

Siddikur ends title drought

Edges Sajib in play-off for BTI Open crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's ace golfer Siddikur Rahman ended a long drought of international success with a thrilling play-off victory in the inaugural BTI Open at the Kurmitola Golf Club in Dhaka yesterday. The two-time Asian Tour winner showed all his experience to stave off the challenge from his younger compatriot Sajib Ali in the play-off after both of them had finished 72 holes with matching scores of 15-under-par (273).

While Sajib, playing only his second international tournament since turning a pro a year ago, fluffed his chance for a birdie to take the play-off to the next hole, Siddikur managed to keep his calm and use his wealth of experience to convert a difficult putter for the title.

The 630,000-taka winner's cheque of this event, co-sanctioned by Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) and Bangladesh Professional Golfers' Association (BPGA), might not seem as much in monetary terms, but it will certainly be a much-needed confidence boost for the golfer, whose career had taken a downward spiral since the Hero Indian Open triumph in November, 2013, owing to a persistent back injury coupled with a loss of form.

The 31-year-old golfer said he was relieved to have finally broken the title-drought at his home course. "Feeling really delighted to win on home soil and winning a very important title after a long time. Everyone knows I struggled a bit during this time due to injury and lack of confidence. This was a big challenge for me and the field was not that easy either. So hopefully this win will augur well for me in international circuit in future," the two-time Asian Tour winner told reporters.

The veteran golfer also reserved praise for Sajib. "I sincerely wished Sajib would win the title, because it would have helped his game a great deal and he also played outstandingly well. But I guess it wasn't to be. Probably my experience made the

difference in the end," said Siddikur.

27-year-old Sajib rued the missed chance, but was nevertheless happy to see the trophy stay at home. "I am obviously disappointed at not making it after coming so close. A win here would have earned me a three-year exemption at the PGTI. But I'm happy anyway that Siddikur bhai won it and that the title remained in Bangladesh," said Sajib.

Siddikur, who began the final round as the joint-leader along with India's Sujjan Singh, managed just two birdies against a bogey on the front-nine and briefly conceded the sole lead to Sujjan for a stretch of three holes. However, he kept it tight on the back-nine with a birdie and a bogey to take the match into a playoff as Sujjan fluffed his chance on the final hole of regulation play.

India's Ajeetesh Sandhu secured fourth place at 12-under-par (276) while his compatriot Deepinder Singh Kullar came in fifth. Bangladesh's Dulal Hossain finished tied sixth while Mohammad Nazim and Jamal Hossain Mollah tied at eighth.



Siddikur Rahman proudly holds the BTI Open 2016 trophy after beating compatriot Sajib Ali in a play-off on the final day at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Spurs slip-up at Liverpool

AFP, Liverpool

Harry Kane's 22nd goal of the Premier League season rescued a point for title-chasing Tottenham Hotspur in a 1-1 draw away to Liverpool on Saturday.

But the result left shock leaders Leicester City four points clear at the top -- and the Foxes will stretch their advantage to seven points if they win at home to Southampton on Sunday.

England striker Kane scored with a superb 62nd minute effort, taking a cross from the quick-footed Christian Eriksen, before turning to beat marker Dejan Lovren and send an unstoppable shot into the corner of the goal.

Kane's goal cancelled out an earlier effort from Liverpool's Brazilian international Philippe Coutinho who struck in the 51st minute of an open contest.

Coutinho started, and emphatically finished, the move, executing a one-two with Daniel Sturridge before beating the diving Tottenham goalkeeper Hugo Lloris with a magnificently-judged right-foot shot from just inside the penalty area.

An absorbing and entertaining game saw both teams play with attacking intent and energy from the outset.

As early as the ninth minute, a super cross-field pass from Danny Rose picked out fellow full-back Kyle Walker and, after a helping touch from Son Heung-Min, Eriksen's well-struck shot was kept out impressively by Simon Mignolet.

Arsenal, City stroll

AFP, London



With the pressure off, Arsenal and Manchester City each breezed to one-sided 4-0 victories on Saturday as they kept their Premier League titles hopes flickering.

Nigerian teenager Alex Iwobi scored for the second game running as Arsenal crushed their FA Cup conquerors Watford, while Kevin De Bruyne netted on his return from injury as City eased to victory at Bournemouth.

