

## INDEPENDENCE CUP FOOTBALL

# Sk Russel to take on MSC in semi

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra moved to the semifinals of the Independence Cup football tournament with a 3-1 win over Feni Soccer Club in an entertaining encounter at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Sheikh Russel's 1-0 lead from first-half was cancelled on the 48th minute, but two goals in the space of three minutes made sure there was no comeback by the club from Feni.

In the last four, Sheikh Russel will meet Mohammedan SC who dumped a star-studded Muktiyoddha Sangsad 5-4 in the tiebreaker. The marathon match that ended 1-1 in 90 minutes and then the extra 30 minutes saw no goal, finally produced a winner only after seven shots each in the shootout.

Luciano Theiler gave the Reds the lead with just five minutes left on the clock, but Mohammedan fought back to equalise through Uwiringiyimana Amani's header following a cross from the by-line just a minute later.

In the first game, the first serious attempt at goal was made by Feni on the quarter hour mark when Tahidul Alam's cross was given a sliding touch in front of goal by Maudsul Alam that forced an excellent reflex save from Sheikh Russel's tall keeper Mamun Khan.

After a few attacks at either end that failed to make much impression, Sheikh Russel took the lead on the 20th minute through a superb finish from Russian striker Eduard Sakhnevich. The former Brothers hitman, who scored the winning goal against Mohammedan in their previous game, beat the keeper with a firm left-footer from the top of the box that kept going away from the keeper before nestling in the back of the net.

Feni Soccer, the revelation of last season's professional league, started the second half at a great pace and found the back of the net just three minutes into the half, courtesy of their African strike force. New Nigerian recruit Nche Francis

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



Feni Soccer Club defender (L) clears the ball before Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra's Russian striker Eduard Sakhnevich (R) can pose any threat during their Independence Cup football semifinal at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday. Sakhnevich scored the opening goal in Sheikh Russel's 3-1 win.

PHOTO: STAR

## Rossi fires Villarreal

REUTERS, Madrid

Giuseppe Rossi kept Europa League semifinalists Villarreal on course for a place in the Champions League next season with a penalty to secure a 1-0 win over relegation-threatened Real Zaragoza in La Liga on Monday.

The Italy striker netted after he had been brought down in the area with 19 minutes to go at the Madrigal and sent Toni Doblaz the wrong way from the spot.

The 24-year-old took his tally for the season to 16 and lifted fourth-placed Villarreal to 57 points, nine ahead of Athletic Bilbao in fifth, with six matches left to play.

Barcelona top the standings with 85, eight ahead of Real Madrid after Saturday's 'clasico' at the Bernabeu.

Villarreal take on Porto in the Europa League semifinals with the first leg in Portugal on May 5.

## Rio stalker detained

AFP, London

A woman found guilty of stalking Manchester United star Rio Ferdinand was detained on Tuesday after she fled a court hearing before her conviction, authorities.

Susanne Ibru, 38, was convicted by Macclesfield magistrates on Monday after a one-day trial where she was accused of harassing Ferdinand outside his home on three occasions between February and June last year.

Ibru, who conducted her own defence and cross-examined Ferdinand in the witness box, left the court before District Judge Nicholas Sanders gave his guilty verdict.

Sanders later issued a warrant for Ibru to be brought back to court for sentencing, saying it was "quite clear" that she was guilty.

"Mr Ferdinand is a high-profile footballer and whilst there will always be occasions where he is exposed to public and press scrutiny, the fact is that when he is in the privacy of his own home with his family he has a right to expect to be left alone," Sanders said.

Ibru was detained in Warrington, Cheshire early Tuesday police said.

Ferdinand told the court he was upset by the visits from the woman, whom he had never met.

# No clear favourites

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona defender Carles Puyol is in a battle to be fit for the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, the second of four clashes with Real Madrid inside 18 days which will go along way to deciding both clubs' fortunes this season.

It is perhaps an indication of the domination of the top two in Spain that their league meetings have become crucial in deciding the title while they have also both reached the final of the cup.

Next week they will be back in action in the semifinals of the Champions League.

While some have claimed that the frequency of the games has taken away the intrigue from the meetings there was certainly plenty of anticipation ahead of the first head-to-head last weekend in the league which ended in a 1-1 draw.

The debate since then has been about who can claim the psychological edge from that match as although the result practically guaranteed

Barca the title, Real no longer considered it a realistic target, and so it was more about the performance.

Barcelona remain eight points clear in the league after the game at the Bernabeu where Leo Messi put them ahead from the penalty spot before Cristiano Ronaldo replied also with a spot kick.

It also marked the return of Barca captain Puyol who missed the last three months with a knee injury.

With Eric Abidal also out after having an operation to remove a tumour from his liver, Barca have struggled at the back.

Coach Pep Guardiola has lost confidence in Gabriel Milito who has had a long battle with injuries over the last few seasons and so Sergio Busquets and Javier Mascherano have filled in at centre-half.

It was a welcome comeback then for Puyol ahead of key games but it turned sour when he pulled up in the second half with a hamstring strain. However, it is not as serious as first thought and there is a chance he will be ready

for Wednesday.

"I am very happy to be back and I only have a muscle problem now which has nothing to do with the knee injury. It was the perfect place to return at the Bernabeu and it all went fine until I felt the back of my leg," said Puyol.

"We will have to see how it goes whether I'll be alright for the final but at the moment it is looking difficult."

