

# ASEAN INT'L FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

## Booters' losing streak continues

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh surrendered the lead twice to suffer a 2-3 defeat against Myanmar in their opening match at the Yunnan ASEAN International Football Open Tournament in Yunnan, China yesterday.

Bangladesh -- on the back of five straight losses -- took to the field with the same eleven that played Tuesday's World Cup and Asian Cup qualifying home match against Australia and dominated proceedings. However Myanmar came out of their defensive shell to press Bangladesh, who took the lead against the run of play in the 35th minute.

Myanmar thwarted a Bangladesh attack which lead to a throw-in, from which Bangladesh scored after striker Nabib Newaj Jibon flicked Raihan Hasan's long throw home. Unfortunately, Bangladesh could only hold the lead for ten minutes as Aung Mge Tgea levelled the margin.

After resumption, Bangladesh went on the offensive again and restored the lead, thanks to a 56th minute strike from captain Mamunul Islam but they again surrendered the lead in the 71st minute when Aung Aung Do equalised.

Italian coach Fabio Lopez then sent on striker Aminur Rahman Sajib in place of defender Raihan to strengthen the attacking line-up but his gamble didn't pay off. Instead Bangladesh conceded the deciding

goal in the 80th minute when Thiha Aung struck.

Manager Amirul Islam Babu informed that the team was tired as they had to play the opening match of the tournament in the morning, after arriving in Yunnan the previous night.

"We checked into the hotel at 9:00pm on the night prior to the match and we had to play the match at 10:00am today [Friday]. The players were not mentally prepared to play the first match on such short notice," team manager Babu told The Daily Star over phone from Yunnan, adding that the players also had to attend the opening ceremony which took place at 8:00pm. The draw of the nine-team tournament was held earlier on Thursday.

"To be honest we really played well throughout the match and went ahead twice but could not hold the lead due to the fumbles of goalkeeper [Shahidul Alam] Sohel and some misses from the forwards and defenders," captain Mamunul told The Daily Star.

"We conceded the last goal due to Sohel's fumble, who gave the ball away to the opposing striker and Sohel could not stop him," said Mamun.

"Even after conceding the third goal, we could have levelled had Yeasin, Toklish, Sabjib and Nasir not squandered the opportunities in the dying minutes."

Bangladesh will play their second match against Lijiang Club of China tomorrow.



Bangladesh defender Raihan Hassan (R) controls the ball during their match against Myanmar at the ASEAN International Football Open Tournament in Yunnan, China yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

## Valbuena appears in court

AFP, Versailles

Mathieu Valbuena, the victim of a sex tape blackmail attempt, over which fellow France international Karim Benzema has been charged, appeared before a judge investigating the affair on Friday, judicial sources confirmed.

The hearing began around 0930 GMT on Friday morning in a court in Versailles, on the outskirts of Paris, hours before Valbuena was due to play for his French club Lyon against Nice.

Judge Nathalie Boutard will question the 31-year-old player notably concerning a conversation he had with Benzema on October 5 at the France national training centre in Clairefontaine, outside Paris.

The enquiry will bid to determine whether 27-year-old Real Madrid striker Benzema acted as a friend or a blackmailer during the conversation.

A source close to the investigation has said Benzema has admitted approaching Valbuena about the tape on behalf of a "childhood friend", Karim Zenati, who himself had been contacted by blackmailers in possession of the tape.

## Platini lodges CAS appeal

AFP, Paris

In a last ditch bid to overturn a 90-day ban and thereby run for the FIFA presidency Michel Platini lodged an appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), his lawyers said Friday.

The move comes after a FIFA appeal committee on Wednesday rejected the French UEFA supremo's joint bid with Sepp Blatter to overturn their suspensions which run until January 5 while Swiss police pursue a criminal investigation.

"Michel Platini's appeal to the CAS has been lodged," the former Juventus star's lawyers confirmed Friday.

One of the lawyers, Thibaud d'Ales, said he expected a CAS decision by the end of November.

Part of the FIFA ethics committee inquiry is into a two million dollar payment made by FIFA to Platini in 2011 for work he had carried out a decade earlier.

The suspension has been a severe blow to Platini's hopes of winning a FIFA presidential election in Zurich on February 26 when Blatter stands down after 17 years in the post.

# Djokovic sets up Nadal semi clash

AFP, London



Tomas Berdych, while Roger Federer defeated Kei Nishikori to eliminate the Japanese star on Thursday.

After Federer's 7-5, 4-6, 6-4 win earlier in the day, world number one Djokovic knew he would advance to the last four if he could secure one set against Berdych in his concluding group match at London's O2 Arena.

The Serb, a winner of three Grand Slam titles this year, wasted little time achieving that goal as he took the first set to ensure he would finish second in the group behind Federer and eventually eased to victory in 89 minutes.

Djokovic's bid to win the Tour Finals for a record fourth successive year is likely to face a sterner test on Saturday from his old rival Nadal, who looked in fine form while romping to victories over Stan Wawrinka and Andy Murray to secure top spot in the other group.

