



Uruguay striker Edinson Cavani heads in the all-important goal past Chile goalkeeper Gabriel Arias during their Copa America fixture at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro on Monday.



Abahani confident of beating Punjab

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani will hope to end the jinx of failing to qualify for the knockout stages of the AFC Cup when they take on Minerva Punjab in their final group match at Indira Gandhi Stadium in Guwahati, Assam today.

The Sky Blues, who have never crossed the group stage in AFC-sanctioned tournaments including two times in the AFC Cup, lead Group E table with 10 points from five matches.

A victory will see them through to the inter-zonal playoff, while even if they fail to win, they might still go through if second-placed Chennaiyin FC, who are on eight points, fail to beat Manang Marshyangdi of Nepal in the other match of the group today.

However, Abahani have issues regarding their playing eleven as their in-form Nigerian striker Sunday Chizoba failed to join the squad due to visa issues while Brazilian forward Wellington Priori will miss out due to injury.

The team's coach Mario Lemos is set to bring some changes in players' position and strategy in a bid to secure full points and he believes his charges are completely prepared to take the challenge against Minerva Punjab, the only unbeaten side in group with five draws from five matches.

"I feel that the team is ready. I still want to focus on some details for the match," Lemos told The Daily Star over the phone.

Despite the absence of some key players, the 33-year-coach believes the strength of his side has not decreased and that the players are confident enough to win the match.

"I don't think we are reduced in

strength but we have to adjust because Sunday will not play and the player that will replace him is a different style of player. We want to be organised and balanced throughout the match; we don't want to make mistakes, not get exposed in our defence and not allow Punjab to create chances," Lemos said. "We are very confident we can score as we have scored 14 goals in last three matches, and we believe we can score tomorrow."

The team management is also encouraging the players to give their best effort and avail the rare opportunity of



Coaches and captains of Abahani and Minerva Punjab at the pre-match press conference.

PHOTO: BFF

a knockout berth following hard work which took the side to this stage.

"The players must believe [in winning without two foreigners] because we have come here to beat Minerva. We are on top of the group and we have a great chance to qualify for the next round. We need to finish the job. We are missing some players but that will not be an excuse for us. We want to win tomorrow," hoped Lemos.

USA, Sweden reach quarterfinals

AFP, Paris

Megan Rapinoe scored a brace of penalties as holders the United States beat Spain on Monday to march on to a mouthwatering quarterfinal against hosts France at the women's World Cup, with Sweden joining them in the last eight.

On another day in the limelight for VAR, Sweden's goalkeeper Hedvig Lindahl made a brilliant second-half penalty save as her country edged out Canada 1-0 in Paris, meaning they advance to a similarly enticing tie against Germany.

The showdown between the holders and the hosts had seemed inevitable from the moment the draw was made back in December, but after France laboured to beat Brazil in extra time on Sunday, the USA did not find the going easy against Spain in Reims.

Rapinoe's first penalty which gave Jill Ellis's team an early lead came after Tobin Heath was brought down in the box by Maria Leon.

However, Jennifer Hermoso pounced to equalise moments later after Becky

Sauerbrunn had been caught in possession, and Spain held their own after that against the World Cup favourites.

They were undone, though, by another penalty awarded for what looked a very slight touch on Rose Lavelle from Virginia Torrecilla.

The penalty was confirmed after a VAR check and Rapinoe smashed the ball into the same corner with 15 minutes left to give the USA the tightest of wins and line up the French in possibly the most highly-anticipated match in the history of women's football.

"I hope it's wild and crazy and the fans are crazy and that there's tonnes of media around it and it's just a big spectacle," Rapinoe said of Friday's match.

"I think it's going to be incredible for the women's game. You have two heavy hitters meeting in the knockout rounds and this is everything you want."

It is not what Spain wanted, and the penalty that decided the game left a bitter taste in their mouths.

"I didn't touch her... they blew for that penalty because it was the United States," a distraught Torrecilla said.

Cavani praises attitude and mentality

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Uruguay demonstrated a winning attitude and mentality in their 1-0 Copa America success over Chile on Monday that gave them top spot in Group C, match-winner Edinson Cavani said.

Uruguay began the game in second place in their pool behind the reigning champions and facing a daunting potential quarterfinal tie with Colombia, the only side to go through the group stage with three wins.

But Cavani's header eight minutes from time from Jonathan Rodriguez's cross propelled Uruguay above Chile and into, what looks on paper at least, an easier last eight challenge against Peru.

"In some moments we played well, in other moments less well, but always with the (right) attitude and mentality we were able to snatch the game," said the 32-year-old, who scored his 48th goal for his country.

But the Paris Saint-Germain forward insisted thoughts of a potentially easier quarterfinal draw played no role in Uruguay's approach.

"We wanted to win the group without knowing what would come next, to show a good image in the group and continue with this attitude," he said following the match at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium.

