

Pato sinks Napoli

AFP, Milan



A brilliant performance by Brazilian striker Pato saw AC Milan inflict what could prove to be a fatal blow to Napoli's Serie A title hopes here on Monday as the leaders cruised to a 3-0 win.

The 21-year-old -- a somewhat controversial omission from last year's World Cup finals squad -- set up Ghanaian Kevin-Prince Boateng for Milan's second goal and then added a glorious third two minutes later to give them a five point lead over champions Inter Milan while Napoli are six points adrift of the leaders.

Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic had opened the scoring for Milan early in the second-half from the penalty spot -- a harsh call by referee Gianluca Rocchi for handball on Napoli defender Salvatore Aronica, who while the ball clearly hit his arm it did not seem to be deliberate on his part.

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri said he believed from his viewing point that Rocchi had called it correctly.

"Seen from the sidelines it was a penalty," he said.

"But independent of that moment, Milan produced a good performance, and deserved the victory.

"We really played very well, (Christian)

Abbiati didn't have to make a save and we created several chances.

"The thing that really pleased me was that the team was looking to make it 2-0, and even 3-0.

"The six point lead is a tidy advantage, but there are still a lot of matches to go, including the derby with Inter, and Napoli cannot be discounted yet."

Napoli -- who exited the Europa League last week -- gave few problems to Milan and the game went beyond them in the 77th minute when Pato found an onrushing Boateng and the World Cup star slotted the ball home to spark wild celebrations with the former Portsmouth player tearing off his shirt.

The 77,000 spectators were driven delirious with joy in the 79th minute.

Pato advanced with the ball, saw the Napoli 'keeper off his line and chipped into the far corner prompting once again huge celebrations with captain Genaro Gattuso even mimicking his infamous head butt on Spurs assistant coach Joe Jordan as he embraced Allegri.

Napoli found little in the final 10 minutes to raise their spirits as their two standout players this season Uruguayan striker and scorer of 20 goals Edinson Cavani and Slovakian playmaker Marek Hamsik failed to sparkle when it mattered most.

Milan travel to out of form Juventus, who have lost four of their last six matches, next Saturday.



Milan striker Alexandre Pato (L) celebrates scoring the third goal against Napoli during their Serie A encounter in San Siro on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Greats renew rivalries

Tennis

AP, New York

Pete Sampras held up his hands in apology when his shot ticked off the net and fell in for a winner to give him triple match point against Andre Agassi.

The two were on their best behavior Monday during their exhibition at Madison Square Garden. No repeats of their charity match last March, when Agassi's jokes got a little too personal and Sampras fired a serve at him in reply.

Sampras won 6-3, 7-5 this time on a night full of nostalgia, a reprise of his final match when he beat Agassi in the 2002 US Open final in New York.

This city was the site of many memorable career moments for both.

"I came back to the people I love to say hello," Agassi said.

Earlier, John McEnroe had the short shorts and big hair ready to pump up the crowd late in his match against old adversary Ivan Lendl. McEnroe never got the chance, twisting his ankle a couple of hours before the match and having to retire leading 6-3 in the on-set, first-to-eight event.

McEnroe was hurt practicing with Sampras but tried to tough it out. He jumped out to an early lead, aggressively going for shots to try to limit how much running he would have to do.

In an on-court interview with younger brother Patrick afterward, McEnroe

revealed he was wearing the "circa 1985" shorts underneath his longer, more modern ones. He said later he also had a wig on hand for the "circa 1982" hair.

Lendl suggested they should return to the Garden next year to play with short shorts and wooden rackets.

That sort of witty banter wasn't likely during their careers, when Lendl and McEnroe faced each other in a record 20 ATP Tour finals. But now they're both in their 50s.

Four tennis greats with 37 combined Grand Slam titles took the court for the event. For guys who are long retired, there's still an edge in the air when the Sampras-Agassi and McEnroe-Lendl rivalries are renewed.