Real coach Jose Mourinho fielded a defensive side at the weekend which included Pepe in midfield, whose job was to keep close to Leo Messi.

Real are expected to play a similar style in the final where they will again look to stifle Barca's midfield creativity. The only change is likely to see Mesut Ozil coming into the forward line at the expense of Karim Benzema.

"I think that it was quite an even game at the Bernabeu but the dismissal of Raul Albiol allowed them to dominate a little. We have a few days to prepare for the final and we hope to be all recovered and fully fit for the game," said Real defender Sergio Ramos.

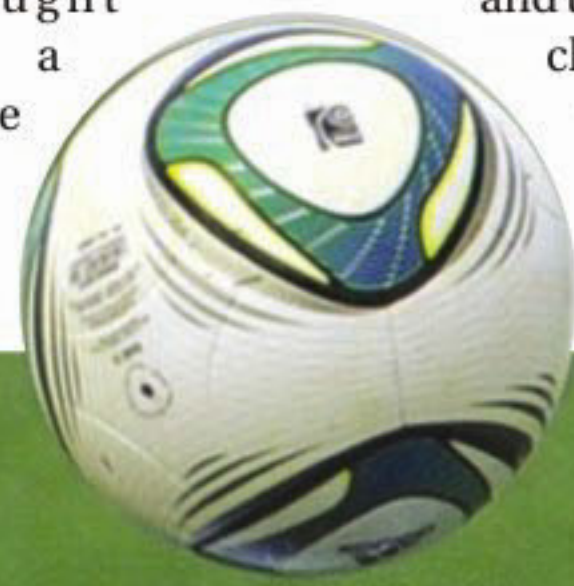


PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid playmaker Kaka eyes the ball during a training session in Madrid yesterday on the eve of their Spanish Cup final against Barcelona.

# 'Arsenal must win'

AFP, London



Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny believes his team's slim hopes of winning the Premier League title will be over if they fail to beat rivals Tottenham on Wednesday.

The clash at White Hart Lane has similarities with a year ago when Spurs claimed maximum points as they chased Champions League qualification, with the result effectively ending Arsene Wenger's chances of finishing top.

Wenger's team need to bounce back this time around after conceding a last-gasp equaliser against Liverpool on Sunday which left them six points behind leaders Manchester United with six games to play.

Szczesny, who returned from a finger injury to face Liverpool, said: "Of course we still believe we can win the title."

"We still have to play United and they also have to play Chelsea. They will drop points and we believe we're good enough to win every game remaining."

"Tottenham is a very good match for us to come back from a big disappointment and we owe it to the fans because they're very disappointed about what happened against Liverpool. We owe them a result at White Hart Lane."

"The draw was a huge disappointment because with a minute to go we scored what we

thought was a winning goal. We're all gutted.

"It was a cheap penalty to give away whether it was one or not. We needed to win really badly to keep the pressure on United."

Arsenal have been in poor form since losing in the League Cup final and the only teams they have beaten since are Leyton Orient in the FA Cup and Blackpool.

It has opened the door for Chelsea or Manchester City to overtake them into second place, but Szczesny, 20, added: "We're only thinking about winning the title, not who is behind us."

"We go into everything to finish first. We are Arsenal, we don't want to finish second and we definitely don't want to finish third."

It will be Tottenham's first game since Gareth Bale was crowned the Professional Footballers' Association player of the year for his performances this season.

Wales winger Bale scored in the fixture last season after a stunning opener from Danny Rose, who has been loaned out to Bristol City this season but has returned to the club.

Spurs manager Harry Redknapp is backing Bale, 21, to get better with age.

"Gareth has got better and better and he has everything to become a world-class player," said the Spurs manager.

"He has pace, he can dribble, he can shoot, he can head - he's got the lot."

# Barca appeal Iniesta ban

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona have appealed a UEFA proposal to suspend

Andres Iniesta from the first leg of their Champions League semifinal clash with Real Madrid.

UEFA will decide Wednesday whether to ban the Barcelona midfielder for an extra match for allegedly incurring a yellow card on purpose, Barcelona said in a statement on their website.

Iniesta picked up the yellow card during Barcelona's commanding 5-1 win over Shakhtar Donetsk at Camp Nou on April 6 meaning he missed the return leg but would have a clean sheet for the following match.

But UEFA match officials at the Barcelona-Shakhtar game issued a report alleging Iniesta picked up the yellow card deliberately, Barcelona said in the statement late Monday.

The proposed suspen-

sion would force Iniesta to miss the Champions League match at the Bernabeu stadium on April 27.

"FC Barcelona have this evening submitted an appeal to UEFA against the proposed imposition of an additional game suspension for Andres Iniesta following the yellow card he picked up against Shakhtar at the Nou Camp on April 6th," the club said.

"FC Barcelona believe that the arguments outlined in their appeal, based on the good faith of the player and the disproportionate nature of the proposed sanction will be sufficient to rebut these allegations."

## Winning King's Cup is 'vital'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas says winning the King's Cup final on Wednesday against archrivals Barcelona is "vital" to the club.

The two sides will face off at Valencia's Mestalla Stadium in the second of their four clashes in just over two weeks, with Real's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho aiming to win his first trophy with the club.

"It is a very important trophy for Real Madrid and we cannot afford to not win it for 17 years. It will be even more important if we do win it. It is vital," Casillas said in an interview.

"I have not won it in the 11 years I have been here. It will be a great match between the two best teams in Spain."



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