



Milan star Kaka (C) is challenged by Siena midfielder Paul Costantin Codrea (L) during their Serie A encounter at San Siro Stadium on Wednesday. Kaka scored the winning goal from a penalty to lead Milan to a 2-1 victory.

Inter draw again

AFP, Rome

Florentina and Inter Milan played out a 0-0 stalemate in the big top-of-the-table clash in Italy's Serie A on Wednesday as Udinese and Napoli pulled clear at the head of the standings.

Udinese are top on goal difference with 20 points after a 2-0 win at Catania while Argentine striker German Denis fired a hat-trick in Napoli's 3-0 rout of rock-bottom Reggina.

AC Milan are a point behind the top two in third following a 2-1 home win over Siena leaving Inter fourth on 18 points with Fiorentina fifth, a point further back.

The build-up to the big match

had been dominated by off-field issues as Inter boss Jose Mourinho left misfiring strikers Adriano and Julio Cruz out of his squad for ill-discipline while Fiorentina were without Serie A top scorer Alberto Gilardino, suspended for celebrating a goal he scored with his forearm against Palermo on Sunday.

Despite a second game without a goal, Mourinho was satisfied. "Tonight I'm going home happy. I can't be satisfied with the result but my team played a match that wasn't good but was intense. I'm happy with the team," he said.

"After this game I can't reproach my players for anything. We fought like a team. Of course I'm not happy because I always want to win but I can't criticise the lads and I'm going home calm."

The champions came out firing and Brazilian winger Mancini hit

the bar with a rocket from a tight angle on just five minutes after a splendid disguised pass from Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Inter came within a whisker of scoring again on 27 minutes through the same combination but this time it was Mancini's delicate chip forward that released Ibrahimovic, who outpaced and out-muscled Alessandro Gamberini before missing the far post by inches with a ripping volley.

The hosts had their best chance two minutes from the break as Julio Cesar saved a Manuel Pasquale free-kick before Nicolas Burdisso pulled back Giampaolo Pazzini's rebound to stop him reaching the shirt, only the referee missed the infringement.

Inter had the first clear chance of the second period when French

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C'Ron, Casillas head FIFA list

AFP, Paris

Cristiano Ronaldo, Iker Casillas and Fernando Torres head a 23-strong list of candidates for the 2008 FIFA World Player of the Year title, the sport's world governing body said on Wednesday.

United's Ronaldo, Real Madrid keeper Casillas and Liverpool striker Torres are also top candidates for this year's European Footballer of the Year award, or Ballon d'Or, organised by France Football magazine.

The winner, voted by national captains and coaches, will be unveiled on January 12 at Zurich's opera theatre. FIFA also unveiled the names of the 10 nominees for the women's version of the award.

Men's FIFA World Player of the Year nominees:
Emmanuel Adebayor (Togo), Sergio Aguero (Argentina), Andrei Arshavin (Russia), Michael Ballack (Germany), Gianluigi Buffon (Italy), Iker Casillas (Spain), Deco (Portugal), Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast), Samuel Eto'o (Cameroon), Cesc Fabregas (Spain), Steven Gerrard (England), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Sweden), Andres Iniesta (Spain), Kaka (Brazil), Frank Lampard (England), Lionel Messi (Argentina), Franck Ribery (France), Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal), John Terry (England), Fernando Torres (Spain), Ruud van Nistelrooy (The Netherlands), David Villa (Spain) and Xavi (Spain).

Women's FIFA World Player of the Year nominees:
Nadine Angerer (Germany), Shannon Boxx (USA), Cristiane (Brazil), Daniela (Brazil), Marta (Brazil), Birgit Prinz (Germany), Christine Sinclair (Canada), Kelly Smith (England), Hope Solo (USA) and Ingvild Stensland (Norway).

Pele wishes Maradona well

AFP, Sao Paulo/Buenos Aires

Pele has wished Diego Maradona well in his new job as Argentina coach but the Brazil legend warned that great footballers rarely become great managers.

"I hope that everything goes well for him and that he'll be able to overcome what's happened in the past and that he'll know how to manage the Argentine players well," Pele, making reference to Maradona's past problems with drugs and health, said.

According to Pele if Maradona is to succeed he must listen to his director of football Carlos Bilardo who led the Maradona-inspired Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title.

"He has at his side an experienced manager who knows football really well.

"If Maradona listens to Bilardo he can go far. He can learn a lot if he wants to."

"But often a great player doesn't become a great coach. And sometimes players who weren't very good footballers like (Wanderlei) Luxemburgo (former Real Madrid and Brazil manager) become good managers."

Maradona, who turns 48 on Thursday, was named as a surprise successor to Alfio Basile who stood down after Argentina's 1-0 World Cup qualifier loss to Chile a fortnight ago.

That left the South American giants in third place after ten matches, seven points adrift of leaders Paraguay.

Meanwhile Maradona is set to make his debut as coach of the national side against France in a friendly in Marseille on February 11, according to the local media here.

They don't rule out however that the 1986 World Cup winner - who

will be 48 on Thursday - could be on the bench for the friendly with Scotland in another friendly in November.

However, prior to making Maradona coach on Tuesday the Argentinian Football Association had chosen the Olympic winning coach Sergio Batista to handle the Scotland friendly.

Batista - a teammate of Maradona's in the 1986 World Cup triumph and was on the substitute's bench in the 1990 final defeat to West Germany - had been seen as favourite at one time to replace Alfio Basile, who resigned a fortnight ago after a World Cup qualifying defeat to Chile which left them in third place after 10 matches, seven points adrift of leaders Paraguay.

Maradona has been chosen just four years after suffering a near fatal heart attack and despite having no prior top coaching experience but is regarded as being virtually a god in Argentina.

Redknapp hails spirit

AFP, London

Harry Redknapp feels belief has flooded back into Tottenham Hotspur after his new charges earned an unlikely point in a thrilling 4-4 north London derby draw away to Arsenal.

The Spurs manager has only been in his new post five days, yet he has already breathed life back into this previously ailing club, following last Sunday's first league win of the season with this extraordinary draw at the home of their fiercest rivals.

Tottenham looked certain to lose as they trailed 4-2 with one minute of normal time remaining but then came a revival that almost defied belief.

First Jermaine Jenas scored a beautifully-crafted goal before Aaron Lennon reacted fastest to Luka Modric's shot hitting the post for the equaliser.

Such a comeback would have been unthinkable at the fag-end of Juande Ramos's tenure, when

Tottenham looked bereft of confidence, but Redknapp insists morale is on the up, despite Spurs remaining bottom of the Premier League table.

"I don't know what they were like before but I've tried to make them believe in themselves," the former Portsmouth manager said after Wednesday's extraordinary match at the Emirates Stadium.

"Coming back tonight, they showed what character they have. We were bang in trouble but we picked up a great result on Sunday against Bolton - if you lose to Bolton, you're in big, big trouble. Then we come here and get a point in the way we did. It was amazing."

Proof of Tottenham's renewed assertiveness came in the reaction of their players. David Bentley, who scored Spurs' first goal with a remarkable 40-yard shot over Manuel Almunia, claimed he felt like "Superman" moments after the final whistle, while Jenas was equally eager to hail Redknapp's skills.

"Harry is great motivationally," he said. "The lads have done him a

favour today (Wednesday) by reacting to it."

"It showed complete team spirit and togetherness. We always believed."

"We just showed that never-give-in spirit. Any team who comes to the Emirates and gets a result has done well but given the circumstances this is just brilliant."

That said Spurs' resurrection was as much down to Arsenal's defensive failings as their own quality.

The Gunners were inspired after falling behind to Bentley's strike, drawing level with Mikael Silvestre's header and then nudging ahead early in the second half when William Gallas nodded in.

Arsenal laid siege after that, with Emmanuel Adebayor extending the lead after good work from Samir Nasri, and although Darren Bent pulled a goal back after Almunia had blundered again, Robin van Persie's strike from eight yards should have been the killer blow.

It wasn't, and Arsene Wenger must now find a way of lifting his side's ahead of the weekend trip to Stoke City.

AFC adopts 3+1 rule in C League

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Next season's revamped and lucrative AFC Champions League will introduce a 3+1 rule for foreign players, it was announced Thursday, while the final will be played in Japan.

The Asian Football Confederation said it had been decided to allow each ACL team to field a maximum of four foreign players, one of whom must be from an Asian country.

Japan's J. League is introducing a similar system next season, and Asian football's governing body is pushing other member associations to follow suit.

"I would love to see a Saudi player playing in Korea and a Korean playing in Saudi Arabia," said AFC president Mohamed Bin Hammam.

"By implementing this 3+1 rule, we are giving more chances for Asian players to play for other Asian clubs."

The AFC also chose Japan as the host for the 2009 final, which will be played at a neutral venue for the first time.

Japan was selected because of its "ability to promote the event and arouse regional interest."

Spurs' stunning revival

AFP, London

Harry Redknapp might as well be Harry Potter as far as Tottenham Hotspur fans are concerned after his new side achieved the near-magical feat of securing a 4-4 draw away to Arsenal in the north London derby despite being two goals behind with a minute left of normal time.

The former Portsmouth manager, who last weekend guided Spurs to a first league win of the season, could have been forgiven for thinking the game was up when Arsenal led 4-2 heading into the 89th minute.

But goals from Jermaine Jenas

King he remains

Chess

AFP, Berlin

India's Viswanathan Anand successfully defended his world chess champion title Wednesday against Russia's Vladimir Kramnik in Bonn, Germany.

The "Tiger from Madras", 38, won the match in the 11th round, which finished in a draw. The two players drew seven times in a contest that started October 14. Anand sealed three victories while Kramnik managed just one.

"Vladimir pushed me into giving my all. I've given one of my best-ever performances here in Bonn," Anand said.

"I tried everything, but it just wasn't enough. Life is like that and defeat is part of it," the defeated Russian said.

Kramnik finished second to Anand last year, followed by Israeli Boris Gelfand when eight of the world's top chess brains met in Mexico for the competition.

The Indian, who learned to play the game at the age of six, distinguished himself as a youth title, the sport's world governing body said on Wednesday.

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euro (775,000 dollars). Next year, he will face either Bulgaria's Veselin Topolov or the Russian-American Gata Kamsky.

PTI adds: Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil on Thursday congratulated Viswanathan Anand for winning the World Chess Championship title.

In her message, Patil said she is "delighted to learn about the victory and that Anand's consistent performance throughout his long and successful career is testimony to his hard work and dedication towards the challenging game of chess." The President also wished Anand more success in the future.



Indian chess world champion Viswanathan Anand (R) poses for photographs with his challenger Russian Vladimir Kramnik (L) in Bonn, Germany on Wednesday. Anand defended his title in a marathon championship bout that started on October 14.

Ribery leads fightback

AFP, Berlin

French star Franck Ribery led Bayern Munich's fightback as both goalscorer and provider in the 2-1 win at Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday to put the defending Bundesliga champions fourth.

After Bayern defender Martin Demichelis scored an own goal to give Frankfurt the lead, Ribery got down to business and his cross was

converted by Miroslav Klose to put Munich level before he hit the winner on 70 minutes.

"We failed in the first half to score two or three clear goals as we controlled the game," said Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"Unfortunately after the own goal, the situation became a bit precarious for a moment, but it didn't disturb me, as the team are in top condition and settled."

"We seized back control of the game and sealed the win, our goal now is to be top of the table."

Having come from 2-0 down to beat Wolfsburg 4-2 in Munich last weekend, Bayern have now risen

from 11th in the league in a space of five days.

Despite dominating the first-half, when they only allowed Frankfurt a single shot on goal, Eintracht took the lead when Argentinian defender Martin Demichelis turned the ball into his own net on 55 minutes.

Frankfurt midfielder Markus Steinhofer put in a testing cross and when Bayern's Demichelis attempted to clear the danger it went in off the post.

But Munich levelled when their French star Franck Ribery sprinted down the right wing and dragged his cross back for Miroslav Klose to score on 64 minutes. And Ribery then bagged one of his own when Klose returned the compliment by scrambling in a cross which Ribery slotted home on 70 minutes.

But it was a bruising second half as Bayern's robust tactics earned Jurgen Klinsmann's team five yellow cards in the second 45 minutes.

Hoffenheim went back to the top of the league with a convincing 3-1 win at ten-man VfL Bochum and their striker Vedad Ibisevic has now scored 11 goals in ten games having converted a second-half penalty.

Hamburg are third in the table thanks to their 2-0 win over Stuttgart. Before the game Hamburg coach Martin Jol has said his side needed to show 'some balls'.

And they took the lead when Germany defender Thomas Hitzelsperger brought down Hamburg's David Jarolim in the area and Piotr Trochowski slotted home the penalty on 17 minutes.

And Dutch defender Joris Mathijsen led the second on 74 minutes. Hertha Berlin are up to fifth in the table after their 3-0 win over Hannover while Dortmund go seventh after their 1-0 win in Cologne.

On Tuesday night, Werder Bremen's defence leaked two late goals in quick succession to hand Bayer Leverkusen a 2-0 victory which leaves them second.

Bayer's Brazilian midfielder Arturo Vidal had a simple tap in on 71 minutes and then Germany



Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery celebrates after scoring the equalising goal against Eintracht Frankfurt during their Bundesliga match in Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Ballack set to give up armband

AFP, Munich

Chelsea star Michael Ballack is set to stand down as Germany captain to be replaced as skipper by Philipp Lahm, according to Munich newspaper Abendzeitung here on Thursday.

Ballack, 32, apologised to Germany coach Joachim Loew last weekend for criticising him in a German newspaper and the pair are set to meet face to face to discuss the situation.

The Abendzeitung claims Ballack will stand down as captain as a compromise to keep his place in the team, but the article cites no source.

The German Football Federation (DFB) have not commented.

Greek footballer commits suicide

AFP, Rhodes

A Greek footballer committed suicide by jumping off a cliff after being left out of the team for a cup match on Wednesday, the Athens News Agency (ANA) reported.

Police said 25-year-old midfielder Yiannis Koskiniatis, who had had psychological problems recently, was found dead in the mountainous Profitis Ilias Koskinou area and had left a suicide note explaining his actions.

The news of Koskiniatis' death was not made known to the Diagoras players until after their 3-2 Greek Cup defeat to Greek first division champions Olympiakos. A full investigation was being carried out by local police, ANA said.

Local press reports said Pavlos Dermitzakis, coach of second division side Diagoras, had left Koskiniatis out of the line-up for the big match and had told him to report back to the hotel.

Instead, Koskiniatis went to the mountainous area and jumped off a cliff, where police found the body and the note.

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