

SERIE A Cagliari stun Juve

AFP, Rome

Serie A's in-form team Cagliari stunned Juventus 3-2 at Turin's Stadio Olimpico to put a huge dent in the Italian giants' title hopes on Saturday.

Goals from Momo Sissoko and Pavel Nedved gave Juve the lead at half-time following Davide Biondini's opener, but Brazilian Jeda and Alessandro Matri struck after the break to record a famous victory for the Sardinians.

It means second-placed Juventus, who lost their second game in a row, could fall to nine points behind leaders Inter Milan if the champions win at home to Torino on Sunday.

Juve coach Claudio Ranieri was magnanimous in defeat but admitted he didn't know what was wrong with his team.

"They deserved it. They played great, they were organised and that's not a surprise when you saw how they played against Inter and Lazio," he said.

Cagliari sprung a surprise on 16 minutes, though, as they took the lead following some shoddy defending by the hosts.

Michele Fini sent over a deep cross from the right to the back post where the diminutive Marco Marchionni was left to mark Biondini who easily climbed above his man to head powerfully past Gianluigi Buffon.

The lead lasted only a quarter of an hour before Sissoko levelled matters, rising highest in the box to head home an Alessandro Del Piero corner.

Things got even better for Juve on 38 minutes as Nedved's cross into the box was only half cleared and the Czech veteran himself followed up to smash home a half-volley from just inside the area.

Juventus were looking good at the break but Cagliari turned the match on its head after the restart with two clinical counter-attacks.

On 54 minutes, Andrea Cossu ran down the left flank and crossed into the centre where Jeda beat the onrushing Buffon.

And on 78 minutes two Cagliari substitutes combined to stun the home crowd.

Matri played a one-two with Andrea Lazzari before finding himself in the clear and he comfortably slotted past Buffon.

Earlier, Napoli gave up a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw with Udinese in Naples.

TT camp gets underway

SPORTS REPORTER

The month-long AB Bank national table tennis coaching camp began at the Woodenfloor gymnasium yesterday.

A total of 34 paddlers including 12 female players are taking in the camp under IITF's Pakistan coach Arif Khan. He will be assisted by local expert Hafizur Rahman.

The AB Bank is sponsoring the event.

Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation president Abu Solaiman Chowdhury inaugurated the camp as chief guest. AB Bank's deputy managing director Niaz Habib was also present.

Maple Leaf sports

SPORTS REPORTER

The Maple Leaf annual sports competition began at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex on Saturday.

The competition has been organised for all students of the school from Play Group to A Levels. Zeba Ali, principal of the school, was present during the opening ceremony to encourage nearly two thousand students, who compete in the three-day meet.

Liza shares lead with Saif, Sagar

SPORTS REPORTER

Shamima Akter Liza, Abdullah Al Saif and Mohammad Sagar continued their winning runs to share the lead in the BASIC BANK 30th National Junior Chess Championships at federation hall-room.

Liza beat Sahrif, Saif beat Ahely, Sagar beat Imran Ali Elin in the fifth round yesterday to secure maximum five points.

FIDE Master Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar followed the leaders with 4.5 points as he beat sub-junior champion Uqramul Haque Siam in the fifth round.



Real Madrid striker Raul (R) celebrates scoring against Numancia during their Primera Liga match at the Pajaritos Stadium in Soria on Saturday. It was Raul's 307th goal for Real.

RAUL EQUALS DI STEFANO Real cut gap at top

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's captain Raul joined Alfredo di Stefano as the club's all-time leading scorer with 307 goals on Saturday as he helped his team cut Barcelona's lead to nine points.

Raul, 31, scored his historic goal in the 48th minute of the 2-0 win at Numancia following in after Gonzalo Higuain's shot had been parried.

Dutch winger Arjen Robben scored a great individual goal on 56 minutes to clinch Real's sixth successive league win.

Barcelona, who reached the semifinals of the Kings Cup in midweek, must now respond against Racing as the treble dream goes on.

"If it was that easy to win the treble, we'd have done it several times over our 109 years of history, but it hasn't been like that. Things are not that easy," explained coach Pep Guardiola.

Barcelona will face Real Mallorca in the last four of the cup and are strong favourites to lift the trophy.

Holders Valencia were dumped out by Sevilla and hope to bounce back with victory over Almeria on Sunday.

Valencia sit fourth, four

points behind their cup conquerors who travel to Sporting Gijon on the same day.

