

Sports

Ahly overpower Zamalek, lift CAF Champions League title

Magnificent Magdi goal hands Al Ahly League title

CAIRO: A late goal from Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy gave Al Ahly a dramatic 2-1 victory over Zamalek on Friday in an all-Egyptian CAF Champions League final in Cairo. Magdy struck as stoppage time loomed behind closed doors because of the coronavirus pandemic after Amr el Soleya had given Ahly an early lead and 'Shikabala' scored a magnificent equaliser before half-time.

With 85 minutes gone, Magdy controlled the ball with his knee outside the area and hammered it into the net to earn Ahly a record-extending ninth Champions League title and first since 2013. The climax was in keeping with a thrilling final that completed a competition which began in August last year and was constantly delayed by Covid-19.

Success for Ahly meant South African Pitso Mosimane became only the third coach after Argentine Oscar Fullone and Egyptian Mahmoud el Gohary to win the Champions League title with two clubs. Mosimane guided Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa to a 3-1 aggregate victory over Zamalek in the 2016 title decider. Before the kick off in a stadium that would normally be packed to its 74,000 capacity for a Cairo derby, both teams observed a moment of silence in honor of Argentine icon Diego Maradona, who died on Wednesday.

Ahly took a fifth-minute lead when Amr el Soleya rose to powerfully head a corner kick into the net after goalkeeper Mohamed Abou Gabal had conceded the set piece under pressure from Hussein el Shahat. Boosted by the dream start, the Cairo Red Devils use both wings to keep the White Knights under pressure in the first Champions League final featuring clubs from the same country. When Zamalek did push forward they were no match for an Ahly defense that conceded just six goals in 14 matches en route to the final.

Memorable solo goal

But any disappointment Zamalek supporters experienced as they watched the match live on national television disappeared after 31 minutes thanks to



CAIRO: Ahly's players celebrate winning the CAF Champions League Final football match between Egyptian sides Zamalek and Al-Ahly at the Cairo International Stadium in Egypt's capital on November 27, 2020. — AFP

'Shikabala'. One of many Egyptian footballers who favour a nickname over their official name, in his case Mahmoud Abdelrazek Hassan Fadlala, 'Shikabala' levelled with a memorable solo goal.

Receiving possession on the touchline, he burst between two Ahly defenders, took the ball across another, then smashed a left-foot shot into the roof of the net. Ahly goalkeeper Mohamed el Shennawy barely moved such was the power and speed of a shot that

produced one of the greatest goals in the 55-year history of CAF Champions League finals. Under the cosh for much of the opening half, Zamalek would have been the happier team trooping off the pitch at half-time in a contest living up to its billing of the 'derby of the century'.

Ahly should have regained the lead eight minutes into the second half but El Shahat hits a post with an unguarded goal in front of him and Mahmoud Ibrahim

cleared. The woodwork came into play again midway through the half, this time preventing Zamalek taking the lead as Ahmed 'Zizo' Sayed watched his shot cannon off a post. As the frantic pace inevitably slackened, El Soleya was yellow carded for fouling Sayed and Zamalek had a penalty appeal rejected by the Algerian referee. Then, after 54 minutes with the sides equal, Magdy scored his third goal of the African campaign to give Ahly a record-extending 20th CAF title. — AFP



DOHA: Beijing's midfielder Chi Zhongguo (right) is marked by Melbourne's forward Marco Rojas during the AFC Champions League group E football match between Australia's Melbourne Victory and China's Beijing Guoan on November 27, 2020. — AFP

Beijing storm into last 16, deja vu for Perth Glory

DOHA: Beijing Guoan and Ulsan Hyundai Motors continued their relentless march in the Asian Champions League at the expense of Australian sides who suffered another day of misery on Friday. While Beijing Guoan stormed into the last-16 phase of the tournament with a 2-0 win over Melbourne Victory in Group E, Ulsan Hyundai Motors edged past Perth Glory by a similar margin to boost their chances of qualifying from Group F.

Bruno Genesio's Beijing Guoan have yet to drop a point, their fourth win in as many matches proving they are the team to beat in this year's competition as they made the next stage with two matches to spare. Spaniard Jonathan Viera was Beijing's star on Friday, scoring their first goal with a superb finish in the ninth minute and providing the assist to Zhang Yuning in the 35th for their second win over Melbourne Victory in three days.

"Overall the team had a very good performance. We controlled the game very well and scored two goals in the first half which was very important for us," said Frenchman Genesio. "We were also able to keep a clean sheet, but it would have been good had we scored a couple of goals more." Victory's Steve Kean was struggling to cope with the result. "It's obviously a difficult result for us, but I think we need to put the game into perspective," he said. "We said yesterday we had the opportunity to go again against the same side, and we take a lot of positives from the game."

"There are mistakes to work on, but overall, while we are bitterly disappointed with the result, our performance showed we are making strides to get to where we want to go." Meanwhile, Perth Glory were struggling to cope with their fourth straight loss as Ulsan Hyundai notched their third win in four matches. Ulsan had beaten Perth 2-1 three days ago in Doha, first equalising in the 89th minute through Kim In-Sung and then netting the winner through Junior Negao four minutes later when the match was into stoppage time. — AFP

Argentina bids chaotic farewell to Maradona

BUENOS AIRES: Huge crowds bade a grief-filled farewell to Argentina's favorite son Diego Maradona before the football legend was buried on the outskirts of Buenos Aires after a chaotic public wake. The 1986 World Cup winner widely regarded as one of the greatest players in history was laid to rest on Thursday after a ceremony attended by family and close friends in the Bella Vista cemetery. Maradona, who had battled cocaine addiction for decades, died on Wednesday aged 60, sparking mourning around the world.

"I thought Diego was immortal, I thought he would never die on us. I feel a terrible sadness for a person who made us so, so happy," said 63-year-old bus driver Antonio Avila outside the cemetery. The peaceful farewell contrasted sharply with the raucous scenes of his send-off in the Argentine capital that seemed somehow in keeping with the player's tumultuous life.

Riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets in clashes with stone-throwing fans that briefly threatened to mar the day of mourning. In Naples, where Maradona was adored for leading Napoli to two Italian titles and putting one over their richer northern rivals, fans held an all-day wake and players took to the pitch for a match wearing his number 10 shirt.



BUENOS AIRES: Aerial view of the grave of late Argentinean football legend at the Jardin Bella Vista cemetery, in Buenos Aires, on November 27, 2020. — AFP

Gerrard leads Rangers' revival; Celtic crumble

LONDON: Rangers have spent nearly a decade in the doldrums but their revival under Steven Gerrard appears to be coming just in time to stop rivals Celtic from winning a historic 10th consecutive Scottish league title. The club have had a bumpy ride since they last won the league in 2011. Financial troubles led to liquidation and the club were reformed in the fourth tier of Scottish football.

Rangers returned to the Scottish Premiership in 2016, but even then the turmoil did not end as three managers were dismissed in little over a year trying to bridge the chasm Celtic. Now it is the blue half of the Glasgow divide that enjoy an 11-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership and are outperforming their rivals on the European stage. Gerrard's men are

unbeaten in 22 games in all competitions this season, confirming the steady progress he has made since landing his first senior managerial role in 2018.

The former Liverpool captain famously never won a league title as a player, but he will forever be hailed a Rangers' hero if he denies Celtic the coveted 10-in-a-row. Gerrard has benefited from a level of patience scarcely afforded to Old Firm managers. He is the first Rangers manager to begin a third season in charge without winning a trophy in his first two. Celtic have not just swept the board in the league, but won all of the past 11 domestic trophies on offer in Scotland and can make that 12 in the Scottish Cup final next month.

However, the tide appears to have turned, with Celtic boss Neil Lennon clinging to his job as calls grow from fans for the Northern Irishman to go after a run of two wins in nine games. "I look at the league table every time we play, I'm not going to deny that," said Gerrard after a 4-0 demolition of third-placed Aberdeen last weekend. "But I've never known a manager to get carried away in November. I don't know how many games we've played, but there is a lot of football to be played, a lot of challenges, a lot of big hurdles to get over. — AFP

Thousands bid farewell

Tens of thousands of people had queued from early morning in Buenos Aires to file past Maradona's coffin, draped in the Argentine flag, at the presidential palace. As the day wore on, people queuing outside the Casa Rosada grew increasingly impatient, and some took over a courtyard inside, where they chanted slogans, forcing officials to move Maradona's coffin to another room as a security precaution.

Later, the hearse bearing Maradona's coffin rolled through the gates of the presidency building and into the streets of Buenos Aires. Fans crowded onto roadsides and highway bridges as the funeral cortege sped towards the western outskirts, surrounded by police outriders with sirens blaring and pursued by TV crews. The outrageously skillful Maradona, widely remembered for his "Hand of God" goal against England in the 1986 World Cup quarter-finals, died of a heart attack on Wednesday while recovering from brain surgery.

"He was the best in the world, we're going to miss him and his death broke our souls," said Diego Armando Cabral, a 29-year-old bricklayer in Buenos Aires who was named after the footballer. Brazilian legend Pele, 80, said he hoped they would one day "play together in the sky." Lionel Messi, Argentina's modern-day superstar, described Maradona as "eternal." Still the tributes rolled in, with Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho, a former boss of Chelsea, Real Madrid, Inter Milan and Manchester United, recounting how Maradona would call him to offer support after defeats. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: The coffin with the remains of late Argentine football legend Diego Armando Maradona is carried by his family and friends at the Jardin Bella Vista cemetery in Buenos Aires province. — AFP

Maradona's death may trigger family inheritance battle

BUENOS AIRES: Diego Maradona's tormented private life, with its tangled relationships and paternity suits, suggests distributing his inheritance will be a complex task for lawyers bracing for claims from a slew of children - those he recognized and those he didn't. "There's going to be a big fight. He didn't leave a will," according to a source close to the family who declined to be named. Maradona made and wasted millions over his years at the pinnacle of his fame with Barcelona, Napoli and Argentina, and he also made some shrewd investments. Some reports circulating since his death estimate his estate at around \$90 million.

Angered over a dispute with his daughter Giannina last year, he threatened to donate all his wealth, including properties, luxury cars and sponsorship contracts, to charity. "I know that now, as you get older, people are more concerned about what you leave behind than what you are doing," he was quoted as saying at the time. "And I tell them all that I'm not going to leave them anything, that I'm going to give it all away. Everything I've got in my life I'm going to give away," he said.

Under Argentine law, however, a person can only give away a fifth of their assets. At least two-thirds must be left to the spouse or offspring of the deceased. Giannina, 31, had sparked the row by accusing the former star's entourage of not taking proper care of him, which seems to have been a recurring theme of their relationship. Father and daughter had reconciled by his 60th birthday in October, Giannina lauding him in a series of affectionate messages posted on social media with her sister Dalma. "He is my great example of all the things to do and all the things not to do. I have admired him, yesterday, today and always. He taught me to forgive, to forgive myself," Giannina wrote.

Claudia Villafane was Maradona's childhood sweetheart since the age of 15. His only wife, they divorced in 2003. Their two daughters, Dalma, 33 and Giannina - were the only children he recognized for many years. But there were others, spawning the joke that Maradona had fathered his own soccer team. It threatens to make the task of distributing his inheritance a complicated one for his lawyer Matias Morla. The football icon has been forced to acknowledge three children over the years, including Diego Junior, born a few months before Dalma. — AFP