

RASHFORD THANKS RONALDO FOR NEW SHOES

Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford took to his Instagram page to thank Cristiano Ronaldo as the Portuguese sent him a pair of red Nike Air Max 97 CR7 shoes. Former United star Ronaldo may not have been close with Rashford during his time at Old Trafford - the Wythenshawe forward would have been 11 at the time Ronaldo left for Madrid - but he was more than willing to sort out some new footwear. Known as the 'Portugal Patchwork' design, the trainers have been designed to pay homage to Ronaldo's mother; she used to patch his shoes back together when he was younger as he would continually create holes in them. The trainers carry Ronaldo's CR7 mark on the heel inside a golden sphere.



AGENCIES



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo will be hoping to add to his tally of 14 Champions League goals as he aims to shatter his single-season record of 17 goals in the second leg of the quarterfinal against Juventus tonight.

Ronaldo better than ever

Real face Juventus in return leg today

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo has already broken one record in this year's Champions League but against Juventus in their quarterfinal return on Wednesday he can edge closer to beating a bigger milestone of his own. Ronaldo's bicycle kick in Real Madrid's 3-0 first leg victory last week ensured he passed Ruud van Nistelrooy's feat by scoring in 10 consecutive Champions League games. But the Portuguese also now stands just three goals short of his best ever tally in a single European campaign, an achievement that would suggest this Ronaldo, aged 33, may even be the finest version yet.

His 14 goals so far have come over nine matches and featured doubles against APOEL, Borussia Dortmund, Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus.

It means this is Ronaldo's third most prolific Champions League showing to date already and, with Real almost certain to reach the semifinals, he is unlikely to finish here.

When he posted 16 goals in the 2015-16 tournament and his personal best of 17 in 2013-14, both times Real were crowned champions.

"Cristiano is Cristiano, it's always been like that," coach Zinedine Zidane said after Ronaldo opened the scoring against Atletico Madrid on Sunday. "There's no other player in the team that scores like he does."

There is no doubt Ronaldo's game is now more streamlined and therefore more geared towards goals than perhaps it has ever been before. To preserve his fitness and

energy, he accepts less touches and covers less ground. The touches he takes and the spaces he finds are aimed at creating the greatest chance of hitting the net.

Even Zidane's system is suited to accommodating this predator Ronaldo, a 4-4-2, with Karim Benzema playing the supporting role and wingers instructed to supply deliveries into the box.

When Ronaldo volleyed in from eight yards against Atletico, it was a simple cross to the back post from Gareth Bale that provided it. In this mould, Ronaldo could be terrorising goalkeepers for a fair few years yet.

Zidane withdrew his star player in the 64th minute last weekend, despite the match being delicately poised at 1-1 after Antoine Griezmann's equaliser.

The draw keeps Atletico four points clear of Real, and favourites for second place in La Liga, but Ronaldo going off early in a Madrid derby, without any protest, is a measure of how the Champions League is now all-encompassing for Los Blancos.

"He is intelligent," Zidane said about Ronaldo's substitution. "There are moments where he does not play and others where he does. He needs it, he knows that and he is better every day."

Luka Modric and Karim Benzema were also left out of the starting line-up at the Santiago Bernabeu while Bale played 90 minutes, an indicator the Welshman is set for another European snub in midweek.

Bale's first choice is still to regain favour under Zidane and then stay at Real this summer but his coach is showing little sign of softening. Zidane made three substitutions last week in Turin but Bale remained rooted to the bench.

MSC, Sk Russel to lose 3 points

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is all set to deduct three points each from Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel in line with FIFA instructions. The deduction comes following an appeal filed to the world football governing body, to which there was no response.

FIFA had instructed the BFF last year to deduct three points each from Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel in the Bangladesh Premier League after both clubs failed to clear unpaid wages to its coach and players.

As per the statement from the BFF, Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel have already cleared the due wages and had applied to FIFA to exempt them from the points deduction on last season's league table.

"As we are yet to get any reply from FIFA about an exemption from the point deduction penalty, we have to follow the previous instructions from FIFA and deduct points from Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel to finalise last season's Bangladesh Premier League table," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, adding that they will soon sit at a league committee meeting to finalise the table.

Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel had finished fifth and sixth in the 12-team league with 32 and 27 points respectively and the league standings will not be affected even after the deduction of points.

Abahani hoping to turn the tide

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani will be looking to get their first points in the AFC Cup when they square off against I-League champions Aizawl FC at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium in Guwahati today.

The match will get underway at 7:00pm (BST).

The two winless sides are set to face each other for the first time but on the basis of their previous games in the tournament, five-time professional football league champions Abahani are tipped to be ahead of Aizawl -- a Northeastern Indian club who entered the top flight of Indian football in 2016 but clinched the I-League the following season.

