



**Ajax players fell to the ground and pointed to the heavens after slaying another giant in the Champions League, defeating Juventus 2-1 in a hostile Turin environment, on an unforgettable Wednesday night.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Messi demands more from Barca

AFP, Barcelona

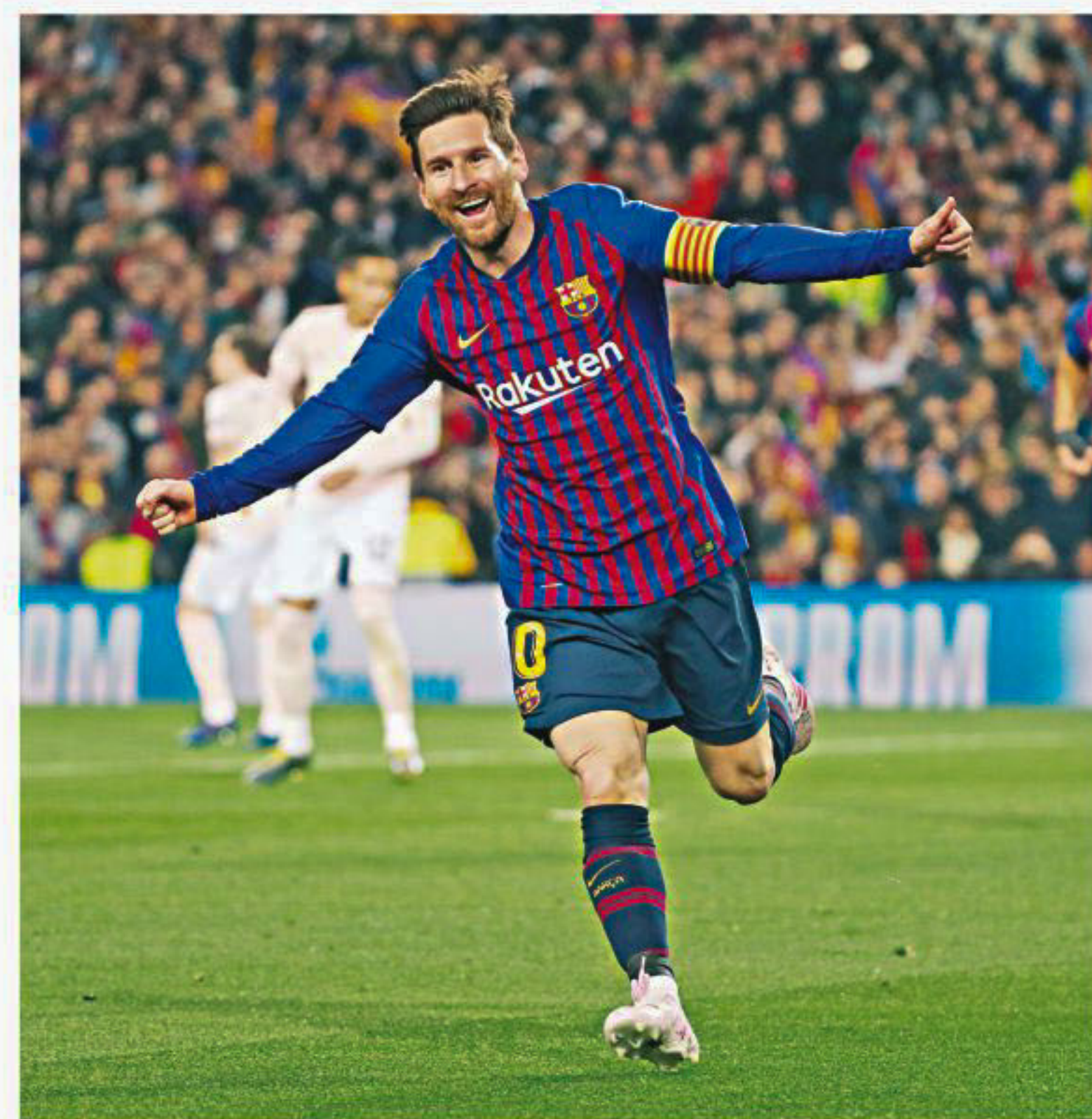


Lionel Messi lit up Camp Nou and devastated Manchester United before firing a warning to Barcelona that they cannot start slowly again. Barca were superior to United in all departments for the best part of 80 minutes on Tuesday, a 3-0 win perhaps even flattering for their opponents, who were two down in 20, both goals belonging to Messi.

By the time Philippe Coutinho had curved in a third to send Ernesto Valverde's side into the Champions League semifinals, United's stirring opening was long-forgotten, except by Barcelona's captain.

"We put on a spectacle," said Messi. "But we came out cold and looked nervous in the first five minutes. We cannot come out like that in a Champions League match. Five bad minutes can knock you out. We have shown who we are," Messi added, and in some ways, they were a perfect picture of their season.

Thrust into a position of comfort by their mesmeric number 10, Barca put on an exhibition of attacking, possession football, all tricks, flicks and bicycle kicks. But there was also a nervousness at the start that suggests their desperation to win this tournament for the first time since 2015 does not weigh lightly.



**Lionel Messi ensured there would be no hiccups against Manchester United in a Champions League quarterfinal with two goals in the opening 20 minutes at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Insatiable' Ajax slay Juventus

AGENCIES, Turin



Ajax have now turned football on its head twice. And if you would bet against them doing it a third time next month and a fourth time in June then you should start paying attention.

This is the greatest story in the modern history of the Champions League because it is entirely at odds with every other page of it. This is a proud historic club but a financially powerless one. David only killed one Goliath; Ajax have now killed two in six weeks.

Last month they beat three-time reigning champions Real Madrid 4-1 at the Bernabeu, a result applauded all over Europe in part because it felt like watching Halley's Comet, seeing a poor team outclass a rich team that comprehensively. But on Wednesday night in Turin, Ajax produced their second once-in-a-lifetime game, beating Juventus 2-1.

They should have won by far more given how they dominated the second half, playing football their richer opponents did not even dare, cutting through Juventus with every attack. But it did not

**We should have won 4-1. On the basis of our second half showing it was a deserved victory.**

**DONNY VAN DE BEEK**  
AJAX MIDFIELDER

matter, 3-2 over two legs was no real reflection but it was more than enough.

Ajax are now in the semifinals for the first time since 1997, back when they could still compete with sides like Juventus as equals, not financial inferiors. They could easily beat Tottenham or Manchester City over two legs if they play like this, and they could win the Madrid final on 1 June too.

But regardless of whether Ajax go on to repeat what they last did in 1995, they have already done something far more important than simply winning a competition. They have proven a point, and now proven it again.

Ajax's wage bill is less than the richer sides from England's second-tier, but

they have turned that into a source of strength this year. They have a team of academy products and clever buys who are proving better than the big boys. Not because the individuals are brilliant -- although they are -- but because Ajax know that football is about being more than just a sum of your parts. It is about being a team. That is how they did the unthinkable to Real Madrid and now to Juventus, who paid Real £88

million for Ronaldo in the summer.

Ronaldo is the greatest individualist and he scored here, as he always does, giving Juventus a 2-1 aggregate lead. But he is no substitute for identity, coherence, team-work or belief.

His headers, one in each leg, were very good but they were also the full extent of Juventus' attacking play over 180 minutes of football. And after his goal Juventus did nothing else at all, as Ajax seized control and never gave it back.

Donny van de Beek equalised, Matthijs De Ligt headed the winner, and Ajax missed plenty of chances in a second half that was just as good as their one in the Bernabeu. In the end they dominated both legs and 3-2, in a tie where Juventus had two chances, barely scratches the surface.

"Can we can go on to win the competition? Well, we are in the semi-finals now. And we have eliminated two of the favourites in the last two rounds," Ajax skipper De Ligt said. "The next games will be very difficult, but so were these ones. So who knows? We don't know what we can achieve but we are never satisfied."



**Mosaddek Hossain put in an all-round performance as Abahani defeated archrivals Mohammedan Sporting Club. The batsman, who was recently picked in Bangladesh's World Cup squad, hit an unbeaten fifty before taking three wickets to pick up the player of the match award.**

PHOTO: BCS

## WC stars hammer MSC

SPORTS REPORTER



Mosaddek Hossain celebrated his World Cup call-up with a fine all-round performance as Abahani continued their supremacy over traditional rivals Mohammedan with a 45-run victory in the Super League encounter of the Dhaka Premier League at BKSP yesterday.

The 23-year-old cricketer was named in Bangladesh's 15-member squad for the 2019 World Cup announced on Tuesday as a spin-bowling all-rounder and the cricketer from Mymensingh provided some evidence of his calibre during yesterday's Super League clash. Mosaddek led from the front with a three-wicket haul after hitting an unbeaten 57-ball 54 with the help of five fours and a six.

Sabbir Rahman (64 off 53 balls), Mohammad Mithun (56 off 52 balls) and Mohammad Saifuddin (41 off 35 balls) also celebrated their World Cup call-ups by contributing substantially with the bat to lift Abahani to a mammoth 304 for seven after recovering from 32 for two.

When it came to defending the total, Mosaddek took charge along with inspirational Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who achieved a milestone by becoming just the second Bangladesh bowler after Abdur Razzak to take 400 List A wickets. Another World Cup squad member, Soumya Sarkar, grabbed two wickets to wrap up Mohammedan for 259.

Former national player Raquibul Hasan continued his good form with a 79-ball 96 that featured 10 fours and four sixes and Mohammad Ashraful added 68 off 85 balls after an initial hiccup that saw Mohammedan teetering at 61 for four. Their efforts, however, were not good enough to avert a second defeat of the season against their archrivals after having suffered six-wicket defeat in the first round.

Their second consecutive win in the Super League helped defending champions Abahani (20 points) reduce the gap with leaders Legends of Rupganj (22

### SCORES IN BRIEF

#### ABAHANI v MOHAMMEDAN

**Abahani:** 304 for 7 in 50 overs (Sabbir 64, Nazmul 36, Mithun 56,

Mosaddek 54 not out, Saifuddin 41; Shaiful 3-63, Rahatul 2-41

**Mohammedan:** 259 all out in 46.3 overs (Raquibul 96, Ashraful 68,

Shohag 28; Mosaddek 3-36, Mashrafe 3-40, Soumya 2-40)

**Result:** Abahani won by 45 runs.

**Player-of-the-match:** Mosaddek Hossain.

**PRIME BANK v PRIME DOLESHWAR**

**Prime Bank:** 169 all out in 48.1 overs (Al-Amin 32, Kapali 61, Ariful 27;

Reza 4-22, Talbur 2-10)

**Prime Doleshwar:** 172 for 3 in 43.4 overs (Saif 55, Reza 41 not out)

**Result:** Doleshwar won by 7 wickets.

**Player-of-the-match:** Farhad Reza.

**LEGENDS OF RUPGANJ v SHEIKH JAMAL**

**Legends of Rupganj:** 171 all out in 49.3 overs (Naim 58, Dhawan 23;

Khaled 4-31, Tajjul 2-16)

**Sheikh Jamal:** 172 for 6 in 48.3 overs (Sunny 58, Nurul 29, Tanbir 43 not

out; Nabil 3-27)

**Result:** Sk Jamal won by 4 wickets.

**Player-of-the-match:** Elias Sunny.

points), which suffered a four-wicket defeat against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in a low-scoring match at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Elias Sunny was the hero in the match as he scored 58 runs off 99 balls after opening the innings, which followed economical bowling figures of 10-1-27-1 as Rupganj reached the target of 172 with four wickets and nine balls remaining. Tanbir Hayder was the other notable scorer with an unbeaten 43 off 53. Earlier, pacer Khaled Ahmed took four wickets for 31 runs to dismiss Rupganj for 171.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Forhad Reza came up with an all-round show, hitting an unbeaten 24-ball 41 after claiming four wickets for 22 to guide Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club to a seven-wicket victory against Prime Bank Cricket Club.

