



PHOTO: REUTERS

## Survival instincts PROPELLING REAL

### STAR SPORTS DESK

Off the pace in the Champions League and the Spanish top flight last season, Real Madrid once again showed what they are made of when it comes to the Champions League – a competition that they have conquered the most times.

Real Madrid can now truly aim for a prestigious double as Carlo Ancelotti's side beat reigning European champions Manchester City on penalties on Wednesday to reach the semifinals. They also boast a commanding eight-point lead on Barcelona in La Liga ahead of the Clasico on Sunday.

It was sweet revenge for Real Madrid, who were thrashed 4-0 at the Etihad Stadium in their exit from the Champions League at the semifinal stage last year.

▶ Real Madrid have knocked out reigning Champions League winners on six occasions, the most, in knockout ties. It is at least twice as any other side in the competition's history.

▶ Real qualified for the semifinals of the Champions League for a record-extending 17 times. Bayern Munich are in second with 13 appearances.

▶ This was only the third time that Real have managed to progress from a Champions League knockout tie after failing to win the first leg at home. The other two instances were against Manchester United.

▶ Real have not lost any of their last 58 Champions League games in which they were ahead at half-time (W50 D8). Their

last such defeat came against Galatasaray in April 2013 when they lost 3-2 after being 1-0 up at half-time.

▶ Real boss Carlo Ancelotti qualified for the semis of the Champions League for a 10th time, the joint-most in the competition's history alongside Manchester City's Pep Guardiola. Ancelotti is also the first manager to knock Guardiola out of the competition in three different campaigns.

▶ Real goalkeeper Andriy Lunin has saved 10 out of 26 penalties he faced in his senior career – a staggering success rate of almost 40 percent.

▶ City's Rodri kept his unbeaten record intact as he has not lost any of his last 67 games for the Citizens.

minutes from full-time.

City's relentless barrage of attacks only amplified but Real, as they so often do, still made it through after a gruelling 120 minute second leg – mostly because of the belief that every Real player usually have it in them to win a game from nowhere.

"We showed the attitude and commitment demanded by this jersey," said Ancelotti.

"This is a very special competition for us and we always deliver something that people are not expecting us to produce. "Everyone was writing us off but we're still here."

Even during penalties, Real saw their most experienced player Luka Modric miss the first kick. But they bounced back from there as well, thanks to goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, who had morphed into a wall in the entirety of the tie.

Real midfielder Federico Valverde was named UEFA's man-of-the-match, but Lunin had made a strong case to be handed the award after making two saves in their shootout.

"It's an away Champions League game and we went through a lot of suffering... but I'm very grateful to the team for everything they've fought for. I can't imagine myself running like my teammates did today," the 25-year-old keeper said.

And for what had unfolded eventually, all City coach Guardiola could say after the game was: "It is what it is. We performed to our best, but it was not good enough."

Maybe that's what facing Real Madrid is like – you can play to the best of your abilities and still come out without the desired result from the tie just because you are up against Real, the record 14-time winners of the competition.

But for the game to be dragged down to penalties, it needed Real Madrid to play unlike themselves. They needed to show that they had the defensive steel in them to thwart the last season's treble winners in front of a packed home crowd at the Etihad Stadium.

In a defensive backline that was pegged back with injuries and forced to form makeshift combinations for most of the season, Antonio Rudiger, who himself was out injured for the first part of the season, stood tall in immaculate brilliance.

He nullified City top-scorer Erling Haaland, almost with ease, once again like he did in the first leg at the Santiago Bernabeu. Rudiger's brilliance was spread to the entire Real Madrid squad on Wednesday as they played in a low block, allowing City to play their game and come at them – but only to frustrate

the likes of Phil Foden, Haaland, Rodri, and their coach Pep Guardiola.

Real dug deep, and never looked in a rush to force things. Their plans seemed to have started on the right trajectory when a long ball was brilliantly controlled by Jude Bellingham in the midfield. He played on Federico Valverde, the player-of-the-match, as the Uruguayan put Vinicius through on the right flank. From there, Vinicius combined with Rodrygo, who put it past City goalkeeper Ederson on the second attempt to give Real the lead in the 12th minute.

But from then on Real were the second-best team, as they were happy to be.

With City being mostly at Real's half, the slender one-goal lead looked to fizzle out at some point, and it did when Kevin de Bruyne found the net 14



"I love it when a team gives their all and sacrifices everything in big games like this one," Ancelotti said after a pulsating two-legged quarterfinal that ended 4-4 on aggregate before the Spanish side triumphed 4-3 in a penalty shootout.

## Kane toasts 'fight and grind' in Arsenal win

### AGENCIES

Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane toasted his side's willingness to "fight and grind" after Wednesday's 1-0 win over Arsenal sent them into the Champions League semifinals.

Bayern's narrow win, thanks to a 63rd-minute header from Joshua Kimmich, gave Bayern a 3-2 aggregate win after a 2-2 draw in London in the first leg.

The 3-2 aggregate quarter-final victory means Bayern return to the last four for the first time since winning the title in 2020.

The hosts worked hard for the win which was in stark contrast to the free-flowing draw at the Emirates.

England captain Kane told TNT: "It's an unbelievable win – it's been a tight season for us."

"We had to fight and grind and today was that. We knew we could make the difference with our own fans."

"It was what we expected, a tough game, a tight



game and we got a great goal from Josh to make the difference."

Bayern's form in Europe is in stark contrast to that in the Bundesliga, where they are 16 points behind Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen, who last week won the title, breaking the Bavarians' 11-year streak in the process.

"Our expectation is to try and win the Champions League," added Kane.

Meanwhile, the result continues a poor week for Arsenal, who conceded top spot in the Premier League table on Sunday.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said his side had "wanted it so badly".

"However, you can see with many other clubs that sometimes it takes six or seven years to get to that stage. We were very close, that is the reality."

- ▶ Arsenal have lost eight Champions League matches against Bayern Munich, two more than they've lost against any other side.
- ▶ Five of Joshua Kimmich's last seven goals in the Champions League for Bayern have come in the knockout stages. He has 12 in total in the competition.
- ▶ Bayern have scored a total of 30 goals against Arsenal in the Champions League. Only Real Madrid (against Bayern) and Bayern themselves (against Barcelona) have scored more against a single opposition with 34 and 33 goals respectively.
- ▶ Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer made his 23rd Champions League quarterfinal start, the most by any player.

### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMIFINALS

**BAYERN MUNICH VS REAL MADRID**  
 1st leg: May 1, Allianz Arena  
 2nd leg: May 9, Santiago Bernabeu

**DORTMUND VS PSG**  
 1st leg: May 2, Signal Iduna Park  
 2nd leg: May 8, Parc des Princes

## MSC threaten to boycott last match

### SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club need a victory over title contenders Abahani Limited in today's last match of Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League to regain the prestigious title but the league leaders are hesitant to play their last match over the issue of Rasel Mahmud Jimmy's suspension.

As per the bylaws, Jimmy has been handed a one-match suspension after receiving yellow cards against Bangladesh Police, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club and Usha KC respectively, thus the veteran player will miss the Abahani match.

However, Mohammedan sense there is a "conspiracy" at play against them and have appealed the league committee to withdraw Jimmy's suspension, threatening to skip their last match otherwise.

"As per the bylaws, we were supposed to be informed about Jimmy's issue after he received his second yellow card, but the federation didn't inform us. So, we were not aware of the issue," said Mohammedan SC manager Ariful Haque Prince at a press conference at the club premises yesterday.

"Jimmy was intentionally given a yellow card in our last match following an argument, so that he cannot play the vital match against Abahani. This is a conspiracy to make our squad weaker because Jimmy is our key player," he said, adding that they would skip today's match if the suspension is not withdrawn.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary AKM Mominul Haque Sayeed said, "We don't have the right to go against the rules and regulations. They [Mohammedan] alleged that we did not inform them after Jimmy received two yellow cards. We have already sent them the evidence, a document that Mohammedan SC manager had signed. It is clear that we will not consider anything which goes against the rules and regulations." In reply, Mohammedan SC manager Prince said, "We are waiting for the reply from the federation and our board of directors will take the decision whether to play tomorrow's [today] match or not."

Meanwhile, the title race remains wide open with contenders Mohammedan (35 points), Abahani (34) and Mariners (34) all set to play their last league match today.

## Concussion sub stirs controversy

### SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) encounter between Shinepukur Cricket Club and Legends of Rugganj at BKSP's ground-3 yesterday flared up following a concussion-substitute controversy, serving as another reminder about the state of the country's premier one-day competition.

The incident happened during the 43rd over of the first innings when Shinepukur batter Robiul Haque ran himself out and, in the process, got injured. The physio came to the ground to accompany the batter out of the field, and it was learned that Robiul had been taken to hospital in an ambulance.

However, before the start of the innings, Rugganj players and officials were surprised upon seeing Mukidul Islam Mugdho replacing Robiul as the concussion sub.

While it was a like-for-like replacement, the nature of the injury caused a raging debate between umpires and club officials, leading to the game being halted for around 30 minutes. Rugganj alleged that Robiul had left with a hamstring injury.

The match eventually continued through former Rugganj captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza intervening, after which Shinepukur won by 67 runs to rise to second spot in the standings.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

**Pacer Shoriful Islam, after his four-for helped Abahani to a 10-wicket win over Sheikh Jamal in DPL yesterday, stated after the match that he was wanted by IPL team Lucknow Super Giants for this season, but a "too short" NOC blocked his way.**

A Rugganj official told The Daily Star, "If a player suffers injury around the shoulder area, a concussion sub could be used. The situation demands as such but the player in question, batting during the 43.3 over mark, was run out and we saw in video footage that he dove while his shoulder hit the ground."

"There were no signs of head hitting

ground. When you get hit in the head, you won't be holding your waist in pain. He got up and when walking [back], he cramped. It was not like he had a head injury," he continued.

"The physio was with him and he did not rub his shoulder or head because of a head injury. When they felt that this player can't bowl, they made a drama and said 'the player is facing difficulty seeing properly and we have to use an alternate player'. We protested when we saw Mugdho in the field as the sub."

"Their physio gave the report but we have not seen it yet. Who will we complain to? The umpires would say it's the match-referee's jurisdiction, and the match-referee told us that there was an injury and the sub could be allowed."

When The Daily Star contacted match-referee Syed Asif Hossain for a statement, he was too busy to comment on the decision.

Earlier, Irfan Shukkur's 88-ball 106 saw Shinepukur post 256 for nine before pacer Nahid Rana picked up three wickets for 11 in eight overs while Mugdho bagged one, conceding the same number of runs in eight overs, as Rugganj reached 189 for nine.

Meanwhile, leaders Abahani won by 10 wickets against Sheikh Jamal in Mirpur, thanks to Shoriful Islam's four-for. Elsewhere, Prime Bank won by 141 runs against Gazi Tyres in Fatullah.