

## Muktis keep winning

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Muktijoddha Sangsad came from behind to thrash holders Sheikh Russel KC 3-1 in the Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League at Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Muktijoddha Sangsad have been in superb form at their home ground by notching up wins over Mohammedan, BJMC and Sheikh Russel and a creditable draw against four-time champions Abahani in their last four matches.

The tenth win in 23 matches took Muktijoddha Sangsad to third position with 37 points, equal with Muktijoddha SC even though the freedom fighters' side have a superior goal difference to stay ahead of the Black and Whites, who however have played a match less than

Muktijoddha Sangsad's 23. Sheikh Russel, on the other hand, suffered their eighth defeat in the league to remain at sixth position with 29 points from 23 outings.

Back to the game, both sides were looking for full three points following their respective stalemates against Abahani and Feni Soccer, but neither found a goal in the first half.

However, Sheikh Russel went ahead with a strike from Mithun Chowdhury five minutes into the second half but the lead lasted only one minute as Nkowcha Kingsley equalised in the next minute.

Enamul Haque then gave hosts Muktijoddha Sangsad the lead for the first time in the 65th minute and two minutes later Sunday Chizoba confirmed the win scoring the team's third

## Ariful shines in Asian Youth Swimming

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Swimmer Ariful Islam performed brilliantly by finishing first in the 50m breaststroke in the Asian Youth Camp which was arranged for 32 trainees in Doha recently.

Olympic Association of Asia, Qatar Olympic Committee and FINA jointly held a ten-day training camp from June 18-28 for swimmers from different countries, where Ariful Islam and Marium Akter of Bangladesh participated.

# The raging soloist

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM



On a good day, Arjen Robben looks like a 45-year-old bank manager who would be more comfortable cracking a winning smile to clients behind a big, clean, teak desk. Out on the pitch too, Robben's bald plate and wide smile seems totally out of character with the blazing orange jersey of the Netherlands, which is generally pictured worn by soulful, lithe superstars in rockstar mops. This image disintegrates even further when Robben starts playing. The man is annoyingly one-footed, incredibly selfish with the ball and almost always plays with his head down. He gestures wildly when the ball is not passed to him and even his ex-coach branded him a 'serial diver.'

Robben is the kind of person who, you think, irritates not only the opposition but also his own teammates. As the Dutch journalist Simon Kuper puts it, "you would imagine that a lot of people want to slap Arjen Robben, but only Franck Ribery actually did." That offending incident happened during a Bayern Munich game when both of them got into a scuffle over who would take a free-kick. Almost about the same time, Robben was swiftly developing a reputation as a choker -- he had missed a glorious chance in the World Cup final in 2010 and then missed a penalty in extra-time in Bayern's heartbreaking loss to Chelsea in the Champions League final in 2012. Suffice to say that the vitriol from the public was not kind.



ARJEN ROB BEN

*Arjen Robben is the exact anti-thesis of the Dutch footballer; a man whose style reminds you more of a sturdy village footballer in a kickabout than an elite professional player.*

But there is a small caveat that people have seemingly always ignored -- Robben is truly an exceptional footballer. And in a World Cup where the power of the individual has often made the difference, Robben has emerged as perhaps the best of the lot -- perhaps ahead of even Lionel Messi, James Rodriguez and Neymar.

Robben's position in a Dutch side forever obsessed with the power of the collective is even more unique. The unbreakable Dutch code of Total Football that

emphasises the power of many over the power of the individual seems the exact opposite of the code that binds Robben's style of football. In truth, Robben is the exact anti-thesis of the Dutch footballer -- a man, whose knock-kneed dribbling style direct towards goal with his head down and shoulders hunched remind you more of a sturdy village footballer in a kickabout than an elite professional player. And that is exactly what Robben is -- a footballer from a windy Dutch village in the north who spent most of his formative years dribbling down the wing while his contemporaries learned the perfect geometric exercises that define Dutch football.

And therein is Robben's charm. He is a one-trick pony, but with a trick so good that he almost always wins the prize; receiving the ball on his left foot on the right wing, cutting diagonally across defenders before finding the angle to beat the goalkeeper either at near or far post with a shooting technique that can only be described as genius.

He is quick too, unofficially recorded at running at a mind-boggling 37.2 km/hr during a manic sprint to beat Sergio Ramos to score a thrilling goal in their 5-1 win over Spain in the group phase. That game exercised some of Robben's ghosts from 2010 when his feint and miss managed to send Iker Casillas the wrong way but still found the goalkeeper's body during a finish that might have won them the World Cup. "I play that miss over in my head a lot," admitted Robben. This follows close on the heels of his rolled finish in the Champions League final in London last year that meant that he

finally had a Champions League trophy to his name.

The Dutch coach Louis van Gaal has been a great fan of Robben ever since he saw him first as a 17-year-old in 2001. "I have never seen a talent as big as him," Van Gaal had said at that point. It was true that his blinding pace and direct play had won Robben many admirers -- the world looked his oyster. But a series of injuries managed to debilitate Robben, who could be unstoppable on his day but rarely managed to stay fit long enough to create those days.

At 30, Robben is a seasoned professional in a World Cup of young men. He is finally fit and showing why many still say that on his best day he can reach the level of a Messi or a Ronaldo. He is also an outlier in a Dutch side; a raging soloist in a team of passmasters, but one on whom plenty depends. Van Gaal believes in him enough to anoint him as the X-factor, the man who can make the difference with his significant departure from tactics. A man who plays like "a dog chasing a piece of fly-paper floating in the wind". Not even the best defence can cope with a Robben special and even the defence knows that.

The Dutch are playing Costa Rica in the quarterfinal and with a potentially winnable semifinal against Argentina on the cards. The path to a second final in two consecutive World Cups seems a tantalising possibility. If they get there, maybe Robben can make up for 2010 again. And with that he would not remove the unfair tag of choker just from himself, but also from a nation who, for all their storied history, have never



Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova celebrates after beating compatriot Lucie Safarova in the Wimbledon semifinals at All England Tennis Club in London yesterday.

## Shakib asked to return immediately

**SPORTS REPORTER**

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday sent a letter to all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan instructing him to immediately join the ongoing national preparatory camp for next month's tour of West Indies. It was learnt that the all-rounder left the country to play in the Caribbean Premier League on Wednesday morning without a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the BCB.

When contacted acting BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said, "Yes we have sent him a letter and asked Shakib to join the camp immediately." He was unwilling to go into further details.

Shakib is already in hot water with the board for leaving the dressing room and allegedly physically assaulting a spectator in the stands during the first ODI against India on June 15. According to the CEO, the board will have a meeting on July 7 to decide on the action to be taken against the ace all-rounder. It will later be decided whether his latest indiscretion, leaving a national camp without an NOC, merits punishment.

## Flu-hit Germany

REUTERS, Santo Andre

Seven Germany players are suffering mild flu symptoms ahead of the quarterfinal match against France today, coach Joachim Loew said in a German radio interview without identifying the players.

"Seven players have somehow come down with slight cases of the flu," Loew was quoted telling Germany's ARD radio. He said that most had "throat aches" but did not reveal their names.

"As a result, it's too early to make any final decisions about the lineup," Loew added.

Defender Mat Hummels missed Germany's round of 16 match against Algeria on Monday due to a fever. He said on Wednesday he had recovered and posted a picture of himself sitting on the beach.

Loew has said that the travel across Brazil and different climate zones for their four matches so far as well as matches in tropical heat, a heavy downpour and then in chilly Porto Alegre - along with air conditioning - had taken their toll.

"I hope they're all doing well now," Loew said.

He added: "It's not all that bad at the moment. I don't want to dramatise it."

But Loew said that Hummels condition had actually deteriorated.

"Mats Hummels suffered a negative setback on the second day," Loew said.

Loew has come under heavy fire in Germany for his decision to put captain Philipp Lahm in midfield instead of at right back, where he has excelled for years. Loew was forced to put Lahm at right back late in the

## Fearless youth takes on experienced class

AFP, London

Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic face young and restless Milos Raonic and Grigor Dimitrov for places in the Wimbledon final on Friday as men's tennis reaches a potentially game-changing moment in its history.

In the space of 24 hours at the All England Club, the big four of the game were reduced to the big two following the shock exits of Rafael Nadal and defending champion Andy Murray.

Suddenly, Dimitrov and Raonic have the opportunity to tip the balance in favour of the next generation by breaking down the door which has been frustratingly ajar for a decade.

But the odds are stacked against them.

Federer -- who beat compatriot Stanislas Wawrinka over four sets in Wednesday's quarterfinal -- is a seven-time Wimbledon champion, the holder of a record 17 majors and will be playing in his 35th Grand Slam semi-final and ninth at the All England Club.

Djokovic's 2011 Wimbledon title was just one of his six majors and he will be playing in his 23rd last-four at a Grand Slam and fifth in a row in London.

Dimitrov and Raonic, both 23, score nought on all of the above.

Federer has a 4-0 career lead over Raonic, the first Canadian man in the semi-finals in 106 years.

Federer will be the sentimental favourite on Friday against eighth-seeded Raonic whose quarter-final win over Australian teenager Nick Kyrgios, the shock conqueror of Nadal, was brutally effective but far from pretty -- 39 aces, 73 winners and just 20 points conceded off serve.

Raonic insists his poor record against Federer will not be a factor when he becomes the first Canadian man since Robert Powell at 1908 to play in a Wimbledon semifinal.

## Bouchard sets up maiden final against Kvitova

AFP, London

Former champion Petra Kvitova swept into her second Wimbledon final with a 7-6 (8/6), 6-1 victory over fellow Czech and close friend Lucie Safarova on Thursday. In the second semifinal Eugenie Bouchard became the first Canadian to reach a Grand Slam singles final, defeating Romania's Simona Halep in the semifinals to set up a final with Kvitova on Saturday.

The 20-year-old world number

13 beat the third seed and French Open runner-up 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 and will take on Czech sixth seed Petra Kvitova, the 2011 champion, in Saturday's final.

Tall, blonde Bouchard, a marketing dream for the women's game with her photogenic looks, athleticism and confident, positive demeanour, will also rise to number seven in the world rankings, the highest position ever achieved by a Canadian player.

Kvitova, the only former Grand Slam winner left in the women's tournament, won her only Grand

Slam title at Wimbledon in 2011 and the sixth seed is one more victory away from lifting the Venus Rosewater dish for the second time after seeing off 23rd seed Safarova with 24 winners and eight aces in 80 minutes on Centre Court.

It was tricky for Kvitova to face one of her closest friends in the first all-Czech Grand Slam semifinal.

But she had already dispatched compatriots Andrea Hlavackova and Barbora Zahlavova Strycova earlier in the tournament, and

managed to keep her emotions in check long enough to get the best of her Fed Cup team-mate as well.

While Kvitova had lost three of her four Grand Slam semi-finals, she could take heart from her 5-0 record against Safarova and she was quickly back in control on a sun-kissed Centre Court.

Unloading a series of ferocious groundstrokes, Kvitova broke in the opening game when a backhand winner flashed past Safarova.

But Safarova was in combative mood herself and she broke back in the fourth game.

FOR ALL YOUR FOOTBALL NEEDS

thedailystar.net

/fifa-world-cup-2014-brazil