West Ham United dropped points in the race for Champions League qualification after Cheikhou Kouyate was sent off in a 2-2 home draw against London rivals Crystal Palace.

Meanwhile, Newcastle United were left six points adrift of safety after Martin Olsson's dramatic 93rd-minute goal earned Norwich City a

potentially pivotal 3-2 win in a relegation tussle at Carrow Road.

Watford's 2-1 win at the Emirates Stadium last month ended Arsenal's two-year reign as FA Cup holders and Arsene Wenger's side claimed a measure of revenge as the teams resumed hostilities in north London.

Alexis Sanchez broke the deadlock in the fourth minute, scoring at the second attempt after Heurelho Gomes had parried his header from Iwobi's cross.

Sanchez returned the favour to Iwobi by teeing up the 19-year-old for a cool finish seven minutes before half-time and second-half goals from Hector Bellerin and Theo Walcott completed victory.

City had a similarly straightforward afternoon at Dean Court as Manuel Pellegrini's men tuned up for their mid-week trip to Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League

quarter-finals by steamrolling Bournemouth.

Fernando opened the scoring in the seventh minute with a neat finish from a Jesus Navas corner before De Bruyne - back in the team after two months out with a knee problem -- volleyed home sweetly from David Silva's flick.

Sergio Aguero added a third goal in the 19th minute with a header from Navas's cross before Aleksandar Kolarov slammed home a fine fourth in stoppage time.

Bottom club Aston Villa are 15 points from safety after their wretched season continued with an abject 4-0 home defeat by Chelsea, for whom Pedro Rodriguez scored twice.

Ruben Loftus-Cheek opened the scoring with his first league goal and Alexandre Pato crowned his long-awaited debut following his January loan move from Corinthians with a penalty in first-half stoppage time.



Former Brazil striker Alexandre Pato is ecstatic after scoring a penalty on his Chelsea debut during their Premier League match against Aston Villa in Birmingham yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

RESULTS

Arsenal 4 (Sanchez 4, Iwobi 38, Bellerin 48, Walcott 90)
Watford 0
Aston Villa 0 Chelsea 4 (Loftus-Cheek 26, Pato 45+3-pen, Pedro 46, 59)
Bournemouth 0 **Manchester City 4** (Fernando 7, De Bruyne 12, Aguero 19, Kolarov 90+3)
Norwich 3 (Klose 45+2, Mbokani 74, Olsson 90+3)
Newcastle 2 (Mitrovic 71, 86-pen)
Stoke 2 (Afellay 13, Bojan 53) **Swansea 2** (Sigurdsson 68, Paloschi 76)
Sunderland 0 **West Brom 0**
West Ham 2 (Lanzini 18, Payet 41) **Crystal Palace 2** (Delaney 15, Gayle 75)

Ribery fires Bayern

REUTERS, Munich



Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery scored a sensational volley to lead the German champions to a 1-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday that sent them eight points clear at the top of the Bundesliga with six matches left.

Frenchman Ribery, who has missed most of the season due to injury, took off at the edge of the box and sent his mid-air volley past Lukas Hradecky in the 20th minute after the keeper had initially saved a shot from Mario Goetze.

It was the 32-year-old's second goal of the campaign after being sidelined for eight months with an ankle problem and then suffering another injury that kept him out until last month.

Bayern found no resistance from

Eintracht and Xabi Alonso rattled the crossbar with a free kick early in the second half with the hosts enjoying close to 70 percent possession.

The treble-chasing Bavarians, who face Benfica in the Champions League quarter-finals next week, are on 72 points with Borussia Dortmund, who host Werder Bremen later on Saturday, on 64.

Schalke 04 failed to climb back into Champions League contention, suffering a 3-0 loss at promoted Ingolstadt to drop to sixth on 44 points.

Argentine Pablo de Blasis struck twice as Mainz 05 battled past Augsburg 4-2 to reclaim fifth spot, ahead of Schalke on goal difference.

Hamburg SV took a big step towards securing their top-flight status, crushing bottom-placed Hanover 96 3-0 with all three goals scored in the second half to move them into 10th place on 34, seven points above the relegation zone.

