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FEDERATION CUP Sheikh Jamal's emphatic start

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club got off to an emphatic victory against Feni Soccer Club while falling giants Mohammedan Sporting Club edged past Rahmatganj MFS in the 27th Federation Cup as the new football season kicked off at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

In the late match played under lights, the Dhanmondi giants breezed to a 4-1 victory against the Feni outfit to declare their credentials of retaining the title.

Mamunul Islam broke the deadlock in the 35th minute screamer with a powerful left-footed strike from the edge of the box that gave Feni goalkeeper Bipu no chance. The lead was doubled at the stroke of the half time when Emeka Darlington bundled home a rebound from inside the six-yard box. Sohel Mia pulled one back for Feni in the 61st minute but Shakhawat Hossain Rony and Landing Darboe netted two more in the 73rd and 82nd minutes to complete the rout.

Earlier in the opening match, Mohammedan edged Rahmatganj MFS 2-1, thanks to a late winner by Guinean forward Ismail Bangoura. The Black and Whites, playing in 4-3-3 formation under new coach Jashimuddin Joshi, broke the deadlock in the 11th minute when Bangoura played on Tophidul Alam for a neat finish. However, Rahmatganj fought back early in the second half through a header from Nurul Absar in the 49th minute. But the Black and Whites had the last laugh as Bangoura scored the winner in the 88th minute with a placing shot after Abu Sayeed Jewel had threaded the ball through from the left.

In today's matches, Abahani will take on Farashganj SC before Muktijoddha Sangsad play against Championship League outfit Uttar Baridhara Club.



Emeka Darlington (L) and Mamunul Islam, scorer of two opening goals for Sheikh Jamal in their Federation Cup match against Feni Soccer Club, acknowledge crowd's applause at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Buffon hits out at Juve

AFP, Milan

Juventus captain Gianluigi Buffon hit out at the attitude of the Italian champions following Sunday's thrilling 2-2 draw with strugglers Cesena.

At the Dino Manuzzi stadium, Juve struggled against a Cesena side that has been fighting to get out of the relegation zone all season.

Chile's Arturo Vidal even missed a late penalty that could have given Juve a nine-point lead over second-placed Roma, who drew 0-0 at home to basement side Parma -- their fifth draw in six games.

"Maybe Roma's result changed the outlook a little, but a squad like ours shouldn't be affected by results elsewhere," Buffon told Sky Sport.

Buffon had to pull off a number of saves in a lively opening period before Milan Djuric beat him with a low shot on 17 minutes.

"It was a great battle," said Bosnian striker Djuric. "It was great to test myself against the Juventus defence and to score against Buffon was pretty special."

Juve were back on level terms on the half hour after Alvaro Morata got his head to Paul Pogba's cross, and then took the lead when Claudio Marchisio pounced on a Fernando Llorente dummy to fire home from close range.

Hammering

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several times when a fielder dropped a catch in the 45th over.

Sammy said: "I'd just like to apologise to the viewers for that, especially the young kids listening."

The all-rounder was one of the few bright lights in the West Indies side, posting a personal best one-day international score of 89 during a 154-run stand for the sixth wicket with Lendl Simmons, who made 102.

The West Indies, who had been 87 for five, recovered to 304 for seven in their 50 overs but it was still not enough as Ireland, who finished on 307 for six, won with 25 balls to spare.

"The batting partnerships should have been motivation enough for the bowlers to want to run into the Irish, but we were lackadaisical in the field," said Sammy as he castigated his side's effort.

Spirit of the

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and they did so quite clinically and efficiently. The bowlers bowled within their obvious limitations and were backed brilliantly by some hardworking fielding effort. The batsmen had the confidence of chasing down a big total and they looked effortless in doing so, paving the way for yet another Irish triumph.

It's a kind of performance that may not have any bearing as far as the title race is concerned, but will certainly add tremendous value to an otherwise endless and tiresome group stage of the World Cup. Let's hope ICC doesn't spoil the fun.

Messi back on song

REUTERS, Barcelona

Lionel Messi claimed a share of two more of the few Spanish soccer records he does not already own with another stunning performance on Sunday that underlined Barcelona's credentials as possible treble winners.