Athletic Bilbao followed up their midweek Kings Cup heroics with an inspirational 3-2 comeback win over high-flying Malaga on Saturday.

Bilbao reached the semifinals of the cup on Wednesday with a 2-1 victory over Sporting Gijon and rounded off a memorable week by ending Malaga's six-match unbeaten run in the league.

"This team has an inner belief that they can come back when they are behind," said coach Joaquin Caparros.

"Let's see if we can keep up these individual and collective performances and go on like this."

Malaga twice went ahead through Albert Luque - back in his homeland again after a disastrous two years at Newcastle - and Manuel Lolo but substitute Markael Susaeta produced an 86th minute winner.

Athletic climb to ninth with the victory and are suddenly challenging for a European spot when a month ago they looked set to be involved in the relegation dogfight.

The cup, where they face Sevilla in the semifinal, also offers Bilbao hope of their first piece of silverware since winning a league and cup double back in 1984.

Malaga stay seventh rueing a missed opportunity to go into the top four.

Hoffenheim go top

AFP, Berlin



Hoffenheim went back to the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday with a 2-0 win over Energie Cottbus to prove they can cope without injured striker Vedad Ibisevic as their fairytale run continues.

Having won consecutive promotions in consecutive seasons, Hoffenheim are dazzling the league on their debut and finished 2008 top of the table.

The club from the tiny village in south-west Germany suffered a potentially fatal blow a fortnight ago when 18-goal striker Ibisevic was ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury.

But Senegal striker Demba Ba and forward Boubacar Sanogo, who was signed from Werder Bremen this month to replace Ibisevic, scored to seal Hoffenheim's 2-0 win over Cottbus to open the club's new Rhein-Neckar-Arena stadium, as well as their second half of the season, in style.

"I am very happy with the result," said Hoffenheim coach Ralph Rangnick.

"It was important we had

patience against Cottbus and we got the two goals from superiority in the air. The team deserves a big compliment for the way they played."

Ibisevic is expected to be out for six months, but in his absence Hoffenheim have now won 12 of their 18 games so far and have a goal difference of 21.

With Hamburg humbling defending champions Bayern Munich on Friday, Hoffenheim carried on after the six-week winter break where they left off and dominated strugglers Cottbus.

Rangnick gave a debut to former Germany goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand who was playing his first game back in the Bundesliga after an 18-month absence since his unsuccessful move to Valencia.

Hertha Berlin took their chance to go second in the table with a 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt at the Olympic Stadium with two goals from striker Marko Pantelic, while Brazilian midfielder Cicero missed a first-half penalty.

Frankfurt midfielder Benjamin Koehler scored a consolation goal on 55 minutes.

"We earned the right to go 1-0 ahead and missed the penalty to go 2-0 up," said Berlin coach Lucien Favre.

NAT'L WOMEN'S FOOTBALL Four reach finals

SPORTS REPORTER

Narayanganj, Ansar, Rangamati and VDP stormed into the final round of the First Citycell National Women's Football Championship by winning their respective matches yesterday.

Narayanganj rode on Surovi Akter Eri's double-hatrick to register a massive 15-0 victory over Sherpur at the Jamalpur Stadium to emerge champions in their group in the Brahmaputra zone.

Mahfuz Khandakar Sukhi also slammed a hatrick, Kulsum struck twice while Bithi and Rupa netted one goal each for the winners.

VDP crushed Jamalpur 5-0 at the same venue with Salma's hatrick and one each from Maleka and Ching Marma.

Ansar outclassed Bandarban 7-0 at the Rangamati Stadium in with Kabina Chakma's hatrick and a brace from Farhana.

Hosts Rangamati blanked Faridpur 4-0 with Rina Das, Prova Chakma, Joya Chakma and Tina Chakma scoring one goal each.

At the Dinajpur Stadium, Ashrafi netted two goals as Rangpur beat Gaibandha 3-0.

Naogaon secured a solitary goal victory over Joypurhat at the same venue with Ishrat Jahan Banya scoring the winner.

AFC PRESIDENT'S CUP Abahani agree to host qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani have finally agreed to host their qualifying group of the AFC President's Cup, the continental club competition for third-tier nations in the Asian rankings.

Drawn with Turkmenistan champions Ashgabat and Sri Lankan Army, Abahani play in Pool B in the group stage.

