

NUMBERS GAME

➤ **25** - Pep Guardiola's side are unbeaten in their last 25 Champions League games at the Etihad, having won 23 of them. Their last defeat came against Lyon in September 2018. In all competitions, City are currently unbeaten in 22 matches, with 18 wins.

➤ **12** – Vinicius Jr has been directly involved in 12 goals in 11 Champions League appearances this season, scoring seven goals and providing five assists. He leads all players for involvement in open play sequences that end in goals (14) and shots (76).

➤ **7** - Madrid are unbeaten in their last seven knockout games in the UEFA Champions League, including finals – winning six and drawing one.

➤ **4** - Real Madrid are winless in their previous four away games against Manchester City in the Champions League, losing each of the last two and drawing the two prior. The only team Real have faced more times away from home in Europe without ever winning is AC Milan, who Real have failed to beat in seven attempts.

➤ **2** – Madrid have only twice progressed on the nine previous occasions they failed to win the first leg of a Champions League knockout tie at home. Ominously for City, both were in Manchester, against United in 2000 and 2013.

Two clubs back out of Women’s DPL at eleventh hour

SPORTS REPORTER

The second and final day of the players' transfer for the upcoming Women's Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League was held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, but events took an unexpected turn as two clubs, Sheikh Russel KC and Ajax SC, no-showed for the second consecutive day, signaling their withdrawal from the league and creating uncertainty among the cricketers.

The 11-team tournament now looks to be a nine-team affair and national pacer Jahanara Alam expressed her frustration about the turn of events.

"I think it's disappointing for women's cricket that two clubs backed out from the league at the last moment. As you know, not all cricketers are financially solvent. It's a big blow for the girls who wait for the Dhaka league each year," Jahanara told the media yesterday.

"I recruited two cricketers who were supposed to represent Ajax SC for my team last night. But it's sad that many players are still looking for a team. I hope the BCB will handle such issues strongly in the future so no other team can back out from the league at the last moment."

According to the sources, the two clubs did raise some concerns to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) before eventually backing out from the league. It was also learned that there was bargaining over councillorships from the two clubs but the two parties could not come to an agreement in the end.

"It's definitely a concern but everyone has some limitations. The clubs raised some issues but obviously it's disappointing that some of the players are now uncertain about their participation in the league since the two clubs did not participate this season," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

As in previous seasons, each club can field one foreigner in their playing eleven in the round robin league. Organisers are yet to announce the schedule but it was learned that the league is likely to begin between May 23 to 25.

‘These situations may arrive at the WC against big teams’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh clinched two very close games against Ireland and Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was adjudged the player of the tournament for his vital contributions with the bat, opined that digging in for the wins in difficult scenarios would be useful to their World Cup campaign.

There are about four months left until the World Cup in India and the Tigers are planning to get their preparations right in the remaining matches. The conditions in Ireland provided a challenge and chasing down 320 in just 45 overs in the second ODI was a big boost.

"The 320 we chased down was very important. Then the match where we defended [a 274-run target in the third ODI]. Both matches were very important. These kinds of situations may arrive at the World Cup against big teams. We got a feel for both instances; how to chase and how to defend. If we can keep these instances in our memory when playing matches, it will be great," Shanto told reporters at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport after landing in the country.

Bangladesh finished third in the ICC ODI Super League ahead of India, Pakistan and Australia and Shanto believed their form must continue. "We are playing good cricket but there is room for improvement," he said.

Shanto was credited with putting forward



good feedback to the team during the third ODI while defending 274. The left-handed batter was also electric on the field.

"Whenever the team is fielding, we all try to help out and give ideas we may have to bowlers or the captain. It's good we could do it and when it helps the team out, it's a good feeling. We always try to contribute and provide feedback," he said, adding that the crowd in Chelmsford made them feel like they were playing at home.

AGENCIES

It's not an exaggeration to suggest that tonight's Champions League semifinal second leg against defending champions Real Madrid is the biggest game in Manchester City's recent history.

With the Premier League title all but wrapped up after Arsenal's defeat to Brighton at the weekend, and a FA Cup final against Manchester United – where City will be heavy favourites – Real Madrid stand between them and the chance of going for an historic treble.

But this is the Champions League. And this is Real Madrid, a side that thrive in knockout competition. So much so that it can sometimes feel like they can channel black magic to drag themselves



out of desperate situations.

As recently as last year, when these two sides met in the semifinal and Rodrygo's injury-time brace took the tie into extra time. From that point on, Karim Benzema's winning penalty seemed inevitable.

It was the second time that City had been eliminated from a UCL semifinal, after Real Madrid inflicted the same

pain on them in 2015-16. Should they fail to progress here, it would be the first time that a team have been eliminated by the same side in the semifinals in consecutive UEFA Champions League campaigns.

In the first leg, avoiding a Bernabeu beating was priority number one for Man City's treble chasers, who will undeniably enter Wednesday's second

Lemos relishing Abahani-Mohammedan final

SPORTS REPORTER

Coach Mario Lemos expressed his excitement after leading Abahani to the final of the Federation Cup against historic rivals Mohammedan following a 3-0 win over Sheikh Russel in the second semifinal at the Shaheed Dhirendra Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

The final, to be held in Cumilla on May 30, will be the first Federation Cup final between the country's two most popular clubs in 14 years, with the Black and Whites winning the last battle at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in 2009.

The two sides met later twice in cup finals during the 2009 Super Cup and 2011 Super Cup, with the Black and Whites winning the former and the Sky Blues having the last laugh two years later.

Mohammedan's 2-1 win against favourites Bashundhara Kings in the first semifinal last week means this will be the first Dhaka Derby final in more than a decade, a prospect that excited Lemos.

"I'm very excited. It's a big game with a lot of history. I think it's a game that is going to get the gallery full. People who love football and love Mohammedan-Abahani, hopefully we can have a good game and show them that Bangladesh football is still alive," the Portuguese told The Daily Star



over phone following yesterday's victory.

Abahani are the defending champions and record 12-time winners of the Federation Cup, which had been a traditional curtain-raiser in Bangladesh football in the past. But is being held in concomitantly with the Bangladesh Premier League for the first time this season.

Both Abahani and Mohammedan are realistically out of contention for the Bangladesh Premier League title, with Abahani in second position, 10 points behind leaders Bashundhara Kings and Mohammedan sixth, a further 11 points behind. This is both teams' first chance to taste silverware this season, but Lemos

was confident.

"I know it's not [going to be] easy, but when you are in a final, it's one game. It's a very tough game but we have to win. We have to play the same way we played today – be patient, disciplined, organised and try to win the game," the long-term Abahani coach said.

After Sheikh Russel striker Mfon Udoh missed a couple of scoring chances, Colombian forward Daniel Colindres gave Abahani a 38th-minute lead with a powerful diagonal shot following a long-ball from Rezaul Karim.

Foysal Ahmed Fahim doubled that lead six minutes after the restart with a placed shot on a square pass from Raphael Augusto. The 24-year-old Bangladeshi forward wrapped up the victory with a floated attempt that Sheikh Russel keeper Ashraful Islam Rana failed to keep out in the 71st minute.

Lemos felt the team defended very well and were effective on the counterattack.

"Sheikh Russel are a very tough team to beat. We played three times against them. We lost one, we drew one and we won on penalties in the group stage of the Federation Cup. I thought it would be a 1-0, 2-0 or a 2-1 – a very tight game. We defended very well and attacked very well. It was a good win for us," Lemos added.



PHOTO: RCB

Royal Challengers Bangalore have their own 'Cristiano Ronaldo fan club', with their star player Virat Kohli leading the pack including Wayne Parnell and Karn Sharma.



PHOTO: TWITTER

Barcelona players turned hip in celebrating their first La Liga in four years, parading through the Spanish city on an open-top bus with fans flocking the streets and cheering from the balconies of their homes on Monday. A 4-2 win over Espanyol on Sunday ensured Barcelona's La Liga triumph with four games in hand.

PCB ‘unhappy’ with new revenue model

STAR SPORTS DESK

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is unhappy with the proposed revenue distribution model for international cricket although it accepts that India, the game's financial engine, should get the biggest share, chairman Najam Sethi told Reuters.

According to figures leaked to Cricinfo, India would claim 38.5%, while England and Australia would pocket 6.89% and 6.25% respectively. Pakistan stands to earn 5.75% of the ICC's projected earnings, primarily from its media rights sale.

"We are insisting that the ICC should tell us how these figures were arrived at," Sethi told Reuters from London. "We are not happy with the situation as it stands."

Sethi said the PCB had already asked the ICC to explain how its finance and commercial affairs committee, headed by Indian cricket board secretary Jay Shah, determined the share.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told the Daily Star yesterday that they already explained their position to ICC and they were not in a position to make any comments regarding the issue.

Former England captain Mike Atherton wrote in The Times newspaper on Monday: "If that distribution comes to pass, then the strong will get stronger, the weak weaker (relatively) and international cricket will continue to become less competitive – which is in nobody's long-term interest."

Leicester staring down the barrel

AGENCIES, London

Leicester City supporters left the King Power Stadium in their droves with 20 minutes remaining during their 3-0 drubbing against Liverpool, knowing full well that their Premier League fate could well have been sealed by the time they return.

The Foxes face West Ham at home on the final day of the season but Monday's loss felt like a crucial moment. Should Everton win at Wolves on Saturday and Dean Smith's side get beaten at Newcastle two days later, Leicester will be relegated to the Championship, just seven years after defying 5000-1 odds to win the Premier League title.

But Leicester fans were in no mood to empathise, booing at both half-time and full-time during the game against Liverpool while chanting: "You're not fit to wear the shirt".

Almost exactly seven years earlier, those same supporters were packed inside the King Power Stadium waiting for Andrea Bocelli's rendition of Nessun Dorma – the perfect prelude to getting their hands on the Premier League trophy. More recently than that, these fans had also been treated to a Champions League quarterfinal, regular Europa League matches and an FA Cup final triumph at Wembley.

Now, barring a miraculous recovery



in their final three games, Leicester are set to swap night outs at the Wanda Metropolitano to a brief layover at Taunton Dean services en route to Plymouth Argyle.

Smith understood why the fans were upset, but did not question his players. "I wouldn't question our fight today. I wouldn't question our attitude. If you're losing 3-0 at home and you're fighting a relegation battle, I understand why fans will react in certain ways."

Smith reiterated that narrow margins contributed to Leicester's defeat. "It is two marginal inside goals and a free-kick that should never have been," he added. "I can't question the players and I won't."

On what he has said to his players, Smith said: "Not an awful lot. It's a tough time to lift the players. Liverpool made it very tough for us. We have to keep believing."