

Flamengo beats Al Hilal the hard way

Comes back from a first half deficit to make the final

CLUB WORLD CUP

AYON SENGUPTA
DOHA

Flamengo's run to FIFA Club World Cup final was not as easy as its canter to the Brazilian Serie A title, which it won by a 16-point margin – the highest in recent times. The South American side had to overcome a first-half deficit to inflict a 3-1 loss on Asian champion Al Hilal.

Former Benfica coach Jorge Jesus with the help of a string of veteran Brazilians with European experience has tried creating a modern team – valuing the ethos of pressing football – unlike the pragmatic approach of coaches like Luiz Felipe Scolari and Dunga, which has long been prevalent in Brazilian club football.

While the new methods have offered grand success at home, Flamengo has found it hard to deal with teams from outside the country as was evident during its laborious Copa Libertadores final win over Argentina's River Plate.



Heading ahead: Bruno Henrique puts Flamengo in front against Al Hilal with this strike on Tuesday. •AP

Here, too, the Brazilians started listlessly with too many mispasses in the middle as Al Hilal looked happy to concede possession and hit its more illustrious opponent on the counter, using the pace of Salem Aldawsari,

who played on the left of a midfield three, and his fellow Saudi Arabian international Mohammed Alburayk, operating as a right-wing back.

Former Italian international Sebastian Giovinco, too, orchestrated some fine

move with his guile and turn, exploiting the space opened up by the burly forward Bafetimbi Gomis, who did well to hold the ball and draw defenders his way.

The Saudi side, cheered on by pockets of faithfuls,

took the lead in the 18th minute when Aldawsari sneaked inside the box to connect a strong right-footer past a diving Diego Alves – left flat-footed following a deflection off Pablo Mari – after Alburayk had run into space on the right before playing a teasing ground pass towards his team-mate.

Asserting dominance
Flamengo had to wait till the break to assert its dominance and almost immediately after the restart Gorgian De Arrascaeta equalised with an easy tap-in.

With the Asian side showing signs of fatigue, Flamengo took control of the game and found the lead when Bruno Henrique, running into the box, was left unmarked and placed his header on the back of the net after a curling cross from the right by De Arrascaeta in the 78th minute.

More misfortunes were to come Al Hilal's way as Ali Al-Bulayhi conceded an own goal four minutes later as a shot from Henrique caused

panic near the goalmouth. The Brazilian champion's ploy to exert more pressure in the second half on its tiring opponent finally bore fruit, offering the team a way out from a difficult situation. Summing up the contrasting nature of the two halves, Henrique said: "In the first half we were not playing that bad.

"However, we knew that they (Al Hilal) did not have the physical strength to play with the same intensity for 90 minutes and we were able to create more opportunities in the second session, playing as a team."

With a chance now to collect the world title, manager Jesus called the final to be the "most important match of his career".

"I am always impressed with European football. I know Liverpool is favourite, but it has to win the next match. We have reached the final and it will be one of the most important match of my professional career. Winning this trophy will be a great honour," he said.

I-League: Kolkata derby postponed

New date will be announced later

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The I-League match featuring the two city giants Mohun Bagan and East Bengal has been postponed owing to the fragile political situation in the state.

The match was scheduled to be held on Sunday. According to a release from host Mohun Bagan, the police authority responsible for the security match advised of allowing a restricted number of spectators.

With the Kolkata Derby attracting more than 50,000 spectators on average, the Mohun Bagan management did not agree to the advice of restricting the number of fans and approached the organiser, All India Football Federation, seeking a fresh date. The new date will be

announced later. "After a detailed discussion, the Police Authorities informed us that the match should be organised on a limited scale and that sale of tickets should be restricted. Subsequently, we wrote to AIFF to apprise them of the situation and told them that the derby is the flagship match of the League. "Football lovers look up to this match and to restrict this capacity would be to deprive the thousands of football crazy people from seeing the match. The AIFF taking stock of the situation and considering the importance of the Derby Match in the larger interest of the game have granted our request to postpone the match to a later date," the Bagan release said.

Bengaluru FC regains its rhythm

Goes to the top of the standings with win over NEUFC

ISL

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
GUWAHATI

Bengaluru FC pumped in two late goals against host NorthEast United FC to regain its winning rhythm, at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here on Wednesday.

This was a nice comeback for the defending champion, which seemed to have slipped a bit after suffering its first loss of the tournament in the previous match at home against Mumbai City FC.

Captain Sunil Chhetri opened the account midway through the second half through a penalty before Spanish defender Albert Serran moved up to find the insurance goal in the final quarter of the action.

With the tournament about to reach the half-way stage, the win took the holder to the top of the standings with 16 points from nine outings. The game saw a nice con-



Over the moon: BFC defender Albert Serran celebrates after scoring the second goal against NEUFC. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

test in the midfield in the opening half with NorthEast dominating the first quarter but as the action wore on Bengaluru started asserting itself with Ashique Kruniyan excelling from the left.

Sure chance missed
Kuman Udanta Singh missed

a sure chance to bring up the lead in the 32nd minute when Kuruniyan set him up with a nice lob that had just to be nodded home.

With the NorthEast goalkeeper Subhasish Roy Chowdhury caught completely off position, Udanta connected his header to the

crosspiece instead of finding net. Subhasish did a nice job in the 39th minute cutting off a Rahul Bheke header to keep the scoreline unchanged.

The host missed the services of injured Ghanaian Wold Cupper Asamoah Gyan and struggled to get its feet in the striking zone.

Bengaluru FC enjoyed more space upfront after the change of ends and it was a matter of time before it found the break.

This happened in the 67th minute when NorthEast defender Reagan Singh was hauled up for handling the ball inside its own box while trying to clear an Udanta Singh cross.

Chhetri made no mistake from the spot. Bengaluru took the game beyond the reach of the host on an 81st minute counter-attack as Albert Serran nodded home a cross from Erik Partalu.

The result:
NorthEast United FC 0 lost to Bengaluru FC 2 (Sunil Chhetri 68-pen, Albert Serran 81).

FOOTBALL

NANDAKUMAR MARAR
MUMBAI

One goal after two league matches (against Sweden, Thailand back-to-back) does not speak much about the India under-17 girls' finishing capacity.

Three goals conceded (all scored by Sweden) is no embarrassment either to the collective defensive work by the home side so far. The final face-off against the Swedes at the Mumbai Football Arena on Thursday evening can be

viewed as an opportunity for the Shilky Devi-captained squad to show how far they can learn from mistakes, when in possession of the ball approaching the goalmouth, besides continuation of impressive work in the backline, supported by goalkeeper Manju Ganjhu.

The U-17 women's football tournament, supported by AFC Assist and conducted by the All India Football Federation, is only the first of a series of competitive experiences designed to gear up the girls for next year's big one – the FIFA women U-17

World Cup at venues across the nation.

Chief coach Thomas Dennerby is fortunate to have the raw material to work with straightaway. Stout and intelligent defenders, hard-working midfielders, tearaway wingers and a no-frills goalkeeper. Football talent is ready and willing to be moulded into a crack combination by November 2020 when the curtain goes up.

The display over two matches by the Indian probables was a mix of endurance and elegance, speed and skill. The deciding tie against

Sweden will offer the third and final chance for the home team performers. Maverick strikers like Lynda Kom, Sumati Kumari, Sunita Munda to name a few first-choice probables, no longer carry the surprise element.

India's lightning counter-attacks from almost the centreline deep into rival territory is a thrilling spectacle. Ruthless finishing which convert all the ball possession by the players into goals will be celebrated by fans.

The final will be streamed live on Facebook from 5.30 p.m. onwards.

Kallis to be SA batting consultant



Jacques Kallis. •AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JOHANNESBURG

Jacques Kallis was on Wednesday appointed as South Africa's batting consultant for the entire duration of its home summer.

"Former Standard Bank Proteas all-rounder, @jacqueskallis75 has been named as the team's batting consultant for the duration of the summer. He will join the squad for their camp starting in Pretoria today (Wednesday)," CSA announced. Kallis, 44, played a combined 519 international matches for South Africa with 25,534 runs and 577 wickets across formats. He featured in 166 Tests, 328 ODIs and 25 T20Is.

IANS adds from Dhaka:
Charl Langeveldt is set to work with the South African team after his resignation as the fast bowling coach of Bangladesh was accepted by the BCB. "Langeveldt said he has offer to work in South Africa's senior side, which is why he requested the BCB to let him go," *ESPNCricinfo* quoted Akram Khan of BCB as telling Bengali daily *Prothom Alo* on Tuesday.

Azhar predicts a close contest

Says he would step aside from captaincy if he is unable to score

LANKA IN PAKISTAN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KARACHI

Pakistan's Test captain Azhar Ali on Wednesday said he will "step aside" from the role if he is unable to contribute substantially to the team's cause, candidly admitting his run-drought.

"I am going through a bad patch but I am not out of form. I am middling the ball well. It is a matter of one good innings and I know I can get back into form," Azhar told reporters here.

"But yes if I feel things are not working out for me and I am not contributing to the team, I would prefer to step aside myself," he added.

Azhar also predicted a close second Test at the Na-



Needed, change of luck: Pakistan's Azhar Ali admitted his run-drought. •AFP

tional Stadium.

"In Rawalpindi the weather had a role to play but here I think it is a good balanced Test wicket for bat and ball and I think we will have a good, close game here. Obviously both teams would

want to win here," he said.

Azhar indicated that leg-spinner Yasir Shah would be making a comeback after being dropped for the first Test, but there will still be no place for middle-order batsman, Fawad Alam.

Tokyo Olympics ticket lottery: 1M offered, 23M sought

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TOKYO

The Tokyo's Olympics tickets continue to be very hard to find, particularly in Japan.

Organisers on Wednesday said there were 23 million tickets requested in the latest lottery for Japan residents only. The bad news is that only 1 million tickets were available. Which means almost everybody went back empty handed. Next summer's Olympics

have generated unprecedented demand. Organisers said 3.57 million tickets had been awarded to Japan residents in previous lotteries. Organisers confirmed for the first time the demand was almost 20 times over supply – about 60 million tickets requested.

And now Japan residents are running out of chances.

The next ticket offering in Japan will be early next year, but will be open to Japan

and non-Japan residents on a first-come, first-served basis.

Overall, organisers say about 7.8 million tickets are available for all events and at least 70% of the tickets will go to Japan residents. Large blocks also go to sponsors, international sports federations, national Olympic committees, and the IOC.

Millions are also sold outside Japan by official Olympic tickets resellers.