerala, in India's south.

"We have two Keralites in the team and I'm sure they are affected by this," said Houghton, whose side were thrashed 5-2 by Bahrain on Friday to banish any vague hopes of making it to the knock-out stages.

There was a brief period of silence before Friday's game between Australia and South Korea for the 16 people killed in flooding in Australia's northeast.

Jones moving to Rovers

AFP, Berlin

Schalke's out-of-favour USA midfielder Jermaine Jones looks set to go on loan to England's Blackburn Rovers until the end of the season.

The 29-year-old, who opted to play for the United States in 2009, fell out of favour with Schalke's coach Felix Magath after the Royal Blues were routed 5-0 by Kaiserslautern last November and was banished to the reserves.

He is poised to join Premier League side Rovers on loan until the end of the season and is already in England, German daily Bild reported.

"The coach (Magath) doesn't include me in his plans and that is difficult for any player," Jones told Bild.

Makoun joins Villa

AFP, Birmingham

Cameroon international Jean II Makoun has joined Aston Villa from French side Lyon in a three-and-a-half year deal, the English Premier League side confirmed Saturday.

A statement on Villa's website said the 27-year-old would be eligible to play for the club in around two weeks time once a work permit had been secured for the midfielder.

"I am thrilled to be here at Aston Villa," Makoun said. "I am really, really happy and very proud to have joined a great club."

"Villa have been after me for quite a while so I am delighted it's finally happened. I can't wait to get started."

Villa boss Gerard Houllier said Makoun's versatility and experience would be an asset to the Birmingham club, who reportedly paid Lyon a 6 million pound transfer fee to secure the player's services.

Olic out for season

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's injured Croatian striker Ivica Olic said on Saturday he is unlikely to play again this season as he recovers from a knee injury.

The 31-year-old told Munich newspaper TZ he only expects to be able to run again in 'mid-April' after undergoing surgery last November on his left knee to repair damaged cartilage.

"It's unrealistic that I will play again this season," he told TZ.

Olic admits the past few weeks have been "the most difficult of my career. I went through hell. There were certainly days when I had depressive thoughts."

Because he has had to have his leg in a plaster cast, he says his wife Natalie has had to look after "not



NEO Cricket

New Zealand v Pakistan
Second Test, Day 2
Live from 4:00am

STAR Cricket

Australia v England
First ODI
Live from 9:20am
ESPN

English Premier League

Birmingham v Aston Villa
Live from 5:55pm
Liverpool v Everton
Live from 8:00pm
Tottenham v Man United
Live from 10:00pm

STAR Sports

English Premier League
Sunderland v Newcastle
Live from 5:55pm
AFC Asian Cup



Premier Division Cricket League

Mohammedan v Abahani
Venue: Mirpur
Biman v Orient
Venue: BKSP-2
Kalabagan v Prime Doleshwar