The Argentine captain, already the all-time La Liga top scorer, netted his 23rd hat-trick in Spain's top flight in a 5-0 demolition of Levante at the Nou Camp, matching the record set by his great rival Cristiano Ronaldo earlier this season.

Messi has 31 trebles in all competitions for Barca, tying the most scored for a Spanish club set by former Athletic Bilbao forward Telmo Zarra, while Ronaldo has 27 overall for Real.

Messi's assist for Neymar on Sunday was his 106th in his 300th La Liga appearance, overhauling former Barca and Real midfielder Luis Figo who held the previous best of 105 since records began in 1990.

"What can I say about him?" Barcelona forward Pedro told reporters after Messi's latest masterclass.

"It is a privilege to have him as a team mate and share a dressing room with him," added the Spain international.

"He is a unique and different player and is always surpassing himself. He has ambition to remain the best."

Messi's scintillating recent form, which has coincided with a Ronaldo slump, has helped Barca cut Real's lead at the top of La Liga to one point and put them on the verge of a place in the King's Cup final.

They are through to the last 16 of the Champions League against Manchester City and, with Messi on song, some Barca fans are starting to believe the club can repeat their 2009 treble under former coach Pep Guardiola.

Sunday's victory was their 11th in a row in all competitions, matching Guardiola's best run at the end of 2008.

MESSI STATS

La Liga appearance:	300
La Liga goals:	269
La Liga assists:	106
La Liga hat-tricks:	23
Overall hat-tricks:	31
Overall goals:	419

Bayern fighting nerves

APP, Lviv

Arjen Robben admits Bayern Munich have a few nerves as they head to the war-torn Ukraine for Tuesday's Champions League last 16, first-leg clash away to Shakhtar Donetsk.

Due to fighting in east Ukraine between government forces and pro-Russian rebels, Shakhtar host their home league games in Kiev, but have opted to play their Champions League matches in Lviv, near the Poland border.

They will host Bayern at Arena Lviv, some 1000 kilometres from their own Donbass Stadium in Donetsk, which is being used to distribute humanitarian aid and whose facade has been damaged by shelling.

Pep Guardiola's star-studded Bayern squad head east fully aware it's far from a typical away match, just days after romping to a record 8-0 rout of Hamburg on Saturday.

"Of course you are aware of the situation, it affects us all," said Robben, who scored twice against Hamburg.

"You can't just go there and ignore what is going on."

Bayern fly to Lviv from Munich at 1445 local time on Monday and are scheduled to head back at 0030 on Wednesday morning.

Less than 36 hours on Ukraine soil means the German champions want to spend as little time there as possible and they have cancelled their usual post-match banquet.

Guardiola has admitted he is "concerned about the situation in Ukraine", while chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said the ceasefire over the weekend "has made the whole thing a bit more relaxed for us".

European football's governing body UEFA insist there is nothing to worry about.

"The safety of all participants is guaranteed," a UEFA spokeswoman told SID, an AFP subsidiary.

Bayern warmed-up by hammering Hamburg in Munich as Robben, Thomas Mueller and Mario Gotze each scored a brace.

It was the visitors' heaviest league defeat and the league's biggest victory

for 30 years.

Bayern rested Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso, who had a leg injury, and were also without suspended Germany defender Jerome Boateng against Hamburg, but both are expected to face Donetsk.

With the Ukraine Premier League still in a winter break, Shakhtar will come into the game short of competitive match practice and having only played friendlies in Brazil and Spain during recent training camps.

Their last competitive game was a 1-1 draw at Porto on December 10 in their final Champions League group game.

They are second in the Ukraine Premier League table, five points behind leaders Dynamo Kiev, and in danger of missing out on a sixth straight league title.

While Bayern won their group with two matches to spare, Donetsk finished second behind Porto in their pool, but still managed to make Champions League history.

They posted a 7-0 away win at BATE Borisov when Brazil striker Luiz Adriano, their top scorer for the last five seasons, finished with five goals.

Blues raring to go

APP, Paris

Fresh from a rare weekend off, Chelsea recommence their bid for Champions League glory on Tuesday when they face injury-ravaged Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their last-16 tie at the Parc des Princes.

