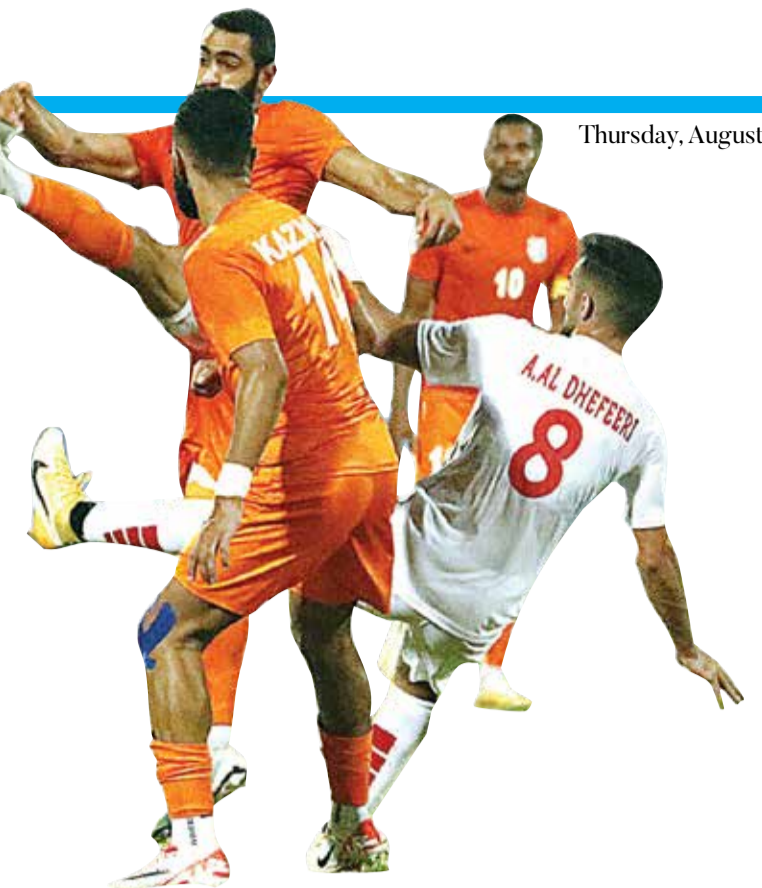


Kuwait crush Kazma 5-2

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football Club scored the opening goal in the third minute of the match. Later on, Kazma were able to score twice. Kuwait later scored another four goals - there by making it a total of

five goals. The match ended 5-2. This was the opening match of the second round of the Zain Football League. Kuwait now have six points. Kuwait's Mohammad Marhoon scored the first goal in the third minute.

Nawaf Al-Khaldi scored the equalizer in the 8th minute, while Nasser Lafi added Kazma's second goal at the 12th minute. Kazma's Dhari Al-Ruqom was shown a red card in the 43rd minute.



Indian teen chess wizard receives a hero's welcome

CHENNAI: India's teen chess prodigy Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa arrived home to celebration Wednesday, with media jostling to catch a glimpse of the newly minted star who faced international No.1 Magnus Carlsen in the World Cup final. Popularly

known as "Pragg", the 18-year-old is the youngest player to reach a chess World Cup final, held last week in the Azerbaijani capital Baku. Pragg finished with the silver after losing to Carlsen in a nail-biting tiebreak at the International Chess Federation (FIDE) final. He earned praise from chess legend Garry Kasparov who said Pragg was "very tenacious in difficult positions".

On Wednesday, Pragg was greeted by hordes of supporters who handed him bouquets of flowers and sweets as he emerged from the airport in his home city of Chennai in southern India. "I am very happy to see so many people have come to receive

me... it feels really great," he said, as he stood shyly waving from the sunroof of a car, with a purple and gold scarf draped around his neck. Such adulation is usually reserved in India for cricket stars, who enjoy celebrity status. The son of a bank employee and a housewife, the grandmaster has been playing the sport since he was four.

Mother's cooking

Pragg's success has been fueled by the cooking of his mother Nagalakshmi, who accompanies him on chess tournaments with pots and southern Indian seasonings to make his favorite meal of rice and spicy rasam or sambhar soup. Nagalakshmi told the ChessBase India news site on Tuesday that she had made rice and sambhar for Pragg at the FIDE World Rapid Team Championship in Dusseldorf, Germany, that followed the Baku event.

Pragg's first coach S Thiagarajan, who began teaching him at age four, said his student was always dedicated. "He was always a bright student and a jovial child," Thiagarajan, who coached him at his academy until he was 10, told AFP. "He used to be in the academy every day from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, at times staying longer-and I would give him homework which would take at least three hours to finish," he said.

In 2018 - aged just 12 years, 10 months and 13 days - Pragg became the world's then second-youngest chess grandmaster. Chess has gained in popularity in India in the past two decades after Vishwanathan Anand became the country's first grandmaster aged 18 in 1988 and dominated the game in the 2000s. A predecessor to chess is thought by some to have originated in India in the sixth century AD, from where it spread to Persia and developed into the "Game of Kings" it is today.— AFP



CHENNAI: India's chess grandmaster and silver medalist Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa, responds to a television media personnel as he is welcomed upon his return from the FIDE Chess World Cup in Baku, at the Chennai International airport in Chennai, on Aug 30, 2023. — AFP

Postecoglou defends selection after Spurs crash out of Cup

LONDON: Ange Postecoglou defended his team selection after suffering his first defeat as Tottenham boss after Fulham won 5-3 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in the League Cup second round on Tuesday. Postecoglou had masterminded an encouraging start to his first season in charge of Tottenham, with successive Premier League wins against Manchester United and Bournemouth following a draw against Brentford. But the former Celtic boss paid the price for making nine changes to his starting line-up at Craven Cottage.

Postecoglou handed a full debut to Manor Solomon, while Giovanni Lo Celso and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg started despite speculation over their futures. Fulham boss Marco Silva made six changes himself, but it was Tottenham's understudies who struggled. Micky van de Ven's 19th-minute own goal gave Fulham the lead as the defender turned Tom Cairney's cross past keeper Fraser Forster. Tottenham took advantage of a curious incident that left Fulham down to 10 men to equalize in the 56th minute.

A problem with Kenny Tete's boot meant the Fulham defender had to sprint down the tunnel to find a replacement in the dressing room. Moments later, Ivan Perisic whipped in a cross from the position Tete would have been defending and Richarlison headed home from an acute angle. But Tottenham were unable to find a winner and in the shoot-out Davinson Sanchez's effort was saved by Marek Rodak before Tete, now with boots on both feet, fired the decisive kick.

Currently enduring a trophy drought that stretches back to 2008, Tottenham already have one less competition in which to end that barren run this term. Postecoglou had introduced stars James Maddison and Son Heung-min in the second half, but defended his decision to select his fringe players. "How am I going to find out about my players? It doesn't mean the cup, or any game, isn't a priority for us,"

the Australian said. "We are very much at the discovery stage and we need to give the players the opportunity. We are going to need these guys if we get disruptions along the way with injuries."

'Absolutely incredible'

Fourth-tier Salford, co-owned by former Manchester United stars David Beckham, Gary Neville, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, beat Leeds 9-8 on penalties after a 1-1 draw with the Championship club. "Absolutely incredible. I would have never imagined this game to go so far, never mind to go to penalties and to win. Such a big night for all these Salford fans," Neville said. Hoping for a reunion with his old club in the third round, Neville added: "Us lads as owners, we love Man United and we love this club as well. To have the opportunity to play them is the special night that we want." Luton beat fourth-tier Gillingham 3-2 at Kenilworth Road to win for the first time this season. After losing to Brighton and Chelsea in their first two Premier League games, Jacob Brown, Alfie Doughty and Cauley Woodrow scored for Luton, who are playing in the top-flight for the first time in 31 years.

Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola earned his first win in English football as Ryan Christie's last-gasp goal clinched a 3-2 victory at second-tier Swansea. The Spaniard had overseen a draw with West Ham and defeats by Tottenham and Liverpool in his first three league games. Brentford needed a 3-0 penalty shoot-out victory to advance after a 1-1 draw at fourth-tier Newport. Crystal Palace survived a scare as they fought back from two goals down to win 4-2 at second-tier Plymouth thanks to Jean-Philippe Mateta's hat-trick.— AFP



Head Coach Ange Postecoglou

Asia Cup defending champion Sri Lanka unfazed by injuries

KANDY: Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said on Wednesday the defending champions will challenge every team in the Asia Cup despite injuries to several key players. Sri Lanka, co-hosting the tournament with Pakistan, face Bangladesh on Thursday after injuries forced them to drop two key players at the last minute. They won the tournament in the T20 format last year but it reverts to the ODI format as a prelude to the 50-over World Cup in India, which starts on Oct 5.

"We are playing in our backyard, so have the home advantage," Shanaka told reporters in Pallekele. "There are a few players not participating due to injury but still I think we have got a pretty good side who can challenge all the teams." Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and fast-bowler Dushmantha Chameera will sit out the tournament after being named in the original 15-member squad but Shanaka said his team remained confident. "There is no pressure at all," he said.

Sri Lanka were underdogs at the previous Asia Cup in Dubai and were expected to bow out after losing their opening match to Afghanistan. Interest this year remains focused on the rivalry between India and Pakistan, with potential for Asian cricket's two giants to face each other three times before the World Cup. Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan was unfazed by the India-Pakistan hype. "They are the favorites, so people will talk about them more," Shakib said. "But having said that, Sri Lanka have won the Asia Cup plenty of times, so they are one of the favorites."

Bangladesh have made the Asia Cup final three times but are still searching for their first trophy. Emotions have often hampered Bangladesh's performance, which Shakib acknowledged was the case in Dubai last year. "Emotion-wise we have to play the game and see where we are at this moment," he said. "I think the dressing room is calmer and that is a good thing." —AFP

News in brief

China probes league chief

BEIJING: The head of China's top professional football league is under investigation for suspected corruption, the country's sports authority said Wednesday, as a campaign against graft rages through the sector. Liu Jun, the chair of the company that runs the Chinese Super League, is being probed for "suspected serious legal and disciplinary violations", the General Administration of Sport said. The statement used a well-worn byword for alleged corrupt practices but did not give details of the suspected offences. Liu joins a lengthening list of Chinese sports officials investigated in recent months amid an industry-wide anti-graft drive. They include notable football personalities like former national coach Li Tie who has been criminally charged with bribery and other violations. — AFP

Napoli sign midfielder Lindstrom

ROME: Napoli have signed Denmark midfielder Jesper Lindstrom from Bundesliga side Eintracht Frankfurt, the Serie A champions announced on Tuesday. The 23-year-old was reportedly set to sign a loan deal with an obligation to buy, but Napoli said in a statement he had joined "on a permanent transfer". Lindstrom scored 14 goals in 80 appearances for Eintracht after leaving Danish club Brondby two years ago. He has netted once in 10 international appearances and was part of Denmark's 2022 World Cup squad. Napoli have made a strong start to their title defense, with back-to-back wins in their first two Serie A matches of the season.— AFP

Ajax, Mikautadze sign deal

THE HAGUE: Ajax have signed Georgia striker Georges Mikautadze from French club Metz in a deal worth 16 million euros (\$17.4 million), the Dutch club announced on Wednesday. French-born Mikautadze, 22, has agreed a five-year contract in the Dutch capital after playing a pivotal role in Metz's promotion to Ligue 1 promotion last season. "I'm very proud," Mikautadze said in a video on Ajax's website. "Everybody knows what the name Ajax means in football. I did not hesitate for a second to come to the club," he added. He started his professional career with Metz in 2019, before joining Belgian side Seraing on loan. He returned to Metz in 2022 where he became their top scorer with 23 goals in 37 appearances before the club's promotion to the French top-flight. — AFP

Kolo Muani skips training

BERLIN: French international forward Randal Kolo Muani skipped training with Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday morning, as he continues to try to force a move to Paris Saint-Germain. The German club on Wednesday confirmed Kolo Muani, 24, had chosen to miss the training session due to "his desire to be transferred to another club before the transfer window ends on Friday evening." The club confirmed Kolo Muani would not play in Thursday's Europa Conference League qualifier at home to Levski Sofia. The away tie in Bulgaria finished 1-1, with Kolo Muani scoring Frankfurt's goal. Frankfurt sporting director Markus Kroesche said in a statement "we know Randal differently and know his real character", saying "the behavior has no influence on transfer activities." The forward's contract in Frankfurt runs until 2027.—AFP