

IFA SHIELD FINAL TODAY

Sheikh Jamal eye historic title

SPORTS REPORTER

When Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club left for Kolkata on January 30 to participate in the 118th IFA Shield, hardly anyone outside the football circuit took notice. Consistent poor performances from the national team made people turn their attention away from the game. But today, people from all walks, whether a football fan or not, will have their eyes glued to their TV monitors as Sheikh Jamal stand on the verge of becoming the first Bangladesh side to clinch this historic IFA Shield title when they take on Kolkata Mohammedan Sporting Club in the final at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata.

The match begins at 6:30pm (BST) and will be telecast live on satellite channel Star Jalsha Movies.

The Dhanmondi outfit, who began the tournament with a 1-2 loss against Mohammedan before beating United Sikkim 3-1, Mohun Bagan 1-0 and lastly outplaying East Bengal 3-0 in the semifinal, will have a chance to exact revenge for their earlier defeat and thereby achieve the unique feat of beating all the three giants of Kolkata.

Sheikh Jamal's Nigerian coach Joseph Afusi said the first defeat doesn't count for much as the final will be a different ball game. "We did not play badly that day; rather we were victims of poor refereeing. And we had trouble adjusting to the artificial turf, which we have overcome since. The final will be a different ball game," said a confident Afusi.

The team had a practice session of one hour and twenty minutes at the match venue yesterday afternoon and everybody is fit and confident about winning the title, informed team manager Abdul Gaffar over phone yesterday.

"The team is very spirited and everyone is eager to give their all. There is no injury concern as first-choice goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman is back to fitness," said Gaffar.

Aus in driving seat

REUTERS, Pretoria



David Warner took over from Mitchell Johnson as South Africa's tormentor-in-chief as the Australian opener blitzed a quickfire century to extend his team's huge lead on the third day of the first Test on Friday.

Australia closed the day 479 runs ahead of their hosts at 288 for three in their second innings, a massive lead with two days still to play.

Warner was dropped three times in a characteristically cavalier 115 off 151 balls and featured in a partnership of 205 runs for the second wicket with Alex Doolan, who fell 11 short of a debut Test century.

Shaun Marsh and Michael Clarke will resume

on the fourth day as Australia dominated again following a seven-wicket haul for Johnson who helped bowl out South Africa for 206 in their first innings before lunch. Johnson scythed through the batting order as he took three more wickets on the third day to end with figures of seven for 68.

Only AB De Villiers provided any resistance with a defiant 91 that ensured the follow-on target was passed.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA: First innings 397

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings (over-

night 140-6)
Smith c Marsh b Johnson 10
Petersen c Haddin b Johnson 2
Amla lbw b Siddle 17
Du Plessis c Clarke b Johnson 3
De Villiers c Warner b Johnson 91
Duminy c Johnson b Lyon 25
McLaren b Johnson 8
Peterson c Clarke b Johnson 10

Philander lbw b Lyon 15
Steyn not out 7
Morkel c Haddin b Johnson 0
Extras: (b-14, lb-2, nb-1, w-1) 18
Total: (All out in 61.1 overs) 206
Fall of wickets: 1-11, 2-15, 3-23, 4-43, 5-110, 6-126, 7-140, 8-189, 9-202.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Harris	17	3	51	0
Johnson	17.1	1	68	7
Siddle	13	1	33	1
Lyon	14	0	38	2

AUSTRALIA: Second innings

Rogers b Steyn 1
Warner c Smith b Peterson 115
Doolan c de Villiers b Duminy 89
Marsh not out 44
Clarke not out 17
Extras: (b-3, lb-13, w-6) 22
Total: (For 3 wkts in 69 overs) 288
Fall of wicket: 1-1, 2-206, 3-243

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Philander	11	2	28	0
Steyn	13	2	60	1
McLaren	11	0	47	0
Morkel	11	2	38	0
Peterson	19	0	87	1
Duminy	4	0	12	1

However, Mazharul Islam, who stood under the bar in the last match, is likely to tinker with the winning combination. The attack line will be spearheaded by three foreigners -- Sony Norde, Wedson Anselme and Emeka Darlington -- who have scored all the eight goals for Sheikh Jamal in the tournament so far. Mamunul Islam and Sohel Rana will be used as creative midfielder alongside Nasiruddin Chowdhury in defensive midfield position. The four-man defence is likely to be comprised of Yeasin Ahmed, Didarul Islam, Yeamin Munna and Mohammad Linkon.

The opposition are likely to take a counter-attacking approach against Sheikh Jamal's passing and pressing football. Brazilian striker Josimar will likely play up front with Nigerian forward Penn Orji in the support striker's role and be flanked by Rahim Nabi and Ashim Biswas at the wings. The Black Panthers will have veteran goal-keeper Louis Barreto under the bar.

One thing that will give the home side an advantage is a raucous partisan crowd which will be egging on Mohammedan to keep the title at home. The club's veteran midfielder Rahim Nabi felt it was more than a final.

"This is not a mere final, it has become a battle of pride between the football of India and Bangladesh. I want to score in the final and give Mohammedan the title," said Nabi after a practice session on Thursday.

But the Sheikh Jamal team will have the prayers of millions of Bengalis this side of the border.

PROBABLE STARTING XI:

SHEIKH JAMAL DC: Mazharul (GK); Yeasin, Didarul, Linkon, Yeamin; Nasiruddin, Mamunul (C), Sohel; Sony, Wedson, Emeka.

MOHAMMEDAN SC: Barreto (GK); Nirmal, Sabrosa, Mehraj, Dhanaranjan; Masih, Maneesh, Ashim, Nabi; Penn, Josimar.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Barcelona players have fun during a practice session at the Joan Gampar training ground near Barcelona yesterday.

Women's chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Five players shared the lead in the Sultana Kamal 34th National Women's Chess Championship with five points each after the end of the seventh round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall room yesterday.

Both the defending champion Sharmin Sultana Shairin and runner-up WIM Shamima Akter Liza lost their 7th round games. Shirin lost against WFM Zakia Sultana while Liza lost against WFM Nazrana Khan Eva. The leaders are: Shirin, Liza, Tanima Parveen, Eva and Zakia.

RFEF fines Atletico

AFF, Madrid

The Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) on Friday fined Atletico Madrid 600 euros (\$822) after Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo was struck on the head with a lighter during the clubs' Copa del Rey clash on Tuesday.

Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo was hit by a lighter thrown from the crowd as he made his way off the field at half-time in the semifinal second leg clash, which Madrid won 2-0 to advance to the final.

Barca eyeing goals

AFF, Madrid



Barcelona recovered top spot in La Liga just one week after being knocked off their perch for the first time in 59 league games last weekend as they took advantage of Atletico Madrid's shock defeat to Almeria.

Victories for Barca away to Sevilla and Real Madrid at home to Villarreal mean both sides are now level with Atletico in a three-way tie at the top on 57 points.

The Catalans lead thanks to a superior goal difference and will fancy themselves to rack up a few goals when relegation-threatened Rayo Vallecano visit the Camp Nou on Saturday.

Rayo's visit comes in the midst of a big week for Barca as they sealed their place in the Copa del Rey final against Real Sociedad on Wednesday and will travel to face Manchester City in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Tuesday.

Gerardo Martino's men's performances against Sevilla and Sociedad also suggested they are finding their form at just the right time of the season, and defender Gerard Pique said they can't afford any slip ups with so many important games on the horizon.

"I don't know if we're back in our stride, but we certainly put in a good performance against a good team," he said after the Sociedad game.

"Now we're coming into the most exciting part of the season, we have three months ahead of us in which we're alive in all three competitions.

"We have to keep up this level in every game because every match that we have left is a Cup final and at this stage of the season there is no room for error."

Atletico are the first of the three title contenders in action as they host Valladolid

earlier on Saturday.

A 2-0 defeat to Real Madrid in the Cup on Tuesday made it three consecutive defeats for Diego Simeone's men, having previously lost just twice in 36 games this season.

The Argentine has admitted that tiredness may be beginning to affect his stretched squad and continued to play down any expectations they can last the pace with Madrid and Barcelona until the end of the campaign.

