



Brazil players were in jovial mood in training yesterday ahead of their Copa America final against Peru. The game will kick off at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro at 2:00am on Monday (Bangladesh time). PHOTO: REUTERS

Brazil banking on defence

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil will be looking to maintain their defensive invincibility against Peru in Sunday's Copa America final, midfielder Casemiro says.

The hosts have yet to concede a goal in the tournament, including when they thrashed Peru 5-0 in a group-stage match earlier in the competition.

And keeping their goal intact will be key to lifting a ninth Copa crown, according to the Real Madrid man.

"Ending the competition without conceding a goal is one of our aims," said Casemiro.

"And if we don't concede a goal, it's not just thanks to the guys at the back, those up front help us a lot and that makes the difference."

The woodwork also made a difference in Brazil's 2-0 semifinal victory over arch rivals Argentina, as did referee Roddy Zambrano's refusal to consult VAR twice when Lionel Messi and his teammates were claiming a penalty.

Sergio Aguero headed against the bar in the first half and Messi rattled the post after the break, while Brazil captain Dani Alves and midfielder Arthur both got away with blatant off-the-ball fouls inside the area on Manchester City pair Aguero and Nicolas Otamendi respectively.

Argentina have complained to South American football's governing body CONMEBOL over the refereeing in that semifinal, although to no avail as the result will not be changed.

Brazil have identified the main threat to their defensive invincibility on Sunday at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium: Peru forward Paolo Guerrero.

He's a player well known to Brazilian fans having spent the last seven years playing in the country.

The 35-year-old scored the winning goal for Corinthians in the 2012 FIFA Club World Cup final against Chelsea.

Currently playing for Internacional in Porto Alegre, he previously helped Corinthians win the Sao Paulo state championship in 2013 and Flamengo to do likewise in the Rio state championship four years later.

"He's a player who deserves special attention for everything he's done in the past," said centre-back Marquinhos.

"I know him well, I played with him for a bit at Corinthians and I've played against him several times for the national team."

One of those was two weeks ago at the Corinthians Arena in Sao Paulo when Guerrero was kept quiet while Peru when into a defensive meltdown.

They've bounced back spectacularly from that set-back, though, first ousting Uruguay on penalties in the quarterfinal, in a match in which they were clearly second best, and then in a stunning performance to beat the outgoing champions Chile 3-0 in the last four.

"It'll be a great final, a really difficult match. We can't think it's already won, we have to play it," said Casemiro.

"They've eliminated great teams -- Uruguay and Chile -- we have to respect them."

It's only the second time Peru have reached the Copa final in its 103-year history.

They beat Colombia in a play-off in Caracas in 1975 after each side had won at home in a two-legged title decider.

And their first title in 1939 on home soil came at the end of a single five-team tournament played in a round-robin format.

"We've got to approach it calmly. It's true that we've achieved something very important after many years," said forward Raul Ruidiaz.

"We're aware and calm that there's one more step to glory."

"We need to play with our feet on the ground and give everything on the pitch to make it happen."

Brazil, in stark comparison, have won the Copa eight times and finished runners-up on a further 11 occasions, a record bettered only by Uruguay and Argentina.

From 1997 to 2007, Brazil won four out of five editions of the Copa, missing out only in 2001 when the Seleccion turned up in Colombia without leading lights such as Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos -- four crucial players in their World Cup success the next year.

MSC, Sk Russel notch victories

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club and Sheikh Russel KC registered victories in their Bangladesh Premier League fixtures yesterday while Muktiyoddha Sangsad were held to a goalless draw by Rahmatganj MFS.

Mohammedan, who came into the match against Chittagong Abahani in 11th position, beat the visitors 2-0 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, thanks to second-half goals from Uryu Nagata and Souleymane Diabate.

After a barren first half on a rain-soaked pitch, Mohammedan took the lead in the 66th minute through a spot-kick, converted by Japanese midfielder Uryu Nagata after Yousuf Sifat was brought down inside the box.

Six minutes later, Mohammedan's three African recruits combined to double their lead, with Diabate tapping home a cleverly worked free-kick.

The win took Mohammedan to ninth position with 17 points from 18 matches while Chittagong Abahani remained in sixth position with 22 points from 19 matches. It was the first win for the beleaguered Black and Whites in five matches.

Away at the Sylhet District Stadium, one-time champions Sheikh Russel edged three-time champions Sheikh Jamal 2-1 to move into third position in the 13-team table. The win ended a two-match losing streak for Saiful Bari's charges as they moved to 39 points from 18 matches, leapfrogging Saif SC who have 37 points from same number of matches.

The hosts took the lead in the 23rd minute when Biplu Ahmed took a speculative shot at goal from 35 yards out, which Sheikh Jamal defender David Tetteh tried to clear but his header ended up at the corner of his own net, despite a desperate dive from goalkeeper Mohammad Nayeem.

Sheikh Jamal equalised two minutes later when Ali Hossain's throw-in hit the hand of Sheikh Russel forward Azizov Alisher inside the box, with captain Solomon King Kanform dispatching the spot-kick comfortably.

The lead lasted only 15 minutes, though, courtesy of a superb floating effort from outside the box by Sheikh Russel midfielder Khalekurzaman.

The defeat left Sheikh Jamal in ninth position with 21 points from 19 matches. It was the second straight defeat for Shafiqul Islam Manik's charges.

Meanwhile, the game at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium between Muktiyoddha Sangsad and visitors Rahmatganj MFS ended goalless. The result saw Muktiyoddha move to 18 points from 18 matches while the Old Dhaka outfit remained just above the danger zone, in 11th position, with 16 points from 19 matches.

BD to host Asian Champs Trophy, Junior Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will host two of the major hockey tournaments in Asia -- the Asian Champions Trophy and the Junior Asia Cup next year. The Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) accepted Bangladesh's proposal for hosting these two events during a meeting of its executive committee at its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, said a press release from Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF).

BHF's senior vice-president Abdur Rashid Shikdar and vice-president Sajed AA Adel represented Bangladesh at the meeting.

A memorandum of understanding in regards to these two events will be signed between BHF and AHF next month, informed Shikdar.

The Asian Champions Trophy -- featuring the top six teams of the continent -- was last held in Oman last year, with India, Pakistan, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan and Oman taking part. Bangladesh, despite being ranked the sixth best, could not be part of the tournament as the sixth slot was awarded to Oman for being the hosts. Hence, Bangladesh expressed their desire to host the event.

The last edition of the Junior Asia Cup was held in India where Bangladesh finished sixth among eight teams.

BD XI to play 'mini Ranji Trophy'

SPORTS REPORTER

A Bangladesh XI will take part in the Dr. (Capt) K. Thimmappaiah Memorial multi-day All India Cricket Tournament, also known as the 'mini Ranji Trophy', scheduled to begin from July 10 across venues in Bengaluru and Mysuru.

The Bangladesh XI's inclusion makes it the first time a foreign team a foreign team will play in the tournament. A total of 16 teams are going to take part in four-day games, divided into four zones.

Bangladesh have been placed in Zone B alongside KSCA Secretary's XI, Vidarbha Cricket Association and Dr. D.Y Patil Cricket Academy. The top teams of each zone will qualify for the semifinals. The final is scheduled for August 3.

The top performers of this tournament will get the opportunity to take part in the Ranji Trophy, which is the reason this tournament is termed as the 'mini Ranji Trophy'.

To enhance the players' ability to play longer-version cricket, the Bangladesh Cricket Board has formed a strong side comprising the likes of Mominul Haque, Jahurul Islam and Taskin Ahmed along with few fresh faces.

Bangladesh XI: Abu Jayed, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Nayeem Hasan, Mominul Haque, Ebadot Hossain, Robiul Haque, Jahurul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Shadman Islam, Ariful Haque, Taijul Islam, Yasir Ali, Saif Hasan, Quazi Nurul Hasan, Shohidul Islam.

De Jong swayed by 'key player' promise

AFP, Barcelona

Rising Dutch star Frenkie de Jong said that Barcelona's promise to make him a "key player" convinced him to sign for the Catalan giants earlier this year, as he was presented at the Camp Nou on Friday.

The 22-year-old midfielder impressed as Ajax won the Eredivisie title and reached the Champions League semifinals last season.

Barcelona announced the signing of De Jong in January for a 75-million-euro (\$84.3 million) fee on a five-year deal which started on July 1.

"Of course I was thinking about other clubs which were interested, but it's a normal process," he said.

"I considered my options, which was best for me, Barcelona came to see me, they convinced me..."

"The decision was easy for me. They said they had every confidence in me, that they thought I would be a key player for Barca in the future."

De Jong thinks that playing with the best players in the world, like five-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi, will help him improve.

"Of course, he (Messi) is the best," he said. "I'm very happy to play with him and I'm also looking forward to playing with the whole team."

"All the players here are really talented, not just Messi."

He joins a long list of Dutch players to sign for Barcelona, initiated by Johan Cruyff's moves there, also from Ajax, as a player in 1973, and as a coach in 1988.

"The Netherlands and Barcelona have always had a connection," De Jong added.

"It's about playing in a similar way with the philosophy of Ajax and of Barca, which for me is obviously great."

De Jong was a mainstay of the Ajax side last term, scoring three goals in 52 appearances, while also breaking into Ronald Koeman's Netherlands team and winning nine international caps.



Argentine FA seeks answers on VAR

AFP, BUENOS AIRES

Argentina's football association on Friday asked the company supplying the VAR technology being used at the Copa America to clarify whether Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro's security team interfered with Tuesday's semifinal.

Argentina lost 2-0 to hosts Brazil in front of the watching Bolsonaro at the Mineirao stadium in Belo Horizonte but were infuriated that they were denied two penalty claims that replays suggested should have been given.

And what angered them most was that Ecuadoran referee Roddy Zambrano refused to consult VAR to check the validity of their claims.

"We're very concerned that Brazilian media and news websites are talking about possible problems and interference in the system of communication between the VOR (video operating room) and the field officials," said the AFA federation on its website.

It's the second complaint made by AFA about the semifinal having protested on Wednesday to South American football's governing body CONMEBOL over "serious and gross refereeing errors".

"According to the aforementioned versions, this interference was caused by President Jair Bolsonaro's security teams," said the statement, which was signed by AFA's refereeing director Federico Belgoy.

On Wednesday, the Brazilian website Globoesporte.com reported that there had been a problem with VAR before the semifinal match, claiming a "radio signal used by" Bolsonaro's security team affected the referee's communication channel with the VAR team.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his win against Poland's Hubert Hurkacz during the third round of the Wimbledon on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Barty, Serena cruise into last 16

AFP, London

World number one Ashleigh Barty booked her maiden place in the fourth round at Wimbledon on Saturday while Serena Williams made the second week for the 16th time.

Barty overwhelmed British wild card Harriet Dart 6-1, 6-1 while 37-year-old, seven-time champion Williams produced her most convincing display in dispensing with German Julia Goerges 6-3, 6-4.

Barty, bidding to become the first Australian Wimbledon women's champion since Evonne Goolagong Cawley won her second title in 1980, will play unseeded American Alison Riske for a place in the last eight.

She is also the first Australian woman to make the second week since 2010.

Williams reached the fourth round for the 16th time and goes on to face Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro for a place in the quarter-finals.

Eleventh seed Williams, who defeated Goerges in last year's semifinals, is bidding to equal Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam titles.

ERRATUM

On sports page 4 (S4) of The Daily Star's July 6 edition, we mistakenly wrote 'Abahani thrash Rahmatganj' in headline of one of the news while the actual headline should have been 'Abahani thrash Arambagh'. We regret this mistake and apologise for the inconvenience the mistake might have caused. We pledge to be more careful from now on.

--Sports Editor

DAY'S EVENTS

BANGLADESH PREMIER LEAGUE
BASHUNDHARA V TEAM BJMC
TIME: 4:00PM
VENUE: SHEIKH KAMAL STADIUM, NILPHAMARI