

FEDERATION CUP

Sk Jamal eye semis

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Sheikh Jamal DC are looking forward to putting up a more authoritative performance when they take on Brothers Union in the first quarterfinal of the Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Two-time champions Sheikh Jamal are the only team who qualified for the last eight with all-win record backed by 11 goals in two matches but coach Maruful Haque is not happy with the way his charges performed against Feni Soccer and Team BJMC in group-stage matches.

"The boys could not perform the way I wanted in the last two matches though they have been improving match by match. I want the boys to put more pressure on the opponents and enjoy more ball possession throughout the game," said Maruful yesterday.

Sheikh Jamal, who qualified for the Federation Cup final four times in a row, thrashed Feni Soccer 4-1 before inflicting a

massive 7-0 defeat to Team BJMC on the way to the quarterfinals and thus they made their presence felt to the other contenders of the season's curtain raising tournament.

Maruful had rested some key players against Team BJMC but this time he is going to pick his best eleven, which is except the foreign recruits almost the starting eleven of the national team. Playmaker Mamunul Islam is a doubt with his injury and his fitness will be assessed this morning.

Though Maruf is thinking about further improvement, surely he has no problem upfront as nine players hit the target 11 times in two outings and the coach will be hoping for the same sharp edge from his players against Brothers.

Brothers though are far away from Sheikh Jamal DC in performance as they managed two draws against Mohammedan and Rahmatganj MFS to advance into the quarterfinals.

However, three-time federation cup champions, Brothers Union, can turn the tables under the guidance of Indian coach Syed Naeemuddin with their counter-attack strategy.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his goal against Elche during their Primera Liga clash at the Martin Valero Stadium on Sunday. This was Ronaldo's 290th goal for Real trailing record scorer Raul's 323 goals.

City face Barca test

AFP, London



Contrasting weekend results have given Tuesday's Champions League last 16 reunion between Manchester City and Barcelona at the Etihad Stadium a different allure to what might have been expected only days ago.

Barcelona, 4-1 aggregate victors when the teams met at this stage last year, had found scintillating form since a 1-0 loss to David Moyes's Real Sociedad on January 4, winning their next 11 games in all competitions.

But that run came to a juddering and unexpected halt on Saturday when they lost 1-0 at home to Malaga in La Liga after a lacklustre performance completely out of keeping with recent displays.

Roughly 40 minutes after the final whistle sounded at Camp Nou, City set about constructing a 5-0 victory at home to Newcastle United that allowed them to cut Chelsea's lead in the Premier League to five points.

Following on from a 4-1 win at Stoke City, which had seen the English champions end a four-game winless

run, the stylish victory, inspired by David Silva, provided further proof that their mid-winter slump has ended.

For City manager Manuel Pellegrini, it was a sign that his side are once again a "scoring team", but for all the optimism the performance engendered, it will not erase memories of what happened the last time Barcelona crossed his path.

Both games last season followed similar patterns, with Lionel Messi twice opening the scoring, Dani Alves twice adding a late goal, and City twice having a defender sent off -- Martin Demichelis in the first leg and Pablo Zabaleta in the second.

Demichelis's dismissal at the Etihad, for a last-man foul on Messi that yielded a penalty from which the Argentine put Barcelona ahead, left Pellegrini apoplectic and he was given a two-game touchline ban by UEFA for accusing Swedish referee Jonas Eriksson of impartiality.

But while Vincent Kompany's late goal in the return leg meant that City belatedly landed a blow on their opponents, there were few complaints about the aggregate scoreline.

"It is important not to make the

mistakes that we made last year," said Pellegrini, whose club have never reached the quarterfinals.

"In both those games we played with one player less. In the knockout stage you have to not concede goals, and with a player sent off it is very difficult. You have to think of the match as being 180 minutes, not 90."

Now under the tutelage of Luis Enrique, Barcelona are much-changed, with the team configured to move the ball as quickly as possible to a devastating front three of Neymar, Luis Suarez and Messi, who has already scored 14 goals in 2015.

When Barcelona have come unstuck this season, as against Malaga and Real Sociedad, it has tended to have been when teams have scored early against them and then defended en masse, but defender Gerard Pique believes City will not approach the tie so cautiously.

"It is one of the games of the year, the most important until now," said the former Manchester United centre-back.

"They will try to attack us and that suits us. It has been proven over the past few months that we are better against teams that attack us because we can counter-attack."

Real go four clear

AGENCIES, Madrid



Real Madrid moved four points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win at Elche on Sunday.

After passing up a host of chances in the first-half, Madrid finally made the breakthrough when Karim Benzema tapped home from close range 11 minutes into the second period.

Cristiano Ronaldo then sealed the three points when he bulletted home a header from Isco's pin-point cross 21 minutes from time.

The Portuguese now has 290 goals and is level with Carlos Santillana, while Raul is out in front on 323.

Boosted by Barca's shock 1-0 defeat to Malaga on Saturday, Madrid started brightly and should have been well in front by half-time.

Gareth Bale had an early strike ruled out for offside before Ronaldo smashed an effort from 20 yards off the post.

The World Player of the Year then passed up a huge chance when he miscued with the goal gaping from Bale's low cross.

Another effort from Ronaldo, this time with his head from Toni Kroos's free-kick, flew just wide as the pressure built.

And the visitors were unfortunate not to be ahead in stunning fashion when Benzema's overhead kick was also chopped

off for the tightest of offside calls.

Madrid captain Iker Casillas was making his 500th La Liga appearance, but had barely touched the ball until he had to make a smart low save to his right to deny Aaron Niguez two minutes after the break.

Niguez was lucky to stay on the pitch moments later when he only saw a yellow card for a horrific challenge on Bale that fortunately the Welshman was able to shake off.

Carlo Ancelotti's men finally got the break that had deserted them early in the game on 56 minutes when David Lombar's clearance from Ronaldo's low cross bounced off Elche 'keeper Przemyslaw Tyton and into the path of Benzema to slot into an empty net.

Ronaldo then ended his three-game goalless streak in La Liga with a wonderful header from Isco's fine cross to put the game to bed.

Earlier, David Moyes's Real Sociedad struck twice in the final 10 minutes to come from behind and seal a thrilling 4-3 win over Sevilla at Anoeta.

The hosts had got off to an ideal start as Imanol Agirretxe slotted home the opener after 16 minutes, but Timothee Kolodziejczak levelled for the Europa League holders before the break.

Sociedad were then gifted a soft penalty at the start of the second period, which Xabi Prieto converted, but Sevilla responded once more when their top scorer Carlos flicked home Ever Banega's free-kick.

App for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Limited has developed a mobile apps for the ICC World Cup name, BanglaCric, the first app that caters to Tigers fans almost exclusively. That is not to say other teams are left out, the app gives mobile users the ability to stay updated on the move. It provides live scores, fixtures and results of the Tigers along with relevant match information, while also staying in touch with the community through quizzes, which have prizes, and a comments section so the people's voices can be heard. There is also a short history of Bangladesh cricket and constantly updated player and team rankings. If you are interested just visit: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.datasoft.banglacrict>

Nadal slips to fourth

AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal has slipped a place to four in the latest ATP Rankings published on Monday after losing his first semifinal on clay in 12 years in Rio.

The third spot previously occupied by the Spaniard is now filled by Andy Murray, last in action when losing in the quarterfinals in Rotterdam 10 days ago.

This is the first time Nadal has not figured in the top three since August, 2013.

Novak Djokovic, who heads the seeds at this week's Dubai Open, retains his steely grip on the rankings ahead of Roger Federer.

TOPTEN

1. Djokovic (SRB)	13.045
2. Federer (SUI)	9.205
3. Murray (GBR)	5.460
4. Nadal (ESP)	5.425
5. Nishikori (JPN)	5.205
6. Raonic (CAN)	4.980
7. Wawrinka (SUI)	4.595
8. Berdych (CZE)	4.460
9. Ferrer (ESP)	4.185
10. Dimitrov (BUL)	3.465



Chief Guest Major General Md. Mahfuzur Rahman, Bangladesh Army handed over the prizes among the winners of the Prime Bank Challenge Cup Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday. Chairman of the Board of Directors of Prime Bank Azam J Chowdhury and Managing Director of the Bank Ahmed Kamal Khan Chowdhury were also present on the occasion as Special Guests. PHOTO: COURTESY

Coutinho sinks Saints

AFP, Southampton



Philippe Coutinho scored a magnificent goal as Liverpool overcame Southampton 2-0 in a controversial game on Sunday to close to within two points of the Premier League's top four.

Coutinho opened the scoring with a stunning 30-yard effort in the third minute and Raheem Sterling added a second goal towards the end, but it was the performance of referee Kevin Friend that was to prove the biggest talking point on a cold, squally evening at St Mary's.

The official turned down two strong penalty appeals from Southampton and was barracked by their supporters throughout, as Ronald Koeman's side went a third home game without finding the net.

The result prevented Southampton from overtaking fourth-place Manchester United, who they trail by a point, and Liverpool are now just a point further back after extending their unbeaten run to 10 league games.

Brendan Rodgers's in-form side are now within touching distance of the Champions League berths ahead of a pivotal week that sees them take a 1-0 lead to Besiktas in the Europa League before welcoming champions Manchester City to Anfield next weekend.

Dejan Lovren, who replaced the injured Mamadou Sakho, and former Southampton captain Adam Lallana were both booed on their returns to St Mary's, but Coutinho sliced through the home fans' jeers with a sensational early goal.

Collecting the ball 30 yards from goal, the Brazilian midfielder shifted it onto his right foot and let fly with a glorious, dipping shot towards the top-left corner that cannoned into the net via the crossbar.

By then, Filip Djuricic, making his first Southampton start, had already had a penalty appeal turned down when he went down after getting goal-side of Emre Can, and he then saw an even stronger claim waved away.

He was sent sprawling by a sliding challenge from Joe Allen, but Friend allowed play to continue and Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet had to block from Eljero Elia.

Juve wary of Dortmund

AFP, Milan



Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini has warned over the counter-attacking threat of Borussia Dortmund, but believes the Italians' Champions League ambitions will shine through in their last 16 clash in Turin on Tuesday.

Juventus underlined their status as Serie A champions in waiting once again at the weekend after taking their lead over stuttering title challengers Roma to nine points.

Yet in Europe's premier club competition, the two-time winners have yet to prove their worth: Juve crashed out at the group stages last season having been ousted by eventual champions Bayern Munich in the 2013 quarterfinals.

Juventus and Dortmund have some history in the competition: in 1997 the Germans famously beat the Italians, then defending champions, 3-1 in Munich and the clubs met several times before then.

Jurgen Klopp's men are only now fighting their way back from a torrid start to the Bundesliga season, having secured a third consecutive win, away to VfB Stuttgart on Friday, to move further away from the relegation zone.

But while Chiellini warned of the threat posed by the Germans, he believes Juventus's ambition to make the final stages of the competition will come to the fore.

"Dortmund have some good players, a few who played well at the start of the season are coming back from injury, but over two legs anything can happen," Chiellini said to Rai television.

"We can't afford to gift them opportunities to launch counter-attacks, because they have players who excel when you give them space - although that tactic can be very risky."

"At the start of the (German league) season, they conceded a lot of goals from open play."

"We have a lot of respect (for them) but we really want to win this game, progress and keep our European dream alive: we really feel stronger than in recent seasons."

Dortmund may have flirted with the relegation zone earlier this season, but the Germans -- currently 12th at 30 points behind Bundesliga pacesetters Bayern Munich -- can be unpredictable when it comes to high-octane European meetings.

As they struggled to keep pace on the domestic front, Klopp steered his men to the top of Champions League Group D, scoring 14 goals and conceding just one defeat, to set up a last-16 clash with Juventus.

Borussia have now scored 10 goals in their last three league wins, but Juve are unbeaten at home all season and suffered their only defeat, away to Genoa, in October.

Mominul down

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in the number three position and I believe Mominul has got the quality to contribute for the team playing at number seven position. We need Mominul in the team," said Mashrafe.

Nasir has hardly any chance to bat at number seven as the team management has doubts over his form and ability of batting against pace bowling in Australia and New Zealand conditions. On the other hand, Mominul can get the chance to bat at top of the order only if opener Anamul Haque is dropped and Soumya opens. But for the third match this Thursday, there is hardly any chance to bring any change to the team.

Hit them

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than looking for boundaries all the time.

The Tigers will, in all likelihood, need two more scalps to ensure their quarterfinals berth, unless one or more upsets change the scenario completely. They have four games in hand -- against Sri Lanka, Scotland, England and New Zealand as per the schedule -- and two wins in their next three matches do not at all look unlikely at the moment.

Parma players to pay for transport

REUTERS, Milan



Parma's players are prepared to pay for their own transport to next Sunday's Serie A match at Genoa if the club cannot afford a bus, team captain Alessandro Lucarelli said on Monday.

Lucarelli said he felt bad on Sunday after the home match against Udinese was called off because the cash-strapped club could not afford to pay for stewards or police.

Parma are bottom of the table with 10 points, the players have not been paid all season and the club, which has changed hands twice in two months, is in danger of not finishing the season.

"It's like being in a film. We've seen everything you could possibly imagine, with four different presidents this season," Lucarelli told Radio Anch'io.

"When we didn't play yesterday it left me with a bad feeling, it was a Sunday with a bitter taste."

"Today, we are starting our preparations for the match against Genoa and if there isn't a bus we'll get five or six cars together and travel in them. We're prepared to pay for the trip ourselves."

"We are ready to play but want to feel protected, there has to be respect for Parma and not just so the championship is kept in order," he said.



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