

Sheikh Jamal scrape into semis

SHEIKH JAMAL 2(5) – 2(4) BROTHERS UNION

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Sheikh Jamal DC survived a massive scare from a spirited Brothers Union side as they scraped into the semifinals of the Federation Cup with a 5-4 win in sudden death tiebreakers in the first quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Goalkeeper Mazharul Islam Himel dived to his left to thwart substitute Habib Mia's sixth effort to propel the star-studded outfit to their fifth Federation Cup semifinal in a row after the two sides were locked at 2-2 in regulation time and 4-4 after five shots each in the tiebreakers.

Following two crushing wins in the group-stage matches, Bhutan's King's Cup champions were expected to ease through this quarterfinal, but the match turned out to be a topsy-turvy affair, thanks to some enterprising football from the All Oranges.

Brothers never looked like underdogs as they came from behind to take a 2-1 lead before Sheikh Jamal put huge pressure to level the margin six minutes from time.

Sheikh Jamal had gone ahead with a fortunate strike from Haitian Leonel Preux, who tapped in from close range after Brothers' goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee failed to grip a grounder from Landing Darboe in the 45th minute.

However, the All Oranges struck twice within 11 minutes of the second half to take a strangle hold of the encounter. The equalizer came in the 51st minute, thanks to a brilliant chip over the keeper's head by Kawsar Ali Rabbi. The All Oranges stunned the defending champions five minutes later when Nigerian defender Adams Jankasa headed home from close range. Brothers could have killed the contest in the 81st minute had Rajon Mia not drove of the target from inside the box with only the keeper to beat. The mistake proved costly for the falling giants as Sheikh Jamal forward Landing Darboe equalised a placing shot from inside the six-yard box three minutes later, before Himel's save from the spot sealed the fate of the match.

Sheikh Jamal will face the winners of the third quarterfinal between Sheikh Russel KC and Chittagong Abahani in the semifinal.



Sheikh Jamal players celebrate their sudden death victory over Brothers Union during the Federation Cup quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

FIFA suggests 2022 WC in winter

AFP, Doha

A FIFA World Cup task force on Tuesday recommended the 2022 World Cup in Qatar be shortened and held in November-December to avoid the scorching summer temperatures.

"There is one solution, November-December," said FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke after a meeting of the task force in Doha.

FIFA's executive committee will make a final decision at a meeting in March. But a FIFA statement said: "The proposed event dates have the full support of all six confederations."

FIFA said the task force had also recommended a shorter competition. But it did not say by how much the tournament would be shrunk.

"The outcome of the discussions is also a proposed reduced competition days schedule with the exact dates to be defined inline with the match schedule and number of venues to be used for the 22nd edition of football's flagship event," said the FIFA statement.

No romance for Wenger



Arsenal forward Theo Walcott controls the ball during a training session in London Colney yesterday ahead of their Champions League round of 16 encounter against Monaco.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insists he hasn't been wasting any time on nostalgic reminiscences ahead of his reunion with former club Monaco in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Wenger made his name as a manager during a successful seven-year spell at Monaco, which included leading them to the Ligue 1 title in 1988, winning the French Cup three years later and finishing as runners-up in the 1992 European Cup Winners' Cup.

Yet, since leaving the French Riviera after being sacked in 1994, Wenger, now in his 19th year in charge at Arsenal, has rarely come into contact with the team where he spent his formative years as a coach.

The Gunners were beaten by Monaco in a pre-season match before the current campaign, when a goal from Radamel Falcao, now on loan at Manchester United, gave Leonardo Jardim's side a 1-0 victory in the Emirates Cup.

But this last 16, first leg clash at the Emirates Stadium will be Wenger's first competitive clash with Monaco, prompting questions about whether he has fond memories of his time at the Stade Louis II.

Wenger's response made it clear romantic reflections on his past relationships came a distant second to keeping his players focused on their battle to finish in the Premier League's top four had been con-

suming all his waking hours.

"I have enough experience to know that the most important game is this one, after, you think about the next one, so it has not been hard," Wenger said after Saturday's 2-1 win at Crystal Palace lifted Arsenal to third in the league.

"We fought like mad to come back in a strong position in the (Premier League), and not to win (against Palace) would have been disastrous."

While Wenger was dismissive of his own memories of Monaco, the 65-year-old Frenchman is far too astute to be as offhand about his old club's current players.

After failing to reach the quarter-finals of Europe's elite club competition since 2010, due to a series of tough draws against the likes of Bayern Munich and Barcelona, this appears a golden opportunity for Arsenal to finally reach the last eight again.

But Wenger warned his players not to underestimate the French side, who are fourth in Ligue 1 and advanced to the last 16 as group winners thanks largely to a pair of impressive victories over Bayer Leverkusen.

"The last 16 in recent years has been super tough. This is a 50/50 game," Wenger said.

"We know that Monaco are very tight defensively - they didn't concede in the group stage against good teams. Of course it will be tricky, but a possible tie."

"It is really a 50-50 because Monaco are in a similar position to us. They came back into a good position in the league and their confidence level will be high."

Zapata lifts Napoli

REUTERS, Milan

Duvan Zapata scored a goal of sheer brute force and determination to set Napoli on the way to a 2-0 win over Sassuolo which moved them another step closer to second-placed AS Roma in Serie A on Monday.

Mauro Icardi scored his 14th league goal of the season to give Inter Milan a 2-1 win at Cagliari in Monday's other game, pushing Gianfranco Zola's side closer to Serie B.

Napoli had spent just over one hour banging away at the Sassuolo rearguard when Zapata collected Marek Hamsik's pass and ran towards the centre of the retreating defence.

