

# Sk Russel through with Baridhara bashing

CTG ABAHANI 1 – 0 FARASHGANJ  
SK RUSSEL 5 – 0 UTTAR BARIDHARA

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russell Krira Chakra proved their title credentials on their very first day of the domestic season as they trumped Uttar Baridhara Club 5-0 in their Federation Cup fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The win took Sheikh Russel through to the quarterfinals from Group B, along with Muktijoddha Sangsad KC, while Uttar Baridhara were eliminated after two successive defeats.

Nigerian forward Kingsley Chigozie broke the deadlock with a 23rd minute strike before national team's striker Zahid Hasan Emily made it 2-0 four minutes later.

Emily doubled his tally eight minutes later before Cameroonian recruit Paul Emile widened the margin eight minutes after the restart. Chigozie completed the rout with his second of the night in the 89th minute.

Meanwhile, an injury time strike from substitute Khaled Mahmud ensured Chittagong Abahani's last eight berth from Group C at the expense of Farashganj SC.

The Chittagong outfit will square off against their Dhaka namesakes on February 22 to decide group winners.



Sheikh Russel forward Zahid Hasan Emily celebrates one of his two goals with fellow striker Kingsley Chigozie (R) as Uttar Baridhara goalkeeper picks the ball from the back of the net during their Federation Cup fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Figo proposes WC expansion

REUTERS, London

Luis Figo is proposing an increase from 32 to "40 or 48" teams at the World Cup finals as part of his FIFA presidential manifesto launched on Thursday.

The former Portugal international, launching his campaign at Wembley Stadium, also said a greater percentage of FIFA's income should be spent on grass-roots development.

"I believe we should consider proposals to expand the competition to a 40 or even 48 team World Cup," Figo told a news conference.

"Both these options are feasible with an extra three to four days of tournament play. If this expansion were to take place I believe that additional teams should come from non-European nations."

The election takes place at the FIFA congress in Zurich on May 29.

## Siddikur sets the pace



SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman opened his title defence at the Hero Indian Open with a six-under-par 65 to share the lead with four players yesterday.

The two-time Asian Tour winner was tied alongside SSP Chawrasia of India, Richard T Lee of Canada, Chaphchai Nirat of Thailand, and Joakim Lagergren of Sweden at the 1.5-million-dollar event sanctioned by the Asian Tour and European Tour.

Siddikur had an unblemished day as carded six birdies – on holes 1, 7, 8, 12, 15, and 18 – and went bogeyless throughout the day.

Siddikur relied on his sharp-shooting game at the narrow Delhi course where he has enjoyed great results in the past which include winning the 2013 Hero Indian Open and finishing second twice.

"I played really good golf and made some long putts. My hitting was perfect so that was good. I always look forward to returning to the Delhi Golf Club. This is my favourite course," Siddikur told Asiantour.com.

"This is a tight and narrow golf course. I'm a very accurate player so I really like playing on this type of layout. You always see me in good positions when I play here," smiled the 30-year-old.

## Messi-Enrique truce on shaky ground

REUTERS, Madrid



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi and coach Luis Enrique appear to have agreed an uneasy truce but hostilities could break out again if the Argentina forward's form dips and the club stumbles as the season reaches a crucial stage.

A series of inspirational Messi performances have helped Barca put together a streak of 11 wins in all competitions since a 1-0 La Liga defeat at Real Sociedad on January 4, matching their best run under former coach Pep Guardiola in 2008-09.

They are on the verge of a place in the King's Cup final, through to the Champions League last 16 to face Manchester City and will climb above Real Madrid to the top of La Liga if they avoid defeat at home to Malaga on Saturday.

The surge in form means that rather than looking on helplessly as their club teetered on the edge of crisis, Barca fans are now starting to dream of a repeat of their historic 2009 treble.

The turmoil that followed the reverse at Sociedad, when reports of a rift between Messi and Luis Enrique surfaced in the Spanish media, is a distant memory, at least for the time being.

The forward quashed speculation he was considering leaving the club he joined as a

13-year-old but has pointedly declined to comment on his relationship with Luis Enrique, who took over from Messi's compatriot Gerardo Martino at the end of last term.

A former Barca and Spain midfielder, Luis Enrique knows that if Messi is not content, the team's chances of getting back to winning ways after failing to win major silverware in 2013-14 will be seriously diminished.

For the moment, the smile is back on Messi's face and the fans are happy but that could all change very quickly if the team loses its way again.

Messi sounded a note of caution in a Argentine television interview broadcast on Wednesday.

"We still haven't won anything," he told Mundo Leo, a TV channel dedicated to the four-times World Player of the Year.

"There are many months of competition left both in La Liga and in the Champions League," added the 27-year-old.

"The truth is that we are in very good shape. Luckily, after the Real Sociedad game, when we did not start the year well, everything changed.

"Now we are on a different path and everything is coming off for us.

"The team is confident and changed its attitude and desire and that is why we are like we are today. But there is a long way to go."

## Real cruise

AFP, Gelsenkirchen



Title holders Real Madrid have one foot in the Champions League quarterfinals after beating Schalke in the last 16 first leg in Germany for a second year running on Wednesday.

A Cristiano Ronaldo header gave Real a deserved lead at the break and Marcelo rifled home a superb second goal with 11 minutes left as the Spanish league leaders stretched their winning streak in the competition to 10 games equalling Bayern Munich's record winning run which ended in December 2013.

Ronaldo's goal, his first in four matches, was his 73rd in the Champions League. The Ballon d'Or winner now sits only two behind Barcelona's Lionel Messi in the all-time top scorers list and Real manager Carlo Ancelotti was delighted to see his star forward back on the scoresheet.

"It's clear that Cristiano Ronaldo lives to score goals," Ancelotti said. "It's not a problem for us if he doesn't score for a game or two but it's obvious that the goal did him good."

"It wasn't only a goal for the statistics. It was an important goal - the lead goal. At a key stage of the season it was important to win and I think we're on the right track."

Schalke's Champions League debutant Felix Platte had struck the bar before Marcelo's goal, as the German side fared much better than last season when Real won 6-1 at the Veltrins Arena.

Robert Di Matteo had employed a compact 5-3-2 formation in the hope of avoiding a repeat of that result but he was left with some regrets.

"It's a disappointing result for us because both teams had few chances," he said.

### RESULTS

Basel (SUI) 1 (Gonzalez 11) Porto (POR) 1 (Danilo 79-pen)

## Pace will be imperative

FROM PAGE S1

"Pace is my main strength, so it will be exciting to bowl at the Gabba. But I am learning that one cannot be successful with pace only, line and length is very important. As I earlier said I want to bowl at 150kmph and this would be the best opportunity, but I have to bowl in the right areas, otherwise what kind of fate I have to embrace, I know. I bowled quickest at 144kmph in the first match with good line and length and hope I can continue it," added the well-built pacer.

Taskin said that he has been learning a lot from the bowling of Mashrafe. "He is our inspiration in many ways. I am learning a lot from him. It is a fantastic experience to be bowling alongside him," said Taskin.

The Australian dailies wrote that Bangladesh have good reason to pray for incessant rain in order to secure a point, but in reality, from Mashrafe to Taskin, everybody is praying for sunshine come Saturday.



The Daily Star



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