Prime Bank could manage only 169 runs despite Alo Kapali's 61 and Doleshwar eclipsed the total easily, with 38 balls to spare.

## Mashrafe the perfect beacon

MAZHAR UDDIN



A common perspective about Bangladesh fast bowlers is that they do not get enough opportunities or that the pitch does not allow them to exploit the attributes a genuine seamer would otherwise utilise and eventually, most fade away.

Among all those fast bowlers a 35-year-old pacer, who has undergone seven surgeries in his career so far, is still setting standards for those who dream of becoming a fast bowler in Bangladesh.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who picked up his 400th List A wicket in the Dhaka Premier League game for Abahani against Mohammedan yesterday and became the second Bangladeshi to reach the milestone yesterday. The Narail Express, who was stuck on 399 for three games, bowled Irfan Sukkur in his third over and ended up taking three wickets at the end.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak was the first to reach 400 List A wickets earlier in the league, in 269 games, while it took 287 games for Mashrafe.

He will be leading Bangladesh for the second time in the World Cup -- his fourth World Cup appearance since 2003. He missed the 2011 World Cup at home where a dejected Mashrafe was in tears after being left out of the squad because of injury.

With the traditionally seam-friendly conditions in the United Kingdom in mind, the selectors picked five pacers in the 15-member World Cup squad announced on



RUBEL HOSSAIN



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

Tuesday. The seamers will have to play a crucial role in the mega event as the pitches are also expected to be batting-friendly.

Apart from Rubel Hossain, who is set to make his third World Cup appearance, it will be the first time for Mustafizur Rahman, Abu Jayed and all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin and it is a blessing that they have someone like Mashrafe in the team from whom to learn.

The question however remains about whether the young seamers actually follow Mashrafe's sheer determination and hunger, evidenced by the way he still pushes himself to keep proving himself as a fast bowler, rather than just as a captain leading the team with inspiration.



**Bangladesh's inspirational captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza became the second cricketer yesterday after Abdur Razzak to grab 400 wickets in Bangladesh's List A cricket. He was conarated by a young fan after the match at BKSP.**

According to pacer Abu Jayed, it is Mashrafe's strong mindset and determination that inspires him to give his best.

"Obviously, Mashrafe bhai is a role model for me and many of the fast bowlers in the country. He has always provided me the confidence and actually he was the first to tell me that I am in the team yesterday [Tuesday], before the selectors announced the World Cup squad. The way he has been picking wickets in both international and domestic cricket teaches us a lot to keep the hunger," Jayed told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 25-year-old Jayed, who has the ability to swing the ball in both directions, also chalked out some plans for the World Cup, saying that he is looking to pick up early wickets and maintaining a tight economy rate.

It will also be a great platform for another pacer in Mustafizur as there are huge expectations of the left-arm seamer ever since he burst onto the scene with series-winning performances against India and South Africa at home.

There are however concerns over Mustafizur, who is recovering from an ankle injury and it will be a huge test of endurance for the Tigers as they will play a minimum of 14 matches in a short span, starting with the Ireland tri-series before the World Cup.

"I don't think it's a big issue; we won't play matches back-to-back as there will be some gap between games. Injuries are part of cricket, but it's important to remain fit," Mustafizur told the reporters yesterday.

Belief, for Bangladesh fast bowlers, is perhaps the most important ingredient because instead of blaming luck the likes of Taskin Ahmed, who was seen crying after failing to make the World Cup cut, they can take a leaf out of Mashrafe's book and keep working hard for the future.