With a shock defeat to third-tier Bradford City last month meaning Jose Mourinho's side were not involved in the fifth round of the FA Cup over the weekend, Chelsea were able to put their feet up and watch Paris endure the worst possible preparations for one of the glamour ties of the round.

"The rest is welcome for us. In the end they have only one game that we don't have. It's only one more game, but I welcome this little rest for the players," said Mourinho before discovering what happened to PSG in a catastrophic afternoon against Caen.

The reigning French champions lost Yohan Cabaye, Marquinhos, Serge Aurier and Lucas to muscle injuries during the home Ligue 1 game that saw them finish with just nine men and draw 2-2 after conceding two late goals.

Paris coach Laurent Blanc later admitted that the quartet were almost certain to miss the rematch with a Chelsea side who won when the clubs clashed in the quarterfinals of the same competition last year.

With Blaise Matuidi taking a knock in the same match and Javier Pastore battling to recover from a calf problem in time, PSG captain Thiago Silva was left to complain that his side's European prospects had not been helped by the powers that be in the French game.

"I think the league could have protected us," Silva told sports daily L'Equipe after a result that ensured they would remain two points behind Ligue 1 leaders Lyon. "The French authorities must think a bit more about PSG, but also Monaco (who face Arsenal in the last 16)."

"It is very hard to play every three days. And for a special event like this match against Chelsea, the match against Caen could have been rearranged to allow us to prepare better."

Silva was in the PSG side that beat Chelsea 3-1 at the Parc des Princes in the first leg of their last-eight tie almost a year ago, when his compatriot David Luiz scored an own-goal.

However, counters from Andre Schurrle and Demba Ba helped Chelsea win 2-0 in the return to go through on away goals.

Since then David Luiz has swapped west London for Paris and will partner Silva in the heart of the home defence on Tuesday, while Schurrle and Ba have also now left Stamford Bridge.

However, Chelsea are a stronger team these days, with Mourinho's acquisitions in the transfer market helping take the Blues seven points clear of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League and making them favourites in this tie.



Bayern Munich stars Franck Ribery (L) and Bastian Schweinsteiger attend a training session in Munich yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Shakhtar Donetsk.

PHOTO: AFP

Celta Vigo stun Atletico

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's hopes of a second straight La Liga crown were hanging by a thread on Sunday after a 2-0 loss at Celta Vigo that defender Diego Godin blamed on the absence of midfielders Koke, Arda Turan and Raul Garcia.

Atletico were a shadow of the side that beat leaders Real Madrid 4-0 at the Calderon last weekend and barely threatened the Celta goal in a weak performance that left them seven points behind Real and six adrift of second-placed Barcelona.

The excellent Nolito fired Celta ahead

with a penalty in the 59th minute at their Balaicos stadium in Galicia and Fabian Orellana made it 2-0 in the 71st to cap a deserved victory.

For Atletico, strikers Mario Mandzukic and Fernando Torres toiled fruitlessly, while Antoine Griezmann had their best chance shortly before Orellana's goal but his low strike was tipped onto a post by Celta goalkeeper Sergio Alvarez.

It was the first time Atletico had failed to score away in La Liga since a 0-0 draw at city neighbours Rayo Vallecano at the end of August and they sorely missed the injured Koke and suspended Arda and Garcia.

"We're a large group and we're all prepared to play," Godin said in an interview with Spanish broadcaster Canal Plus.

The Daily Star

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DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day-2)
Rangpur v Barisal
Venue: BKSP 3
Chittagong v Dhaka Metro
Venue: BKSP 2
Rajshahi v Khulna
Venue: SBNCS
Dhaka v Sylhet

Venue: KSOAS
Time: 10:00am
Federation Cup
Abahani v Farashganj
Time: 4:00pm
Muktijoddha v Uttar
Baridhara
Time: 6:15pm
Venue: BNS

SCOLARI ABANDONS TEAM

Former Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was accused of unprofessional conduct this weekend after he abandoned his Gremio side before the end of their 1-0 home defeat by lowly Veranopolis. An angry Felipao, as he is known in Brazil, left the dugout and walked to the dressing room with four minutes still left in the game. "I sent myself off," he told reporters after Gremio's third defeat in four matches. "There was nothing more I could do so I went to the dressing room."

--REUTERS

