

118TH IFA SHIELD

Do-or-die for Sk Jamal

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club will lock horns against Mohun Bagan AC in their crucial last match of the group stage in the 118th IFA Shield Football Tournament, needing an outright victory to secure semi-final berth. The match will get underway at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata at 3:30pm (BST).

With Kolkata Mohammedan SC having already confirmed their with seven points from three outings, both these sides will be looking forward to ensure the last four berth by toppling each other in the crucial match.

However, the Indian side have the edge going into this match as they have one point more than Sheikh Jamal's three and will need just a draw to advance but for Sheikh Jamal, there is no alternative to a victory.

Despite a morale shattering 1-2 defeat at the hands of Mohammedan in the first match, the way Sheikh Jamal outplayed United Sikkim in the following match will definitely give them inspiration to perform well against Karim Bencherifa's outfit, who managed a 1-0 win over United Sikkim and played out a goalless draw against Mohammedan SC.

According to football websites in Kolkata, Sheikh Jamal are being considered

as the strongest side in the group due to their attacking options, which is spearheaded by Haitian Sony Norde, Wedson Anselme and Nigerian Emeka Darlington.

The attacking formation and fast-paced style had yielded Sheikh Jamal a lot of scoring opportunities against United Sikkim, but poor finishing meant they had to be content with a 3-1 win, thanks to a brace from Wedson and the other from Emeka.

"The win against United Sikkim gave us a morale boost, after having gone down against Mohammedan and we are upbeat before facing Mohun Bagan. If we can repeat the performance we put on against Sikkim, we can hope for an outright victory," captain Mamunul Islam was quoted as saying by Sheikh Jamal official Anwarul Karim Helal, who talked to Mamun over phone from Bangladesh.

Helal informed that Nigerian coach Joseph Afusi is likely to pick the winning combination in Saturday's match with Sony, Wedson and Emeka playing up front while Mamunul, Shohel Rana and Nasiruddin to play ahead of four defenders – Yeamin Munna, Didarul, Yeasin and Linkon.

Team management has announced that 10,000 dollars would be distributed among the players and coaching staff if they can



Performers light up as the Russian flag during a glitz-filled opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympics at the Fisht Olympic Stadium in Sochi on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP



US ambassador Dan Mozena (C) is introduced to the Bangladesh women's national football team by BFF president Kazi Salahuddin prior to an exhibition match at the BFF House turf yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Crucial spell for Arsenal

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger has challenged Arsenal to seize control of the Premier League title race as the leaders kick-

off a vital period with a trip to Liverpool on Saturday.

Wenger's side retained pole position after second-placed Manchester City missed a chance to go top in their 1-0 defeat against Chelsea on Monday and the Gunners can cement their spot on top of the table with a victory at Anfield.

Arsenal, who are two points clear of City and third-placed Chelsea, have repeatedly been written off by pundits who don't believe they have the mental strength to end the club's nine-year trophy drought.

But Wenger is confident his players are ready to finally put some silverware in the Emirates Stadium trophy cabinet and sees their next two fixtures as the perfect opportunity to send a message to their title rivals.

Arsenal, who host Manchester United next weekend, have already beaten Liverpool in the league this season and head to Merseyside looking for a fourth win in their last five visits to Anfield.

"This is a massive month for us," said Wenger, who hopes England midfielder Jack Wilshere can return from an ankle injury.

"When you are in a good position to fight for something, the closer you get to the end of the season, every game

FIXTURES

(1500GMT unless stated):

Saturday

Aston Villa v West Ham, Chelsea v Newcastle, Crystal Palace v West Brom, Liverpool v Arsenal (1245GMT), Norwich v Manchester City, Southampton v Stoke, Sunderland v Hull, Swansea v Cardiff (1730GMT)

Sunday

Manchester United v Fulham (1600GMT),

becomes vital and every point is important.

"We have fought very hard up until now to be in this position, so let's enjoy it and do our best.

"I told you that one month ago there is no invincible team because there are so many quality sides in the Premier League.

"It is just how close you are to your best every time which decides the game."

Liverpool's potent attack will pose a significant test to Arsenal's title credentials however.

Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge have 37 league goals between them in 35 appearances.

Uruguay forward Suarez has bagged 23 league goals this campaign and although none have come in matches against Arsenal, Chelsea or Manchester City, manager Brendan Rodgers expects his star to shine on Saturday.

"I think he has made an impact; he may just not have scored but he certainly scored in those games last season," Rodgers said.

Vidic eyes MU exit New Zealand eye big lead

AFP, London



Manchester United captain Nemanja Vidic is to leave the English Premier League champions at the end of the season, in a move the Serbia defender hopes will end speculation about his future.

"I have decided that I will move on at the end of this season," he said in a statement on the club's official website. "It's the last year of my contract and I have had eight wonderful years here."

British press reports suggested the 32-year-old had not been offered an extension to his current Old Trafford contract and Vidic, who insisted he did not want to play for another club in England.

"I want to challenge myself again and try to make the best of myself in the coming years," Vidic explained. "I'm not considering staying in England as the only club I ever wanted to play for here is Manchester United and I was lucky enough to be part of this club for so many years."

He added: "I've got a few options to move on and I will choose the right one for me and for my family."

Under the Bosman regulations, Vidic can now talk to clubs outside of England amid speculation he could be on his way to join Italian giants Inter Milan.