"I am not worried by the defeats, eight days ago we were top of the league", he told Italian newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport.

"All teams, sooner or later, will go through a bad moment. We will have to see how we respond to this. If one looks at a league of 38 games, it is impossible to think that we could compete with Real Madrid or Barcelona. They have the quality that makes the difference in the long run."

Real Madrid, meanwhile, will once again be without the suspended Cristiano Ronaldo when they travel across the Spanish capital to take on Getafe on Sunday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side are in fine form having won 13 of their last 14 games in all competitions and will be heavy favourites for another three points against a Getafe side that hasn't won since November.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday

Atletico Madrid v Valladolid (1500), Levante v Almeria (1700), Barcelona v Rayo Vallecano (1900), Villarreal v Celta Vigo (2100)

Sunday

Granada v Real Betis (1100), Getafe v Real Madrid (1600), Athletic Bilbao v Espanyol (1800), Sevilla v Valencia (2000)

Monday

Malaga v Real Sociedad (2100)

Rajib wins rapid chess title

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmaster Enamul Hossain Rajib became unbeaten champion in the Sheikh Moni Memorial Rapid Rating Chess Tournament which was held at NSC Tower Auditorium Lounge on Wednesday and Thursday. Rajib earned 8 points from 9 games to clinch the title. GM Abdullah Al Rakib became runner-up with same number of points. IM Abu Sufian Shakil became 3rd.

Amol, Arif in men's final

SPORTS REPORTER

Amol Roy and Arif Hossain moved to the final of the 17th MA Jabbar Memorial Tennis Tournament which is being held at the National tennis Complex in Ramna. Amol beat Mofazzel Hossain 6-4, 6-4 while Arif defeated Alamgir Hossain 6-3, 6-3 in their respective semifinals yesterday.

Ishita Afroz beat Shah Safina in 6-3, 6-4 sets to set up a final clash against Sharda Alam, who defeated Afrana Islam Priety 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 in the women's semifinals. Both the finals will take place today.

Pak name Asia Cup & World T20 squads

AFF, Rawalpindi

Pakistan's selectors on Friday announced 15-man squads for this month's Asia Cup and next month's World Twenty20 -- both to be held in Bangladesh.

ASIA CUP: Misbahul Haq (capt), Mohammad Hafeez, Ahmed Shehzad, Sharjeel Khan, Sohaib Maqsood, Shahid Afridi, Umar Akmal, Fawad Alam, Anwar Ali, Bilawal Bhatti, Junaid Khan, Umar Gul, Abdur Rehman, Saeed Aijmal, Mohammad Talha.

WORLD T20: Mohammad Hafeez (capt), Kamran Akmal, Ahmed Shehzad, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Malik, Saeed Aijmal, Umar Gul, Sharjeel Khan, Sohaib Maqsood, Junaid Khan, Bilawal Bhatti, Sohail Tanvir, Umar Akmal, Zulfiqar Babar, Mohammad Talha.



Lt. General Mollah Fazle Akbar, ndc, psc, Comdt, National Defence College, inaugurates the 3-day long Square Cup golf tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Jose tips L'pool for title charge

REUTERS



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho believes Liverpool have an advantage in the Premier League title race because they will not be distracted by the Champions League.

Liverpool are the only side in the top four who are not involved in European competition and Mourinho thinks it could be a crucial factor as he again stated his table toppers are not favourites for league glory in May.

"There are teams with more potential than others, obviously. There is another, like Liverpool, with a big advantage with the fact that they don't play in the Champions League," Mourinho told Britain's Sky Sports News on Thursday.

"Playing in this is going to take concentration and energy from the teams that are involved in it. I think it will be good fun."

"When I say we're not the top candidate everyone thinks 'here he is again, with what you like to call the mind games'. But it's just my feeling. The league is amazing - it is difficult for every one of us."

Chelsea could only draw 1-1 at lowly West Bromwich Albion on Tuesday and lead the table by a point from Arsenal, with Manchester City a further two points back and Liverpool one behind Manuel Pellegrini's men.