

Diabate enjoys 'special moment'

ATIQUE ANAM from Cumilla

Soon after the presentation ceremony following the pulsating Federation Cup final in Cumilla yesterday, Mohammedan captain Souleymane Diabate ran up the stairs with two trophies in his hands — one for the top scorer and another for the player of the tournament — and a crest for becoming the most valuable player of the final. He walked into the dressing room, where the Mohammedan players were revelling following a thrilling win over arch-rivals Abahani.

The Malian sat still and opened his phone to video call his family back home. He was calm, reluctant to get carried away by the euphoria around him, embodying the mindset he had shown when he calmly dispatched his spot-kick in the penalty shootout after netting four goals in regulation and extra time.

Diabate has been playing football in Bangladesh for five years now but he hardly gets recognition for his efforts, dwarfed by the fame of more illustrious foreigners like Robson Robinho and Daniel Colindres. But he was unfazed by the lack



Mohammedan players burst into euphoric celebrations after downing holders Abahani in an epic Federation Cup final that fully lived up to its billing yesterday. Breathing much-necessary life into Bangladesh football, the high-voltage affair in Cumilla had it all, from goalfest to heroics to nail-biting turn of events, making it a match to remember for all participants and supporters. The stadium audiences, in tens of thousands, deserve a special shout-out as the glorious ambiance at the Dharendra Nath Dutta Stadium was a vivid reminder of the bygone past of the country's domestic circuit. [Bottom] Former Bangladesh forward and Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed along with Jashimuddin Joshi, former Mohammedan player, celebrate the club's first trophy in nine years.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



A triumphant Mohammedan after nine years

SPORTS REPORTER from Cumilla

Captain Souleymane Diabate engineered an extraordinary fightback as Mohammedan beat archrivals Abahani 4-2 on penalties following a 4-4 draw in regular and extra time during a topsy-turvy Federation Cup final in Cumilla yesterday to clinch their first title in nine years.

The Malian forward scored an unprecedented four goals in the final and then calmly converted the first spot-kick to set the Black and Whites on a path to glory as the Motijheel-based outfit raised their first Federation Cup trophy since 2009.

The final between the two most illustrious outfits in the country and the drama and excitement of the final, reminiscent of Argentina's FIFA World Cup final win against France in Qatar six months ago, more than paid dividends to the 10,000-plus that had braved the scorching heat and turned up at the Shaheed Dharendra Nath Dutta Stadium.

Diabate conjured a superhuman performance, dragging his side back into the match every time Abahani seemed to have taken the game away. Whether or not this will serve as a resurgence for the Black and Whites, who have already enjoyed a sort of mini-revival under coach Alfaz Ahmed, remains to be seen, but the entertainment and competition provided by a rather unfancied Mohammedan surely gives hope for the future.

Diabate had come into the match



as the joint-leading scorer of the tournament, but it did not look likely that he would add to that tally as Abahani went into half-time with a comfortable 2-0 lead. Faisal Ahmed Fahim had given the record 12-time champions a 17th-minute lead with a placed shot before Daniel Colindres doubled their margin two minutes before the break with a fine curling effort from the left.

Alfaz made three substitutions at half-time, and those changes made an instant impact as the Black and Whites found some verve in their attacks. Diabate reduced the arrears with a fine side volley after Abahani defender Alamgir Molla's header, intended to clear the danger, landed right next to the Malian forward in the 56th minute.

Diabate then took just five minutes to net the equaliser, getting a glancing header after Muzaffarov's initial volley was parried by Sohail.

With everything to play for again, the match stretched at both ends and Abahani, despite seeing their two goal cushion wiped out in a flash, got their rhythm back in midfield.

Emeka Ogbugh rattled the woodwork after a cross from Rahmat Mia in the 64th minute before reclaiming the Sky Blues' lead two minutes later with a smashing attempt on a rebound following a shot from Fahim.

But Diabate seemed determined not to go down easily, orchestrating another moment of inspiration as he rose above to head home from Kamrul Islam's corner in the 83rd minute to force extra time.

There was enough drama left in store, with Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain making two terrific saves and then limping off while Diabate's fourth from a spot-kick was cancelled out by a screamer from Rahmat Mia with two minutes of extra time remaining.

The indefatigable Diabate stepped up to take the first spot-kick in the shootout and gave confidence to his teammates, which rubbed off on substitute keeper Ahsan Habib Bipu, who saved against Colindres and Augusto's efforts to take the Black and Whites to the verge of glory.

Although Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohail saved Shahriar Emon's attempt, Mohammedan's young defender Kamrul Islam converted his team's fifth spot-kick, ensuring this epic final was not stretched to sudden death.

Ruud, Jabeur cruise while Gauff survive hiccup

REUTERS, Paris

World number seven Ons Jabeur made a near-flawless start to her French Open campaign as she brushed aside unseeded Italian Lucia Bronzetti 6-4, 6-1 on Tuesday to reach round two, while last year's runner-up and fourth seed Norwegian Casper Ruud also made his way into the next round by thumping Swedish qualifier Elias Ymer 6-4, 6-3, 6-2.

Later in the day, American sixth seed Coco Gauff, runner-up a year ago, recovered from an error-strewn start to begin her French Open quest with a 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 victory over Spain's Rebeka Masarova, ranked number 71.



"The [2022] final is in the past so I'm not worried about that," 19-year-old Gauff said of her initially rocky return to Roland Garros.

Tunisian Jabeur, the runner-up at last year's Wimbledon and US Open after a shock first-round defeat at Roland Garros, blended guile and power as she reeled off the breaks in the second set to go 5-0 up before dropping serve.

Meanwhile, 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva grabbed her first Grand Slam main draw win. Andreeva announced herself to the world when she stunned 2021 US Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez 6-3, 6-4 in Madrid last month.

"Last year I was here as a junior and I think I couldn't even imagine that I can be here playing the women's tournament and being in a major passing qualification," Andreeva said.



PHOTO: TWITTER

After Chennai Super Kings secured a dramatic five-wicket win over Gujarat Titans in the Indian Premier League final at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi stadium on Monday, all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja came up with a beautiful post for skipper MS Dhoni. Jadeja, who pulled off the improbable by striking a six and a four in the final two deliveries to ensure CSK's record-equaling fifth IPL title, tweeted: "We did it for one and only MS Dhoni. Anything for you Mahi bhai."

Windies dominate opening day

SPORTS REPORTER

West Indies A dominated the opening day of the third and final unofficial Test after posting 320 for six against Bangladesh A at the Sylhet International Cricket stadium yesterday.

The hosts, however, got off to a brilliant start early in the day after being asked to bowl, having picked up two wickets for just one run as the visitor felt the pressure upfront.

Left-arm seamer Shoriful Islam removed opener Kirk McKenzie while another young pacer Mushfik Hasan, who eventually went on to pick two wickets, dismissed Zachary McCaskie.

However, West Indies gained control as the day progressed, riding on eighties from opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul and skipper Joshua Da Silva, and fifties from Alick Athanaze and Raymon Reifer, who remained unbeaten with Kevin Sinclair at 22.

Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed did raise hope by picking three wickets later in the day but the visitors eventually had the upper hand at stumps.

In-form Chanderpaul continued to impress with his patience and resilience, facing 160 deliveries for his 83-run knock which included nine fours and a six. Skipper Silva also played brilliantly before being dismissed on 82 off 94 balls, striking twelve fours and two sixes.

A battle to stay perfect in Budapest

AFP, Budapest

Roma manager Jose Mourinho has never lost a European final while Sevilla are six from six in Europa League finals. Something has to give in Budapest on Wednesday.

Portugal's Mourinho has five major continental titles to his name — two Champions League wins, two Europa League trophies and last year's triumph in the inaugural Europa Conference League with the Italian side.

The 60-year-old announced himself on the big stage in 2003 when he led Porto to the UEFA Cup, the Europa League's precursor, and the following year he won the Champions League.

Inter Milan became champions of Europe on his watch for the first time in 45 years in 2010 and he celebrated his fourth continental trophy during his spell at Manchester United in 2017, winning the Europa League.

Twenty years on he is defying the naysayers who said his career was on the wane after a disappointing spell at Tottenham.

If Roma lift the trophy in Hungary, Mourinho will pull clear of Giovanni Trapattoni, who also won five major European trophies in his coaching career.

The much-travelled Mourinho is in no doubt he is improving with age and experience.

"Better coach, better person,



same DNA," said the Portuguese. "The DNA is motivation, is happiness. Desire for these big moments, and these are the feelings that I try to pass to the boys. "I think you can be better and better with your experiences. I think your brain becomes sharper and the accumulation of knowledge is better with the years. "I think you stop when you lose motivation. My motivation grows every day. I think I am better now." Roma, who edged past Bayer Leverkusen in the semifinals, finished sixth in Serie A but victory against their

Spanish opponents this week would be a passport into the Champions League.

Mourinho's future beyond this season is uncertain but he says for now his only focus is on Wednesday's match at the Puskas Arena.

In order to achieve his target, Mourinho must get past Sevilla, who are kings of Europe's second-tier competition — their tally of six wins is double that of Inter Milan, Liverpool, Juventus and Atletico Madrid.

They are 11th in La Liga but have turned on the style in Europe, coming from 2-0 down at one stage in the first leg against Manchester United to see off the English giants before beating Juventus in the semis.

It is a remarkable end to the season for the club, who flirted with relegation for much of the campaign, sacking Julen Lopetegui and then Jorge Sampaoli, before Jose Luis Mendilibar steadied the ship.

Veteran wing-back Jesus Navas is aiming to win the Europa League for the fourth time, just two months after Mendilibar took charge.

"We transform (on Europa League nights) and it's incredible how we come out in every match," said veteran wing-back Jesus Navas.