The club officials had reportedly said no after the Asian Football Confederation's approach but Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin yesterday confirmed that the Bangladesh professional league champions have changed their mind.

"I had requested them and had a talk with their chairman Salman F Rahman. They just told me that they are ready to do it now," said former Abahani striker and coach Salahuddin last evening.

"I know it's a matter of big money and it is difficult to agree to such a proposal. Still, I think it will be helpful not only for the club but also for the country too."

The President's Cup qualifiers will be held from May 6-16 but Abahani will now need the final clearance from the AFC.

Abahani, who beat Pakistan Wapda but lost to Nepal Police and Regar-TadAZ of Tajikistan in last year's competition in Kuala Lumpur, are in the only three-team group.

Three group winners and the best runners-up will qualify for the semifinals.

"I'll let the AFC know about Abahani's decision and Anwarul Hoque Helal (BFF member), who is now in Kuala Lumpur, will talk with them," added the BFF chief, who is also looking forward to make most of the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers here in April when Myanmar, Cambodia and any of the two teams - Macau and Mongolia - join Bangladesh.

"It would be a test for us: How we can organise an international tournament and also, how the crowd response. We want to make it a success and also learn more for the future."

Bayern loan out Kroos

AFP, Berlin

Defending Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich are to loan teenage wunderkind Toni Kroos to Bavarian rivals Bayer Leverkusen for 18 months, his club have announced.

The 19-year-old, the youngest-ever player to appear for Bayern in the German top flight, will be officially placed on the transfer list on Monday before inking a loan move to Leverkusen until 30 June 2010.

Kroos is under contract at Bayern under June 2011 and the move is designed to give the teenager more match time and experience.

The midfielder would be eligible to appear for Bayer as soon as next weekend.

Kroos has made just seven starts for Bayern in the Bundesliga and a further five as a substitute this season.

The 19-year-old was voted player of the tournament at the Under-17 World Cup in 2007, but has failed to regularly break into the Bayern first-team.

Indians claim crown

AFP, Melbourne



success on Sunday will give the sport a huge boost back home in cricket-obsessed India.

Bhupathi and Mirza became the first Indian pair to win a Grand Slam mixed doubles title when they crushed Andy Ram of Israel and Frenchwoman Nathalie Dechy 6-3, 6-1.

It rounded off a successful tournament for India after 16-year-old Yuki Bhambri won the boys' junior championship on Saturday, while Bhupathi also made the final of the men's doubles alongside Mark Knowles of the Bahamas.

"You know, it's great, I don't remember the last time when we had so many -- I mean, he (Bhupathi) played the finals, we won today, Yuki won. It's

been a great two weeks," Mirza said.

"Let's hope a lot more people play, and tennis grows. It's been growing -- it might take it to another level."

Bhupathi said the fact that Mirza, India's most popular sportsman, had won added to the impact.

"I know for a fact the whole country's excited now," Bhupathi said.

"It's her first slam -- she's been in the news for the last four years."

While Mirza was celebrating her first success at this level, Bhupathi's victory was his 11th Grand Slam title.

"It's been a bit of an emotional rollercoaster for me this weekend," he said.

"I want to thank all the Indians -- we are very lucky that there are so many millions supporting us, not just here but back at home."

The unseeded Bhupathi and Mirza, who were granted a wildcard to the Open, were in great touch all tournament from the moment they beat sixth seeded Czech pair Pavel

Vizner and Kveta Peschke in the first round.

They started well against Ram and Dechy, breaking Dechy early in the first set.

Ram and Dechy broke back but the Indians attacked Dechy's serve later in the set and broke again to take the first set in 28 minutes.

It took two minutes less to wrap up the second set and with it the match as they outplayed their opponents with some perfect doubles.

"We wanted to stay out there and make it longer but they were just too good for us," Ram admitted.

Bhupathi said there may be more Indian success to come later this year.

"Well, you know, for us, it's always four slams where we have the opportunity to play mixed," he said.

"Ideally I'd like to continue playing with her, now that we're doing so well."

"Obviously I think millions and millions of people watched this match today (and) any time Sania plays at home, there's a lot of people watching."

Indian tennis stars Sania Mirza (L) and Mahesh Bhupathi celebrate with the Australian Open mixed doubles champions trophy after winning in the final on Sunday.



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Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo (L) blasts home from the penalty spot to score the only goal of the game in their Premier League match against Everton at Old Trafford on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP