

## Atletico return to winning ways

REUTERS, Madrid

**LaLiga** Atletico Madrid snapped a three-game winless streak in La Liga by beating Athletic Bilbao 2-0 at home on Saturday to move level on points with table-topping Barcelona.

Saul Niguez put injury-stricken Atletico ahead in the 28th minute while Alvaro Morata bundled the ball in from close range in the 64th to seal their first home league win for four games.

Atletico have 19 points after 10 games along with champions Barca, who have a game in hand after the 'Clasico' against Real Madrid was postponed until December due to security concerns.

The victory helped ease tensions at the Wanda Metropolitano after fans booted the team and especially midfielder Koke in the midweek 1-0 win over Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League.

"Today the fans were on our side and that makes you much more up for the game from the start," Saul told reporters.

"We always go out looking to win and the three draws in a row (in La Liga) had left us with a bittersweet taste so it was vital that we won today."

Atletico were without their record 126

million euro (\$139.58 million) signing Joao Felix due to an ankle injury and first-choice central defenders Jose Gimenez and Stefan Savic, while Diego Simeone left out Diego Costa in favour of Angel Correa.

Argentine Correa has enjoyed little first team football this season and was making only his second start in the league but he played a decisive role in the victory by setting up both goals.

He used strength and pace to burst into the box and roll the ball across for Saul to strike it into the net to break the deadlock against an Athletic side who before the game had the joint-best defensive record in the league along with Atletico.

Correa then got down to the byline to send a low cross towards Morata, who only had to guide the ball into the net.

The visitors had nearly taken the lead early in the game when defender Inigo Martinez glanced a header towards the top corner but Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak produced an outstanding leaping save to keep the effort out.

Athletic then had a half-hearted appeal for a penalty waved away shortly after the opening goal when Iker Muniain appeared to be pushed to the ground by Saul.



Atletico Madrid forward Alvaro Morata (R) celebrates his 64th-minute strike with teammate Thomas Lemar during a La Liga encounter with Athletic Bilbao at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid on Saturday. Atletico Madrid won the match 2-0.

PHOTO: AFP

## Local hopes rest with hosts

Chattogram Abahani take on Gokulam Kerala in first semifinal today

ATIQUE ANAM from Chattogram

Hosts Chattogram Abahani will square off against Gokulam Kerala in the first semifinal of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup today. The match will kick off at 7:00pm at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram.

With Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings out of the competition, the 2015-edition champions are the only remaining hope of the host nation, but the host team is up against one of the most impressive sides of the tournament.

Chattogram Abahani registered 4-1 and 4-2 wins against defending champions TC Sports and Young Elephants in their first two group matches before suffering a 1-0 defeat against Mohun Bagan.

Gokulam Kerala, on the other hand, beat Bashundhara Kings 3-1 before playing out a goalless draw with Terengganu FC and ending their group campaign with a 2-0 win over I-League champions Chennai City.

Chattogram Abahani coach Maruf Haque showed respect to the opponents at the pre-match press conference yesterday, but said they were confident of making it to the final.

"Before the tournament I said that our target is to regain the title. We have shown improvement in performance graph in every match and if this trend continues,



Chattogram Abahani captain Jamal Bhuiyan (2nd from R) and Gokulam Kerala striker Henry Kisekka shake hands while their coaches stand beside them on the eve of the first semifinal of the Sheikh Kamal Club Cup in Chattogram yesterday. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

we should win the semifinal," the veteran coach said.

"They have some quality players and we have our plan regarding them. But we don't have plans to mark a specific player, rather we will try zonal marking to stop their forwards," Maruf added.

The foreign recruits of Gokulam Kerala

have made the difference in every match, with Trinidadian forward Nathaniel Garcia scoring one goal and setting up three others while Ugandan striker Henry Kisekka bagging three goals so far.

Garcia scored from a free-kick in their first match and then set up two goals in their third match from free-kicks, each of

the three being different in style. Maruf said they have studied the probable variations of set-pieces of the opposition team.

The Durand Cup champions have two more influential Trinidadians -- striker Marcus Joseph and midfielder Andre Etienne -- who could be game changers on their day. Chattogram Abahani captain Jamal Bhuiyan admitted that the opposition team's foreign recruits are better than theirs' but he was confident of stopping them in all regards.

"They have very good foreign players. They scored three against the Bangladesh champions [Bashundhara Kings]. It is going to be a closely-fought match" Jamal said. "But it's our home ground; we will play in front of our crowd. So we should be the favourites."

Gokulam Kerala coach Fernando Santiago Valera said they enjoy playing in front of a big opposition crowd. "We played against Mohun Bagan in the final of the Durand Cup in front of 40,000 people. We love crowds," the Argentina-born Spaniard said.

Valera said that they were happy to have reached the final and were looking forward to playing good football and win the semifinal.

"They [Chattogram Abahani] are a very good team. They have national team players and a very good striker, Luka [Rotkovic]. We will try to be intensive and win the game," the coach said.

## No place for the Prince

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Prince Tagoe was one of the most advertised names for hosts Chattogram Abahani ahead of the third edition of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup.

The port city outfit, in their pre-tournament campaigns, had said that they were building a strong squad to regain the title, with the Ghanaian member from the 2010 World Cup their to-be star forward.

But the former Hoffenheim star is yet to take the field, with Chattogram Abahani having already played three group matches. And it has not been in an attempt to rest his precious legs, rather to not endanger the chances of the home side. Tagoe has not even found a place as a substitute even when the team rested six starters in their last group match.

The 32-year-old striker was a genuinely good striker in his days, playing for arguably the best Ghana team of all time during the 2010 World Cup. He played in all the three group stage matches, but did not get a place in the round of 16 match against USA and the quarterfinal against Uruguay which they lost on penalties in a heartbreaking fashion. In his 35-match career for the Black Stars, Tagoe scored five goals and was affectionately called Prince of Goals by many back in his homeland.

But those days are long gone as the then Hoffenheim striker moved from a few lesser teams of Europe, Africa and Asia before being almost out of the game for the past four years. Tagoe joined a Turkish lower-tier club last season, but did not get to play a game for them before being poached by Chattogram Abahani for this tournament. But on seeing him at the ground, Chattogram Abahani coach Maruf Haque realised it was a bad decision taken by the club.

"He is not really fit to start matches," the coach said ahead of one of the games. When asked whether there was any possibility of him getting some gametime, Maruf said he was not sure of it.

It has been learnt that the decision to hire Tagoe was taken by one of their influential officials, which has divided opinion among the players and officials. One of the players, on condition of anonymity, said: "Any local African player, playing on hire, could have been a better option than him. Due to him, we lost a valuable foreign player quota."

Even if Chattogram Abahani make it to the final, it seems like Tagoe may not find a place in the eleven. The only way he can bring value to the team is sharing his big-match experience from the World Cup.



PRINCE TAGOE



Afsana Akhter won a gold medal in the 50m freestyle event of the Inter District Age-Group Women's Swimming Competition in Dhammudi yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## BHF meet sans GS Mominul today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation executive committee is all set to hold its third meeting today sans general secretary AKM Mominul Haque Shaheed, who remains outside of Bangladesh following his alleged involvement in illegal gambling.

Shaheed had accompanied the Bangladesh women's team to Singapore, where they participated in September's Women's Junior (under-21) AHF Cup. However, he did not return after the tournament.

There have been murmurs in the hockey fraternity that they may decide to take action against Shaheed at the executive committee meeting, however, BHF vice president Abdur Rashid Shikdar ruled it out.

"Firstly, there is no agenda regarding what steps to take against the general secretary. As per the constitution, if any member of the executive committee remains absent for three successive meetings or remains absent from BHF's activities for six consecutive months, then the executive committee can render that person's position void," said Rashid, adding that they will form different sub-committees and endorse the under-21 national hockey team programme among other issues.

## Arambagh pull out of players' transfer

SPORTS REPORTER

Instead of meeting expectations by forming a formidable side, Arambagh KS have decided in principle to pull out of the ongoing players' transfer window for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League citing financial constraints. Interestingly, Arambagh were one of the clubs recently found to have been involved in illegal gambling.

The club's doors have remained shuttered ever since Rapid Action Battalion completed a drive against illegal gambling at seven clubs based in Motijheel's 'Club Para' on September 18, just 13 days ahead of the transfer window, which opened on October 1 and is set to close on November 20.

Arambagh president AKM Mominul Haque Shaheed intended to form a strong squad for the upcoming season as the 2018 Independence Cup champions ensured the services of 14 new footballers. In addition, they retained the services of 11 old guns by paying 10 percent of their proposed wages, amounting to about Tk 70 to 80 lakh. They also sent offer letters to three Brazilian and one Uzbekistani footballers in an effort to stun other established clubs.

However Arambagh hit quite the snag indeed when Shaheed, who is now abroad, was reportedly found to have been involved in running an illegal gambling establishment. This put the

club in jeopardy ahead of the players' transfers.

"We requested the Bangladesh Football Federation [BFF] to extend the transfer window for three months [on October 5] following the changing situation in Club Para but the BFF did not accept our appeal and let us know about their decision on October 15.

"So, we have decided in principle to pull out of the transfers because we don't have any funds to sign players."

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"So, we have already asked all our players to find new clubs as Arambagh is not going to take part in the players' transfer this time. We, the club officials, will hold a meeting within a few days and let the football federation know

about our official decision to withdraw by October 30," he added.

In reponse to a query, the Arambagh official said: "It is not possible to even form a mediocre team with the money we already gave the players in advance and we can't ask them to return the money until they get new contracts either. As far as I know so far, only two or three players have managed to secure new clubs while the others have yet to do so."

Arambagh coach Maruf Haque also seems to be in hot water though as the three Brazilian and one Uzbekistani players they approached are continuously asking for final contracts.

National discard Nasirul Islam was supposed to sign for Arambagh for the upcoming season but he now finds himself in a difficult situation, finding another club.

"A club official informed me that Arambagh KS won't form a squad, requesting me to find out a new club. But you know most of the premier league clubs have already formed their respective squads and I don't know my future," the right-back told The Daily Star from Nilphamari.

"I am even ready to play for clubs for less money than what I was supposed to get from Arambagh. I want to play football but don't know whether any club will rope me in this season," said the defender with sorrow in his voice.

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## Fixtures changed again

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

The fixtures of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup have been changed again, pitting the semifinals on two days while deferring the final from Wednesday to Thursday.

The fixtures were rescheduled a few times since the start of the tournament in an attempt to accommodate late entrants Gokulam Kerala following the withdrawal of Abahani at the eleventh hour.

Now the fixtures have been rearranged in an attempt to draw bigger crowds to the ground, according to the organisers.

"We initially thought of two semifinals on two days, but due to the late arrival of Gokulam Kerala and to complete the tournament within October 30 with the imminent start of I-League, we rescheduled two semifinals on October 28. But now we have been informed that the start of I-League has been postponed to the third week of November, so we can reschedule the two semifinals on two days and shift the final to October 30," the tournament's chief coordinator, Tarafder Ruhul Amin, told reporters yesterday.

"This rescheduling has been done so that the matches could be held in the evening, which will attract more crowds. We have taken all necessary permission from AFC and consent of all the four semifinalist teams," Ruhul Amin added.



Besides, there is no environment to make the club functional as it still remains under lock and key. We communicated with the police to open the club but did not get a positive response from them," a senior Arambagh official seeking anonymity told The Daily Star yesterday.

"So, we have already asked all our players to find new clubs as Arambagh is not going to take part in the players' transfer this time. We, the club officials, will hold a meeting within a few days and let the football federation know