



Safwan underlines his credentials

SPORTS REPORTER

British-born Bangladeshi boxer Al Safwan Uddin advanced to the second round of the 29th Senior Men's Boxing Championships by knocking out Kamruzzaman Jonny in the first of three rounds of their 60kg weight category bout, on the opening day of the competition, at the Muhammad Ali Boxing Stadium yesterday.

Though the young pugilist is under the age limit, Safwan was afforded the opportunity to participate in the national boxing championships and compete against his seniors. Jonny, from Dinajpur DSA, was knocked down twice before being ultimately knocked out within the three-minute first round and left the ring with his nose still bleeding.

Safwan is now set to face Faisal Mollah of Bangladesh Army in a semifinal match today.

After communicating with the Bangladesh Amateur Boxing Federation (BABF), Safwan and his father Joblu Uddin arrived in Bangladesh a week ago to compete in the national championships in hopes of drawing the federation's attention so that he may represent Bangladesh at an international level.

"Safwan, who is 18 plus, is not eligible to compete against senior boxers according to the laws but we gave him the opportunity to see him in the ring. In the first game he did well but we will be able to judge him tomorrow [Friday] when he takes on a boxer from services team," BABF general secretary MA Kuddus Khan said yesterday.

"We want to keep hope on Safwan because his style of play is good and he can be a good boxer if good training is provided," Khan continued. "If Safwan does well in the national championships, then we will call him in the national team's trial for the 2019 SA Games."

Khan might even consider sending Safwan to the Kings Cup Boxing Championship in Thailand this June if the youngster impresses at this national championship.

SA Games gold medallist Abdur Rahim saw Safwan in the ring and termed him a good boxer with good techniques and a strong punch but opined that he needs

advanced training to compete at the top level.

BKSP coach-cum-judge SM Mahfuz Hossain echoed the sentiment but added that it was mostly Safwan's punches that had Jonny down three times in quick succession in his first match of the tournament.

"However, it is not clear about his stamina and techniques as he did not face any challenges from the opponents. We could have figured him out had he played full three rounds," said Mahfuz.

Meanwhile his father Joblu informed that Safwan, the first of four sons, is personally motivated to represent Bangladesh at the international level and that he set up the communications with federation officials by himself.

"It is an introduction to Safwan, local boxers and officials know Safwan as he came to Bangladesh many times before but



Boxer Al Safwan Uddin is all smiles as he walks into the Muhammad Ali Boxing Stadium yesterday and he walked out much the same after KO-ing his opponent in the very first round of their bout. PHOTO: STAR

this time he has come to participate in the tournament," said Joblu, who migrated to England in 1995.

"We did not come here for money, rather we want to give something to the nation. If Safwan is selected for the national team, I am ready to provide him better training in England because I have already spent a lot of money behind him," informed Joblu.

Meanwhile, another British-born boxer Bryan Ahmed also represented Bangladesh in the SA Games in 1993 but did not shine at the tournament.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo showed up on the biggest of occasions yet again, plundering two goals against Paris Saint-Germain as the two-time reigning European champions secured a 3-1 win in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 fixture at the Bernabeu on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldo wins round one

Not over yet, Neymar warns after 3-1 defeat

AFP, Madrid



Paris Saint-Germain face a huge task to reach the Champions League quarterfinals after Cristiano Ronaldo defied talk that his powers are waning with two goals as Real Madrid won 3-1 in the first leg of their last-16 tie.

Billed as a contest between World Player of the Year Ronaldo and Brazilian heir-in-waiting Neymar, the 33-year-old Portuguese came out emphatically on top as he became the first player to score 100 Champions League goals for the same club.

"He who never fails," said sports daily Marca of Ronaldo's latest decisive contribution on a pulsating evening at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Ronaldo dragged Real level with a penalty -- his 100th Champions League goal for the club -- after Adrien Rabiot had given PSG the lead, fed by a cheeky Neymar backheel.

As PSG seemed to be heading for a draw that would have put the French side in the driving seat for the return leg on March 6, Ronaldo turned the match in Madrid's favour with a scrappy goal that bounced in off his knee.

Marcelo then completed the turnaround to show PSG -- who have never won the Champions League -- the value of the experience of winning the competition 12 times.

Zinedine Zidane's side have been flagging domestically, leaving the French coach under pressure, but Madrid's other major sports daily As called the performance "the late push of a team who still rule in Europe".

"Real Madrid love the Champions League and as players we can feel that on the pitch," Ronaldo said after being

named man of the match. "Today things worked out for me, scoring two goals and helping the team win, but we know the tie is not finished yet."

Neymar, who cut a dejected figure at the end, said his side "committed errors at certain moments".

"We didn't play badly, but I think we need to be better if we want to eliminate Real Madrid. It is difficult, but nothing is impossible," the 26-year-old Brazilian said.

The return leg at the Parc des Princes will be the hottest ticket in Europe.

Zidane will take credit for sending on Marco Asensio, who set up the two late goals, although Alfredo Relano in AS warned that the youngster now "has to play every time".

TRIVIA

The only other time PSG were defeated 3-1 in an away first leg of a European game was back in March 1993 against Real Madrid. Paris qualified in the second leg with a 4-1 win.

Only four of the 12 teams to have lost the first leg 1-3 away from home in the Champions League have qualified after the second leg.

Wednesday was the first time that Paris Saint-Germain lost a game on Valentine's Day. They had won seven and drawn three prior.

Under Zinedine Zidane, Real Madrid have won 10 of their 14 Champions League knockout games, lifting the trophy twice in as many seasons.

The Frenchman, meanwhile, paid tribute to Ronaldo, who despite showing signs of fallibility in La Liga this season has scored 11 goals in Europe in just seven matches.

"With Ronaldo it's difficult to always say the same thing. He has shown once again that he always turns up in the big games," Zidane said.

PSG coach Unai Emery, who has never been further than the Champions League round of 16 in five previous attempts, gambled with a young line-up, starting with 21-year-old Argentinian midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso and 22-year-old defender Presnel Kimpembe.

He also took off Edinson Cavani in the second half, replacing the club's all-time record goal-scorer with a right-back in Thomas Meunier rather than Angel di Maria.

"Emery, bets lost", said France's L'Equipe, although the front page of the sports daily struck a defiant tone, saying: "It's not finished".

Emery tried to turn the focus on Italian referee Gianluca Rocchi, saying the penalty the hosts got for a Lo Celso challenge on Toni Kroos was soft. He also felt his side should have had a spot-kick for a Sergio Ramos handball.

"When we play against a big team, it's the same, always," bemoaned PSG president Nasser Al Khelaifi. "Last year against Barcelona, this year against Real Madrid. OK, Real Madrid are a big club, but that's enough now. UEFA have to do something."



Real Madrid defender Marcelo (L) put in a man-of-the-match performance against PSG and scored a deserved goal, which he celebrated with manager Zinedine Zidane. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Federer two wins from history

AFP, Rotterdam

Roger Federer delivered a crushing 6-1, 6-2 defeat of Ruben Bemelmans in just 47 minutes on Wednesday as the Swiss star moved just two wins away from becoming the sport's oldest world number one.

The 36-year-old top seed, a two-time champion at the Dutch indoor event, needs to reach the semi-finals to take back the number one spot from Rafael Nadal.

With two more victories, Federer would become the oldest man by three years to hold the top position in the rankings.

"It's very surprising how good things went today," Federer said. "The key is to start well, put him under pressure."

"I wanted to make him think he had to do something special to beat me. I did well there, I felt good, I'm healthy and I'm confident. It was a great first round for me."

Federer gave no quarter as he raced to a 5-0 lead, with the out-matched Bemelmans winning his first game after 16 minutes.

The outcome was never in doubt as Federer dominated with six aces and four service breaks, winning an impressive 21 of 23 first-serve points in the demolition.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion on Thursday takes on German Philipp Kohlschreiber, against whom he stands 12-0 in career meetings.

"You always prefer to play the guy whose game you know," Federer said. "You know his patterns, it's nice to play someone like that, you know what to expect."

"My start will be crucial, I need to stay focused all the way. Any lapses can get you into trouble."

Third seed Alexander Zverev fell in an upset to qualifying lucky loser Andreas Seppi of Italy, 6-4, 6-3 in the second round to open up Federer's half of the draw.

Germany remain top

AFP, Lausanne

World champions Germany remain top of the FIFA rankings published on Thursday as there was no move in the top 10 during a last month in which few internationals took place.

Iceland were the only climbers in the top 20, up two places having thrashed Indonesia twice in January.

Olympic champions Brazil are second in the rankings with European title-holders Portugal third.

Mexico are the top north and central American team in 17th, Tunisia lead the Africans in 23rd while 33rd-ranked Iran are leading in Asia.

The top 10 is dominated by Europe with seven teams, while South America provides the other three.

TOP TEN

1. Germany
2. Brazil
3. Portugal
4. Argentina
5. Belgium
6. Spain
7. Poland
8. Switzerland
9. France
10. Chile

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QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Controversy follows Ronaldo's penalty
Controversy has followed the bizarre penalty that Cristiano Ronaldo scored at the Bernabeu against PSG. The ball appeared to have popped up slightly right at the moment that Cristiano was about to hit the ball as if by witchcraft. Initially it was speculated that the forward had disturbed the ball in a way so as to make it pop up just slightly.

Barca face team dilemma in visit to Eibar
Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde faces a dilemma before his side's potentially tricky trip to in-form Eibar, having watched his side's seemingly unassailable La Liga lead cut to seven points from 11 in the last two weeks.

Infantino says Italy's WC failure a wake-up call
FIFA president Gianni Infantino revealed his despair at Italy's failure to reach the World Cup finals where he had hoped to hand the trophy to Azzurri captain Gianluigi Buffon. "I'm sad, yes I'm sad for the World Cup. I almost cried," Infantino, who holds both Swiss and Italian nationality, said.

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