

Gutiérrez 'tricks' as Churchill Bros send 8-man Shillong Lajong packing

The win allows Red Machines to overtake Inter Kashi at the top, the encounter was a spectacle filled with drama, including two sensational goals, three penalties, an own goal, and three red cards, all unfolding in a chaotic second half

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RAIA: Colombia's Sebastian Gutiérrez emerged as the hero as he netted a hat-trick to propel Churchill Brothers to a dramatic 6-1 victory over an 8-man Shillong Lajong FC in the I-League match played at the Raia ground on Friday.

This encounter was a spectacle filled with drama, including two sensational goals, three penalties, an own goal, and three red cards, all unfolding in a chaotic second half.

Churchill Brothers' triumph not only featured Gutiérrez's remarkable performance but also saw Pape Gassama and Wayde Lekay converting penalties. Marcos Rudwere of Shillong Lajong, who himself scored from the spot and was later sent off, contributed to a match that shifted dramatically after Shillong Lajong took an early lead.

The win also allowed Churchill Brothers to overtake Inter Kashi at the top. Despite both sides having an identical 34 points after 18 games, Churchill Brothers lead due to a superior head-to-head record, intensifying the title race with only four matches remaining.

Shillong Lajong's day went from promising to disastrous. They held a 1-0 lead



Churchill Brothers Sebastian Gutiérrez celebrates with teammates after scoring a hat-trick at the Raia ground on Friday

at half-time thanks to Rudwere's penalty but collapsed under the relentless pressure from Churchill Brothers. Though Shillong Lajong remain in fifth spot with 26 points, they can drop to seventh in a couple of days if Gokulam Kerala and Rajasthan United win their games.

Even though Shillong Lajong took the lead, Churchill Brothers dominated possession and created numerous opportunities, setting the stage for a second-half onslaught. The turning point came in the 50th minute when Kharshong was red-carded

for blocking a goal-bound shot with his hand inside the penalty area. Gassama stepped up to the spot and levelled the score, despite Shillong Lajong goalkeeper Ranit Sarkar guessing the direction correctly. Momentum firmly with Churchill Brothers, Gutiérrez broke through just two minutes later, skillfully navigating past two defenders to put his side ahead. The

situation worsened for Shillong Lajong when Renan Paulino received his marching orders for a second yellow card after a foul on Gassama, reducing the visitors to nine men. Gutiérrez continued his impressive display, adding his second in the 66th minute after latching onto a precise cross from Maibam Deny Singh with a skillful first touch and finishing coolly past the beleaguered Sarkar.

The hosts then extended their lead when Rafiq Aminu's strike hit the woodwork and rebounded off Sarkar, crossing the line for an own goal.

In the 78th minute, the Colombian completed his hat-trick with a long-range effort that flew past Sarkar, cementing his player-of-the-match performance.

The rout was completed in added time after Lekay was fouled in the box, leading to Rudwere's dismissal and the South African converting the resulting penalty to score his tenth goal of the campaign.

RESULT
Churchill Brothers 6 (Pape Gassama 50 p, Sebastian Gutiérrez, 52', 66', 78', Ranit Sarkar 73' og, Wayde Lekay 90+3' p)
Shillong Lajong FC 1 (Marcos Rudwere 27' p)



Dempo Sports Club aim to return to winning ways

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PANJIM: Dempo Sports Club will aim to return to winning ways when they take on SC Bengaluru in the I-League 2024-25 on March 8, at the Nehru Stadium, Fatorda, at 4.30 pm.

The Golden Eagles are coming off a narrow 2-1 defeat against Delhi FC, where early strikes from Bi-

nong and Victor Kamhuka put them on the back foot. Marcus Joseph's fourth goal of the season offered hope, but Dempo SC couldn't salvage a result.

Despite the setback, Head Coach Samir Naik remains focused. "We always approach games with a winning mentality, but lately, things haven't gone our way. Now, we're in

this situation, and we have to fight our way out," he admitted.

SC Bengaluru, too, enter the fixture on the back of a similar 2-1 defeat to Aizawl FC, where goals from Sai-coach and Lalbiaknia proved decisive, despite Kisekka converting a penalty for Bengaluru.

Both teams share a fierce rivalry, dating back to their

battles in I-League 2 before earning promotion.

Naik acknowledged the competitive edge between the sides. "They feel like rivals because we've been fighting to move up the divisions together. Now, we're in the I-League, and once again, we face each other."

Dempo SC currently sit ninth in the standings with 19 points from 17 matches (5W, 4D, 8L),

while Bengaluru are just behind them in tenth, with 17 points (4W, 5D, 8L). With only two points separating them, Naik understands the significance of the encounter.

"It's a crucial game for us because they are right behind us. The boys know their responsibilities, and we have prepared well. We understand what's at stake," he signed off.

PREVIEW

Chhetri's surprise comeback raises questions on 'sleeping giant'

Blue Tigers will play a friendly match against Maldives on March 19 in preparation for the opening match of AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Qualifiers Final Round against Bangladesh on March 25

PTI, NEW DELHI: Described as "a wise decision" by the sport's national federation, Sunil Chhetri's return from international retirement at 40 is certainly an acknowledgement of his greatness in Indian football but more strikingly, it lays bare the paucity of quality strikers in a country of over 1.4 billion.

No amount of praise is too high for the man who has served the national team with distinction for nearly two decades, eventually ending his glorious career as India's highest-ever goal scorer with 94 strikes to his name.

But his long list of achievements in the sport is one thing, and his coming out of retirement within a year is another. The surprise comeback raises a fair number of questions on whether Indian football can ever graduate from being a "sleeping giant", as once described by FIFA.

"It's a good decision from the team's point of view. You

are asking me that you are calling back a 40-year-old to play for national team, but there have been similar instances in the past."

"We have been trying so hard to find good strikers, but unfortunately, we have not succeeded so far. Most of the top strikers in the Indian Super League are foreigners, so that is how it is," conceded the legendary I M Vijayan in a conversation with PTI, trying to strike a balance between finding the positives and being mindful of reality.

According to the All India Football Federation (AIFF), Chhetri was coaxed out of retirement by national team head coach Manuel Marquez, who urged him to join his old teammates for the crucial final round of the AFC Asian Cup 2027



qualifiers. People in the top rung of the AIFF are convinced that the right move has been made by head coach, who is also doing duty as FC Goa's gaffer in the ongoing Indian Super League.

His form in the ISL, in which he has also made two assists besides finding the back of the net a dozen times, has also impressed All India Football Federation President Kalyan Chaubey.

"Sunil's leadership qualities are unmatched. A player of his stature can motivate the entire team. His form too has been impeccable in the ISL, scoring 12 goals, and India can greatly benefit with a striker like him," Chaubey said. Like Chaubey, AIFF Secretary General Anilkumar P too preferred to look at the positive side of the move, and so did the legendary Vijayan.

"It's a wise decision on part of the head coach to include Sunil Chhetri based on the technical data we received from our experts," Anilkumar told PTI.

"In the ongoing Indian Super League, Chhetri is performing consistently.

His inclusion will definitely strengthen the Indian national team."

"We have some important matches coming up soon. We are fully aligned with the coach's decision and hopefully Chhetri can contribute much more to the national team so that we can move to the next level of the Asian Cup 2027," Anilkumar added.

Vijayan, currently the head of the AIFF's Technical Committee, sounded excited when asked to share his views on Chhetri's return.

"You look at Roger Milla, who came out of retirement (at 38) to help Cameroon qualify for the quarter-finals of 1990 World Cup. Age is not a factor, what matters is fitness, and Sunil remains extremely fit and he is also playing very well," he said. Marquez, who took over the reins after Chhetri's retirement, has not any luck with his strikers as they have not really delivered.

Going ahead, the Blue Tigers will play a friendly match against Maldives on March 19 in preparation for the opening match of the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Qualifiers Final Round against Bangladesh on March 25.

India have been placed in a qualifying group alongside Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Singapore for the Asian Cup.

Kerala Blasters pip Mumbai City

AGENCIES, KOCHI: Kerala Blasters FC edged past Mumbai City FC with a 1-0 win in the Indian Super League match played at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, here, on Friday.

The Islanders, at 33 points tied with Odisha FC, needed just a point to qualify for the play-offs, but will now take their hunt for a top-six place to Bengaluru FC when they face the Blues on March 11.

It was a quiet first half with both teams cancelling each other out in midfield. The second half saw Kwame Peprah score a goal from a tight angle and it was enough for the home side to secure three points. This is their first home victory this season since January 13, when they defeated Odisha FC 3-2.

Kerala Blasters FC will travel in their last match day as they will face Hyderabad FC on March 12, whereas Mumbai City FC will be on the road as they lock horns against Bengaluru FC on March 11.

RESULT
Kerala Blasters FC (Kwame Peprah 52') 1
Mumbai City FC 0

ISL FIXTURES
East Bengal FC vs face NorthEast United FC at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Shillong, at 5 pm
Mohun Bagan Super Giant vs FC Goa at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, at 7.30 pm

Sesa FA gain 3 points

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RAIA: Sesa Football Academy moved past Churchill Brothers FC 3-2 in the Goa Football Association's U-13 Division I League match played at Betalbatim panchayat ground, on Friday. Pratik Tate, Parshuram Kandolkar and Muzammil Sayed scored a goal each for Sesa FA, while Mukesh Kashap scored a brace for Churchill Brothers.

Futsal: Verna CSC win

Verna CSA defeated Cana Benaullim Sporting Association 6-4 in the Goa Football Association Futsal League match played at Manohar Parrikar Indoor Stadium, Navelim, on Friday. Roydon Rego scored five goals, while Milburn Moniz scored the other goal for Verna CSA. Lendan Mendonsa scored a hat-trick, while Alejo Fernandes was the other scorer for Cana Benaullim SC.

TODAY'S SPORTS

I-League: Dempo Sports Club vs SC Bengaluru at the Nehru Stadium, Fatorda, 4.30 pm.

Goa Professional League (Relegation League): Churchill Brothers FC vs Vasco SC, at Benaullim ground. Panjim Footballers vs Pax of Nagoa SC, at Duler Stadium, Mapusa. Kick off 4 pm

GFA Futsal League: Futebol Club YFA vs Margao SC, at Manohar Parrikar Indoor Stadium, Navelim, 6 pm. UC Verna vs St Sebastiao YC, Murida-Fatorda, 7 pm. Parish Youth Nuvem vs Ambelim SC, 8 pm

GFA U-13 Division I League: Guardian Angel SC vs Salgaocar FC, at Betalbatim ground, 4.30 pm

GFA U-19 Division I League: Dempo SC vs Sesa FA, at Dempo Sports Academy ground, Ella-Goa, 4 pm

10th Fatorda Veterans football: Murida Veterans vs Fatorda Veterans, at Don Bosco ground, Fatorda, 4.45 pm

14th Wilted Leisure Soccer Cup: St Anthony SC, Assolda, vs USC Seraulim, at DSYA ground, Curtorim, 4.30 pm

Sporting Clube play out a goalless draw

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PANJIM: Sporting Clube de Goa played out a goalless draw against FC Bengaluru United in the All India Football Federation I-League 2 match played at the Bambolim Athletics Stadium, on Friday.

I-LEAGUE 2

Sporting Clube, who stand at 12 points in the league, were determined to build on their recent performances, looking to dominate possession and dictate the tempo of the game, as they faced off against their opponents.

While FC Bengaluru United, positioned at 10 points, posed a threat on the counter, Sporting Clube's de-

fence stood firm, with key players making crucial interceptions and nullifying their opponents' efforts.

Sporting Clube's resilience at the back allowed them to push forward in search of a winning goal, while the team's attacking duo fought to break down the opponent's defence, but the home side couldn't capitalise.

The second half saw Vikram Venkatachalam come close with a powerful header, while Joyson G was unable to convert a guilt-edged opportunity, with neither able to find the back of the net. Both teams continued to press for a breakthrough, ultimately resulting in a goalless draw.

Sporting Clube will next be in action on March 12, as they face CFC on home turf.

Shiroda YC in quarters

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RAIA: Shiroda Youth Club secured a place in the quarter-finals of 14th Wilted Leisure Football Cup 2025 defeating Sporting Club Davorlim 5-4 via tie-breaker at the DSYA ground, Curtorim, on Friday.

Both teams remained 1-1 draw at the full time. Prince Figueiredo opened the scoreline for SC Davorlim, while Kevin Dias equalised for Shiroda YC. In the decisive penalty shoot-out, Shiroda YC scored

through Placito Cruz, Elton Cruz, Monzilo Pereira and Climax Fernandes, while for SC Davorlim Aaron Figueiredo, Prince Figueiredo and Melchior Miranda were on target



Goalkeeper of Shiroda YC Pearson Vaz receives the man-of-the-match from Gajanan Shirodkar

BOOKINGS STARTED
TIATR SILVER SCREEN TIATR
WILLY SILVEIRA'S
9TH TIATR
PANCH ANI DON BARA
5 & 2 = 12
MUSIC BY THEO ALVARES & NORMAN CAROZZO
FOR SHOWS CONT 9921448516 / 9806503634
For Village shows call 9921448516
12th March 7.30pm Corlim
16th March 7.30pm Pai Hall Margao
23rd March 3:30pm KA Panjim

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE COUNTER
TODAY
AL-RIYA PRODUCTION
ROMA FERNANDES
8th MARCH
3:30 PM
K/A PANJIM
PANVDE
NASLEEM GHOR
10th MARCH
3:30 PM
R.B. VASCO
16th MARCH 3:30 P.M. MARGAO
Galaxy Assolda, 9823244657

IT'S TOMORROW
2 SHOWS AT PANJIM
9th MAR. 2025 AT 10.30 A.M. & 3.30 P.M.
AT KALA ACAD.
4th REPEAT SHOW AT MARGAO
10th MAR. 2025 AT 7.45 P.M. AT PAI T. HALL MARGAO
-Manja 8806560203