



Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema peels away in celebration after scoring his side's second goal which earned them a 5-4 win on aggregate over defending champions Chelsea in the quarterfinal second leg at Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Tuesday. (Bottom) Bayern Munich talisman Robert Lewandowski hangs his head as Villarreal players celebrate their aggregate win in Munich.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP

# Ancelotti credits the ‘magic of the Bernabeu’

AGENCIES/AFP

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has credited the ‘magic of the Bernabeu’ for his side’s Champions League comeback against Chelsea to reach the semi-finals on Tuesday night.

Real held a two-goal advantage from the first leg at Stamford Bridge but saw that disappear when goals from Mason Mount, Antonio Rudiger and Timo Werner turned the tie around and gave Chelsea the aggregate lead with only 15 minutes remaining.

But Rodrygo pulled back a stunning late goal to force extra-time, before Karim Benzema continued his best ever season by winning it in the added period.

“At no stage did I think that it was over, particularly because we were playing here at the Bernabeu. It’s difficult to put it into words, but this magic spurs you on,” Ancelotti reflected.

“It helped to give the whole team that energy boost to get through to the semi-finals...the magic of this stadium helps the players to never give in.”

Benzema’s tie-winning goal was his 38th of an increasingly spectacular season and his 12th in the Champions League alone after successive hat-tricks



in recent games.

The Frenchman has thrived at Real since taking over from Cristiano Ronaldo as the main man in 2018, with this season representing the most prolific of his career.

His previous record tally for a single season was 32 goals in all competitions and you couldn’t bet against him reaching 50 before 2021/22 is over.

Speaking ahead of the Chelsea game, Ancelotti didn’t hide away from how important the player is.

There were slight concerns that Benzema had suffered an injury as he appeared in discomfort towards the end of the game and seemed to be hobbling. But Ancelotti allayed fears.

“There’s nothing wrong with Benzema,” he confirmed.

**‘Villarreal fuelled by Nagelsmann remark’**

Villarreal forward Gerard Moreno said comments by Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann inspired the Spaniards to their shock 2-1 aggregate win over the German giants in the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Leading 1-0 from the first leg, Villarreal snatched a 1-1 draw on the night and a semi-final place through Samuel Chukwueze’s 88th-minute goal.

“Tonight they (Bayern) made the mistake of not killing us off and we took advantage of that,” Moreno said.

On Monday, Nagelsmann said Villarreal had made a mistake by winning the first leg by a slender 1-0 margin “which allowed us to survive”.

“In the first leg we made the mistake of not finishing them off. All the comments about that served as motivation,” said Moreno, whose cross set up Chukwueze’s tie-winning strike.

“What this team has done is great.”

Robert Lewandowski had put Bayern ahead on the night to level the tie.

Unai Emery’s Villarreal had already knocked out Juventus in the last 16

following a stunning 3-0 win in Turin.

“It’s an extraordinary feeling, it was not easy for us. We are a small club, from a village, like that of Asterix and Obelix,” said Emery.

“We are moving forward step by step, we had a very difficult quarter-final.”

The Spaniards face either Benfica or Liverpool in the semi-finals. Jurgen Klopp’s Reds take a 3-1 lead into Wednesday’s second leg at Anfield.

“It’s unbelievable, it’s taken a lot of hard work,” said Villarreal captain Raul Albiol, the man of the match in Munich, who at 36 is two years older than Nagelsmann.

“Our victories are as a team. We have suffered a lot in both games, but to be in the semi-finals is great for Villarreal.

“We knew it was going to be a long 90 minutes and we were going to suffer a lot.

“We want more. We see ourselves as causing problems to all our opponents.”

Emery basked in the glory of a historic result for Villarreal in his 50th Champions League match as a coach.

“We took a lot of confidence from the first leg result, but we had to defend well and we tried to create our own chances – we created five and took the final one,” he said.



## Years of hard work paying off for Ferrari

REUTERS, MILAN

Years of hard work are paying off for Ferrari with a stellar start to the Formula One season, company chairman John Elkann said on Wednesday.

Charles Leclerc has won two of the first three races, finishing second in the other, and has a 34-point lead in the championship.

Ferrari, who last won a title in 2008 and failed to win a race in 2020 and 2021, also lead the constructors’ standings by 39 points from champions Mercedes.

“We said two years ago that we had to work hard to get back to being competitive and the 2022 championship has got off to a truly thrilling start,” Elkann said at Ferrari’s annual shareholders’ meeting.

“Like all our tifosi (fans) around the world, I am delighted we are competing at the highest level,” said Elkann.

## Age doesn’t matter: Mirajul

Fifteen-year-old striker Mirajul Islam impressed everyone with his goal-scoring ability in ongoing Bangladesh Championship League (BCL), finishing as the second-tier’s top goal-getter while representing BFF Elite Academy. His performances saw him earn a shot at top-flight football in the Bangladesh Premier League, with Mohammedan set to rope in Mirajul on loan after the Bangladesh Football Federation decided in principle to send the teenager to the Black & Whites for the rest of the season in exchange of Tk 10 lakh. The 10th-grader shared the tales of his journey and spoke about plans for the future with The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): You started with the BFF Elite Academy in the BCL and are set to join Mohammedan in the coming days. How do you feel?

Mirajul Islam (MI): I just now learned that information from you. If it happens, it really is big news for me and I would be very happy. I will try to give my best for Mohammedan although I’m sure there will be a lot of challenges.

DS: You are the top-scorer of the BCL with 10 goals in 11 matches. Does striking goals come easy to you?

MI: No, it is not an easy task. I always try to improve in terms of scoring but nothing is easy. However, I really love to score goals and I feel really good after scoring. Scoring 10 goals in 11 matches was possible because of my teammates, who helped me a lot.

DS: How do you feel you match up against Mohammedan’s foreign recruits and experienced



players for a place in the playing eleven?

MI: I believe I can compete against them. Age doesn’t matter. Performances on the field are more important. I believe in myself and I believe I can secure a place in the starting eleven through my performances.

DS: Do you have experience of playing any position other than striker?

MI: From the beginning, I play as a striker. Before coming into the BFF Elite Academy, I played in the 3rd Division Football League for King Star in 2021 and hit 13 goals in probably 20 matches as we became runners-up in the league. I also participated in the 2018 Subrato Cup in India for BSKP and I hit seven goals.

DS: Can you tell us briefly about your football journey?

MI: In my childhood, my parents, especially my father, prevented me from playing football. However, my two elder brothers, who were also playing football in our village of Jhalakathi, inspired me to play and helped me develop as a footballer. After being admitted to the BKSP in 2017, my parents also inspired me. I joined the BFF Elite Academy from BKSP.

DS: What are your strengths and shortcomings?

MI: I can press well up front and I also have good accuracy with my shots. I am also good at dribbling, but need to improve in one-on-one situations. I also need to improve my heading in front of goal.

DS: What is your ultimate target in football?

MI: My target is to play for the national football team but I think that is still a ways off.



Bangladesh Test team’s captain Mominul Haque departs the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Wednesday morning following the arrival of the first batch of players from South Africa, where the team lost the two-match series 2-0. Talking to media present at the airport, Mominul said they have to learn from their mistakes while emphasising that he was the one making key decisions during the games.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED