

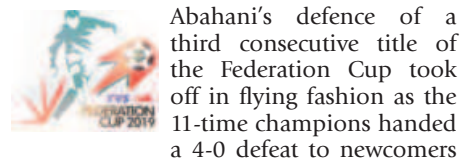
'SERIE A'S MONKEY CAMPAIGN TOO PROVOCATIVE'

An anti-racism campaign by Serie A featuring monkeys was "too provocative", Lazio president Claudio Lotito said Wednesday, stressing however that the league was not racist. Monday's launch of the campaign was aimed at promoting "integration, multiculturalism and fraternity" but immediately drew widespread criticism and ridicule. "The spirit was not to accentuate the racist side, but unfortunately, it was not seen in a positive light, judging from the reaction," Lotito told reporters in Rome. "The league is certainly not in favour of racism, the problem is that the campaign that was done was too provocative."



Abahani too strong for Police

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani's defence of a third consecutive title of the Federation Cup took off in flying fashion as the 11-time champions handed a 4-0 defeat to newcomers Bangladesh Police in the opening match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Haitian forward Kervens Belfort scored twice while Nigerian marksman Sunday Chizoba and local forward Nabib Newaz Jibon netted one goal each in the match which started 15 minutes later than schedule time due to opening ceremony formalities.

Promoted Bangladesh Police created a hype by forming a good squad, roping in four players from Montenegro, Bulgaria, United States and Kyrgyzstan. However, they could hardly impress in their debut match against the traditional giants, conceding three goals in the first half before letting in the fourth goal after the break.

The Sky Blues stepped up boldly as expected to create a lot of scoring chances with new-signing Kyrgyz midfielder Edgar Bernhardt playing key role behind the three forwards - Sunday, Belfort and Jibon - while new Brazilian centre-back Mailson Alves kept the defence unbroken throughout the match.

Belfort broke the deadlock in the 28th minute with a glancing header from inside the box after Bernhardt whipped in a curling free-kick from outside the right-hand side of the box while Jibon, playing

as captain, tapped in at far-post after a long throw-in from Raihan Hasan came his way following a deflection off a Police defender four minutes later.

Sunday killed off the contest after firing home from inside the box following Belfort's assist two minutes before the break while Belfort converted a spot-kick in the 71st minute to ensure Abahani's comprehensive victory.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos took off three foreign players - Edgar, Sunday and Belfort - by 70 minutes but Police could not make any dent on Abahani's defence despite playing better in the second half.

"We had really very good training in last two weeks even though you never know what might come in season's first match. Police is a new team and I saw some of their games. However, it is a good start for Abahani and we can improve more as it was our first game," Lemos said. "One thing which we want to improve this season is defending as we conceded too many goals last season. I know our attackers can score but we need a very compact defensive line."

Jibon said that he was happy with the overall performance of the team and his own goal, adding that he has a target of scoring 20 goals this season.

Bangladesh Police manager Sheikh Maruf Hasan said, "The defeat margin was big but our players played well. Abahani availed opportunities but we could not cash in on the opportunities we created in the match. I think we will play better in upcoming days."



ABAHANI 4 - 0 BANGLADESH POLICE
Belfort 28', 71'; Jibon 32', Sunday 43'

Kervens Belfort (L) scored twice while Nabib Newaz Jibon and Sunday Chizoba scored one apiece as defending champions Abahani beat Bangladesh Police 4-0 in the opening match of the TVS Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Tsitsipas aims for top three breakthrough

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Greek star Stefanos Tsitsipas is eyeing a top-three finish next season as he hopes to break the rankings stranglehold of Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The 21-year-old concluded his 2019 season with a bang, lifting the ATP Finals crown in London on his debut in the tournament to end his year at No.6 in the world.

Tsitsipas struggled to sleep in the days after his victory. He says he kept getting flashbacks of the point that earned the biggest trophy of his career.

"I'm currently living in the best period of my life, with the best people around me. I really feel like this is very important for my balance and for my thinking," Tsitsipas said.

One of just two players to beat each member of the 'Big Three' in 2019, Tsitsipas has set himself lofty goals for next season, as he looks to challenge for a Grand Slam.

"I understand that our tennis era is changing in a way, the top-three are getting older obviously, we are the ones come from behind. So for me, I do have as a goal to win a Grand Slam title next year, that's for sure, but it's not a matter of life or death for me," explained Tsitsipas.

"One of my goals for next year would be a Grand Slam title, finishing in the top-three by the end of the year, making the Nitto Finals again and winning a Masters 1000."

Leipzig, Dortmund play 6-goal thriller

AFP, Berlin

Patrik Schick snatched a draw for RB Leipzig in a pulsating 3-3 draw at title rivals Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday that moved them three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga.

Timo Werner also struck twice as Leipzig twice came from behind twice in the second half in a fiery encounter played out in torrential rain at Signal Iduna Park.

The draw means third-placed Dortmund missed the chance to move up to second.

"The game opened up after the break and we played with more courage and emotion," said Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann. "In the future, we need to make sure that we play like that from the beginning of big games like this."

"It was a lucky point for us. Dortmund could have defeated us, but they didn't."

While Dortmund at times showed a level of skill and quality to worry their

upcoming Champions League opponent PSG, at other times they showed clear signs of the defensive softness that has come to define their season.

In other games, Robin Quaison's first half hatrick saw Mainz increase Werder Bremen's relegation fears n 5-0 thumping on Tuesday evening.

Bremen, who were hammered 6-1 at Bayern Munich on Saturday, are just two points away from the drop zone after being blown away in the opening period by a Mainz team who started the match just one place above them.

"It's my first hatrick in top level football so I'm very proud of myself," said Quaison. "It was a perfect evening for us."

Elsewhere, Augsburg put three past a struggling Fortuna Dueseldorf at home, to leave the visitors entrenched in the relegation playoff spot.

Hoffenheim won 2-0 at Union Berlin through second half goals from Ihlas Bebou and Christoph Baumgartner.



PHOTO: AFP

Patrik Schick scored a dramatic equaliser for league leaders RB Leipzig in a pulsating 3-3 draw with Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga on Monday.

TELEGRAPH SCHOOL CHESS

Neer second in Kolkata

SPORTS REPORTER

Candidate Master Manon Reja Neer became runner-up in 28th Telegraph School Chess Championship in Kolkata yesterday. Neer beat India's Pratay Chowdhury in the ninth and final round to secure 7.5 points.

Kazi Zarin Tasnim and WFM Noshin Anjum became 17th and 21st respectively with seven points, said a Bangladesh Chess Federation press release.

Ruman fails, Ram Krishna shines

SPORTS REPORTER



SA Games triple gold medallist Ruman Sana failed to shine in Teer 11th National Archery Championship as he was eliminated from the semifinals of men's recurve individual event at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi yesterday.

Sakib Mollah ousted Sana by 6-2 set points in semifinal to advance into the final before surrendering to unheralded Ram Krishna Saha in the final which Saha won by 7-1 set points.

Sana settled for a bronze medal after beating Rakib Mia by 7-1 set points in the

place-deciding match.

In women's recurve individual event, Beauty Roy grabbed gold after beating Mehnaz Akter Monira by 6-0 set points in the final while Afroza Akter Sathee beat holder Diya Siddique by 7-3 set points to win bronze medal.

In men's compound individual event, Siam Siddique beat Himu Bachar by 144-140 points to win gold while SA Games gold winner Suma Biswas justified her reputation by winning gold medal with a 143-140 points win over Shyamoli Roy in women's compound individual final.

The finals of all six team events will take place today.

SHORT CORNER

Wenger defends Ozil

Former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has defended Mesut Ozil after comments made by the Gunners midfielder condemning treatment of Uighur Muslims led to a stinging backlash in China.

"Mesut Ozil has the freedom of speech like everybody else and he uses his notoriety to express his opinions which are not necessarily shared by everybody, but he has the right to do that," Wenger told journalists in Doha on Wednesday.

"You are a human being, you have an opinion, and then when you play football you play football. You do your job first and you have to respect that."

Ozil condemned China's crackdown on Muslim minorities in the western region of Xinjiang in a tweet last week.

In response, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV pulled its coverage of Arsenal's Premier League game against Manchester City last weekend.

-- AFP

I dream of playing with Zidane, says Pep

Pep Guardiola has admitted that he would love to have played alongside Zinedine Zidane during his career. Guardiola will lock horns with the Real Madrid manager when his Manchester City side face the La Liga giants in the Champions League round of 16.

It is the first time the two men will come up against one another on the touchline, although they have been on opposite sides during their playing careers.

"It's a special moment because Zidane is one of the best," he said. "I dreamed when I was a player with playing with him, but it never happened."

"I didn't talk much with him, but my impression is that he is an amazing perso."

"I admire him, it's really good to have these kind of people. It will be a pleasure to see you again."

--AGENCIES

Ireland tour of SL postponed

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has announced that the proposed Ireland Tour of Sri Lanka, which was expected to take place in February 2020, has been postponed due to the lack of a broadcast partner.

Under the original schedule, Ireland was scheduled play a single Test match vs Sri Lanka from 8-12 February 2020. ICC regulations require that all Tests are broadcast and the tour was not part of SLC's original broadcast agreement, which was concluded in 2013.

Cricket Ireland have agreed to SLC's request to reschedule the tour to a later date to ensure that the one-off Test will come under the next broadcast agreement, which SLC is planning to sign during 2020. The date for that rescheduled match will be announced in due course.

--AGENCIES

Villa teach Liverpool's kids a lesson

AFP, Birmingham

Liverpool's youngest ever team suffered a harsh lesson on Tuesday as Aston Villa ran out 5-0 winners to reach the League Cup semifinals, with Jonathan Kodjia scoring twice.

The Liverpool line-up contained five debutants and an average age of 19 years, six months and three days with the European champions' first team and coaching staff, including manager Jurgen Klopp, in Qatar for their Club World Cup semifinal against Monterrey on Wednesday.

That inexperience showed defensively despite a much better performance from the visitors than the scoreline suggests.

"I thought we were magnificent," said Liverpool's stand-in manager Neil Critchley.

"We were really unfortunate to concede from a free-kick and a cruel deflection and find ourselves 2-0 down. It was an incredible night and no-one wanted it to end."

Villa made 10 changes themselves with Premier League survival a priority.

"It was a bit of a weird game, probably the weirdest one I've been involved in for a quarterfinal of a major competition," said Villa boss Dean Smith.

"I came through coaching those sorts of age groups. It was great to see them on that stage, so we had to be very professional."

"It was a lose-lose for us," Villa midfielder Conor Hourihane said. "Everyone expected us to win and we just had to do our jobs."

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