The burly Colombian fell over when his shot was blocked but, despite being surrounded by four defenders, leapt to his feet, got to the ball first and then managed to place it into the net, leaving three bemused opponents sprawled on the pitch.

Zapata, who only started because Gonzalo Higuain was suspended, then provided the pass for Hamsik to score the second with a curling shot.

Napoli saw out the win despite having substitute Dries Mertens sent off after only six minutes on the pitch. The Belgian midfielder was given a straight red card for a trip from behind, although it seemed a harsh decision.

Third-placed Napoli, who were nine points behind Roma before the Christmas winter break, cut the gap to three points as they moved onto 45 points from 24 games.

Benitez's team have won six out of eight league games since the start of January.

Mateo Kovacic put the finishing touch to a flowing move to put Inter ahead two minutes into the second half and Icardi extended their lead with a solo effort, making him joint topscorer alongside fellow Argentine Carlos Tevez of Juventus.



Napoli striker Duvan Zapata (R) is about to score the opening goal against Sassuolo during their Serie A clash in Naples on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Focus on

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to adapt to that. That's why we came here early... to get used to the conditions, especially the bigger boundaries and bigger fields," he added.

While Al-Amin's departure disturbed Streak's plans, he was still confident that his bowlers would be able to put up a good fight. He even reckoned that spin could play a crucial role at the MCG and that Shakib Al Hasan's previous experience could work in their favour.

"Our spinners were excited to see a little bit of turn. There is something for everyone. We are looking forward to a good contest."

"Shakib [Al Hasan] playing in the Big Bash there was something good for us. He got the experience in the conditions and also being able to impart that knowledge to the rest of the team. It's a big plus for us. Good to have input from such a senior player. Hopefully he can help us win what is an important game," he said.

Having pointed out most of the positives, Streak also warned that the Tigers must make sure that they didn't give Sri Lanka a chance to settle in. This last comment must have stemmed from the way the Lankans have dominated the Tigers in the recent past.

Atletico hunting goals

AFP, Leverkusen

Atletico Madrid arrive at Bayer Leverkusen for Wednesday's Champions League last 16, first leg, clash hoping for a sixth straight clean-sheet in Europe, with Mario Mandzukic and Antoine Griezmann hunting more goals.

Between them the pair have already bagged 37 goals this season as the 2014 Champions League finalists look to leave Leverkusen's BayArena with an advantage in the hunt for a quarterfinal place.

Former Bayern Munich striker Mandzukic has already shown Pep Guardiola what he is missing in Bavaria by scoring 20 goals, while

Griezmann has hit the net 17 times for Atletico this season.

French midfielder Griezmann says Diego Simeone's Madrid need a good start in Leverkusen, just as they had in Saturday's 3-0 home league win over Almeria to stay third in the table.

"We need to keep working and enjoying the games like we are at the moment," said the Frenchman after netting in the 20th and 29th minute following Mandzukic's 13th-minute penalty.

"We need to face all the games the same way, trying to win and coming out flying from the start."

The only casualty for Madrid is midfielder Koke, who will miss the first leg with a hamstring injury having scored two goals and provided four assists in the group stages.

Olympiacos were the last team to

score against Atletico when they enjoyed a 3-2 group stage win in Greece back in September.

Since then, Madrid have scored 12 goals without reply in Europe, including a 5-0 thumping of Malmo and a 4-0 thrashing of Olympiacos in the return leg.

Bayer have never won a last-16 tie in the competition's current format and will have to work hard to change that statistic against an Atletico side who finished top of Group A ahead of Juventus.

Leverkusen are winless in their last three league matches and have had little to cheer about at this stage of the competition in recent years.

They were thumped 4-0 at home by Paris St Germain last season on the way to a 6-1 aggregate defeat.

'Rohit's two hounded me'

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ball -- I said 'you can't be serious?'," he said.

"I was under pressure to score runs, and I kept getting messages from Twitter and on my cell phone from fans. I have never known so many people wanting Chris Gayle to do so well."

Gayle's record-shattering innings came just days after he was inadvertently caught up in an embarrassing Twitter gaffe by West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) president Dave Cameron, who retweeted a post from a spectator calling for the batsman to be pensioned off.

"I have never felt this kind of pressure, but in the end, I am sure I gave them something to talk about," said Gayle.

"A lot of time people don't know what you are going through as I had some issues with injuries. I am also not getting any younger so age is definitely catching up on me."

His innings was only the fifth double century in all one-day international cricket and the first by a non-Indian, with Rohit Sharma (two), Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag the only other batsmen to achieve the feat.

Gayle and Samuels also set a new partnership record for any ODI wicket.

Their unbroken stand of 372 surpassed the 331 shared by India's Rahul Dravid and Tendulkar against New Zealand at Hyderabad in 1999.

"Ever since Rohit got two, I have been hounded to get one as well," smiled Gayle, who even took two wickets with his gentle off-spin when Zimbabwe batted.

After collecting the player-of-the-match award, Gayle said it was key that his side now focussed on Friday's crucial clash against South Africa in Sydney.

When you thought

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record-equalling 16 sixes during his 147 ball-innings, scoring bulk of his runs through the mid-wicket region -- taking the left leg out of the way before launching -- and through the V, both of which necessitated less stress on his body while cutting down the more stressful shots like the slog-sweeps and back-foot drives, which were part and parcel of his batting once upon a time.

Gayle rode a bit of luck though when he was adjudged not out to an lbw appeal on the first delivery he faced from Tinashe Panyangara in the very first over. Hawk-eye showed that the ball would have hit the top of the stumps, but since it was umpire's call, Gayle survived. And as you would expect from a champion batsman, Gayle made the most of that little fortune to write a new chapter in World Cup history.

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