

Napoli reach last eight

AFP, Rome

Napoli eased into the quarterfinals of the Coppa Italia after a comfortable 2-1 victory at home to Bologna on Tuesday.

Goals from Hassan Yebda and Ezequiel Lavezzi put the Neapolitans in control before the break before Riccardo Meggiorini's second half spot-kick threatened to make things interesting.

Napoli were fully deserving of their lead as Yebda headed home a Lavezzi corner.

Lavezzi doubled the advantage after a brilliant dummy left a defender on the ground before he quickly toe-poked high into the net.



Swiss superstar Roger Federer plays a drop shot during his Australian Open second round clash against Gilles Simon of France in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Close-shave for Federer

AFP, Melbourne



Defending champion Roger Federer survived a five-set thriller to overcome Frenchman Gilles Simon and squeeze into the third round at the Australian Open on Wednesday.

Federer had to pull out all stops to get past the unseeded Simon, winning 6-2, 6-3, 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 in 3hr 13min on Rod Laver Arena.

The Swiss world number two had cruised to a two-set advantage, but Simon, who had won their only other two encounters, hit back spectacularly to take the contest into a fifth and deciding set.

Federer was relieved to escape with a five-set victory and prevent his worst Grand Slam performance since a first-round loss at the 2003 French Open.

"Today I got lucky to go through," Federer said.

"He's a great player. Matches against him don't come easy and they always go the distance. Hopefully I won't play him any more," he laughed.

Federer will next play Belgium's Xavier Malisse in Friday's third round.

Federer's victory equalled Swede Stefan Edberg's record (56-10) for the most Open Era wins at the Australian Open. Federer now has a 56-7 win-loss record at Melbourne Park.

The all-time Grand Slam champion with 16 major titles is bidding to become the second man to win five Australian titles behind six-time winner Roy Emerson.

Federer showed his intent from the outset, breaking Simon's service twice early to take a grip on the opening set with precision volleying and deep serving.

Simon, who along with Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray are the only active players to hold a winning record over Federer, was under pressure from the Swiss onslaught and could do little to prevent him from seizing the opening set in 35 minutes.

SPORTS POLL

Should Mohammad Ashrafal be included in the World Cup squad?

Yes 50.9%

No 49.1%

TOTAL VOTES: 397

WEEKLY QUESTION

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City dump Sven out Korea dispatch India

AFP, London



Manchester City dumped their former manager Sven Goran Eriksson out of the FA Cup as the Premier League side beat Leicester 4-2 in a third round replay at Eastlands on Tuesday.

Joining City in the fourth round were fellow Premier League sides Wolves, who defeated Doncaster 5-0, and Stoke, who beat Cardiff 2-0 after extra time.

Eriksson was sacked by City in 2008 after just one season in charge, but goals from Carlos Tevez, Patrick Vieira, Adam Johnson and Aleksandar Kolarov ensured there would be no revenge for the ex-England coach.

City chief Roberto Mancini, who played under Eriksson at Sampdoria, saw his team pegged back by the Championship side when Paul Gallagher cancelled out Tevez's opener before they cruised through to a fourth round tie against Notts County.

City captain Tevez maintained his fine form this season as he dodged two weak tackles and smashed a superb strike into the top corner in the 15th minute.

Leicester were level just four minutes later when Patrick Vieira tripped Lloyd Dyer in the penalty area and Gallagher drove in the resulting spot-kick.

But French midfielder Vieira made amends for that mistake in the 37th minute when he stabbed in from close-range.

Just 80 seconds later Johnson put Mancini's team in complete control when the England winger timed his run to beat the offside trap and slotted past the exposed Weale.

Tevez wasted a chance to bag his second goal midway through the second half when his penalty was saved by Weale.

Dyer scored in the 83rd minute to give Leicester hope but Kolarov's first City goal sealed the win in stoppage time.

At Molineux, it took Wolves just five minutes to open the scoring in their third round replay as Steven Fletcher fired home from Stephen Hunt's cross.

Mick McCarthy's side finished off their Championship opponents with two goals in quick succession in the second half.

Belgian midfielder Geoffrey Mujangi Bia netted his first goal for Wolves in the 61st minute when he converted Kevin Doyle's cross and the provider turned goal-scorer five minutes later as Doyle curled home a fine effort.

Matt Jarvis bagged the fourth goal in the 74th minute and David Jones blasted in the fifth to leave Doncaster shattered.

In south Wales, Stoke needed extra-time before beating Championship promotion chasers Cardiff.

Stoke boss Tony Pulis made 10 changes from the team that beat Bolton on Saturday and it showed as his reserves struggled to find any rhythm.

They finally edged ahead in the 92nd minute when Jon Walters headed in Michael Tonge's corner to set up a fourth round clash with Wolves.

Football

AFP, Doha

South Korea will take on Iran in a mouth-watering quarterfinal Asian Cup showdown after they dispatched India 4-1 Tuesday, but Australia topped the group to enter the last eight by defeating Bahrain.

The Socceroos will likely play reigning champions Iraq, also Saturday, for a place in the semifinals in Doha. The current holders need just a point from their final group game against North Korea on Wednesday to make it through.

Australia, who were made to work hard for the victory, finish ahead of South Korea thanks to a slightly better goal difference, with Bahrain finishing third and whipping boys India last, without a point and having conceded 13 goals.

Australia coach Holger Osieck was content with the win, which came courtesy of a first half strike from Mile Jedinak, but admit-

ted Bahrain made it a hard slog.

"Yes it was three points but I'm not sure about it being a decisive win. It was a very tough game and they gave us a hard time. My team had to really fight to the end," he said.

"But we won and we topped the group, which is positive for the coming games and I'm very happy we achieved our target of getting to the quarterfinals."

One of the pre-tournament favourites along with Australia, South Korea's victory against India was never in doubt -- the only question was how many times they would score and how soon.

In pouring rain, the Koreans established a quick-fire 2-0 lead through Ji Dong-Won and Koo Ja-Cheol before striker Sunil Chhetri brought India back into the game from the penalty spot.

Ji swiftly restored the Koreans two-goal advantage but minnows India's stout defending meant the Koreans had to wait until the 81st minute for Son Heung-Min to score their fourth goal.

"The players did a good job against India's compact defensive organisation," said Cho Kwang-Rae, the South Korea coach.

"We created many chances by breaking down their defensive lines. I personally think we have improved throughout the tournament."

The other guaranteed quarterfinals see hosts Qatar play Japan and Uzbekistan take on outsiders Jordan.



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'Kaka getting better'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian midfielder Kaka is improving after knee surgery but is not yet 100 per cent fit, striker Cristiano Ronaldo said in an interview published Wednesday.

"Kaka is getting better. He is still not 100 per cent, he has to carry on improving, gradually playing more," Ronaldo said in an interview with sports daily Marca.

"He will get back to the competitive level he had before, with a bit more difficulty, the same as anyone who has had an operation and a serious injury," he said.

Kaka, 28, underwent surgery on his left knee on August 5 and only returned to training last month.

Ronaldo said Kaka was working hard to get back.

"I am sure he will triumph," he added.

"If he does not have any more injuries he will be very important for us because he is still a star."



Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez (C) scores the opening goal against Leicester City during their FA Cup third round replay at the City of Manchester Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO:
AFP

IN brief

C'Ron rubbishes spat

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo said reports of a spat with teammate Iker Casillas and his girlfriend Sara Carbonero were "nonsense" in an interview published Wednesday.

Carbonero, a television sports journalist who shot to fame when Casillas kissed her on camera after Spain's World Cup victory, had described Ronaldo in September as being "selfish" on the pitch.

But, in an interview with Spanish sports daily Marca, Ronaldo said he was shocked by reports at the time that he had stopped talking to Iker, keeper for Real Madrid and Spain's World Cup squad.

"I was fine, scoring goals, my family was well... and that happened. It was a controversy that made no sense. I spoke about it with him."

Osieck lauds Schwarzer

AFP, Doha

Relieved Australian coach Holger Osieck heaped praise on Mark Schwarzer after the stopper made several crucial saves in the Asian Cup victory over Bahrain that took the Socceroos into the quarterfinals.

The veteran Fulham keeper, 38, was in sparkling form Tuesday evening as Australia topped their group, setting up a clash with either holders Iraq, North Korea or United Arab Emirates.

"We know the quality that Mark has to offer to the team and I'm happy to have him there," Osieck said after Australia made hard work of a lively Bahrain side.

"He had an excellent performance and made some good saves, especially in the second half."

Cabanas's shooter caught

AFP, Mexico City

The main suspect in the shooting of Paraguayan soccer star Salvador Cabanas in a Mexican bar one year ago was detained Tuesday in Mexico City, security officials said.

Jose Jorge Balderas Garza, nicknamed "JJ," was presented to the media in the Mexican capital with six others, including a Colombian woman identified as his partner.

Upon his arrest, Balderas Garza accused a security guard who had been with him of carrying out the shooting in a Mexico City bar on January 25, 2010, according to federal anti-drug police chief Ramon Pequeno.

The security guard, Francisco Jose Barreto, was detained last June, when he told authorities that Balderas Garza had shot Cabanas in the head.

Spurs snap up Pienaar

AFP, London

South Africa midfielder Steven Pienaar completed his three million pounds (4.1 million dollars) transfer to Tottenham from Everton on Tuesday.

Pienaar used micro-blogging website Twitter to reveal that he would join Tottenham after Everton accepted an improved offer from Harry Redknapp's side and the deal was concluded just hours later.

The 28-year-old passed a medical at Tottenham's training ground before signing a four-and-a-half-year contract.

"We are delighted to announce that we have reached agreement with Everton and Steven Pienaar for the player's transfer to the Club," a statement on