

East Bengal fail to qualify for AFC Cup quarters

East Bengal Wednesday failed to qualify for the quarter-finals of the AFC Cup after they went down 0-1 to Yemen's Ahli Sana'a in their final Group B league match in Sana'a.

According to information reaching here, the only goal of the game came in the 44th minute through striker Ali Al Nono while East Bengal finished with 10 men after Nigerian defender Bolaji Majekodunmi was sent off late in the game.

Federation Cup winners East Bengal desperately needed a win to get into the knock-out stage but with the loss ended the group stage with seven points.

East Bengal coach Alope Mukherjee admitted a number of factors prevented his side from playing as well as they could.

'The referee was not good as the goal came from an offside position,' said Mukherjee.

'The atmosphere affected us while the high altitude affected the players and they couldn't play as well as they can.

'I was surprised with the below-par performance from our players in the first half and while we had a good game in the second half we couldn't create any notable chances.

'We didn't have good preparations for the match as it was our last game of the season and things didn't go as we expected.'

Ahli Sana'a were the best side in the first half and dominated the early exchanges and they had their first chance in the 11th minute when Fuad Al Ammari's shot was saved by East Bengal goalkeeper Subrata Paul.

Ahli Sana'a continued to pile on the pressure and went close in the 22nd minute when Zaid Saleh steered Al Nono's cross over the crossbar before Al Nono sent a header over. The crossbar then denied the home side when Ahmed Ibrahim Kellil fired a long-range effort that rattled the woodwork for Ahli Sana'a.

But Ahli Sana'a eventually converted their superiority into a goal a minute before the break when Al Nono broke the offside trap and bore down on goal before sending a right-foot shot past Paul.

The home team avenged their 0-1 loss to their Indian opponents March 18 in [Kolkata](#) but the win was inconsequential for them as they were already out of contention. They ended their campaign with six points in the group.

Ahli Sana'a coach Mohamad Al Yaraimi, meanwhile, conceded that though he was happy with his side's first win in the AFC Cup, he was disappointed his players didn't convert more of the chances they had.

'I'm happy that we claimed our first win in the tournament,' he said.

'However, it is a shame that we missed several scoring chances because we should have got a bigger win after dominating the game.

'We lacked the experience tonight as we had a lot of young players and that was clear with the chances that we missed tonight.

'We played a good formation and stuck to our tactics as Ali Al Nono returned from injury and scored a goal.

'I brought Adel Al Salemi in the second half to give more support to our attack but the lack of experience prevailed and we won the match with a single goal.'

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