

ACL Elite: Super sub Mujica hat-trick seals Al Sadd comeback win over Shabab Al Ahli

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Rafa Mujica stole the spotlight with a sensational late hat-trick as Al Sadd staged a dramatic comeback to defeat Shabab Al Ahli 4-2 in the AFC Champions League Elite (ACL) at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

Roberto Mancini's Al Sadd found themselves two goals down after Federico Cartabia's header in the 47th minute and Yahya Al Ghassani's penalty in the 70th minute for the UAE side.

However, Mujica's introduction in the 70th minute proved decisive. The forward pulled one back just five minutes after coming off the bench, finishing from an Akram Afif assist.

Tarek Salman equalised in the fifth minute of stoppage time before Mujica struck twice more in the 90+11 and 90+13 minutes - against set up by Afif - to complete a remarkable victory in front of the home supporters.

"We played a great match, and it was a very tough encounter. We were down by two goals, but the coach showed confidence in me, and I was able to score a hat-trick. We gave our best, and I am happy I could help the team. I thank the coach for trusting me," Mujica said after the match.

Mancini said, "We were down by two goals, but we stayed focused and came back strong until the final minutes. This victory is a great opportunity for Al Sadd to restore confidence both locally and in continental competitions."

The comeback win — their first in the continental event this season — lifted Al Sadd to five points in 10th place, keeping their slim hopes of reaching the knockout stage alive.

Shabab Al Ahli looked sharper early on, with Yuri Cesar, Guilherme Bala and Mateusao all testing the defence as they pushed for an early breakthrough.

Al Sadd began to find space towards the latter stages of the half and came closest to scoring through Giovani. Claudinho initiated the move with a clever run down the left before picking out Paulo Otavio inside the area. Otavio's cut-back found Giovani near the penalty spot, but his effort sailed over the crossbar.

Shabab Al Ahli continued to threaten as Cesar fired wide from a promising position, while Mateusao saw his shot punched away by Al Sadd goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham, ensuring the deadlock remained intact at half-time.

The visitors took the lead shortly after the restart. Mersad Seifi delivered an excellent cross from the left, and Cartabia, left unmarked, calmly headed the ball into the centre of the goal.

Soon after, Barsham tipped Mateusao's powerful effort onto the crossbar. At the other end, Claudinho went close with a promising shot that narrowly missed the right post as Al Sadd attempted to respond.


Al Sadd's Rafa Mujica (left) celebrates with teammate Agustin Soria after scoring a goal.

Shabab Al Ahli then doubled their advantage when Pedro Miguel was adjudged by VAR to have fouled Cartabia inside the area. Al Ghassani calmly slotted the penalty into the bottom-left corner, sending Barsham the wrong way.

Al Sadd pressed forward, with Afif seeing his shot blocked by goalkeeper Hamad Al Meqbaali. Mujica, who replaced Pau Prim, made an immediate impact, scoring just five minutes after his introduction. Afif delivered a cross, and Mujica finished with a first-time effort from the centre of the box. The duo came close to equalising soon after, but Mujica's attempt lacked power and was comfortably saved by Al Meqbaali.

Al Sadd continued to push, with Claudinho forcing another save before Salman drew level following a corner, assisted by Roberto Firmino.

The equaliser unsettled Shabab Al Ahli, who left too much space at the back. Mujica capitalised with clinical finishing, scoring twice deep into stoppage time to complete his hat-trick and spark jubilant celebrations among the home fans.

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> ***Rafa Mujica***

Al Rayyan held by Al Shabab in GCCL

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Rayyan and Al Shabab played out a thrilling 2-2 draw yesterday at Riyadh's SHG Arena in the fourth round of the Gulf Club Champions League group stage yesterday.

Al Rayyan drew first blood in the fifth minute when Wesley Ribeiro struck early, and he doubled the lead in the 40th minute. Despite pressure from Al Shabab, goalkeeper Mahmoud Abu Nada and a cohesive defense kept the Saudi side at bay.

The second half saw a turnaround as Al Shabab reorganised and launched quick attacks. Abdullah Maatouk scored from a pass by Abderrazak Hamdallah in the 52nd minute, and six minutes later Hamdallah netted the equaliser, ending the match 2-2.

Al Rayyan now lead the group with six points, while Al Shabab sit last with three.

Al Rayyan coach Artur Jorge said the team "dominated the first half and took a 2-0 lead, but failed to maintain it. We had chances to regain the lead, and my substitutions were aimed at winning, not preserving the score."

Sano delighted to keep Al Gharafa in hunt

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Seydou Sano was glad to have delivered after his last gasp goal secured Al Gharafa SC a 1-0 victory against UAE's Al Wahda FC in their AFC Champions League Elite 2025/26 tie on Monday.

The win moved the Qatari side to six points and kept their Round of 16 hopes alive with two matches remaining.

"I want to thank the head coach and the entire Al Gharafa team because the match would be tough," said Sano.

"We believed in ourselves and earned the three points, which was important to stay in the race. We are very proud to win and will continue working hard to seal qualification."

Sano turned in Aron Gunnarsson's layoff in the 87th minute with head coach Pedro Martins praising his players' determination in a match which saw both teams reduced to 10 players.

"It was a very important match for us to qualify for the knockout stage. The first half was tough, with Al Wahda playing better, but we still created the best chances," said Martins. "The second half was completely different, we controlled the game, dominated possession and created many opportunities.

"Even after booth teams were down to 10 men, the team adapted well, showing strong tactical flexibility. We need to be more clinical in finishing our chances, as small details like these decide matches."

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> ***Seydou Sano***

Dimas Teixeira admitted that pivotal moments in the second half turned the game, resulting in already-qualified Al Wahda suffering their first defeat of the season. "We dominated the first half and didn't give Al Gharafa any chances. In the second half, a penalty against us and a red card for our goalkeeper (Mohamed Al Shamsi) changed the game," said Teixeira.

"Strategically, it affected us and they created more opportunities. Unfortunately, the red card made a big difference." Al Wahda, on 13 points, will face tough encounters against Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli Saudi FC and Al Hilal SFC in February while Al Gharafa will aim for wins against Al Ittihad Club and Tractor FC of Islamic Republic of Iran in their bid to seal a Round of 16 spot. AFC


Seydou Sano

Al Ahli host Uzbekistan's Andijan with eye on Round of 16 berth

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Ahli host Uzbekistan's Andijan today at Al Thumama Stadium as Group B reaches its sixth and final round in the AFC Champions League Two 2025-26.

In the group's other fixture, Bahrain's Al Khalidiya travel to Turkmenistan to face Arkadag, the reigning AFC Challenge Cup champions.

Al Ahli lead the standings with seven points. Any slip-up, however, could allow Andijan to snatch direct qualification. Al Khalidiya hold the edge in their tie, but an Arkadag win would shift the balance in the group.

The Qatari side are chasing their second victory of the campaign after a 1-1 draw away to Arkadag on Matchday Five. Today's match also marks the debut of new head coach Younes Ali, who replaced Croatian Igor Peščan following his dismissal.

Al Ahli are targeting a place in the knockout stage and will lean on the experience of Julian Draxler, Idriss Fettouhi, Éric Expósito, Oumar Sekou, Michel Vlap and goalkeeper Marwan Sherif.

Andijan sit on five points and remain firmly in contention as they continue their maiden AFC Champions League campaign. Founded in 1964, the Uzbek club will look to reward strong backing from their supporters.

Domestically, Andijan have won the Uzbekistan Cup once and lifted the Professional League title three times, in 2005, 2018 and 2022.

Coached by Russian Alexander Khomyakov, the visitors pose an attacking threat through striker Rustam Turdimurodov and Slovenian playmaker Altin Krežić.

The group stage concludes tomorrow. The Round of 16 will be played from February 10 to 19, followed by the quarter-finals from March 3 to 12 and semi-finals from April 7 to 15. The final is scheduled for May 16.



Al Arabi retain Handball Federation Cup

Al Arabi retained the Qatar Handball Federation Cup after a commanding 36–26 victory over Al Duhail in the final at Al Duhail Sports Hall yesterday. The win secured Al Arabi a second straight title and a fifth crown in the competition's history, after leading 16–13 at halftime and pulling clear in the second half. Al Wakrah claimed third place with a 33–28 win over Al Shamal. The tournament was held during the league break as Qatar's national team prepares for the 22nd Asian Men's Championship in January in Kuwait, a qualifier for the 2027 World Championship in Germany.

North Korea's Song sets new world record in Doha

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The combined Qatar International Weightlifting Cup, Arab Championships and West Asia Championships continue to deliver standout performances at the Ezdan Palace Hotel.

Yesterday's highlight came in the men's 79kg category, where North Korea's Ri Chong Song set a new world record in the total with 366kg, surpassing the previous mark by 1kg and winning all three gold medals.

Ri Chong Song lifted 162kg in the snatch and 204kg in the clean and jerk.

Tunisia's Karim Ben Hnia, Jaiygeziz Turaev and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Bassam Al Marzouq shared the remaining medals in the category.

Song's achievement follows that of fellow North Korean lifter O Kang Ok, who earlier set a world record in the women's 58kg category.

In the men's Arab Championship events, Hnia captured three gold medals, with 151kg (snatch) and 185kg (clean and jerk) for a total of 363kg.

Al Marzouq finished second with three silver medals 150kg (snatch), 178kg (clean and jerk) and 328kg (total).

Algerian lifter Farajallah Samir took bronze medals in the snatch at 140kg and the total at 310kg, while Egypt's Ali Abdelradi Mohamed won bronze in the clean and jerk lifting 175kg.

Saudi Arabia continued to dominate the youth and junior events, highlighted by Mohammed Bassam Al Marzouq's clean sweep of three gold medals in the youth category. Saudi lifters also topped the junior men's 79kg standings through Ali Majed, while Egypt's Ali Abdelradi Mohamed secured clean and jerk gold. Yemen's Yazan Nasr Ali Ahmed and the UAE's Saeed Ghassab Al Hajri completed the podium places across the categories.


Ri Chong Song

The West Asia events produced a strong Saudi showing, led by Al Marzouq, who swept three gold medals in the men's 79kg category. Saudi Arabia also dominated the youth and junior divisions through Al Marzouq and Yousef Al Bahrani, while Bahrain, the UAE, Oman, Yemen, and Syria shared the remaining medals.

In the women's 63kg Arab Championship, Tunisia's Shaimaa Rahoumi claimed three gold medals ahead of Egypt's Hager Rashdy and the UAE's May Madani. Rashdy went on to secure triple gold medals in both the youth and junior categories. At the West Asia Championship, Emirati lifter May Madani topped the women's 63kg podium with three gold medals, as Saudi and Jordanian lifters collected multiple podium finishes across age groups.

Nigeria open campaign with narrow win over Tanzania

FES, MOROCCO: Ademola Lookman secured a 2-1 win for a wasteful Nigeria against Tanzania in Fes yesterday in their opening Africa Cup of Nations match.

After the disappointment of failing to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, Nigeria coach Eric Chelle would have hoped for more goals given the opportunities his side created.

Star striker Victor Osimhen was among the culprits. He failed to score but could have claimed a hat-trick with better finishing. Nigerian centre-half Semi Ajayi opened the scoring in the first half, before Charles M'Mombwa levelled soon after half-time.

However, Atalanta attacker Lookman struck the winning goal shortly after the equaliser to spare Nigeria's blushes.

The first half followed a predictable pattern with three-time champions Nigeria pressing and Tanzania soaking up pressure as they sought a first win after three draws and six losses in three previous AFCON appearances.

Tanzania goalkeeper Zuberi Masudi suffered a facial injury after advancing off his line to block a shot by Akor Adams.

From the resultant corner, Sevilla striker Adams came close as his near-post header hit the top of the crossbar.

The east Africans threatened for the first time on 14 minutes with an acrobatic shot from Saimon Msuva comfortably saved by Stanley Nwabali.

As rain began to fall in Fes, Nigerian frustrations surfaced with 2023 African player of the year Osimhen upset after being fouled by Ibrahim Hamad.

Osimhen then became the focal point of Nigerian attacks, threatening to score twice before another attempt was cleared off the line by Bakari Nondo. That set-piece led to the Super Eagles taking the lead as the ball was played back to Alex Iwobi, whose cross was nodded into the corner of the net by Ajayi for his second international goal.

Samuel Chukwueze had a chance to increase the lead just before half-time, but his close-range shot was tipped over by Masudi.



Nigeria's Semi Ajayi (second left) scores a goal in front of Tanzania's goalkeeper Zuberi Foba yesterday.

The opening seven minutes of the second period were dramatic as an Osimhen goal was ruled offside, before M'Mombwa equalised on 50 minutes and then 2024 African player of the year Lookman restored Nigeria's lead two minutes later with a rising shot from just outside the box. Chelle introduced veteran Moses Simon for Adams in the vain hope of building a wider lead ahead of what is likely to be their toughest Group C match, against Tunisia in Fes on Saturday.

Senegal cruise to victory

In Tangiers, Bayern Munich striker Nicolas Jackson grabbed a brace as Senegal eased to a 3-0 victory over Botswana.

Jackson, on loan at the Bundesliga giants from Chelsea, struck either side of half-time in Tangier, with Cherif Ndiaye completing the scoring late on.

The victory took Senegal to the top of the table in Group D on goal difference, ahead of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who beat Benin 1-0 in Rabat earlier.

It was a predictable outcome to the first match of the tournament for both teams as Senegal are 119 places above Botswana in the world rankings.

DR Congo beat Benin

In Rabat, the Democratic Republic of Congo edged out Benin 1-0 in their opening game at the Africa Cup of Nations with Theo Bongonda scoring the only goal of the Group D clash.

Bongonda, of Spartak Moscow, pounced to score on 16 minutes at the Al Medina Stadium in Rabat after the Benin defence left a long ball.

The Leopards thought they had doubled their lead just after half-time when Cedric Bakambu met a Nathanael Mbuku cross to head home from close range, but the goal was eventually ruled out for offside after a long VAR check.

One goal proved enough, however, for a DR Congo side backed by the majority of the crowd and who will hope to emerge from a group which also contains 2022 champions Senegal and Botswana -- those teams were due to face off later Tuesday in Tangier. — ***AFP***



Qatar shooters raise medal tally to 8 in Muscat

Qatari shooters continued their impressive run at the Arab Pistol and Rifle Championship in Muscat, Oman, winning multiple medals. Salma Almas claimed gold in the women's 10m air pistol individual event, while Almas, Duaa Rahmatullah, and Aisha Al-Abdullah took silver in the women's team event. Rahmatullah also added a bronze, and the mixed doubles team of Al Maha Al Ali and Abdullah Al Sunaidi secured bronze in the 10m air rifle. Earlier, Qatar had won four medals, bringing the total to eight. The 17-member delegation, led by Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Aji, will compete in the 25m pistol events today.

Napoli beat Bologna to lift Italian Super Cup

RIYADH: Napoli won the Italian Super Cup on Monday as David Neres scored twice to secure the reigning Serie A champions a 2-0 win over Bologna in the final in Jeddah.

Brazilian winger Neres curled in a brilliant shot from distance to give Napoli the lead before half-time against last season's Italian Cup winners.

He struck again in the second half after intercepting a weak pass from Bologna goalkeeper Federico Ravaglia as he tried to play out from the back. Neres finished with three goals in the Super Cup after also scoring in the 2-0 semi-final win over AC Milan last week.

It is the third time Napoli have won the competition, after 1990 and 2014.

"The lads deserve congratulations," Napoli coach Antonio Conte told Sport Mediaset.



Napoli's Giovanni Di Lorenzo lifts the trophy on the podium as team celebrates the triumph.

"They showed how much they wanted this trophy for the fans, and we'll also have a great Christmas celebration now with a new trophy in the cabinet."

Traditionally featuring the Serie A and Italian Cup champions, since 2023 the Italian Super Cup has also included the runners-up from league and cup.

The four-team tournament is contracted to be held in Saudi Arabia until 2029. Napoli, who trail Serie A leaders Inter Milan by two points, return to league action on Sunday away to Cremonese. Bologna are at home to Sassuolo. — ***AFP***

Isak faces two months out after 'reckless' tackle: Slot

LIVERPOOL: Alexander Isak is expected to be out of action for two months after fracturing his leg against Tottenham, with Liverpool manager Arne Slot accusing Tottenham's Micky van de Ven of making a "reckless challenge".

The Sweden striker was injured in a tackle from the defender in the act of scoring the opening goal in Saturday's 2-1 victory and limped off the pitch.

Liverpool said in a statement that the forward had had an operation on an ankle injury that included a fibula fracture.

"It's going to be a long injury, for a couple of months," Slot told reporters yesterday, "So, yeah, that's a big, big, big disappointment for him. And as a result also of course for us."

Slot described Van de Ven's tackle as "reckless".

"I think I said a lot about the tackle of Xavi Simons (sent off earlier in the game for Spurs), which for me was completely unintentional, and I don't think you will ever get an injury out of a tackle like that.

"The tackle of Van de Ven, if you make that tackle 10 times, I think 10 times there's a serious chance that a player gets a serious injury."

Isak's injury is the latest setback for the forward after he signed from Newcastle for a British record £125m ($168m) in September.

A dispute with Newcastle meant he did not have a proper pre-season programme and arrived at Liverpool well behind his team-mates in terms of fitness.

His season was then interrupted by a groin injury. The 26-year-old has scored just three goals in 16 appearances since completing his protracted move to Anfield.

Isak's absence will be a major blow for Reds boss Slot, with Mohamed Salah at the Africa Cup of Nations and Cody Gakpo not ready to return from a muscle injury until early in the new year.

It leaves Slot with Hugo Ekitike, who has five goals in his past four games, and the little-used Federico Chiesa as his only senior forwards.

Liverpool, whose Premier League title defence collapsed after a shocking run of results, have climbed to fifth in the table after extending their unbeaten league run to five games.

Isak's injury raises the prospect of Liverpool moving to boost their attack in the January transfer window, with Bournemouth winger Antoine Semenyo linked with a move to Anfield.

It may also change the conversation around Salah, who had been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia following his recent claim that he had been thrown under the bus by the club and no longer had a relationship with Slot.

Salah's rant, which came after he was left on the bench for three successive matches, prompted Liverpool to leave him out of the squad for a Champions League match at Inter Milan.

But he returned to action as a substitute against Brighton before leaving for international duty.

Liverpool host bottom side Wolves on Saturday. — ***AFP***



Liverpool's Alexander Isak is helped from the pitch after suffering an injury.



Australia captain Cummins out of rest of Ashes, Lyon to have surgery

MELBOURNE: Australia skipper Pat Cummins **(pictured)** and Nathan Lyon were yesterday ruled out of the final two Ashes Tests against England with the veteran spinner facing surgery and an extended period on the sidelines.

Quick bowler Jhye Richardson and spinner Todd Murphy were named as cover in the 15-man squad for the fourth Test getting underway on Friday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Australia have already retained the famous urn with eight-wicket wins in Perth and Brisbane and an 82-run victory in Adelaide. Cummins "won't play any part in the rest of the series", coach Andrew McDonald told cricket.com.au.

He returned from a lower back injury to lead Australia to victory in Adelaide in his first Test since July, taking six wickets in the match.

"That was a discussion that we had a long time out around his return. Yeah, we were taking on some risk. We've now won the series, and that was the goal," said McDonald.

Cummins will now target full fitness for the month-long Twenty20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, starting in early February.

Australia Squad

Steve Smith (capt), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Brendan Doggett, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Todd Murphy, Michael Neser, Jhye Richardson, Mitchell Starc, Jake Weatherald, Beau Webster

"To position him for further risk and jeopardise him long term is not something that we want to do," said McDonald.

"Pat's really comfortable with that. If he had any setback in the build-in as well, we would have shut him down straight away."

Steve Smith, who captained the team in Cummins' absence during the first two Tests, will lead the side again in Melbourne after missing Adelaide with vertigo symptoms.

His return means there will be at least three changes.

Usman Khawaja replaced Smith at four in Adelaide scoring 82 and 40 and should he be retained then Josh Inglis is shaping as the fall guy.

Lyon, 38, damaged his right hamstring saving a boundary on day five in Adelaide fielding and hobbled off.

He claimed his 564th wicket in the match to move clear of fellow Australian great Glenn McGrath and into sixth on the all-time Test bowling list.

"Nathan Lyon will have surgery on a torn right hamstring which will sideline him for an extended period," Cricket Australia said.

Lyon's replacement, Murphy, is in line to play his first home Test.

His seven previous appearances for Australia all came overseas. His last was in Sri Lanka earlier this year.

Richardson was included after a four-year Test absence, during which he underwent three shoulder surgeries. — ***AFP***