Vidic arrived at Old Trafford in 2005 in a £7 million (\$11.4m, 8.4m euros) move from Russia's Spartak Moscow.

He became a key figure in nearly all of United's subsequent trophy triumphs and last term captained United to an historic 20th English title -- his fifth and the club's last under Alex Ferguson before the celebrated Scottish manager retired.

However, he made only 19 league appearances last season after he was laid low by a severe knee injury first suffered in a shock

Champions League defeat by Swiss side Basel in 2011 that led to two major operations.

In the view of some pundits, Vidic has never been the same player since nor has his once dominant central defensive partnership with England's Rio Ferdinand, who could also be leaving Old Trafford at the end of the season, been as commanding.

Certainly United, who will have Vidic available to face relegation-threatened Fulham at Old Trafford on Sunday after he completed a three-match ban following his red card in the Premier League defeat by Chelsea last month, have struggled under new manager David Moyes.

They have been knocked out of both domestic cups and are currently a huge 15 points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal and seven adrift of a place in next season's Champions League.

However, they do have a winnable last 16 clash in this term's edition of European club football's elite competition against Greek outsiders Olympiakos.

Vidic said it was European football that had provided him with the highlight of his time at United after he returned to Moscow to play in their penalty shoot-out win over Chelsea in the 2008 Champions League final.

"My time at this great club will always rank as the best years of my career," he insisted.

"I never could have imagined winning 15 trophies and I will certainly never forget that fantastic night in Moscow, memories that will live with me and the fans forever."

Vidic also played for United in their two Champions League final defeats by Barcelona in 2009 and 2011.

He said his intention now was to ensure a strong finish to the season for the Red Devils.

"I am now going to focus all my efforts on playing for Manchester United and do the best I can for the team until the end of the season," he said.

"I hope this stops any further speculation

AFP, Auckland



India was struggling at 130-4 after day two of the first Test against New Zealand, who posted a daunting 503-run first innings built on a double century by Brendon McCullum.

In a dramatic start to India's reply, New Zealand claimed the prized scalps of Cheteshwar Pujara and Virat Kohli in a withering burst from Tim Southee and Trent Boult that reduced the tourists to three down for only 10 runs.

Pujara, who averages 66.25, went for one and Shikhar Dhawan a duck as both fell in the opening over when they edged good-length deliveries from Boult.

Kohli's sole scoring shot was a four off Boult before a sharply rising bouncer from Southee nicked his glove and popped into the hands of Peter Fulton at second slip.

Kohli was reluctant to leave and indicated the ball hit his helmet but replays showed it deflected from the helmet to the glove and then to Fulton.

By tea, India were limping at 45-3 but the situation become more dire after the resumption of play, when a swinging Neil Wagner delivery beat Murali Vijay (26) and broke the bats.

Rohit Sharma (not out 67) and Ajinkya Rahane (not out 23) survived through to stumps. While they were troubled by Southee's barrage of rising deliveries they were able to

score freely off spinners Ish Sodhi and Kane Williamson.

Play was called off 17 overs before the scheduled end because of bad light.

When New Zealand resumed the day at 329-4, McCullum spearheaded a blistering end to their innings as they put on 174 runs in 31.4 overs.

The New Zealand skipper was the last wicket to fall for 224, one run short of his career best 225, also set against India at Hyderabad in 2010.

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 329-4)

Fulton lbw Zaheer	13
Rutherford c Rahane b Sharma	6
Williamson c Dhoni b Zaheer	113
Taylor c Jadeja b Sharma	3
McCullum c Jadeja b Sharma	224
Anderson lbw Sharma	77
Watling c Dhawan b Sharma	1

Southee b Shami	28
Sodhi c R Sharma b Sharma	23
Wagner c Kohli b Jadeja	0
Boult not out	1
Extras: (lb-1, lb-5, w-5, nb-3)	14
Total: (All out in 121.4 overs)	503
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-23, 3-30, 4-251, 5-384, 6-398, 7-434, 8-490, 9-495.	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Shami	28	6	95	1
Zaheer	30	2	132	2
I Sharma	33.4	4	134	6
Jadeja	26	1	120	1
Kohli	1	0	4	0
R Sharma	3	0	12	0

INDIA: First innings	O	M	R	W
Dhawan c Williamson b Boult	0			
Vijay b Wagner	26			
Pujara c Watling b Boult	1			
Kohli c Fulton b Southee	4			
R Sharma not out	67			
Rahane not out	23			
Extras: (lb-5, lb-1, nb-3)	9			
Total: (For 4 wickets in 39 overs)	130			

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-3, 3-10, 4-51.

To bat: Dhoni, Jadeja, Zaheer, I Sharma, Shami.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Boult	10	1	20	2
Southee	12	3	27	1

Bayern sweat on Ribery

AFP, Berlin

France's Franck Ribery has undergone surgery for bruised buttocks with Bayern Munich hoping he will be fit for their Champions League clash at Arsenal in less than a fortnight.

"Hopefully, he can play in London," said Bayern coach Pep Guardiola with defending champions Bayern travelling to Arsenal for the last 16, first-leg clash on February 19.

Bayern's media director Markus Hoerwick said the 30-year-old had taken a "knock to the buttocks" and went under the knife on Thursday, ruling him out of Saturday's league match at Nuremberg with Bayern 13 points clear in the league.

Neither Hoerwick, nor Guardiola could answer how Ribery picked up the injury.

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