



"I've never seen the VAR called to review a penalty in a shootout... Never! Did you see him touching the ball twice? Please whoever was present in the stadium and saw him touching the ball twice, the ball moving, please come forward and raise your hand! I don't see anybody with their hand raised so that's all I have to say... next question."

Atletico Madrid coach **Diego Simeone** was fuming with the referee's decision to rule out Julian Alvarez's spot kick in the penalty shootout.

"We made it more difficult by losing unnecessary balls that constantly found us out of position... If they scored 2-0, then the game could have gotten out of control. We wanted to finish the game before penalties, sure, but here we are, still fighting and in contention, as is customary at this club,"

Real Madrid coach **Carlo Ancelotti** was relieved to win the game.



Manchester United great **Wayne Rooney** said about the club, who are 14th in the Premier League.



## Over a dozen goals scored, but does it help Bangladesh?

ANISUR RAHMAN

The Bangladesh national football team scored more than 12 goals in a match on Thursday. At first glance, this might seem like an extraordinary feat, a reason to celebrate the team's attacking prowess -- especially since Bangladesh are not known for scoring heavily at the international level.

However, when placed in context, it raises concerns about the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) planning and vision.

With an eye on their upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers opener against a strong Indian side on March 25, the national team is currently undergoing a training camp in Taif, Saudi Arabia. As part of their preparations, Bangladesh played a practice match against Al-Wehdat Football Club of Taif City -- an academy team based in Makkah -- and dominated. Although the team management did not disclose the exact scoreline, sources indicate that Bangladesh netted over a dozen goals.

"It has been good practice for the players. Most of them got at least 45 minutes on the pitch, and it was a valuable opportunity to implement what we have been working on over the past eight days in Saudi Arabia," head coach Javier Cabrera said in a video message provided by the BFF.

Following the match, questions have been raised about whether playing against an academy side and scoring so many goals serves as ideal preparation for Bangladesh. Meanwhile, India are set to play a single practice match against the Maldives on March 19 at the same venue in Shillong, where they will host Bangladesh in the qualifiers.

Cabrera's charges also participated in a one-hour practice session, a gym workout, meetings, and other activities on the same day as the match. This highlights how comfortable the game was for them, as they still had enough energy left for additional drills.

Italy-based Fahamedul Islam also featured in the match, though details on how the right-winger performed and adapted alongside local players remain unknown.

"We will continue our preparations and hope to play at least one more practice match while in Saudi Arabia," Cabrera stated. However, he had previously mentioned that Bangladesh would play three practice matches, including one against Sudan, which was later canceled due to scheduling conflicts.

Additionally, Bangladesh are awaiting the arrival of Hamza Choudhury, who plays for Sheffield United in the Premier League. He is expected to join the camp on March 17, meaning he will miss all practice matches, making it more challenging for him and the team to build chemistry.

Given these circumstances, one must question whether Bangladesh would have benefited more from playing against the country's top domestic clubs -- such as Abahani, Bashundhara Kings, and Bangladesh Police FC -- who are currently in training for the Bangladesh Premier League.

## Alvarez slips, Real do it again

STAR SPORTS DESK

When it comes to the Champions League, Real Madrid somehow get the job done -- Los Blancos have all but established this notion simply because of the way they have been churning out victories in the competition.

Manchester City, Chelsea, PSG, and Bayern Munich have all been victims of Real's ruthless resilience in the past decade -- even at times when it seemed almost impossible to stage a comeback.

Wednesday was such a night when Real were never on top of their game, yet they still managed to walk out as winners following a 4-2 win on penalties after their last-16 tie against city rivals Atletico Madrid ended in a 2-2 aggregate scoreline at the Metropolitano stadium.

However, the talking point of the game has been the decision to rule out Julian Alvarez's penalty during the shootout.

### The Incident

Alvarez stepped up for Atletico's second penalty after Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham, and Atletico's Alexander Sorloth had already converted. As Alvarez ran towards the ball, he slipped but managed to keep his shot on target. The ball flew into the roof of the net.

### The VAR Intervention

Confusion arose in the moments that followed. Before Federico Valverde could take Real's next penalty, referee Szymon Marciniak halted play for a VAR review.

While initial replays broadcast worldwide were inconclusive, the VAR found evidence that Alvarez's left foot had made contact with the ball before he struck it with his right.

The final VAR decision confirmed: "Atleti player, No. 19, double touched the ball when the penalty kick was taken."

### The Aftermath

Referee Marciniak signaled the double



### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTERFINALS

#### FIRST LEGS

8 April

Arsenal vs Real Madrid

Bayern München vs Inter

9 April

Paris vs Aston Villa

Barcelona vs Borussia Dortmund

#### SECOND LEGS

15 April

Aston Villa vs Paris

Borussia Dortmund vs Barcelona

16 April

Real Madrid vs Arsenal

Inter vs Bayern München

twice, and I told the referee," Courtois said. "It's not easy to see, and it's bad luck for them."

Meanwhile, CBS Sports' FIFA rules expert Christina Unkel explained that ball-tracking technology contributed to the decision.

"The rule is simple and straightforward -- if the ball is touched twice, it's an infringement. Additionally, VAR has access to semi-automated offside technology, which helps detect contact with the ball at the precise moment of impact," Unkel explained.

#### What Happened Before The Shootout

Conor Gallagher's strike 27 seconds into the game at the Metropolitano stadium had levelled the scores on aggregate.

Gallagher's close range finish cancelled out Real's 2-1 lead from the first leg last week, but the reigning champions could have progressed inside 90 minutes.

They won a spot kick midway through the second half when Kylian Mbappe was hauled down by Clement Lenglet after accelerating into the box.

However, Vinicius Junior blazed his kick high over the bar, and the game went to extra time and then penalties with no further scoring.

## UEFA TO REVIEW PENALTY RULE

UEFA said the correct decision was made to disallow Julian Alvarez's penalty in Atletico Madrid's Champions League loss to city rivals Real Madrid on Wednesday but European football's governing body would enter discussions to review the rule. "Although minimal, the player made contact with the ball using his standing foot before kicking it. Under the current law (Rules of the Game, Law 14.1), the VAR had to call the referee signalling that the goal should be disallowed. UEFA will enter discussions with FIFA and IFAB (International Football Association Board) to determine whether the rule should be reviewed in cases where a double touch is clearly unintentional," UEFA said in a statement on Thursday.

### SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud was disappointed that Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad could not bid goodbye from ODIs from the field and said patience would be key in finding replacements for the veteran duo.

"They had glorious careers. Their careers are a bright chapter in Bangladesh cricket. They took Bangladesh cricket from one place to another. So, they deserved to retire from the field," Mahmud, who is one of the only Bangladesh cricketers who retired from the field, told the media in Mirpur yesterday.

"Leaving the game is painful, especially as it's something you love the most. But of course, both of them made wise decisions regarding the timing of their retirement," he added.

Mahmud was part of the Bangladesh dressing room in different capacities for a big chunk of the 'Big Five' era of the national team -- a period in which the likes of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah were the core of the side.

But after Mahmudullah announced his retirement from international cricket on Wednesday, just days after



Mushfiqur also quit the ODI format, no member of the 'Big Five' are now currently a part of the 50-over setup.

Although the 'Big Five' have achieved a lot as individuals, but in terms of getting Bangladesh to the next level, a big trophy remained elusive.

By comparison, the previous generation of cricketers like Minhajul Abedeen, Aminul Islam Bulbul and Mahmud helped Bangladesh cricket make a giant leap by lifting the ICC Trophy in 1997, a triumph that took

Bangladesh to its maiden ODI World Cup in 1999 and eventually made way for them to attain Test status.

The 'Big Five' came close to winning the Asia Cup multiple times, finishing as runners-up thrice, reached the semifinal of the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017 and the quarterfinal of the ODI World Cup in 2015, but could not win any notable silverware as their triumphs were mostly limited to bilateral successes.

Both Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah

faced public ire on social media after Bangladesh's poor showing in the recently-concluded Champions Trophy, where both of them also failed to deliver and soon after announced that they are stepping away.

Mahmud spoke about the harsh criticism the team faced after the Champions Trophy disaster which he felt crossed limits at times.

"Of course, there were expectations from the Champions Trophy but you have to be realistic. The boys too will have to take responsibility for failures but there can't be such bitter criticism like we saw on social media."

The big question in Bangladesh cricket right now is who will replace Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah in ODIs moving ahead.

Although Mahmud did not name any names, he said patience would be key in finding the proper replacements.

"You can't buy the experience of Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah. They were not big stars from the beginning; they built themselves up gradually."

"This is not musical chairs. If you drop someone after just one game then you would need 70 players in the pipeline. BCB is getting players from the pipeline and investing in them. You have to give them time."



Forward Marco Asensio came off the bench and scored twice to help Aston Villa to a comfortable 3-0 win over Club Brugge at home in the second leg of their last-16 encounter of the Champions League. Asensio, who joined Villa from PSG in the January transfer window, scored his seventh goal since the switch. His brace in the second-half on Wednesday helped Villa to a 6-1 aggregate win, setting a reunion with his parent club in the last eight of the competition.

PHOTO: REUTERS