

Mancini confident, Spalletti resigned

Football
AFP, Milan

Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini insisted he was still confident of landing the Serie A crown despite Sunday's 2-1 defeat against AC Milan in the city derby.

A victory for Inter or a defeat for AS Roma at Sampdoria would have seen Mancini's men crowned champions already, but his team lost and Roma came away from Genoa with a stunning 3-0 victory.

But Inter still have two more matches to play to try to earn the three points they need to wrap up the Scudetto and the coach believes that will happen on Sunday at home to Siena.

"The title, we'll win that on Sunday, I've no doubts about that," he said.

"I've always thought that the game where we wrapped up the title would be the one against Siena, above all because I was sure that Roma would not drop points in Genoa.

"The lads have done really well up until now and I don't think this defeat will affect their calm.

"At the worst, if we don't manage it against Siena, we'll do it against Parma, it doesn't change

much.

"But we're sure that on Sunday we'll play a great match. In the meantime we'll also concentrate on the cup semi-final because we also want to win that."

Mancini was gracious enough to pay tribute to Milan, who he admitted deserved to win on the day.

"They played better than us but we didn't play with our usual aggression which served us so well in the last derby," said Mancini.

Inter came back from 1-0 down in the December match to win 2-1 and end any hopes Milan had of winning the title.

This time, though, Inter were off the pace until they fell 2-0 behind to goals from Filippo Inzaghi and Kaka.

They upped their game but could only manage a free-kick from Julio Cruz in response.

"The team was asleep today, particularly in the first half," added Mancini.

"I'm sorry for the disappointment we've caused our fans, losing a derby hurts but at least we'll have another chance (to win the league).

"We're not afraid of Roma, we've always known it would be difficult to go all the way."

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti all but conceded the title and said he expects Inter to wrap it up in

their next match.

Spalletti rued the dropped points at home that have cost his side in the long run.

"They'll win the title on Sunday, they'll beat Siena at home," he said.

"I'm thinking above all about that home draw two matches ago against Livorno."

"We conceded from the only chance they had in the whole match, and it really was the only one."

"Of course there were also matches where we came away with the points against teams that could have caused us a lot of problems."

Spalletti could easily have been referring to this match against Sampdoria. His side were second best for long periods but goals from Christian Panucci, David Pizarro and Cicinho in the final 15 minutes gave them the spoils.

"In the first half they put us under a lot of pressure, if they had gone 1-0 up it would have been a different game."

Spalletti may not believe he can win the title now but he was pleased to have sewn up second place, due to Juventus's 1-0 defeat at Siena.

"I said before the game that it (second place) was an important goal and to have achieved it with two games to play is something to be proud of," he headed.



A goalmouth action from the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League match between Azad Sporting Club and Usha Krira Chakra at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

Kolkata's shield gone?



CRICINFO, undated

It's hard to imagine a 104-run partnership from just 55 balls being intrinsically worthless, especially in the Twenty20 format where such associations are usually 24-carat gold. It's also difficult to think of an occasion when the margin, nine runs, masked what was a yawning mismatch for such long periods. But for David Hussey and Wriddhiman Saha, the Knight Riders were abject with the bat, a parody of the side that looked

like it might sweep all before it after the opening two games.

This was their fourth loss in succession, and though Sourav Ganguly tried to put a brave face on it by speaking of five home games to come, the downward spiral will only continue unless more batsmen offer the splendid Hussey some sort of support.

This was a game that Kolkata could have won, and they'll look back ruefully at two decisive passages of play when they were out in the field. At the fall of the fifth wicket, with a once-flourishing Punjab innings in disarray, Kumar Sangakkara shrugged off a side strain to remerge into the noisy cauldron. His partnership with Irfan Pathan, the Man of the Match, was subsequently worth 49, and it gave the team something to build on.

Kolkata would argue that he shouldn't have left the physio's table in the first place. Before he retired hurt, he had gloved one behind off Ashok Dinda, but the vociferous appeal met with only casual indifference from I Shivram.

The second blow to their fragile confidence came in the final over. A total of 157 from 19 was decent, but it certainly wasn't intimidating. Once Piyush Chawla cheekily nudged and smacked Ishant

Sharma for three fours and a six though, the required rate jumped up by nearly one an over.

"It gave us just a bit of an injection," said Tom Moody, the Punjab coach, later. "We knew we were probably 20 runs short, but it gave us some momentum to take into our bowling."

Different coaches and players have vastly different ideas about momentum, but the rousing finale with the bat certainly appeared to inspire the Punjab team's opening bowlers. Both Pathan and Sreesanth bowled outstanding spells, and the fact that both employ such dissimilar methods made it doubly difficult for batsmen to settle.

"He bowls away (from the right-hander) and I bowl in," said Pathan later. "It's a good combination, isn't it?"

A Kolkata line-up adapting to life without Brendon McCullum and Ricky Ponting simply folded, and by the time VVR Singh castled Laxmi Ratan Shukla, half the innings was gone with only 50 on the board. They needed 94 from the last 36 balls and what followed was strictly of the stable door-horse bolted variety. Without some more armour, these Knights, like the one that John Keats wrote about, will soon be palely loitering.

Tanvir trounces

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At the other end, Smith was skipping down the track and muscling boundaries square of the wicket, and when a wayward seventh over from Morkel cost 14 runs, Rajasthan had raced to 58 for no loss. It wasn't until this stage, after the horse had bolted, that Chennai brought on their best bowler, Muttiah Muralidaran, but the task of bringing Chennai back into the contest was beyond him. Rajasthan lost a couple of wickets but, with the help of some lusty blows from Pathan and Watson, the target was overhauled with 5.4 overs to spare.

After winning their first four matches, this was Chennai's second consecutive loss and the huge margin of defeat meant that they slipped to fourth place in the space of two days.

SCORES IN BRIEF

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: 109 all out in 19 overs (Vidyut 5, Raina 27, Badrinath 15, Dhoni 1, Morkel 42, Gony 1 not out, Nuni 11; Tanvir 14, Watson 1-19, Patel 2-16, Warne 1-29).

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 110 for 2 in 14.2 overs (Smith 35 not out, Asnodkar 32, Pathan 8, Watson 14 not out; Muralidaran 1-20, Vidyut 1-22).

Result: Rajasthan Royals won by 8 wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Sohail Tanvir.

Umpires: Asad Rauf and AV Jayaprakash.

Toss: Chennai Super Kings.

Teams told to behave

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match in Jaipur, which finally prompted the governing council to sound out the team owners officially, said sources.

After that encounter between the Rajasthan Royals and the Kolkata Knight Riders, Warne created a stir during the post-match press conference when he accused Ganguly of flouting the spirit of the game by forcing an on-field umpire to refer a disputed catch to the third umpire. Minutes later, Warne also criticised Ganguly for turning up late for the start.

Later, GA Pratap Kumar, the on-field umpire for that Jaipur match, was suspended for succumbing to pressure from Ganguly. Two days later, Ishant Sharma, Kolkata's fast bowler, was fined for kicking down the stumps in a fit of anger during

another match against Kings XI Punjab.

However, IS Bindra, a member of the IPL council, has dismissed the series of controversial incidents as "aberrations". He said that they merely reflected the "passion and intensity" with which players have approached the tournament.

"Such incidents show the passion and intensity with which players play in the tournament," Bindra told Cricinfo. "Players have developed intense loyalties to their teams and we are surprised. We thought this would take two years, but it has happened in just two weeks. Of course, we can't let players cross the line of acceptable behaviour. But we also have to understand the passion to win that leads to such incidents."

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-15 cricket team received the spirit of the game award for their on and off the field activities during the CLICO U-15 International Competitions in the West Indies.

The Bangladesh Under-15s got the award for discipline, punctuality, team effort, attitude and operational issues with organisers.

The Bangladesh side finished third in the 8-team event.

BCB PICKS UP 42

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selected 42 players for the coming Under-19 Challenge Cup from its Under-18 training programme held in January.

The selected cricketers have been asked to report at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Pratisthan (BKSP) tomorrow by 5.30 pm.

The training and Challenge Series will continue up to May 18.

Selected players are, Tayebur Rahman Parvez, Saikat Ali, Tasamul Haq, Atiqur Rahman, Al Amin, Noor Hossain, Imamul Muttakim, Anjum Ahmed Jessy, Asaduzzaman, Arifat Hossain, Zakir Hossain, Mohammad Sukran (Metro Blue), Mehadad Amin, Mominul Haque, Mohammad Furkan (Metro Green), Ariful Zaman, Mohammad Saim, Joy Sarker, Imrul Hasan Bikram (Dhaka South), Naim M Asif, Sabbir Ahmed, Tajul Islam, Shohag Reza, Mobassir Khan (Rajshahi South), Alauddin Babu, Sadaf Sarkar Hasib, Saddam Hossain, Rasel Khandker (Rajshahi North), Islamul Ahsan, Maidul Islam, Kamrul Islam (Barisal), Chowdhury Labbayek, Muhaimin M Shahid, Shaker Ahmed, Abul Hasan Raju (Sylhet), Irfan Sukur, Victor Barua, Mohammad Polash, Raquibul Hasan (Chittagong), Kawsar Rony, Sohail Rana, Mohammad Ali (Khulna).

VOLLEYBALL

East End Club defeated Shabalambi Society 3-0 in the First Division Metropolitan Volleyball League at the Dhaka Volleyball Stadium.

In the second division, Nagar Samaj Kallyan Sangha beat Hazrat Ali Smriti Sangsad 3-0 and Jubo Sangha beat Nobodoy Sangha 3-0.

ICC wants to save Tests

REUTERS, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will look at ways to protect Test cricket in the wake of Twenty20's growing impact at a two-day board meeting starting in Dubai on Monday.

The India Premier League (IPL) was launched last month involving several high-profile players and has taken the cricket world by storm with the England board also planning their own league.

"Following the changing cricket landscape after the explosion of Twenty20 cricket, the committee will discuss international cricket as the pinnacle of the game, the impact of Twenty20 cricket on other formats of the game and the impact of domestic leagues on the international game," an ICC statement said.

The lure of the IPL has been such that several Australia and New Zealand players put the games ahead of country commitments, including tours of West Indies and England respectively.

The ICC are also facing calls to carve a window in their Future Tours Programme for the league.

The Dubai meeting will also finalise details of this year's ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan and the 2009 Twenty20 World Cup in England, as well as trialing an umpires' decision review system.

PCB pardons

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of principle," he added, with the PCB also withdrawing its suit.

Local media said that Pakistan's prime ministerial advisor on interior affairs, Rehman Malik, brokered the deal at a dinner in his house in Islamabad on Sunday night where Ashraf forgave Akhtar.

The civil court in Lahore had summoned Akhtar for a hearing on May 16.

Akhtar made his surprise apology last week in an apparent attempt to further his appeal against the ban.

A three-member appeals tribunal last week said that Akhtar was free to play abroad, but it said that it would make a final decision next month on the ban stopping him playing in Pakistan or for the national team.

Akhtar said his real fight was still on.

"I am pleased to have my ban suspended which has paved my way to play in India but the real task is ahead and that is to overturn the ban on me," Akhtar told AFP.

"I want to play for my country and bow out on a high. What has happened to me was disappointing but I want to fight the ban and will resume my appeal on my return."



Spaniard Rafael Nadal bites the winner's trophy of the Barcelona Open after beating compatriot David Ferrer in the final on Sunday.

Nadal's 4th in a row

Tennis
AFP, Barcelona

Rafael Nadal needed a rally after losing his only set so far of the clay season, overcoming David Ferrer 6-1, 4-6, 6-1 to lift a fourth straight Barcelona Open title on Sunday.

The tight victory in two hours, 14 minutes sends Spain's king of clay halfway down the road to duplicating a four-event winning streak from a year ago on his favourite surface.

"The first set I played almost perfect, but he was very strong in the second set," said Nadal after claiming a 25th ATP title. "I'm pleased to have won in Barcelona again."

Seven days after defeating Roger Federer to win Monte Carlo for a

record-equalling fourth straight year, the three-time Roland Garros champion followed up with a popular home triumph in the Catalan capital.

Nadal improved his record at the Real club to 21-1, his lone loss coming in 2003. The victory came in his third all-Spanish final at the event, after beating Juan Carlos Ferrero and Tommy Robredo in a pair of previous editions.

The all-but-unstoppable Spaniard will head immediately into a third straight week of high-stakes duelling with a Rome title defence.

Nadal widened his margin atop the ATP with a leading 32 match victories and two titles. He has won 103 of 104 clay matches to spring 2005.

His match with dogged retriever Ferrer - which could have easily

turned into a baseline slug-fest - was dominated early by the top seed, with Nadal breaking three times in a 31-minute first set.

But Ferrer refused to roll over as he broke in the first game of the second to make a match of it.

Nadal went into fightback mode, salvaging four break points in a torrid seventh game, and broke to level at four games apiece.

That only inspired Ferrer, winner of the Valencia title last month, with the second seed re-breaking and serving out the set to bring on a deciding third.

Nadal put things right with an early break to sweep through with ease in the deciding set.

The Spanish powerhouse improved to 6-3 over his compatriot, whom he beat last week in Monte Carlo.

PCA whitewash

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Latif, who was overnight 23, however put the home bowling to the sword as he smashed 14 boundaries and four sixes during his unbeaten 104-ball essay. Asad Shafiq remained not out on 14.

Shehzad chipped in with 44 off 115 balls with the help of seven boundaries.

In the series, the home batsmen never felt comfortable against the combination of Pakistan's pace and spin attack.

The Pakistanis, who also became champions in the tri-nation series, will leave Dhaka today.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NCA: 264 and 173.

PCA: 289 and 154-2 (overnight 56-1) (Shehzad 44, Latif 88*, Asad 14*, Nazmul 1-18, Sajid 1-8).

Result: Pakistan Academy won by eight wickets.

Sylhet enter

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out in 45.2 overs) by seven wickets at the Bogra Stadium while hosts Faridpur were declared winners as their opponents Shariatpur fielded illegal players.

Elsewhere, Satkhira and Brahmanbaria moved into the quarterfinals.

Satkhira (112-2 in 19.5 overs) outplayed Chuadanga (108 all out in 45.1 overs) by eight wickets at the Jessore Stadium and Brahmanbaria (175-7 in 47.4 overs) beat Noakhali (174 all out in 44.3 overs) by three wickets at the Comilla Stadium.

An escape for

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German coach Staerk admired a tight Bangladesh defence.

"I am satisfied with the performance but I am not satisfied with the result," said Staerk after the match.

Afghanistan will play their last group match against Kyrgyzstan tomorrow.

Only the group winners will reach the July 30-August 10 finals to be held in Hyderabad, India.

Red card: Saikat (Bangladesh)

Yellow cards: Hassan Al Mamun (Bangladesh) and Shriyati, Zohib, Yamrali (Afghanistan).

TEAMS

BANGLADESH: Aminul, Hasan Al Mamun, Rajani, Saikat, Waly, Arup, Zahed Parvez (Faisal Mahmud 54th), Arman Aziz (Maruf 80th), Sharif (Mamun 38th), Ujjal and Emily.

AFGHANISTAN: Amiri, Zohib (Saadat 82nd), Yarzada, Shriyati, Barak, Azimi, Kohistani, Habib, Barezkai (Qadami 88th), Karimi and Yamrali.

Invasion of IPL

Cricket
CRICINFO, undated

The popularity of Twenty20 cricket has spread to Canada, including a chance that Indian Premier League teams could visit the country following "advanced" discussions, Cricket Canada has confirmed to Cricinfo.

The board held talks with important IPL figures at the start of the Indian tournament last month but have so far been offered "no promises and no confirmations".

"Anul Ahuja, Cricket Canada's chief executive, had discussions with leading individuals in respect to possible visits to Canada by IPL teams," a CC spokesperson said. "In some cases, those discussion were quite advanced, but at the moment there are no promises and no confirmations."

Either way, Twenty20 will be taking centrestage for the next few months in Canadian cricket. The first-ever national Twenty20 championship will be held over the weekend of May 17 and 18 at King City near Toronto, on four turf pitches. There will be 12 matches per day, involving teams from

British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. The competition is a formal Cricket Canada event in partnership with their new major sponsor Scotiabank.

"There is growing commitment to the Twenty20 format across the country," said the spokesperson, "in part because it fits perfectly with the North American sporting format." The Toronto and District Cricket Association now has a separate Twenty20 League, as does the Etobicoke and District Cricket League in the suburbs of Toronto. In British Columbia, their mainland competition launched a Twenty20 league in April, with Sri Lanka's Arjuna Ranatunga as the chief guest.

There will also be a non-representative team from Canada at the upcoming MAQ T20 Cricket Festival May 23-25 at the Broward Stadium north of Miami, Florida.

The Twenty20 arrangements are aimed at solidifying cricket across Canada. "It's also geared to preparing Canada for playing more Twenty20 cricket internationally," the spokesperson said, "with a particular eye on the Associates tournament in Ireland in August and the June 2009 Twenty20 World Championships."

Mumbai & Delhi fined for slow over-rate

CRICINFO, undated

The Mumbai Indians and the Delhi Daredevils have been fined 1,000 and 500 dollars respectively by match referee Javagal Srinath for maintaining a slow over-rate during yesterday's match at the DY Patil Stadium. According to the Indian Premier League's regulations, a team will be docked 500 dollars for each slow over.

The regulations came into force on May 2, when Lalit Modi, the chairman and commissioner of the IPL, said that he had asked the match referees to keep an eye on the over-rate. "Match referees have been asked to ensure that over-rates go as per the stipulated time. From next match, there will also be a penalty of 500 dollars for every slow over."

The first teams to be docked for a slow over-rate were Deccan Chargers and Kings XI Punjab, who were each fined 1,000 dollars on Friday.

PCB in trouble

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is in a fix after allowing Misbahul Haq to play for liquor baron Vijay Mallya-owned Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League as it is in conflict with its policy of discouraging players from associating themselves with alcohol brands.

Mallya owns the United Breweries group, manufacturers of leading alcohol brands in India, and Royal Challenge happens to be the name of a leading spirit brand of the group.

PCB CEO Shafqat Naghmi said the board does not encourage its players to promote or endorse alcohol and tobacco products.

"Players usually take prior clearance for endorsing or starring in any brand commercials. I am not sure whether Misbah has taken permission for the Royal Challengers and I am also not sure whether he is required to wear or market any brand of the UB group," Naghmi said.

"But yes we do discourage our players from even sporting logos promoting alcohol or tobacco products," he admitted.

Naghmi said the board would look into the matter.

Alcohol consumption is against the tenets of Islam and banned in Pakistan. Even tobacco advertising on television and in sports was banned by the government a few years ago.

To complicate matters, the Indian health minister Anbumani Ramadoss recently said the Bangalore team's name amounted to surrogate advertising and promoted alcohol.

Tait returns to training

REUTERS, Brisbane

Fast bowler Shaun Tait was back training with the Australian cricket team on Monday, three months after walking away from the sport with depression.

Tait was a surprise inclusion at the 15-man Test squad's five-day training camp in Brisbane to prepare for the team's tour of the West Indies starting later this month.

The player will not be involved in Australia's tour of the Caribbean but took the chance to boost his fitness after shocking teammates and officials by quitting the game in January.

Tait was invited to take part in the camp for the first two days after meeting Cricket Australia (CA) officials and selectors to discuss his new contract.

The 25-year-old was able to keep his contract with CA intact after assuring selectors he would return to cricket.

Tait has targeted the start of the domestic season in October for his return to first-class cricket with South Australia.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

38 Banter
1 Caprice
5 Golf ball's position
8 Kernell, for one
12 Teensy bit
13 Bliz
14 Calm
15 Yukon
17 Gilligan's home
18 Spread
19 Foster
21 Utter
24 Doctrines
25 Unaltered
28 A little lower?
30 Make up your mind
33 Berlin's "V" hat
34 Andrews or Newman
35 Sought office
36 Standard
37 Old Cowland

DOWN

39 Early bird?
41 Finished
43 French writer
46 Held the deed to
50 Center of activity
51 One way to order
54 A very long time
55 Way of "King Kong"
56 Lo-cal
57 Small pie
58 Exploit
59 Coaster
61 Perukes
62 Basketball target
63 podrida
64 Officeholders
65 Reverberate
68 Buys and resells
69 Kitchen floor, for short
70 It may be faux
72 Stick with
73 Leprechauns' dances
78 Tiffany merchandise
80 Visitor
82 Neither male
83 Very good, in rap
84 Latvia's capital
85 Bean curd
87 Get down
88 Villa d'
89 Went blonde
92 Anatomical
93 Storm center

Solution time: 21 mins.

ACROSS

38 BANTER
1 CAPRICE
5 GOLF BALL'S POSITION
8 KERNELL
12 TEENSY BIT
13 BLIZ
14 CALM
15 YUKON
17 GILLIGAN'S HOME
18 SPREAD
19 FOSTER
21 UTTER
24 DOCTRINES
25 UNALTERED
28 A LITTLE LOWER?
30 MAKE UP YOUR MIND
33 BERLIN'S "V" HAT
34 ANDREWS OR NEWMAN
35 SOUGHT OFFICE
36 STANDARD
37 OLD COWLAND

DOWN

39 EARLY BIRD?
41 FINISHED
43 FRENCH WRITER
46 HELD THE DEED TO
50 CENTER OF ACTIVITY
51 ONE WAY TO ORDER
54 A VERY LONG TIME
55 WAY OF "KING KONG"
56 LO-CAL
57 SMALL PIE
58 EXPLOIT
59 COASTER
61 PERUKES
62 BASKETBALL TARGET
63 PODRIDA
64 OFFICEHOLDERS
65 REVERBERATE
68 BUYS AND RESSELLS
69 KITCHEN FLOOR, FOR SHORT
70 IT MAY BE FAUX
72 STICK WITH
73 LEPRECHAUNS' DANCES
78 TIFFANY MERCHANDISE
80 VISITOR
82 NEITHER MALE
83 VERY GOOD, IN RAP
84 LATVIA'S CAPITAL
85 BEAN CURD
87 GET DOWN
88 VILLA D'
89 WENT BLONDE
92 ANATOMICAL
93 STORM CENTER

CRYPTOQUIP

XMRQ Z XDB VSTZQJ YEV D
ORSVDZQ BCDFF MYCR
DGGFZDQOR. TYE CZJMV BDT
Z XDB D VYDBVRS VBRVRS.
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF ACTOR FELDMAN COOKED AN INDIAN MEAL, DO YOU THINK HE WOULD POUR ON A LOT OF COREY POWDER?
Today's Cryptquip Clue: X equals W