Aizawl conceded six goals in two previous matches against Bengaluru FC and New Radiant SC, while Abahani have let slip just two goals from as many games. However, Aizawl may be comforted by the fact that they have found the net twice across those two matches while Abahani are yet to score.

Despite their failure in front of goal, Abahani coach Saiful Bari Titu wants to turn the tides in their third match and seemed determined to get their first points after two successive defeats.

"We will play two successive matches against Aizawl, away and home, respectively. I think these two matches are very important for us to turn [things] around," Saiful told The Daily Star over phone from Assam yesterday.

Titu may have been complacent given the fact that his side only went down narrowly to Bengaluru FC and New Radiant SC while Aizawl suffered big defeats against the same opposition. However, Titu was

well-aware that his Nigerian striking duo of Emeka Darlington and Sunday Chizoba must fire on all cylinders against Aizawl, who have foreign players from Romania, Liberia, Ivory Coast and Nigeria in their ranks.

The return of Sunday Chizoba, who missed the previous match against Bengaluru due to a one-match suspension, will definitely be a boost for Abahani, who will also be getting back the crucial services of fit-again midfielder Emon Babu.

"Scoring has been a problem for Abahani as we didn't score any goals but we could have drawn points had we struck goals in the last two matches," said Titu, who will be banking on Emeka and Sunday in a bid to get three points against Aizawl.

"I conducted a special training for Emeka and Sunday in the practice sessions and made them understand that they must put more effort in the attacking third to get goals. If Sunday starts to get goals, then everything will change."

Titu's charges lagged behind Bengaluru FC in the second half and conceded the decisive goal in the last moment, but the coach said they would attempt to play the next full 90 minutes in the same rhythm, although he faced some problems in getting a proper blend of the team after seven Abahani players returned from the national football team.

Another interesting aspect is that Abahani have not played a match since March 14 while Aizawl have played two games -- a 2-2 draw against Chennaiyin and a 1-0 defeat to East Bengal in the AIF Super Cup -- on March 30 and April 8 respectively.

"Despite the hectic schedule, we will not have any excuses. We will give our best and fight to win three points tomorrow," Aizawl FC coach Santosh Kashyap was quoted as saying by the club's Facebook page.

Seven teams send entries for Club Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Hockey season will finally get underway on April 15 at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium through the Club Cup Hockey Tournament, which was last held in 2016.

Though 12 of the available 13 took part in the inter-club players' transfers which concluded last Saturday, it remains unclear how many teams will actually take part in the tournament as only seven have sent their entries so far.

"The number of clubs may be eight to 10 in the Club Cup as only seven teams showed their interest to play in the competition till today [Tuesday]," said League committee secretary Kazi Moinuzzaman Pila after a league committee meeting, which also decided to start the hockey league on April 28.

"Though Usha KC did not take part in the transfers, we will keep them in the fixtures. If they skip the league, we will reschedule the fixture and take a decision about Usha KC later," said Pila while adding that no representative from Usha attended the meeting.

Independence Day Kabaddi final today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Independence Day Kabaddi Championship, organised by the Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation, began at Pabna Stadium yesterday, with eight participating teams.

On the opening day, Joyprhat defeated Pabna 40-22 while Sirajganj beat Naogaon 37-17. Rajshahi also won against Chapainwabganj 79-22 and Bogra edged Natore 39-32.

The winners will play the semifinal today, with the final being held afterwards on the same day.



Abahani coach Saiful Bari Titu (2nd from R) and his Aizawl FC counterpart Santosh Kashyap shake hands ahead of their teams' AFC Cup clash in Guwahati today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Salahuddin's 3rd term from today

SPORTS REPORTER



Incumbent president Kazi Salahuddin will officially be declared the president of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) for his third term today during the SAFF congress, which will be held at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the presence of higher-ups from national football associations across the world. Salahuddin was the lone candidate

for SAFF presidency when he submitted his nomination papers, which were found to be flawless.

Sri Lanka's Anura De Silva and Pakistan's Syed Khadim Ali Shah are the two candidates for three vice-presidential posts. A Nepalese member had submitted his nomination for vice-presidency after the deadline on March 27.

Apart from the members of the SAFF, some high-profile officials from North America and Africa are also expected to be in attendance.

"The representatives of the 2026 FIFA World Cup bidders -- USA, Mexico and Canada -- are expected to be present at the SAFF Congress as observers while CAF [Confederation of African Football] president Ahmad Ahmad, South Korea Football Association president Chung Mong-Gyu and a general secretary from 2026 FIFA World Cup bidder Morocco are also expected to attend," said SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal while adding that all those officials were scheduled to reach Dhaka by last night.

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