

BPL resumes February 22

SPORTS REPORTER



Having demonstrated brilliant performance in the recently concluded IFA Shield in Kolkata, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club will resume their Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League campaign by taking on Team BJMC on Saturday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The Federation Cup champions, who have 13 points from five matches and lie on the fourth position in the 10-team table trailing leaders Abahani by five points, will then play two vital matches against Abahani on Feb 25 and holders Sheikh Russel KC on Feb 28 before playing final match of the first leg against promoted Uttar Baridhara Club on March 10.

The decision was made at a meeting of the professional football league committee following the return of Sheikh Jamal DC, who were allowed to participate in the 118th IFA Shield and skip four first-leg matches of the league.

"The national team is expected to leave the country on March 2 to play a FIFA friendly against India which will be held in Goa on March 5. That's the reason we have shifted the match of the national player-studded Sheikh Jamal against Uttar Baridhara to March 10," said league committee chairman Abdus Salam Murshedy after the meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

Murshedy also informed that the national team players will be asked to report to the Dutch coaches on February 25 for the preparation for the FIFA Friendly and Sheikh Jamal DC players will join the camp after their match against Sheikh Russel.

Murshedy also informed that the mid-season transfer window will remain open from March 11 to 31.

The league committee also decided to start the Independence Cup football tournament from March 16 at two venues with the participation of 12 teams -- 10 from Bangladesh Premier League and two from Bangladesh Championship League, the second tier professional football league which will get underway from February 25, with the participation of seven teams.



Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere (C) tries a trick during a training session at London Colney yesterday ahead of their tonight's Champions League last 16 match against Bayern Munich.

PHOTO: AFP

Del Piero to face old club

AFP, Sydney

Italian superstar Alessandro Del Piero will play for the A-League All Stars against his former club Juventus where he spent 19 years, officials said Tuesday.

Del Piero was signed by Juventus in 1993 and he remained with the Turin-based club until 2012, playing 705 matches including 11 years as captain.

Now playing his trade with Sydney FC in the Australian domestic league, Del Piero, 39, continues to be idolised in Italy and his decision to play for the All Stars and face his old club for the first time in Sydney on August 10 is a coup for the organisers.

"To have a club of the calibre of Juventus FC come to Sydney is a massive coup for football in Australia," said Football Federation Australia chief David Gallop in confirming Del Piero will play.

"To put it into perspective, it's very possible that of the 24 players in the Juventus FC first team squad, 16 players could be at the 2014 FIFA World Cup representing eight different nations."

Milan wary of Atletico

AFP, Milan



AC Milan coach Clarence Seedorf expects a formidable challenge from on-form Atletico Madrid on their visit to the San Siro for the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Wednesday.

Seedorf took charge of the ailing Italian giants following the sacking of former handler Massimiliano Allegri in early January.

But after three wins in five league games and a quarterfinal exit from the Italian Cup at the hands of Udinese, the jury remains out on the 37-year-old Dutchman who spent 10 successful years at the club.

Atletico, who are pushing Barcelona and Real Madrid for command of La Liga, are firm favourites for a win that would boost their quarter-final chances ahead of the return leg at the Vicente Calderon in a fortnight.

Nevertheless, Seedorf, the only player to have won Europe's most prestigious club trophy with three different clubs -- Ajax, Real Madrid and twice with Milan -- is relishing the

FACTFILE

Coaches

AC Milan - Clarence Seedorf (NED) 37 yrs
Atl. Madrid - Diego Simeone (ARG) 43 yrs

Leading scorers

AC Milan - Mario Balotelli (14 goals)
Atl. Madrid - Diego Costa (26 goals)

League performance

AC Milan - Ninth in Serie A, 18 points adrift of the third and final Champions League qualifying spot for next season
Atl. Madrid - Level on points with Liga leaders Barcelona, but trailing the Catalans and Real Madrid on goal difference

Group stage

AC Milan - second in Group H behind Barcelona
Atl. Madrid - winners of Group G ahead of Zenit

challenges.

"It will be another great opportunity to take another step forward in the competition," Seedorf said on Friday after striker Mario Balotelli scored a stunning 86th minute winner against Bologna.

"Atletico are well organised, strong and have great forwards.

"But I know we will raise our game for the Champions League and I'm looking forward to getting reacquainted with the San Siro that I got to know so well in this competition."

Whether the Rossoneri support can give Milan anything extra remains to be seen.

Atletico are currently on fire in La Liga, where striker Diego Costa, on 21 goals, is only one behind championship leader Cristiano Ronaldo of Real Madrid.

And despite Balotelli's wonder goal on Friday, it was an otherwise tepid performance from the Italian giants.

Milan, nevertheless, have succeeded where both Juventus and Napoli failed in reaching the last 16 and Costa says Atletico will be taking nothing for granted.

"Milan are a big side with a great tradition and they know how to play these type of games," said the Brazilian.

Full-backs Filipe Luis and Manquillo are the only injury absentees for Atletico coach Diego Simeone, who played two seasons at Milan's city rivals Inter and three at Lazio.

Seedorf, meanwhile, is expected to

Mini h'ball

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Saint Gregory's High School will face Sunnyside School while Dhaka Residential Model School will meet BAF Shaheen School & College in the two semifinals of the boys' group of Milkman Mini Handball Tournament at the Shaheed (Captain) M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium in Dhaka today.

The four quarterfinals of the girls' group will also be held today at the same venue.

Anelka hearing next week

AFP, London

Nicolas Anelka's disciplinary hearing over his controversial 'quenelle' goal celebration is due to start early next week, British media reported Tuesday.

French striker Anelka, now with English Premier League side West Bromwich Albion, faces a minimum five-match ban for making the gesture.

Chance for revenge

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger insists Arsenal have no reason to fear Bayern Munich as they prepare to face the Champions League holders in the last 16 first leg on Wednesday.

Just 12 months after they crashed out of Europe's elite club competition at the hands of the German giants, Wenger's team have an opportunity for revenge after being drawn to face Bayern at the same stage.

Arsenal were outclassed in the first leg last season as Bayern, who were then managed by Jupp Heynckes, cruised to a 3-1 victory in north London.

But the Gunners responded with a shock 2-0 win in the return game and came close to competing a stunning fightback before bowing out on away goals.

Winning in Munich proved a major boost for Wenger's side, who had lost their way at that time but finished the season strongly and have maintained their impressive form for much of the current campaign.

Yet Bayern, now coached by former Barcelona boss Pep Guardiola, are arguably an even more formidable force this season than they were last year, when they won the Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup.

The Bavarians will swagger into the

FACTFILE

Coaches

Arsenal - Arsene Wenger (FRA) 64 yrs
Bayern Munich - Pep Guardiola (ESP) 43 yrs

Leading scorers

Arsenal - Olivier Giroud (14 goals)
Bayern Munich - Mandzukic, Mueller (17 goals)

League performance

Arsenal - Second in Premier League, one point behind leaders Chelsea
Bayern Munich - Top of the Bundesliga, unbeaten and 16 points clear of Bayer Leverkusen

Group stage

Arsenal - second in Group F behind Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich - winners of Group D ahead of

Emirates Stadium on a 46-match unbeaten run in the Bundesliga.

They lead the German top-flight by 16 points, allowing them to focus fully on retaining the Champions League crown they won against Borussia Dortmund at Wembley last year.

But Wenger remains optimistic and the Gunners manager is confident the experience of last season's encounters will stand his players in good stead as they seek to end Bayern's reign as holders.

Balotelli hits out at critics

AFP, Milan



AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli hit out at his critics a day before the struggling Serie A giants host in-form Atletico Madrid.

Balotelli made partial amends for a string of mediocre performances for Clarence Seedorf's side with a stunning long-range strike which sealed a late 1-0 win against Bologna on Friday.

It came in timely fashion, only days ahead of the first leg of a Champions League last 16 tie against Diego Simeone's Spanish title chasers.

Balotelli hopes it has silenced his detractors for a game for which Milan, going on recent statistics, are the underdogs.

"I criticise myself enough, so when I hear it coming from other people I get really fed up," the 23-year-old told media on Tuesday.

Atletico, who are pushing Barcelona and Real Madrid for command of La Liga, are firm favourites for a win that would boost their quarter-final chances ahead of the return leg at the Vicente Calderon in a fortnight.

However, Balotelli says he is spurred on by the chance to make partial amends for Italy's last final defeat at a major international tournament.

A brace from the Italy striker in the semi-final of Euro 2012 against Germany set up a final against Spain, who went on to rout the Azzurri 4-0.

Balotelli admits the 'Rioja' are a tough nut to crack but added: "Their national side is a little difficult to beat, but maybe we can start (avenging) by beating a Spanish club side."

"Games like tomorrow's are different, but the objective remains the same: like having the determination to win and helping the team reach that objective."

Seedorf, meanwhile, admitted earlier this week that Atletico will be formidable opponents.





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