Federer, who has won the Tour Finals a record six times, will face either Murray or Wawrinka, who clash on Friday, in the semi-finals.

Losing to Federer in straight sets would never be an easy result to stomach for the ultra-competitive Serb, but it was especially painful since it ruined his three remarkable winning streaks.

Not only did the loss end his 23-match winning run dating back to August, it also

brought to an end his 38 consecutive indoor victories and his 15 successive Tour Finals wins.

But, with his tournament survival on the line, Djokovic could take comfort from winning 20 of his previous 22 meetings with Berdych, including their last seven matches and all four of their Tour Finals encounters.

Needing to take just one set to advance, the 10-time Grand Slam champion responded to only his sixth defeat of the season by quickly seizing the initiative against Berdych.

He fired off a string of winners and took seven of the first eight points to break in the second game of the first set.

Berdych broke straight back, but Djokovic got a lucky break that helped him seal the set when the former Wimbledon runner-up failed to challenge on a call that would have gone in his favour.

Bolstered by that good fortune, Djokovic broke just moments later to secure the first set.

Berdych had already lost his first two group matches and when Djokovic broke in the opening game of the second set he could easily have crumbled.

But the 30-year-old kept plugging away with his booming forehand and induced enough Djokovic errors to break back three games later.

Faced with that sudden barrage, Djokovic responded in typically combative fashion and gradually wore down Berdych, breaking for a 6-5 lead before serving out the win.

Federer had already clinched a record 13th Tour Finals semi-final place after ending Djokovic's three-month unbeaten run.

## SECURITY CONCERNS OVERSHADOW CLASICO

# Messi could return

AFP, Madrid



An unprecedented level of security will be put in place for Real Madrid's huge clash with Barcelona on Saturday in response to the deadly attacks on Paris a week ago.

The security threat to what is widely regarded as the biggest game in world football, with an estimated global television audience of 500 million, has even overshadowed the return of Lionel Messi for Barcelona after a two-month injury layoff.

Spanish government officials have promised a security presence of 2,400 police, stewards and emergency services to the Santiago Bernabeu to form a triple ring of security around the stadium.

On the field, Barca lead Madrid by three points at the top of the table despite being without Messi for the last two months.

The Argentine seems certain to feature after taking a full part in training this week, but it is still unknown whether coach Luis Enrique will risk his star from the start or allow him to ease back into action from the bench.

"If we can count on Leo from the

Madrid's website.

"I want to keep trying to give my best, to work hard and to help the team win."

Madrid boss Rafael Benitez is hoping to count on a fully-fit squad for the first time this season as goalkeeper Keylor Navas, Sergio Ramos and Marcelo look set to shrug off injuries picked up before the international break.

Dani Carvajal is also expected to replace Danilo at right-back, while Benitez has a big decision over whether to start James Rodriguez after he proved his match fitness by playing 180 minutes for Colombia over the past week.

Other than Messi, Barca's other injury concern is over Ivan Rakitic, who is doubtful with a calf injury.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) and defender Raphael Varane take part in a training session in Madrid yesterday on the eve their El Clasico against Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP

## KEY DUELS

### MARCELO V LIONEL MESSI

Four-time World Player of the Year Messi looks set to return from a two-month injury layoff on the biggest stage where he has so often made the difference. Messi is the top scorer in the history of the fixture and Marcelo will have the unenviable task of marshalling the Argentine defensively, whilst also playing a major role in Madrid's attacks down the left-hand side.

The Brazilian was in the form of his life prior to a thigh injury picked up two weeks ago. He will be fit to start, but whether he is capable of stopping even a rusty Messi will have a huge bearing in deciding if Madrid can draw level with Barca at the top of the table.

### SERGIO RAMOS V LUIS SUAREZ

Suarez recently described Ramos as the toughest defender he has faced, but it was the Uruguayan who got the upper hand when the sides last met with the winner in a 2-1 Barca win. Ramos will play with a pain-killing injection to numb the discomfort from a dislocated left shoulder and Madrid need a captain's display to prevent Suarez adding to his 13 goals in 17 games this season.

### CRISTIANO RONALDO V DANIEL ALVES

Ronaldo also has a formidable record in this fixture with 15 Clasicos goals to his name. Yet, his form has come under the microscope in recent weeks as he has failed to score in seven of Madrid's 11 league games this season.

Alves has also had a dip in form since his exceptional displays at the end of last season earned him a new two-year contract, but throughout his career has at least marshalled Ronaldo better than the vast majority of right-backs.

### LUKA MODRIC V SERGIO BUSQUETS

Often overshadowed by the star strikers on show, Modric and Busquets are the brains of both sides in midfield. Busquets has been lauded by Barca coach Luis Enrique as the "best midfielder in the world" in recent weeks and has taken on the mantle from Xavi Hernandez in setting the rhythm for Barca's passing game.

Modric's influence on Madrid has grown with every season at the Bernabeu and, after a slow start to his Real career, is now considered undroppable.



Children participate in the annual sports event of Tiny Tots Summerfield School at the physical college field in Lalmatia yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON