

Local hopes rest with hosts

Ctg Abahani face 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 Maruful 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, 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," Maruful 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. Maruful 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.



Tottenham Hotspur took the lead in the very first minute as Harry Kane headed home from close range at Anfield yesterday, but Jordan Henderson's (L) goal and Mohamed Salah's penalty ensured Liverpool would win and remain six clear at the top of the Premier League.

PHOTO: REUTERS



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

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.

Reds sink Spurs to remain six clear

REUTERS, London

Liverpool recovered from the shock of going behind in the first minute to beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-1 at Anfield on Sunday and restore their six-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

Jordan Henderson equalised after the break before Mo Salah tucked away a penalty to complete the comeback as Liverpool's marauding start to the season continued.

Harry Kane's stooping header after Son Heung-min's deflected shot hit the crossbar had given Tottenham a dream start in their bid to win at Anfield for the first time in eight years.

Tottenham keeper Paulo Gazzaniga made a succession of superb saves to keep his side in front at halftime.

Son almost put Spurs ahead with an angled shot against the crossbar early in the second half but it was one-way traffic and Liverpool's pressure eventually told as Henderson fired home soon after -- his first league goal at Anfield since December 2015.

Tottenham were hanging on but right back Serge Aurier's clumsy tackle on Sadio Mane after 74 minutes gave Salah the chance to put Liverpool in front and he made no mistake.

Tottenham are without a Premier League win on the road since January and have slumped to 11th, eight points behind the

Champions League places.

MU CLAIM FIRST AWAY LEAGUE WIN
 Manchester United beat Norwich City 3-1 at Carrow Road despite missing two penalties to claim their first away win of the season and move up to seventh.

Goals by Scott McTominay and Marcus Rashford put United in control by halftime but they could have been out of sight had Tim Krul not saved spot-kicks from Rashford and Anthony Martial -- both penalties awarded after VAR interventions.

McTominay swept the visitors in front on 21 minutes, United's 2,000th Premier League goal, and after Rashford was denied by Krul from the spot the striker made no mistake when he was played in by Daniel James after 30 minutes.

Krul dived to his left to save Martial's spot-kick but the French forward atoned with a neat finish after 73 minutes following a slick interchange with Rashford.

ARSENAL THROW AWAY 2-0 LEAD
 Arsenal were held to an eventual 2-2 draw by Crystal Palace at the Emirates Stadium as VAR denied the home side what would have been a late winner from Sokratis Papastathopoulos.

Arsenal took a 2-0 lead within nine minutes when centre backs Sokratis and David Luiz scored just 106 seconds apart from corners. Wilfried Zaha was booked for a perceived dive in the box but VAR intervened and ruled a penalty, which was put away by Luka Milivojevic.

Warner blazes birthday ton

AFP, Adelaide

David Warner emphatically bounced back to form with a first-ever T20 century as Australia crushed Sri Lanka by 134 runs in their opening match of the series in Adelaide on Sunday.

Birthday boy Warner clubbed an unbeaten 100 as he powered Australia to a massive 233 for two, aided by century stands with skipper Aaron Finch and Glenn Maxwell.

Sri Lanka limped to 99 for nine from their 20 overs in a meek response, with leg-spinner Adam Zampa capturing three for 14.

Coming off a dismal Ashes campaign in England, Warner plundered his ton off 56 balls with four sixes and 10 fours, reaching his hundred off the last ball of the innings.

The ton on his 33rd birthday was complemented by blistering half-centuries from Finch and Maxwell, as the Australians ripped into the Sri Lankan bowlers -- with Kasun Rajitha's 0-75 off four overs proving the most expensive figures in a T20I.

"It's great to come out and play on nice true wickets," man-of-the-match Warner said. "The tone was set by Finchy. I tried to go on and be there at the end. I'd like to think we have enough runs."

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 Shaeed, who remains outside of Bangladesh following his alleged involvement in illegal gambling.

Shaeed 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 Shaeed 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.



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

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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 Shaeed 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 Shaeed, 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.



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

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

In response 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 Maruful 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.

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.

Pre-tournament, the port city side said 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 three group matches gone. And it has not been in an attempt to rest his precious legs, rather to not endanger the hosts' chances. 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 was a good striker in his days, playing for arguably the best Ghana team of all time. He played all 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 heartbreaking fashion. In his 35-match career for the Black Stars, Tagoe scored five goals and was affectionately called Prince of Goals.

But those days are long gone as he moved around 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 before being poached by Chattogram Abahani.

But on seeing him at the ground, coach Maruful Haque realised it was a bad decision taken by the club.

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

It has been learnt that the decision to hire Tagoe was taken by one of their influential officials, which has divided opinion among players and officials. One of the players, on condition of anonymity, said: "Any local African player, playing on hire would 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.