

Good start in kabaddi

Bangladesh men and women's kabaddi teams got off to flying starts in the 11th South Asian (SA) Games at the Outer Stadium Kabaddi Court yesterday. The men's team recorded a convincing 41-20 win over Nepal while the women also registered a moral boosting 33-10 win over Nepal with two lonas. In the men's event, Pakistan also got their campaign off on a winning note when they handed a 28-8 defeat on Sri Lanka with two lonas.



Terry lifts Chelsea

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry put the controversy over his private life to one side by scoring the winner in a 2-1 victory at Burnley as his side went four points clear at the top of the Premier League.

Terry, whose position as England captain was called into question after newspapers published details of his alleged affair with the ex-girlfriend of former Blues team-mate Wayne Bridge, scored eight minutes from time on Saturday when he headed in a corner for only his second goal this season.

Nicolas Anelka had given Chelsea a 27th-minute lead at Turf Moor when the France striker turned in Florent Malouda's cross while, seven minutes later, Terry was booked for a clumsy challenge on Robbie Blake.

Relegation candidates Burnley levelled in the 50th minute when a ball over the top of Alex found Steven Fletcher who beat the defender before shooting past Petr Cech.

Chelsea's victory means they will still be top of the table regardless of the result of Sunday's clash between title rivals Arsenal and Manchester United at the Emirates Stadium.

Earlier, Tottenham stayed fourth with a 1-1 draw at Birmingham.

But Spurs' rivals for a place in next season's Champions League, Liverpool and Aston

Villa, both won to keep up the pressure. Liverpool beat Bolton 2-0 to stay a point adrift of Spurs with Villa, who have a game in hand, two points behind after defeating Fulham by the same scoreline in a match where Gabriel Agbonlahor scored both goals.

At the other end of the table, second from bottom Hull failed to climb out of the

relegation zone after a 2-2 draw with Wolves. Everton made it four league wins from five with a 1-0 victory away to Wigan while Blackburn Rovers and West Ham shared the points in a goalless draw.

Spurs' Jermain Defoe broke the deadlock at St Andrews when, after a Peter Crouch knockdown, he blasted the ball past Joe Hart with 21

minutes left.

But Birmingham rescued a point through Liam Ridgewell's 90th minute equaliser.

At Anfield, Dirk Kuyt put Liverpool ahead eight minutes before half-time.

Liverpool went 2-0 up when Emiliano Insua's 25-yard shot took a huge deflection off Bolton's Kevin Davies for a 70th minute own-goal.

Agbonlahor put Villa in front five minutes before half-time at Craven Cottage when he headed a Stiliyan Petrov cross past Fulham's Australia goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer. And there was still time for Agbonlahor to make it 2-0 ahead of the interval when, in the 44th minute, he curled a shot past Schwarzer from 15 yards.

At the KC Stadium, former Celtic striker Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink fired Hull into an 11th minute lead with a 20-yard shot.

But Wolves were level four minutes after half-time after a comical own-goal where Hull's Anthony Gardner sliced an unthreatening Ronald Zubar cross over the head of goalkeeper Boaz Myhill.

However, minutes later Hull were back in front when Stephen Hunt scored from the penalty spot after Zubar jumped into Jozy Altidore only for Matthew Jarvis to draw Wolves level in the 67th minute.

Tim Cahill was once again Everton's star as the Australia midfielder headed in his sixth goal of the season six minutes from time away to Wigan.

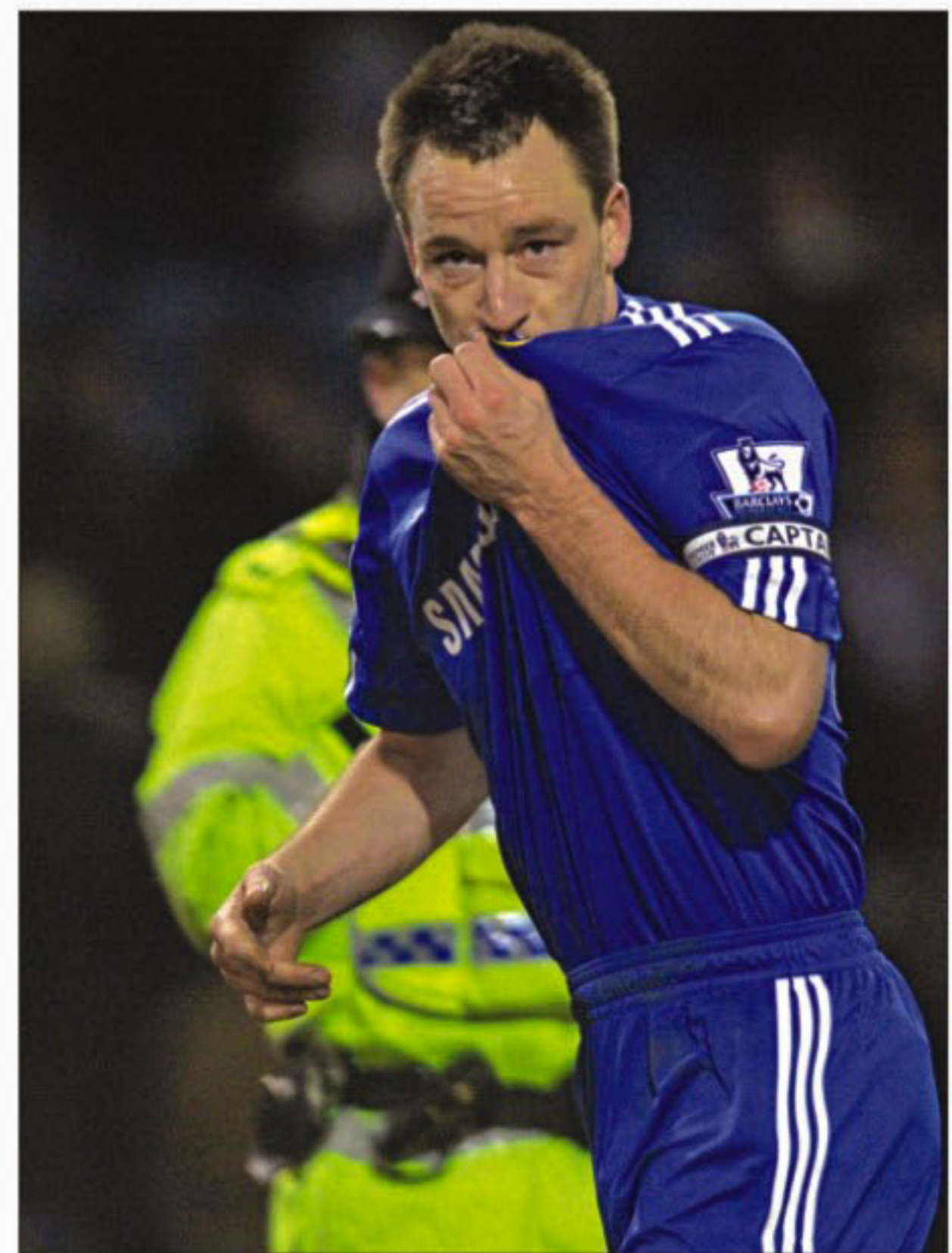


PHOTO: AFP
Chelsea captain John Terry kisses his shirt after scoring the winning goal against Burnley during their Premier League encounter at Turf Moor on Saturday.

Genoa hold Napoli

AFP, Rome

Napoli's drive for a Champions League place slowed on Saturday when they were held at home to a goalless draw by Genoa.

A win would have put Napoli level with second-placed AC Milan, but instead they stay fourth with 38 points from 22 games, 11 behind leaders Inter Milan, who visit Parma on Sunday.

The match got off to a high tempo start and Genoa defender Dario Dainelli almost conceded an own goal in the fifth minute when he diverted a low cross on to the post.

Napoli keeper Morgan De Sanctis dived well to push away a powerful left-footed Domenico Criscito free-kick at the other end in the 17th.

As the first half wore on there was plenty of tough tackling but few clear chances, although Napoli defender Paolo Cannavaro smacked a shot against the crossbar from outside the box shortly before the break.

full-time. Palermo's Champions League hopes also suffered a setback when they lost 4-2 at Bari, ending the match with 10 men.

Second-half goals by Vladimir Koman and in-form Brazilian forward Barreto sealed victory for the hosts after Palermo had hauled themselves level from 2-0 down.

The match's turning point came in the 56th minute, when Palermo midfielder Fabio Liverani received a second yellow card for a nasty groin-high foul.

"We sat back a bit after going 2-0 up, but the second half was great," said Bari coach Giampiero Ventura whose team ended a four-match winless run.

"We had lots of chances. It was beautiful, I liked it. I'm proud of what these lads are doing. Many of them are youngsters and they are disputing a championship that's going beyond expectations."

Defender Leonardo Bonucci fired in the opener in the fifth minute before Honduran Edgar Alvarez coolly slotted the ball past Palermo keeper Salvatore Sirigu for the second.

The visitors roused themselves and Fabrizio Miccoli rattled the crossbar with a free-kick before Uruguayan forward Edinson Cavani nipped in to put away a Federico Balzaretti cross and pull one back in the 27th minute.

Javier Pastore curled the ball inside the far post to level in 54th minute.

But Bari soon regained the lead with the advantage of an extra man.

Barreto converted a penalty in the 62nd minute for his 11th goal of the season, while Hungarian Koman sidefooted home in the closing stages.

Alberto Zaccheroni will go straight into the firing line when the newly appointed Juventus coach takes charge of his first game at home to Lazio on Sunday. Zaccheroni was drafted in by the Juventus board on Friday after the sacking of Ciro Ferrara.

The 56-year-old, who guided AC Milan to the scudetto in 1999, inherits a squad desperately low on morale after five defeats in their last six league matches.

Sixth in the table, 16 points off Serie A leaders Inter Milan and out of both the Champions League and the Italian Cup, the best the Old Lady can realistically hope to rescue from a forgettable season is qualification for next season's Champions League.

Second-placed AC Milan are looking for a response against Livorno on Sunday after their title ambitions suffered a sizeable blow with last weekend's 2-0 derby defeat to Inter.

Inter, who are nine points clear after having played one game more than their city rivals, will be without Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder and Brazil defender Lucio at Parma on Sunday after their red cards in the derby.

Indian men take cycling gold too

Bronze Bangladesh's

QUAZI AMANULLAH from Khulna

India's gold hunt in cycling continued for the second day in the 11th South Asian (SA) Games as their men's team won the 80-kilometre road race time trial that began at 9am from the Zero Point of Khulna to Mollahat of Bagerhat district.

The Indian team of Amardeep Singh, Harpreet Singh, Rajendra Kumar and Sabu Ganajer finished the race in an excellent 1 hour 44 minutes and 11.81 seconds.

Like the women, the Pakistani men's team comprising Haroon Rashid, Muhammad Rafique, Nisar Ahmed and Sabir Sabir won the silver finishing the race in 1 hour 45 minutes and 59.11 seconds.

Bangladesh, who could not win any of the three medals in the women's 30-km road race time trial on Saturday, clinched the bronze this time with a timing of 1 hour 46 minutes and 44.11 seconds, leaving Sri Lankans in fourth position. They took 1 hour 48 minutes and 37.41 seconds to reach the destination. The Lankan ladies had won bronze on Saturday.

The Bangladesh team members are Ripon Kumar, Muslim Uddin, Ekhtir Uddin, Anwar Hossain.

Nepal finished in the fifth position in 2 hours 2 minutes and 48.31 seconds.

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Shuttlers suffer big defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were eliminated from the semifinals in both men's and women's team events of the badminton competition of the 11th South Asian Games at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

India and Sri Lanka will clash in the final of both men's and women's events which will be held at the same venue today while the hosts are confirmed a bronze despite their defeats.

Bangladesh suffered a 5-0 defeat at the hands of India in the men's semifinal while Sri Lanka beat Nepal by the same margin to book their place in final.

In the women's event, Bangladesh lost 5-0 against Sri Lanka while the India thrashed Nepal by the same margin.

In both men's and women's matches, Bangladeshi shuttlers failed to stage much resistance against their opponents.

Cassano going nowhere

AFP, Rome

Sampdoria denied reports that they are about to loan troublesome forward Antonio Cassano to Serie A rivals Fiorentina on Sunday.

Italian media had said the clubs had reached an agreement for Cassano to move to the Florence outfit until the end of the season and were only waiting for the green light from his former club Real Madrid, who still have a say in the player's transfers.

"Sampdoria deny any negotiations regarding an eventual transfer of the player Antonio Cassano to Fiorentina," read a statement on the Genoa club's website (www.sampdoria.it).

Cassano, 27 and capped 15 times, may have been persuaded to change his mind about the move when talking to his Samp team mates and some fans early on Sunday. La Gazzetta dello Sport said on its website (www.gazzetta.it).

The move seemed logical as Fiorentina need a new striker with Adrian Mutu provisionally suspended for failing drugs tests and the fact that relations have been strained between Cassano, who is currently injured, and Sampdoria coach Luigi Del Neri after a sudden dip in form.

Indeed, Del Neri said on Friday that he would not have picked the talented forward for Sunday's home game against Atalanta even if he had been fit.

"Spectacular: Cassano to Florence" read a headline on the front page of Sunday's La Gazzetta Sportiva.



PHOTO: STAR
Members of the Indian 80-kilometre road race time trial cycling team show their gold medals at Khulna yesterday.

Hosts' flying start

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi



Hosts Bangladesh made a flying start in the T20 cricket competition of the 11th South Asian Games with an eight-wicket victory over Nepal in the opening match at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Mithun entertained the crowd with a 21-ball 41 that contained seven boundaries and a six as the hosts romped to the 83-run target for the loss of 2 wickets in 9.3 overs in reply to Nepal's 80 for seven.

Batsmen from the Himalayan kingdom had no answer to the spin attack of the hosts backed by some spirited fielding, as they were restricted to the paltry total after deciding to bat. Sanjamul Islam was the most successful bowler with figures of three for 22.

Binod Bhandari top-scored with 18 off 23 balls for Nepal.

Mithun then put the Nepali bowlers to the sword and ensured 38 runs in 3.5 overs in the opening stand before Rony Talukdar was

bowled by Bhuvan Karki who later took the wicket of Mithun.

One down batsman Asif Ahmed was the other notable scorer with an unbeaten 26 that came from 18 deliveries. Asif hit four sweetly timed boundaries.

Skipper Mithun expressed his satisfaction with the outcome.

"It's a good win the first match and we are looking forward to our next game against Sri Lanka," said the wicketkeeper-batsman.

Bangladesh take on the Lankans tomorrow at the same venue.

In today's matches, Sri Lanka meet Nepal at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium while Maldives play Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

BRIEF SCORES
NEPAL: 80 for seven in 20 overs (Subash 14, Gyanendra 14, Binod 18, Sagar 10 not out; Sanjamul 3-22)

BANGLADESH: 83 for two in 9.3 overs (Mithun 41, Rony 5, Asif 26 not out, Nasir 9 not out; Bhuvan 2-31)

Result: Bangladesh won by eight wickets.



PHOTO: STAR
SMASHING 'EM OUT: The Sri Lankan pair of Renu Chandrika and Nadeesha Gyanthi are in full flow during their badminton doubles semifinal against Bangladesh's Jebunnessa Sheema and Alina Sultan in the SA Games at the Wooden-Floor Gymnasium yesterday. The hosts lost the battle 5-0.

Benzema fires Real

AFP, Barcelona



A delightful back-heel from Jose Maria Gutierrez set up Karim Benzema for the first of a brace as Real Madrid, without suspended Cristiano Ronaldo, beat Deportivo La Coruna 3-1 on Saturday.

The win kept Real five points behind Barcelona who had earlier defeated Sporting Gijon 1-0 to stay top of La Liga in a game which also saw the champions reach the 50-goal mark for the league season.

Esteban Granero headed Real ahead after 13 minutes with the game played out in the home side's half at the Riazor where the Madrid giants had not won for almost 20 years.

With Felipe Luis injured, Manuel Pablo moved to the left-hand side and the defence never looked comfortable especially against the pace of Benzema.

Raul Gonzalez had the chance to add to the lead with a close-range volley before a moment of real quality from Guti.

Through on goal instead of shooting on his weaker right foot, he back-heeled the ball into the path of Benzema to slot home.

Deportivo had their chances in the second half as Real took their foot off the gas and in a late rally Ivan Riki scored a penalty. The last word though was from Benzema who wrapped up the scoring in injury time.

Barcelona stayed top after Pedro Rodriguez scored the only goal in a 1-0 win over Sporting Gijon.

Mate Bilic went close with a header for the home side before Pedro put the visitors ahead with a clinical finish from a defence-breaking through ball by Andres Iniesta on the 30-minute mark.

It was the quality in attack which was the real difference between the sides and especially in the second half where Barca had a number of chances to extend their lead.

earlier Saturday. The home side dominated from the start a match in which injury-hit Athletic were never able to get into their stride.

They lost playmaker Fran Yeste after 18 minutes while Ustarez Aldekoatolara battled through the first half with a head injury before eventually being substituted after the break.

The Athletic keeper Gorca Iraizoz made a couple of important interventions in the first half but he was powerless to block Garcia's close-range winner on 58 minutes after good work from Javi Marquez down the left wing.

The result moves Espanyol six points clear of the relegation zone but for Athletic, who are chasing a place in Europe, they have now lost back-to-back games.

Despite only managing a draw away to lowly Tenerife, Valencia are well placed to qualify for the Champions League but on Sunday they face a crucial game against fellow aspirants Sevilla who have dropped off the pace since Christmas after losing three of their last four matches.

Mallorca continue to be the real surprise this season as they fight among the top four in the championship.

They showed their resilience to draw with Espanyol last weekend after going a goal down and now will be looking for victory against bottom side Xerez, who are really struggling to pick up any points at the moment.

In fact the only point they have won in recent weeks was against Zaragoza who are in similar straits and are now suffering internal strife with captain Roberto Ayala having rescinded his contract.

They face a relegation battle against third-from-bottom Tenerife.

Getafe, who take on Racing Santander, are in the hunt for a place in Europe while also coming into the frame are Villarreal who had a poor start to the season, and they play Osasuna.

Atletico Madrid face Malaga with the pressure on coach Quique Sanchez as the side has failed to show any real signs of improvement since he took over and are firmly rooted in mid-table.

There will be plenty of anxiety also in the clash between Valladolid and Almeria as they both lie on the fringes of the drop zone.