

THE SHIELD OF OXFENFORD

Umpire Bruce Oxenford was involved in a landmark incident without even giving a decision as he pioneered the use of a protective shield for officials in international cricket on Friday. The 56-year-old Australian's left forearm was clad in what looked like a cut-down riot shield as he stood in the second one-day international between England and Sri Lanka at Edgbaston. There have long been concerns regarding the safety of officials, particularly in the case of an umpire standing at the bowler's end. Those concerns intensified when an Israeli umpire was killed in a club match last year after the ball ricocheted off the stumps and hit him in the head. An ECB spokesman told AFP that if the ball deflected off the shield and was then caught by a fielder, the batsman would be given out.



—AFP

Abahani in final

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani moved into the final of the Federation Cup after four seasons following a 2-1 win over Sheikh Russel KC in the second semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The Sky Blues, who would take on Arambagh KS in the final on Monday, put in a much-improved performance from their 2-1 win over Brothers Union in the quarterfinal and made it to the final for the first time since their eighth Federation Cup triumph in 2010.

Abahani coach George Kottan picked Senegalese marksman Camara Sarba ahead of English forward Lee Tuck and the move paid off as Nigerian striker Sunday Chizoba shrugged off his poor form by pairing up with Sarba.

The two threatened the Sheikh Russel KC defence time and again before the latter opened the scoring in the fifth minute.

Wing-back Wali Faisal played a perfect lob inside the box and Sunday chested it down to dink it over Sheikh Russel's onrushing goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton before unmarked Camara nodded the ball home from hand-shaking distance.

Abahani kept pressing and came close to doubling the lead two minutes later

when Sarba put a defence-splitting ball through for Sunday, but the Nigerian saw his placing shot to the far post narrowly miss the target.

With both teams playing fast-paced football, Sheikh Russel gained some momentum and kept the Abahani defenders on their toes with crosses from both flanks.

Shahedul Alam Shaded tried his luck with a 35-yarder which narrowly missed the target with Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel completely beaten in the 37th minute.

From a quick counter-attack in the next minute, Abahani shook the Sheikh Russel defence yet again when Sunday, after availing a cut-back from Sarba, darted into the box but Liton this time was there to foil the attack.

Liton then denied winger Jewel Rana one minute into the second half to keep Sheikh Russel in the match before substitute Rumman Hossain, playing a one-two with Paul Emile, equalised the margin in the 64th minute by placing the ball to the left-hand side of the onrushing Sohel.

But Abahani restored the lead just five minutes later when Sunday ran down from the left flank and curled one in from outside the box which embraced the net giving no chance to Liton. And that proved to be the deciding strike as the Sky Blues held on to the lead for the rest of the match.

SHEIKH RUSSEL	-	1
ABAHANI	-	2



Abahani striker Sunday Chizoba (R) shoots powerfully at the Sheikh Russel goal during their Walton Federation Cup semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Iceland shirt sales rocket

AGENCIES, Reykjavik

Sales of Iceland's home shirt have risen by an astronomical 1800 per cent on the back of their remarkable Euro 2016 campaign, one online retailer has revealed.

The minnows sent shockwaves around the continent after booking their place in the knockout stages by going unbeaten in Group F, finishing above both Portugal and Austria.

Iceland secured back-to-back draws against Portugal and Hungary before beating Austria to set up a clash with England in the round of 16.

Guus ready to help Russia

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Guus Hiddink, who led Russia to the 2008 European Championship semi-finals, said he would be happy to return to his former side as they look to put the misery of an early Euro 2016 exit behind them and prepare for the World Cup in two years' time.

The Dutchman, who took on the role of interim Chelsea manager after Jose Mourinho's sacking last year, has been linked with the job in the wake of Russia's poor campaign in France.

Reawakened Ronaldo faces Croatia test

AFP, Lens



Cristiano Ronaldo awoke from his Euro 2016 slumber in time to rescue Portugal from an early exit, but faces a greater challenge against a classy Croatia side that Portugal coach Fernando Santos called "sharks".

Ronaldo made history as the first player to score in four European Championships with a double in a thrilling 3-3 draw with Hungary. The result saw Portugal just squeeze through behind Iceland and Hungary in third-place in Group F.

The Real Madrid star has more records in his sights as he is just one goal behind French legend Michel Platini's mark of nine in European Championship finals.

However, Ronaldo refused to accept Portugal were underdogs against a Croatia side that shocked two-time defending champions Spain to top Group D.

"We made it and now we face a very good team, but the odds are 50/50," said Ronaldo.

"Croatia are a tough team, with good players. Not every team manages to beat Spain.

"We respect them, but we know our strengths and we'll look them in the eye when we face them."

Croatia are likely to be even stronger for Saturday's clash in Lille (1900GMT) than against Spain with the return of Ronaldo's Real Madrid teammate Luka Modric from injury.

Juventus frontman Mario Mandzukic is also likely to shake off a knock to retake his

place after Croatia coach Ante Cacic made five changes for the historic win over Spain.

"Croatia are one of the sharks we had been trying to avoid," admitted Portugal boss Santos.

"They placed first in a group with Spain, which tells you all you need to know about them."

However, Santos has placed his faith in Ronaldo to again answer his country's call after his double strike.

"This will have increased his confidence levels. He's a confident player anyway, but this will have boosted him for the next game against Croatia."

For Croatia a bright start to a tournament in France has rekindled memories of their fairytale run to the World Cup semi-finals in 1998 before losing out to the hosts 2-1.

Ivan Perisic was the hero against Spain, drilling home the winner three minutes from time.

However, Croatia cannot get carried away despite finding themselves in the weaker half of the draw avoiding Germany, France, Italy, Spain or England until the final.

"We made a really great job in the group stages, but this is just the beginning. If we lose the next match this doesn't mean anything," Perisic said.

"We have to stay at the same level and fight as we did in the first three matches if we want to recreate memories of 1998."

The sour note for Croatia has come off the field as their football federation (HNS) was fined 100,000 euros (\$113,000) for disturbances when fans threw flares onto the pitch during a 2-2 draw with the Czech Republic last week.

No Messi in squad for Rio Games

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Gerardo Martino on Thursday named part of his squad for the Rio Olympics but superstar Lionel Messi was not included after being chosen for the Copa America instead.

The full list of 22 will be revealed in the coming days but not before Sunday's final of the Copa, where Argentina take on holders Chile.

Messi's exclusion was expected. He won gold at the Beijing Olympics but Martino had already decided that the Barcelona star would not compete at both the Copa and the Olympics in August.

Nine players were named in the squad on Thursday.

They were Giovanni Lo Celso (Rosario Central), Geronimo Rulli (Real Sociedad), Angel Correa (Atletico Madrid), Emmanuel Mammana (River Plate), Jonathan Silva (Boca Juniors), José Luis Gomez (Lanus), Mauricio Martinez (Union), Leandro Paredes (Empoli) and Cristian Espinoza (Huracan).

Lippi walks away from FIGC post

AFP, Montpellier



Italy's plans for a smooth build-up to their crunch Euro 2016 clash with Spain on Monday suffered a blow after World Cup-winning coach Marcelo Lippi walked away from a key post with the Italian football federation (FIGC).

Lippi, who led the Azzurri to their fourth World Cup triumph in 2006, was set to become Italy's new technical director, a post that would have seen him oversee an all-new federation programme.

He was set to work alongside former Torino coach Giampiero Ventura, who will replace Italy's Chelsea-bound current coach, Antonio Conte, as national boss later this summer.

But the fallout from a conflict of interest has ended Lippi's hopes of joining the FIGC and helping to revive the national team after years of mismanagement and mediocre performances on the pitch.

Lippi's son Davide has worked as a players' agent for over 10 years -- meaning Lippi's appointment would be against federation rules.

FIGC president Carlo Tavecchio took the case to a federal court for clarification and their ruling is set to be delivered by the end of June.

Lippi, however, delivered a pre-emptive strike when he refused the post claiming his

appointment would be "manipulated" against him.

