



What to WATCH

GTV, STAR SPORTS 1 & SELECT 1
Asia Cup
 Pakistan v Hong Kong
 Live from 5:30pm

TEN 1
Serie A
 Roma v Chievo
 Live from 4:30pm
 Udinese v Torino
 Live from 7:00pm

TEN 2
La Liga
 Leganes v Villarreal
 Live from 4:00pm
Serie A
 Juventus v Sassuolo

Live from 7:00pm
 Empoli v Lazio
 Live from 10:00pm
 Cagliari v Inter Milan
 Live from 12:30am (Monday)

Maldives have the last laugh

Beat seven-time champions India 2-1 in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Maldives emerged champions of the SAFF Suzuki Cup after ending seven-time champions India's run with a 2-1 win in the final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

It was revenge for Maldives, who had lost to India in shootout at the same ground in the 2009 final, and the Islanders became the second team after India to clinch the regional title more than once.

Ibrahim Hussain and Ali Fasir scored one goal each for Maldives before substitute Sumeet Passi pulled one back for India. The youthful India side took the pressure of playing the final and their performance was a shadow of the ones against Sri Lanka, Maldives and archrivals Pakistan in the group stages and the semifinal.

The men in blue seemed to start the match on the wrong foot even though they were strong down the left flank. They initially launched most of their attacks through left-winger Ashique Kuruniyan, who however struggled to find the target inside the danger zone. And when Kuruniyan and right-winger Nikhil Chandra Shekhar did deliver good crosses, there were no strikers on hand to threaten the Maldives backline.

The Maldivians, meanwhile, looked much better compared to their performances from their group-stage matches, especially in the 2-0 defeat against India in the group stage.

Both teams tried to control the midfield, but play was mostly confined to midfield before Maldives took the lead in the 19th minute. Hassan Naiz released a defence-splitting ball for forward Ibrahim Ibrahim, who cleverly dinked over advancing goalkeeper Vishal Kaith and waited for the ball to roll in to the back of the net to start celebrating.

Having conceded for the first time this tournament, India looked nervous and the Islanders applied pressure and twice came close to doubling the lead but were thwarted. Maldives, who failed to score a single goal in the group stages before scoring three against Nepal in the semifinal, went into a defensive shell in the face of Indian attacks after the half-hour mark, but striking duo Haji Faruk Kasam and Manvir Singh failed to break the Maldives defence before the break.

After resumption, India came close to levelling the margin but Manvir's header went wide of near post before Maldives made the result safe by doubling the lead in the 66th minute.

Stand-in-captain Hamza Mohamed

brilliantly released a defence-splitting through pass from the centre circle and Ali Fasir accelerated to receive the ball outside the box before placing it to the left side of the advancing Vishal Kaith.

India pulled one goal back in stoppage time when substitute Sumeet Passi tapped in a low cross from Nikhil Chandra Shekhar, but it was too late for Stephen Constantine's men to repeat their feat from 2009, when their under-23 side beat the same opposition on this very ground.

CHAMPIONS: Maldives
RUNNERS-UP: India
FAIR-PLAY TROPHY: Bhutan
MVP: Mohamed Faisal (Maldives)
TOP SCORER: Manvir Singh (India)

MALDIVES 2 - 1 INDIA
 IBRAHIM HUSSAIN 19' SUMEET PASSI 90+2'
 ALI FASIR 66'

Maldives coach Petar Segrt, who was under tremendous pressure from the country's media and also from the federation over his team selection and the way the team performed in the group stages, admitted that the young energetic players of his team made the difference, with a bit of luck from above.

"I've never seen the speed and energy like this before. These boys have sacrificed a lot over the last six weeks, during camp in Qatar and the competition here. This win is a reward for them and for the whole of Maldives," Segrt said.

"I must admit there was some luck. Maybe someone was looking over us from above," said the Croatia-born German, alluding to the fact that his team needed the luck of coin toss to progress through the group stages.

However, he also claimed his experienced coaching staff and analysis of the opposition played a big part in neutralizing India's threat.

"Me and my coaches analysed India's game and we tried to put our young players who can counter those areas, especially on the wings. We played effective football. France did not win the World Cup by playing beautiful football, they did with effective football," Segrt said, adding that these young footballers are the future of the country's football, claiming that they are much sharper, fitter and faster than the previous generation.



Maldives players are ecstatic after defeating India in the SAFF Suzuki Cup final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. They became only the second team after their opponents to have won the regional showpiece more than once.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Flying starts for Lebanon, Vietnam

SPORTS REPORTER



Lebanon and Vietnam made flying starts in Group F of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers, which got underway at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Vietnam outplayed UAE 4-0 in the opening game before Lebanon thrashed Bahrain 8-0 later in the day.

Hosts Bangladesh, who qualified for the final round in the last edition two years ago, will play their open-

ing game against Bahrain tomorrow in this five-team group.

Six group champions and the two best-placed runners-up teams will play in the second round of qualifying and battle it out for the four remaining spots in the final round. Last edition's top three finishers -- North Korea, South Korea, Japan and hosts Thailand received automatic qualification into the final round.

In the second match yesterday, Lebanon found it hard to break the opposition early, but once the first goal was scored by the half-hour mark, it became one-way traffic.

Centre-forward Nathalie Alabed scored a hattrick while Sophie Fayad scored twice and three other players scored a goal apiece.

Nathalie said she was pleased with scoring her first hattrick at the international level. "I am happy, but I score for the team and not for myself. The opposition played well in the beginning, but they got tired and we played well after opening the scoring."

Lebanon coach Hagop Demirjian was happy with the score, but admitted that sterner tests await them.

"I have seen Vietnam play in the first match. They are a very

good side. I have seen Bangladesh team's footage too, and they are agile and very fit. So the next matches will be difficult," said Demirjian.

The Lebanon team celebrated their big win with a team song which, according to the coach, translates to, "We don't care about cups and championships; We just care about Lebanon."

Earlier, Phan Thi Ngoc Tram scored twice in the first 25 minutes to give Vietnam a two-goal lead. Later, Do Thi Nhi and Bui Thi Thuong added to the scoresheet to give the favourites a comfortable start.

Barca win, Atleti held

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona came from behind to beat Real Sociedad on Saturday as Atletico Madrid lost further ground in the La Liga title race by drawing at home to Eibar.

Barca were in danger of slipping up themselves when Aritz Elustondo put Real Sociedad in front at Anoeta. But two goals in three minutes from Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele clinched a hard-fought 2-1 win.

Atletico rallied too, Borja Garces equalising with virtually the last kick of the game. Garces' strike was enough only to rescue a 1-1 draw for Diego Simeone's side, who had looked on course for defeat when Eibar's Sergi Enrich bundled home in the 87th minute.

BD start on wrong foot

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh volleyball team made a losing start to the AVC 1st Men's Challenge Cup when they suffered a 3-2 defeat at the hands of Iraq in Colombo yesterday.

Bangladesh, who became runners-up in the Asian Men's Senior Central Zone Volleyball Championship in April last year, looked promising when they won the first set against Iraq 2-20.

However, the boys eventually lost the second and third sets 18-25 and 17-25.

Bangladesh did bounce back in the fourth set though, winning 25-21 and equalling the set tally at 2-2.

However, they ultimately conceded defeat when they lost the fifth and final set 9-15.

Bangladesh, who entered the eight-team competition on the back of a month-long preparation camp in Iran, will play their second Pool B match against UAE on Sunday.

Pool A is comprised of Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia.



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September 12, 2018

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