

### Real 'hit a good level' as Chelsea sink

AGENCIES

Real Madrid marched on in their defence of their European crown as they booked their place in the Champions League semi-finals for the 11th time in the last 13 competitions on Tuesday.

Carlo Ancelotti's men breezed past Chelsea at Stamford Bridge with Rodrygo's double securing a 2-0 win.

"Chelsea did very well in the first half and caused us a few problems, but we put in a very well rounded second half, raised our game and moved the ball around better and had more dynamism. We hit a good level," Ancelotti told reporters.

"We are delighted to play in another semi-final and will keep striving to reach the final. Reaching a semi-final is always a success because it allows you to dream of winning another Champions League and playing another final."

Chelsea's interim manager Frank Lampard found crumbs of comfort from his side's performance despite a crushing quarter-final exit.

"I think for 60 minutes the only thing missing was a goal," Lampard told reporters. "One goal or two goals changes the face of the game and at this level when you're not clinical you see what happens. The end bit of scoring is crucial and something we need to address."

But he says the rebuilding job must start in the time he remains at the helm.

"Manchester United have spent time out (of the Champions League), Arsenal have spent time out. It's impossible to try and predict it. We can set the building blocks now of where we want to get to."



Real Madrid winger Rodrygo conjured up his inner Cristiano Ronaldo when he netted twice in his side's 2-0 win over Chelsea in the second leg of the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champion League at Stamford Bridge yesterday. The 22-year-old pulled out the Ronaldo celebration when he gave Real the lead in the 58th minute and paid homage to his idol, who has scored the most goals in the competition's history and had made it a habit of scoring on the biggest occasions.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

### 'When I started weaving that dream, I got a shock to the system'

Loneliness during bad patches in top-level cricket often does not come into the spotlight. It is an issue Virat Kohli had spoken about recently. When former Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque was struggling with performances, on top of the responsibilities of captaincy, difficult times engulfed him and he was eventually relieved of captaincy. He talked about those times, his dreams of Test captaincy and the work he is doing to get

back to rhythm with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts are below:

**DS: How did it feel to score runs Maunganui too. What was it like going through the slump?**

**MH:** As you said, when there is a new innings after a bad patch it's a good feeling and that knock was really important to me. It was something to feel good about as well.

**DS: Oftentimes batters don't score runs despite everything looking good. Did you face a similar issue during the slump?**

**MH:** At my age, having played 55 Tests, there aren't any technical issues. I know the way I score runs and maybe at that time I was mentally broken. Or when I was captain, I was thinking too much about the team. When I took the captaincy, I had said that I have a big dream regarding the Test team. When I started weaving that dream, I got a shock to the system a little bit. Maybe that's why my focus wavered.

**DS: Where did that shock to the system come from?**

**MH:** Actually, by saying shock what I mean is that when you are building a dream, you have to perform yourself as well, but I wasn't performing myself.

**DS: But you scored at Mount**

you can check it too, I was batting at a strike rate of 50 to 55. The ones where I didn't score runs, my strike rate was 30 to 35.

**DS: Because you weren't playing your natural game?**

**MH:** Yes. Knowing that particular fact worked well for me. I thought about it and was able to bring it back. Maybe I scored 84 (against India) but my strike rate was good.

The more defensive you become, the more it will kill you. You will die trying to survive, whether in a battlefield or in life. If you look to dominate, maybe you will face difficulties at first but you will be successful going forward.

**DS: Who were you working with apart from Salahuddin sir?**

**MH:** I worked with Wasim Jaffer. He was working with the U-19s and sir was busy with the BPL. I was mentally down and sir was busy too, so I couldn't find

anyone. It was a little difficult during the BPL. I appreciate Shahriar Nafees bhai for helping me with the practice facility.

**DS: You feel less pressure now?**

**MH:** When you don't have captaincy, that pressure comes down. You can focus on your own game but the dream I have won't end.

**DS: How far did you come along to making the Test team a real unit?**

**MH:** I was almost there. Pace-bowling unit wise at least.

**DS: What have your interactions been like with Hathurusingha?**

**MH:** I feel that he is more mature than before. He is much better now in the context of giving freedom.

**DS: Did you have issues with him in his previous stint?**

**MH:** No there was no problem. It was created by you guys (smiles).

**DS: Plans on upcoming Afghanistan series?**

**MH:** Premier League has ended for me and I will begin preparations soon. West Indies A team are also due and I will get two four-day matches there. Being on the field continuously will help me.



### 80 is the new 50

REUTERS, TOKYO

Mutsuhiko Nomura's football career has spanned 18 World Cups, or 70 years, to be exact. Now the silver-haired former Japanese national team player is a member of the brand new over-80 division of Tokyo's "Soccer For Life" (SFL) league, which played its first match this month.

The sprightly 83-year-old and his teammates are among a growing number of seniors pushing the boundaries of active living in Japan, one of the world's fastest greying societies.

"When I was a kid, men in their 50s and 60s were considered 'grandpas,'" Nomura, already a member of several amateur teams, said after a pre-season practice match in February.

"And now, we're all still at it in our 80s. It's shocking."

It was only two decades ago that Tokyo created a division for the 0-60 age group. In 2012, the 0-70 division followed, and five years later, the 0-75 category. At that



rate, 0-80 was simply a matter of time.

If his more "mature" teammates are something to go by, Nomura may easily have

another decade on the pitch: the oldest player, Shingo Shiozawa, is 93.

"If I hadn't played football, I'd have been dead by now,"

said the former designer of racing cars, who plays goalie.

He credits the sport with motivating him to quit smoking and helping to speed

his recovery after treatment for spinal stenosis.

With an average age of 83-1/2, however, stiff backs, creaky knees and laboured breathing were often on display as the players of the three SFL teams slogged through inaugural matches under a blazing sun last Wednesday.

A ball propelled forward by a player failed to reach his slow-moving teammate, while a few stumbled and wobbled on the pitch. An 89-year-old who ran out of breath asked to be substituted about 10 minutes into a match, unable to play the rest of the 15-minute half.

After the game, Nomura and his teammates toasted their prowess with cans of beer, in a ritual familiar to many younger players.

"I think the formation of the 0-80 division is a reflection of what we're seeing in Japanese society, where the elderly demographic can be active like this," said Yutaka Ito, the secretary general of the SFL league.

<b>SONY SPORTS 1</b>
UEFA Europa League
Sevilla vs Manchester United
Live from 1:00 am (Friday)
<b>SONY SPORTS 2</b>
UEFA Europa League
Sporting Lisbon vs Juventus
Live from 1:00 am (Friday)

### Semifinal berth a 'big step forward' for Milan

AGENCIES

AC Milan reached the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since they won the trophy 16 years ago thanks to a first-half goal from Olivier Giroud at Napoli that secured a 1-1 draw and 2-1 aggregate win despite a barrage of pressure on Tuesday.

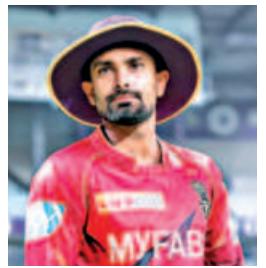
"We're too happy to have overcome such a good team... it's a great feeling," AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli said after the match.

"Let's take it one step at a time, whoever we get, we get. Whoever we get it will be a great derby and Champions League semi-final."

They have overcome a post-World Cup slump in recent weeks and Tuesday's performance was another statement display which gives them hope of reaching the final.

"These are experiences which give you the strength and ability to manage a certain type of pressure. For many of us it was the first time that we were playing such an important match... it's another big step forward."

Napoli, who were in the last eight for the first time, are in a mini slump without a victory in their last three matches in all competitions.



### Liton-Fizz duel in store?

STAR SPORTS DESK

Delhi Capitals are slated for a clash against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi today (8:00 pm BST) and the hosts would be desperate to stage a revival act after losing all five matches of the 2023 Indian Premier League (IPL) season.

For Bangladesh fans following the IPL, this game presents the first opportunity of the season to watch the only two Bangladesh stars – batter Liton Das and pacer Mustafizur Rahman – in the same fixture of the ongoing IPL edition.

While Liton is yet to feature for Kolkata in his maiden IPL stint, Mustafizur has had a lacklustre show by his standards as the "cutter master" has only been able to make impact sporadically for Delhi in two outings.

Based on recent form, Kolkata is undoubtedly the favourites in the fixture but two back-to-back losses would be playing on their minds. Bangladesh fans would thus hope that Kolkata would change their playing eleven, unlike how they operated in the two previous games, and allow Liton to make his much-anticipated IPL debut.

The two sides are faced with contrasting problems on the batting front. While Delhi has repeatedly struggled to capitalise inside Powerplay since the tournament's start, Kolkata's death-over batting in their last match against Mumbai Indians had left a lot to be desired.

### 4 guest nations on SAFF C'ship radar

SPORTS REPORTER

The South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) is preparing to invite guest nations to take part in the upcoming SAFF Championship after all South Asian nations, bar Sri Lanka, confirmed their participation.

The 14th SAFF Championship is scheduled to begin on June 21 in Bengaluru and will feature eight teams, with one or two nations beyond the South Asia region being invited depending on the number of participating nations from South Asia.

India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan have already confirmed their participation and there is hardly any possibility to include Sri Lanka, whose football federation was suspended by FIFA.

So, concerned authorities are mulling to include two guest teams from among four further invitees.

A SAFF secretariat insider informed that they would invite 54th-ranked Saudi Arabia, 95th-ranked Vietnam, 138th-ranked Malaysia and 149th-ranked Indonesia before choosing two.

"The scheduled of the SAFF Championship has been fixed outside the FIFA Window (June 12 to 20), so it will be a challenging job to get guest teams since they may have domestic commitments," said a source seeking anonymity. "However, we will try our best. The All Indian Football Federation will also be trying to convince the guest nations to play the SAFF Championship."

The draw for the tournament will be held after the SAFF Congress on May 6 in Dhaka.