

For Habas, statistics don't matter

A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta: There is still some confusion about the venue for Atletico de Kolkata's (ATK) first-leg semi-final against Chennaiyin FC, but that is not stopping Antonio Lopez Habas from getting his team ready for the key match.

ATK are favourites for not just being the defending champions of the Indian Super League (ISL) who are playing pretty well this year too, they also enjoy the upper hand, at least psychologically, because they have won both their league matches — home and away — against Chennaiyin.

But after their practice session on Monday, Habas, the manager, made it clear that they are not looking back for inspiration or confidence and are instead focusing on the job at hand.

"Statistics don't work in football... So it is meaningless to think about our earlier matches, even if we have won both against Chennaiyin. We have to be alert and do our job," Habas said.

Habas's concerns, if they can be called so, are understandable.

In their last league match, they suffered a setback losing 2-3 to Mumbai City FC and that ultimately cost them the top spot in the league standings. "We cannot relax thinking what we did last season or in our earlier matches. We can't take things lightly. Actually, the loss in our last match served as a wake-up call for us," he said.

Asked how much chance does marquee player Helder Postiga, who has missed almost the entire ISL with injury, have of playing in the semi-finals, the manager didn't look very positive. "Well, he is still recov-

ering. It will take some time."

Coming to the venue problem for the first-leg semi-final match, scheduled to be held on Saturday, well, meetings all through the day failed to come up with a definite solution. However, as things stood till late on Monday, the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, in Chennai, is more or less certain to host the match as originally scheduled.

Sources claimed that the only thing that is stopping officials from the ISL, ATK and Chennaiyin from giving an official confirmation was clearance from the Tamil Nadu government. Chennai is struggling

to come back to normalcy after being devastated by heavy rains and flood and that basically has put the question mark on the city's readiness for hosting the franchise's home match. To make matters worse, the weather forecast for the next two days in Chennai carry threat of rain. A source in the ATK, however, said: "As far as we are concerned, the first leg semi-final is going to be played in Chennai and we are preparing accordingly. We don't see any reason to think otherwise."

Some other sources, too, con-

firmed that the ISL's brief to ATK, as of Monday, has been positive about Chennai. So much so that the franchise has already booked tickets for their journey to Tamil Nadu's capital, on Friday.

One learnt, that ATK would send a reconnaissance team of their own to take stock of the situation.

Interestingly, the official website of the ISL shows Chennai as the venue for the match.

In case Chennai fails to get the nod, Pune is the front-runner to host the match, though a few other venues are also in the list.



Iain Hume, on Monday.

A Telegraph picture