

# Star SPORT



ARGENTINA-NIGERIA



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18

## Thank you

FARAZ IHTESHAM

Can anyone dare question the capability of Argentina superstar Lionel Messi? Perhaps not and there was not an iota of doubt on the limitless talent of football's No 1 genius last night at the Bangabandhu National Stadium here in Dhaka. The spectators were witness to the Argentine captain's breathtaking abilities that will be remembered for a long, long time.

In the opening 15 minutes, there were flashes of brilliance from the little maestro but the end result came to nothing. Messi, wearing bright yellow boots, was unable to finish his moves. Maybe he was taking the match as a friendly. Something needed to happen to change the mood.

And then, came the game-changing moment. A Nigerian strong-man thought that he could get the better of Messi by running into him with full force in the process hurting Messi's face. Bloodied, a white-tape was plastered on Messi's upper lip. A new-look Messi, sporting a white-moustache, perfectly complimenting his Albiceleste shirt was seen. He temporarily left the field, took the tape off, washed his face, came back on the field determination in his eyes. The battle has just begun. The challenge was thrown and Messi accepted it.

Unfortunately for the Super Eagles and fortunately for the eagerly anticipating fans, Messi weaved his magic putting everyone in the ground spellbound. Two assists in a couple of minutes; the audience breathless at what they saw the Nigerians in a state of shock and awe.

The first was an inch-perfect pass from nowhere delivered right into the feet of striker Gonzalo Higuain who finished with aplomb. The second a goal that would make the great Diego Maradona proud. Messi dispossessed an opponent at the halfway line. There was only one thing on his mind: to go all the way and score.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 8



GREASED LIGHTNING: Lionel Messi has yet another Nigeria player, this time Ogude Fegor, chasing him all around the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The Argentina skipper set up the first two goals and pretty much dazzled the packed Big Bowl.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Media lesson a must for BFF

SPORTS REPORTER

The players' lists of both Argentina and Nigeria were supposed to be distributed among the working journalists at the press box half-an-hour before the start of the game but it finally reached nine minutes into the game.

However, insufficient copies soon ran out after distributing it to half of journalists, even there was no media committee member to let working journalists know about the problem as only volunteers were seen but they were not ready to answer anything.

It was just an instance of the BFF's professional setup of the media wing, which made a huge blunder in distributing accreditations at the 142-capacity press box.

The way the professional setup and the BFF media committee handled the media for the lone friendly match was not the proper way as there was discrimination in distributing accreditations. It left out a good number of big houses in the country to cover the most high profile football match the country has ever hosted.

There was a huge discrimination in distributing the duty-pass as it was also seen that four to five duty-passes were distributed among few houses and even some house was not given the duty-pass, though 20-25

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

## 'Eita ki chhilo!'

SAKEB SUBHAN

The day had finally arrived. Cricket may be the dominant sport in the country, but nothing quite stirs passions among Bangladeshi sports fans as football does -- a fact evidenced by the wild frenzy during the football World Cup in which Bangladesh are not even participants. And during the football World Cup, it is the flag of Argentina along with Brazil's that colour the streets and home of the country.

And that it was Argentina playing a friendly against Nigeria on Bangladesh soil, that too with the world's best player leading them, stirred passions to a fever pitch as thousands flocked to the Bangabandhu National Stadium to be a part of Bangladeshi sporting history.

The sight of the approaching Argentine team bus only heightened the mania as the crowd converged to catch a

glimpse of their heroes, especially the FIFA World player of the Year Lionel Messi.

A police officer, who stepped through the crowd seemingly to blow his whistle to calm the over-excited crowd, could only smile and wave at his hero when he spied the man from Rosario at the back of the bus. The Messi-induced delirium overpowered all in its wake; not even police officers were safe.

The arena was more than half full an hour before the scheduled 7:00pm start, and the assembled fanatics did not have to wait too long before they could give full voice to their support as first the Nigerians and then the Argentinians trotted onto the field. His have always had a soft the Albiceleste, but the had to be seen to be believed. Even during the warm-ups, let alone the match of 'Messi, Messi'

rang around the Big Bowl whenever the ball was at his feet.

The atmosphere was electric throughout the 90 minutes of play, but never more during Messi's moment of magic when he left at least four Nigerians in the dust to conjure the second goal off teammate Di Maria's boot. As he progressed more than half the stadium got up from their seats with hands on heads, with most exploding into incredulous cries of 'Eita ki chilo?' ('What was that?') when the magic was complete.

And fittingly for a high-profile international football match, there was at least one boisterous Englishman in the crowd. That Chris Macalay was welcomed with open arms by the mostly Bangladeshi crowd had as much to do with his friendly nature as the Bangladesh cricket jersey he was wearing. His

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



Crowds gather outside the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday ahead of the Argentina-Nigeria international friendly. Such colourful crowds at a football game is rare in this country and it was a happy day for the sport.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

## History repeats itself

Obasi learns it the losing way

This interview was taken at the Westin Hotel few hours before the match. And Chinedu Obasi, coming on as a second-half substitute, scored the only goal for his side. But his strike once again was not enough for him to win a battle against Messi. The Argentine magician did not score but his two assists helped Argentina to win the game 3-1.



ATIQUA ANAM

Six years ago, a 19-year-old Chinedu Obasi was so close to lifting the World Youth Football Championship. The Nigerian youngster was one of the stars of that tournament, having scored three important goals. He scored against Switzerland in the group stages, then scored against Morocco to see the African side to the cherished final.

But there in the final, Obasi came up against a man who would later go on to become the best in the world. He was playing against Lionel Messi's Argentina. Obasi showed his best by scoring one, but fell short by two penalties from Messi. Having come so close and yet bidding the Cup goodbye is something which makes Obasi very emotional to this day. A member of the Nigeria national side now, Obasi recalled that match with much affection and a bit of sadness, as he talked at his hotel lobby yesterday.

"It was a very emotional match for me. Because I scored in that match, yet ended up on the losing side. We had to concede to the two penalties from Messi. It still hurts as we came so close to winning the trophy."

Despite that tinge of sadness, Obasi is fond of that tournament in Switzerland since it was there that he grabbed the attention of football pundits and was soon rewarded with a promotion to the national side. "It was a memorable tournament for me. I scored in the group phase and then scored in the semifinal too," recalled Obasi fondly.

Life would have been lot easier had it been the end of the story. But as fate conspired three years later, Obasi's Nigeria was up against the same team in another final, this time the Argentine national team in the final of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. As luck would have it, Nigeria lost that too.

Nigeria though had their revenge lately, earlier this year, when they thrashed the former world champions by 4-1 in Abuja. Sadly for Obasi, he wasn't in the playing eleven in that

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

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