Djokovic eyes Agassi's record

REUTERS, Miami



Top seed Novak Djokovic overcame a strong challenge from Belgium's David Goffin to reach the Miami Open final with a 7-6(5) 6-4 victory on Friday as he continued his pursuit of a fifth title in six years on Key Biscayne.

The Serbian world number one shrugged off a slow start in tough on-court conditions before hitting his stride, and sealed the win with a powerful first serve that forced a wayward Goffin return to end an encounter that lasted just over two hours.

Australian Open champion Djokovic improved his stellar record for the year to 27-1 and will next face Japan's Kei Nishikori, who ousted Australian Nick Kyrgios 6-3 7-5 in the second semi-final.

The 28-year-old Djokovic, a five-times champion in Miami, is bidding to match Andre Agassi's record of six titles at the event and earn a record 28th ATP World Tour Masters 1000 crown.

Nishikori made his first Miami final by taking out brash young Australian Kyrgios in some style.

Teen escapes with caution

AFP, London

A teenage football fan who was arrested after West Bromwich Albion midfielder Chris Brunt was struck in the face by a coin will face no further action, police announced Friday.

The Northern Ireland midfielder was hit by a coin thrown from among Albion supporters when he went to give his shirt to a supporter at the end of the team's shock FA Cup fifth-round loss to Reading on February 20.

"A 17-year-old boy has been given a youth caution for using threatening or abusive words or behaviour or disorderly behaviour," a police spokesperson said in a statement published on BBC Sport's website.

MU target top three

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United have edged their way back into contention for a Champions League place in recent weeks, with manager Louis

van Gaal declaring that a top-three finish is still realistic. Van Gaal has been buoyed by the public support in recent days of Alex Ferguson, who called on United fans to be patient as the current manager awaits his first trophy with the club after almost two full seasons in charge.

Having been six points adrift of fourth-placed Manchester City in mid-February, United are now just one point behind going into the weekend's fixtures.

A 1-0 win at City two weeks ago was United's third victory in four league matches, and softened some of the disappointment that came with a Europa League exit at the hands of bitter rivals Liverpool.

Sunday's home game against Everton offers the opportunity to keep the pressure on in the chase for fourth, but Van Gaal has

set his sights higher than that.

"We are still capable of being in the top three in the league," he said. "We believe in it, and the players believe in that, which is much more important. We can win the FA Cup. We have a lot to fight for."

"We have five matches at home and three away, and that is also a benefit, I think. I hope that we show that in the next match."

"If you have to succeed a man like Ferguson, the expectations are very high. He mentioned in his interview that he did not win a trophy for nearly four years. That's a good example that you cannot change a team in one year. I have said before it is a process. Many times I was laughed at, but it is like that."

United will be without midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger for the Everton game, as he is likely to miss the rest of the season after tearing knee ligaments while training with Germany during the recent international break.

United captain Wayne Rooney is not ready to return against his former club, having been absent since mid-February with knee ligament damage.

34TH NATIONAL BADMINTON

Ayman, Shapla win singles titles

SPORTS REPORTER



Ayman Ibne Zaman and Shapla Akter were crowned singles champions of the Gazi Group 34th National Badminton Championship after they clinched the finals at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Gymnasium yesterday. Young Ayman, representing Bangladesh Railway, beat former champion Enamul Haque in straight sets (21-6, 18-21) for his second successive title while Shapla edged her Narayanganj teammate Elna Sultana in three sets (15-21, 21-7, 21-19) to win the national title for the fifth time.

Shapla also won the women's doubles title as well as mixed doubles title for the fifth treble of her career. The Narayanganj shuttler teamed up with Elna in women's doubles and she paired up with Abdul Hannan for the mixed doubles crown. The men's doubles title was won by Jamil Ahmed and Rahat Kabir, who beat Ebadul Haque and Joyal Abedin pair in three sets.

Secretary of National Sports Council Ashok Kumar Biswas distributed the prizes as the chief guest where deputy secretary general of Bangladesh Olympic Association, Ashikur Rahman Miku, was also present.



Ayman Ibne Zaman receives the men's singles trophy from the organisers and federation officials at the end of the Gazi Group 34th National Badminton Championship at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Gymnasium yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY