



# Final in sight

Bangladesh take on Bahrain in first semifinal today

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh will be looking towards their strikers to fire to make it to the final of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup when they take on Bahrain in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The match gets underway from 5:30pm and will be telecast live on Channel 9.

Since a convincing 4-2 win over Sri Lanka in the tournament opener, the home side have struggled to find the target in last two matches where they played out draw against Malaysia XI and Nepal. The lack of scoring from the forwards is the main cause of concern for Bangladesh, who are however pinning hopes on striking duo of Shakhwat Hossain Rony and Nabib Jewaj Jibon ahead of the crucial match against Bahrain, a team which comprises players born between 1995 and 1996.

Even though young Jibon appeared anonymous in all three outings, Rony looked a bit better scoring a brace in the opening match. But he failed to capitalise on a number of chances against Malaysia and Nepal, and the onus is now on the

striking pair to redeem themselves so that the hosts make it to the final, a stage where they played in the last edition too.

"We had good ball possession and created more chances in every match, but there is still weakness in scoring and we have worked on it mentally and physically. Hopefully it will not be a problem tomorrow [Monday] and we will get goals," said Bangladesh coach Maruful Haque at the pre-match conference at the BFF House yesterday.

Not only the strikers, the whole team have been struggling to find rhythm since the SAFF Suzuki Cup where they were eliminated from the group stages with below-par performances, and the team badly needs to get back to the performance they displayed against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan during the World Cup and Asia Cup Qualifying matches on home ground earlier last year.

To replicate that sort of performance, there is no alternative but to perform together as a team starting from the goalkeeper to the strikers alongside the defenders and the midfielders.

"As a player I always want to perform better than the previous match and I think every player thinks that way. We also know that the result

lies on a good performance and we are ready to give our best and get the result," said captain Mamunul Islam.

Mamunul however gave emphasis on the need to ignite the forwards to reduce the pressure on the rest of the team.

"If the forwards can avail early chances, which they are getting in every match, in the semifinal, our confidence level will be high for the rest of the game. Our only target is to make it to the final and everyone has the mentality to perform well," said the lad from Chittagong.

Bangladesh Olympic team's 1-1 draw against Bahrain may be an inspiration for Mamunul and Co, but the captain believes the Bahrain players are more skillful with better running ability and they won't have any chance if they do not run better than the Bahrainis and deliver their best performance in the tournament.

Bahrain coach Marjan Eid was upbeat about his team, labeling them as the 'favourites' against the home side.

"I have confidence in my players. It would be easier for us because they [Bangladesh] have the pressure in front of their home crowd. Hopefully it will be a good game for my young players to get experience," said Eid.



Wayne Rooney scored the winning goal against Liverpool at Anfield yesterday in an intense Barclays Premier League encounter. That goal took Rooney past Thierry Henry's haul of 175 goals for Arsenal, making the English striker the player with the most goals for a single club in the Premier League era.

PHOTO: REUTERS



The Bangladesh players will be looking to shrug off their poor recent performances, and the challenge from the young Bahrain side, in the first semifinal of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

PHOTO: STAR

## Zahid omitted

SPORTS REPORTER

Winger Zahid Hossain has been excluded from the Bangladesh squad for the rest of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup for disciplinary reasons, team manager Ilyas Hossain informed yesterday.

Zahid was sent back home the day before Bangladesh's final group match against Nepal on Friday, however, coach Maruful Haque had at that time said that the midfielder was given rest.

"Zahid has been suspended from the tournament for disciplinary reasons and we will place a report regarding him before the national teams' committee, which will take a further decision on him," said Ilyas.

Even though Ilyas declined to explain the reason for Zahid's dismissal, it has been learnt that the winger took liquor before the day before the Nepal match.

# New year, old Rooney

Gunners top after draw against Stoke

AFP, Liverpool



Manchester United captain Wayne Rooney pounced to score a 78th-minute winner as his side stunned eternal rivals Liverpool with a smash-and-grab 1-0 victory at a freezing Anfield on Sunday.

Presiding over his first game against United, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp watched his team dominate, but Rooney punished their profligacy with his fifth goal in four games, a close range snapshot after Marouane Fellaini had hit the bar.

It was United's first shot on target, but it was enough to give visiting manager Louis van Gaal his fourth win over Liverpool in four games.

Victory took United to within two points of the Champions League places, leaving Liverpool six points back in ninth place.

They may be England's two most decorated clubs, but Liverpool and United are not this season's leading contenders and a scrappy, shapeless first half reflected both clubs' recent difficulties.

Both teams had drawn 3-3 on their previous outings but there was to be no

frenzied attacking to warm the 43,865 shivering souls at Anfield.

What quality football there was came chiefly from Liverpool and, in particular, Roberto Firmino, preferred once again to Christian Benteke as the nominal frontman.

Liverpool could not make their pressure count, however, and with 12 minutes remaining Rooney made them pay by slamming the ball past Simon Mignolet after Fellaini's header came back off the bar.

Liverpool's best chance of an equaliser fell to Firmino, but he could not control Milner's mishit shot right in front of goal and as his disbelieving glance at the linesman testified, there was no offside flag to spare his blushes.

A goalless draw at Stoke left Arsenal top of the Premier League. A share of the spoils at the Britannia Stadium saw Arsenal return to the summit on goal difference ahead of surprise title contenders Leicester City, with both clubs now boasting 44 points from 22 league matches played so far this season.

But for the second time in a matter of days Arsenal were left to reflect on whether they had gained a point or in fact dropped two after a thrilling midweek 3-3 draw with Liverpool

# Real Madrid hit 5 again

AFP, Madrid



Zinedine Zidane's dream start to life as Real Madrid boss continued as Los Blancos scored four times in the opening 18 minutes on their way to a 5-1 rout of Sporting Gijon on Sunday.

However, Madrid's joy was tempered as Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema both had to be replaced due to injuries.

Bale limped off with what looked like the recurrence of a calf problem just before half-time after having scored his 11th goal in eight games.

Benzema and Cristiano Ronaldo also scored twice in the first-half before the former picked up a knock in a collision with teammate James Rodriguez.

Madrid have now scored 35 goals in six games at home since losing to 4-0 to

RESULTS		
Real Madrid	5 - 1	Sporting Gijon
Bale 7, Ronaldo 9, 18, Benzema 12, 41		Lopez 62
Valencia	2 - 2	Vallecano
Negredo 55, Alcaraz 88		Jozabed 15, Lorente 69

Barcelona in November.

Victory takes Madrid above Barcelona and to within a point of leaders Atletico Madrid at the top of La Liga.

However, Atletico and Barca are in action later when they can make up the gap.

Having thrashed Deportivo la Coruna 5-0 in his managerial bow at the Bernabeu last weekend, Zidane made just one change with Raphael Varane replacing injured captain Sergio Ramos.

Earlier, Gary Neville's winless streak as Valencia boss in La Liga stretched to six games in a disappointing 2-2 draw at home to relegation threatened Rayo Vallecano.

# All eyes on Novak, Serena

AFP, Sydney



Novak Djokovic will look to extend his sensational run of form at the Australian Open on Monday as expectations

soar about what he could achieve this year.

The Serbian world number one is yet to drop a set this year and his performance in the Qatar Open final was described as "perfect" by his flummoxed opponent, Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic could even pick up the first ever men's 'Golden Slam' if he manages to unite the four major titles and be crowned Olympic champion at Rio de Janeiro in August.

Roger Federer is also in action on day one, against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili, with Djokovic's other main

challengers Andy Murray and Stanislas Wawrinka starting on Tuesday.

A second Australian Open title for Nadal appears a stretch after his slump in 2015, but Wawrinka, champion in 2014,



NOVAK DJOKOVIC



SERENA WILLIAMS

should be a contender after he beat Djokovic in last year's French Open final.

Meanwhile, in the women's rounds, Serena Williams begins her quest to equal Steffi Graf's Open-era record of 22 Grand Slam titles battling fitness concerns and with a host of players desperate to dethrone the defending champion.

Following a dominant 2015, the world number one is gunning for a seventh Australian crown adamant that she is over the knee problems that hindered her during the latter half of the year and during her Melbourne Park build-up.

She insisted on Saturday she was "120, 130 percent right" as she prepares for a tricky first-round encounter with Italian Camila Giorgi, the highest ranked non-seeded player in the women's draw.

Her three Grand Slam titles last year in Australia and at Roland Garros and Wimbledon took her within one of Graf's long-time record of 22.

Williams is in a tough half of the draw with Russia's Sharapova, seeded five, potentially awaiting her in the quarters.

Sharapova, 28, also lacks match practice after a left forearm problem forced her out of the Brisbane

# De Gea wants legacy at MU

AGENCIES, London

Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea has dismissed talk of a move to Real Madrid and says he wants to become a club legend like Peter Schmeichel.

"I'm happy, I'm enjoying it and I believe in the team," De Gea told Sky Sports.

"[Schmeichel and Van Der Sar] were the greatest goalkeepers in the Premier League, they are legends for this club and that is what I want.

"I train to be the best goalkeeper in the world, that is my aim. I'm not sure who the best is now, but it's what I want. Also, to win trophies for Manchester United."

# Higuain brace widens gap

REUTERS, Milan



Paulo Dybala hit a brace and Alex Sandro struck his maiden Juventus goal in a 4-0 rout away to Udinese that closed the gap on Serie A leaders Napoli to two points on Sunday.

Napoli, who are gunning for a first title in 26 years, went top of the pile on Saturday thanks to a 3-1 win over Sassuolo when striker Gonzalo Higuain took his tally to 20 goals in 20 games, scoring twice.

Juve stayed well in the hunt with a comprehensive win at the Friuli Stadium that gave Massimiliano Allegri's defending champions their 10th consecutive league win.

But Allegri insisted Napoli were the team to beat from the league's leading contenders, telling Mediaset Premium: "Napoli are going along at an impressive pace, so for now they are the favourites, although there are still five teams with the chance to win the title."

RESULTS		
Udinese	0 - 4	Juventus
		Dybala 15, 26-pen, Khedira 18, Sandro 42
Atalanta	1 - 1	Inter Milan
Murillo 17-og		Totoli 25-og
Torino	4 - 2	Frosinone
Immobile 9-pen, Belotti 37, 41, Benassi 82		Sammarco 33, Avelar 73-og
Napoli	3 - 1	Sassuolo

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