Captain Diego Godin said this win "is important for confidence, to

Suarez's bizarre penalty appeal

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Uruguay striker Luis Suarez took his reputation as a fierce competitor to new heights in his side's 1-0 win over Chile in the Copa America on Monday by appealing for a handball -- by Chile's goalkeeper.

With his side searching for a goal against the Copa America holders to earn them top spot in the group, Suarez raced into the box and rounded Chile's Gabriel Arias but the keeper rose again to punch the striker's shot away for a corner.

Suarez, however, seemed to momentarily forget that Arias' job is to stop shots with his hands and appealed for a penalty, gesticulating to the referee by pointing to his own hand.

The striker soon realised his mistake and stopped protesting, putting his hands on his head to console himself for the missed opportunity.

It was five years to the day when Suarez infamously bit Italy's Giorgio Chiellini in a group stage decider at the 2014 World Cup, which saw him banned for four months.

Later in the game the striker made another frantic appeal to the referee to ask for Chile's Gonzalo Jara to be sent off after the defender tripped up a pitch invader.

rediscover the feelings after Japan" in which they were surprisingly held to a 2-2 draw.

Veteran coach Oscar Tabarez admitted there was little between the two sides.

"It was a keenly contested match with few spaces. We managed a little bit better than our opponents," he said.

More so than avoiding Colombia, Tabarez was most pleased that Uruguay will get an extra day of rest

ahead of their quarterfinal, against a Peru side that has had two extra days to recover from their pool efforts, on Saturday in Salvador.

Chile will face Colombia the day before in Sao Paulo.

"One extra day of rest is useful, it's important, because we're on the limit," said Tabarez.

Chile's Colombian coach Reinaldo Rueda said his side were beaten by "Uruguay's strength" -- their aerial game.

Chelsea to appoint Lampard

AFP, London

Frank Lampard's return to Chelsea as the club's new manager edged closer on Tuesday as Derby said they had granted permission for the Premier League club to conclude negotiations.

"Derby County Football Club can confirm that they have granted permission for Chelsea Football Club to speak to Frank Lampard about the vacant managerial position at Stamford Bridge," Derby said in a statement.

"With pre-season fast approaching for both clubs it is hoped this will allow Chelsea to swiftly conclude their discussions."

Lampard is Chelsea's record goalscorer with 211 goals between 2001 and 2014 at Stamford Bridge, where he won three Premier League titles, the Champions League and Europa League in a 13-trophy haul.

Chelsea have been seeking a manager since Maurizio Sarri departed to take charge of Juventus last week.

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Lara admitted to hospital

AFP, Mumbai

West Indies batting legend Brian Lara was admitted to a hospital in Mumbai Tuesday after complaining of chest pain, Indian media reports and sources said.

The 50-year-old Trinidadian was rushed to hospital after he complained of discomfort during a promotional event, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said, quoting a source close to the player.

"He is fine and will be discharged soon," the source told PTI.

Lara was in Mumbai to take part in events organised by Star Sports, the official broadcasters of the ongoing cricket World Cup.

"He complained of chest pain and uneasiness this morning and was sent for a routine check-up. He is fine now," a source at the broadcaster told AFP.

Lara holds two world records -- the highest Test score of 400 not out, and the highest first class knock of 501 that he scored in the English county championship in 1994.

The former skipper retired in 2007.

Neymar set for Barca return

AFP, Madrid

Neymar is ready to cut his salary by 12 million euros to leave Paris Saint-Germain as part of a "verbal agreement" reached between the Brazilian and Barcelona, according to reports in the Spanish press.

PSG are yet to sanction the sale of their star striker, who they paid a world record 222 million euros to sign from Barca only two years ago.

But Neymar is reportedly eager to return to Spain and Barcelona are prepared to take him back, with Spanish sports newspaper Diario Sport claiming a five-year contract has been agreed.

The newspaper says the terms include Neymar reducing his salary from around

36 million euros at PSG to the 24 million euros he received at Barca in 2017, while also dropping his 26-million euro court case against the Catalan club.

Neymar claims he was due the amount before leaving as a loyalty bonus.

Barcelona sports newspaper Mundo Deportivo has reported Neymar will also have to make a public apology to the club's fans for the manner of his departure.

The 27-year-old had spent four years at Camp Nou, winning the Champions League in 2015 and two La Liga titles. Any return for Neymar would likely require Barca to raise funds through sales. Antoine Griezmann is expected to join from Atletico Madrid for 120 million euros while Frenkie de Jong has already signed for 75 million euros from Ajax.

Neymar, who is not playing in the Copa America due to an injury, shakes hands with Dani Alves at the team hotel in Sao Paulo, Brazil on Friday. While the right-back has announced he is soon leaving Paris Saint-Germain, Neymar is reportedly looking to join his former club Barcelona.



Neymar, who is not playing in the Copa America due to an injury, shakes hands with Dani Alves at the team hotel in Sao Paulo, Brazil on Friday. While the right-back has announced he is soon leaving Paris Saint-Germain, Neymar is reportedly looking to join his former club Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP FILE

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(তাহমিনা ইয়াসমিন)

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