FIGC president Carlo Tavecchio, speaking to media at Italy's Euro 2016 training base in Montpellier on Friday, said he regretted Lippi's decision.

"You all know how much I wanted Lippi to become the technical director of the national team," said Tavecchio.

"But when you're faced having to interpret a legal issue, I immediately requested guidance from the federal court. I had no choice.

"I can understand his (Lippi's) regrets." Lippi on Thursday appeared to grow tired of waiting. He told Tavecchio by phone that he would be walking away from the project.

"I'm leaving. I told the president this morning," Lippi was reported as saying on a website report by La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I'm very sorry about this, but I'm leaving because I understand what is going to

happen in the future and I don't like it."

Lippi is considered one of the world's most successful football coaches, having won a World Cup, five Serie A titles, an Italian Cup, the Champions League, three Chinese Super League titles, an AFC Champions League, one UEFA Supercup and one Intercontinental Cup.

He also remains the only coach to have won the UEFA Champions League and the AFC Champions League.



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) controls the ball during a training session in Marcoussis yesterday on the eve of their Euro 2016 Round of 16 match against Croatia.

PHOTO: AFP

An all-British affair

REUTERS, Paris



The world's most expensive player, Gareth Bale of Wales, will face an ageing goalkeeper looking for a club in Saturday's intriguing all-British showdown against fellow debutants Northern Ireland for a place in the quarter-finals of Euro 2016.

Bale, who has scored a goal in each game so far to help Wales top their group ahead of England, was expected to shine on the pitches of France.

It is a different story for Michael McGovern, whose heroics in the Northern Ireland goal have earned him a comparison to the great Pat Jennings by coach Martin O'Neill.

While Bale, 26, features prominently in the star-studded Real Madrid outfit, the 31-year-old McGovern is a free agent whose contract with struggling Scottish side Hamilton Academical has just expired.

The two now hold the key to Saturday's battle of the European championship first-timers at Parc des Princes, which Wales will start with an advantage after their convincing displays in the group stages showcased Bale's pace, skills and set-piece expertise.

Northern Ireland, making their first appearance at a major tournament since the 1982 World Cup, advanced as one of the best third-placed teams, taking full advantage of the expanded 24-team format which helped the less-fancied sides win a moment

in the sun.

They enjoyed that moment, showing plenty of fighting spirit, helped by a string of fine saves from McGovern, who was instrumental in limiting the damage in a 1-0 defeat by world champions Germany.

"A few people didn't give us a chance of getting a point when the draw was made," said defender Gareth McAuley. "But that's what Northern Ireland are all about -- proving people wrong."

It cannot be argued that Wales are not highly dependent on Bale, the world record 85 million pounds (\$121.21 million) forward having scored seven of their 11 goals in qualifying before hitting three more in the opening phase of the tournament to top the scorers' table alongside Spain's Alvaro Morata.

"At times, Bale has won games extraordinarily," said Wales coach Chris Coleman. "I can understand the one-man team tag if you have a player like him who plays for Real Madrid. He fits our style of play and he enjoys it."

Wales are likely to take the initiative in Saturday's game with Northern Ireland shutting up shop at the back to rely on their trademark, counter-attacking tactics.

The winners will go on to meet Hungary or Belgium in Lille.

Whatever happens on Saturday, both teams know they can rely on some of the most passionate fans in the tournament and there should be plenty of colour and noise in the Parc des Princes stands.

Nolito thought Brexit's a dance

REUTERS, Paris

Spain forward Nolito has a lot to learn if he ends up joining former Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola at Manchester City.

Nolito, linked with the Premier League club in media reports, was caught by surprise when asked at Euro 2016 if he knew what Brexit was.

"I think it's a dance or maybe I'm wrong," he told Spanish radio. "A dance that they do in the NBA."

Britain voted in a referendum on Thursday to leave the European Union in a move dubbed Brexit.

The 29-year-old Nolito, coming off a superb season with Celta Vigo, is playing in his first major tournament with the national team and started all three group games.

"In life you need to be brave and take decisions. I try to take the right decisions," he said when asked about a possible move to Manchester.

Spain play Italy on Monday in the last 16.