PHOTO: REUTERS

American tennis legend Pete Sampras (L) shakes hands with fellow legend Andre Agassi after winning the exhibition match at the BNP Paribas Showdown at Madison Square Garden in New York February on Monday.

We're better: Roach

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off 8.3 overs including a maiden hat trick.

"I feel really great. This is an amazing feeling, getting a hat trick and doing it in the World Cup.

"We needed a win and the captain and the coach asked me to be aggressive and go for the wickets. I knew I had to give it my all and that's exactly what I did.

"At first it [hat trick] was not on my mind. I was just looking to finish off the batsmen and get the win for the team but then the captain pointed out to me that I was on a hat trick. I went for broke and it worked."

Roach, who opened the bowling Monday with left-arm spinner Sulieman Benn, dismissed talk about not having a partner to match his pace especially in a side which was

once renowned for hunting in fast-bowling pairs.

"I don't feel as though as I am left out. Benn is a very good partner of mine. To see that two guys from Barbados are opening the bowling for the West Indies is great.

"Our bowling is coming on. We have some very good bowlers and once we click we can get the job done. We can definitely repeat this kind of performance [against any other side].

Roach, who has 33 wickets from 17 ODIs, admitted that bowling in sub-continental conditions required special skills.

"It's tough coming here as a bowler to the subcontinent, you have to be very accurate and consistent, once you get that right, you get wickets."

What's on off the pitch

FROM PAGE 18

During the West Indies-South Africa match at the Delhi venue, the police decided that food won't be allowed into the stadium, starving thousands including players, journalists, volunteers and one very miffed commentator (Geoff Boycott).

And then as an antidote, the famed Eden Gardens in Kolkata decided to give the crowd something more to be interested to come to the venue -- a free health check-up.

With mainly smaller matches in the venue, the

authorities will offer the check for everyone carrying a ticket.

THE PEOPLE

While the Bangladeshi people have told the whole world where the World Cup truly belongs through their invincible enthusiasm, others in India are not too far behind.

Forty-five couples, who tied their knot in a mass wedding in the Indian city of Udaipur, chose the World Cup as the theme of their wedding.

The grooms on horses carried cricket bats instead of the customary sword. The venue was decorated with Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni posters while couples went around the holy fire holding cricket bats and balls and after the ceremony was over, the brides were asked to bowl to their grooms!

The massive scale of the tournament also means that volunteers in their droves have been required and while most have (just about) done their job, one man in New Delhi won praise through his unique efforts. Dipender, a volunteer at the Feroze Shah Kotla, has been singled out in praise by journalists for the extra care he has provided to his work.

Malaga get a lifeline

AFP, Barcelona

Malaga came from behind in a relegation thriller to beat nine-man Almeria 3-1 and give themselves a survival lifeline on Monday.

There was plenty of tension in the air ahead of this Andalusian derby between the bottom two sides in the table and it was Malaga, who had not won in seven games, who began the more nervous as passes went astray.

Almeria went ahead after just eight minutes with Sofiane Feghouli slotting home from close range with the ball rebounding to him in the box.

It took until the second half for Malaga to relax and show more composure in possession.

Substitute Enzo Maresca gave them a deserved equaliser and then both teams pushed forward for the all-important winner with a point serving for little.

Although Malaga dominated, Pablo Piatti was desperately unlucky when he saw a volley come back off the post.

Almeria's Jose Ulloa was dismissed for a second yellow card and minutes later Jose Rondon headed Malaga into the lead.

Fortune again eluded Almeria as Albert Crusat saw a shot come back off the post and the visitor's night went from bad to worse with the sending off of Antonio Luna followed by Malaga scoring a third through Juanmi Callejon in stoppage time.

Barca's Valencia test

AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona defender Dani Alves believes his side are getting better each season after opening up a sizeable seven point lead at the top of the La Liga table but they face a tough test away to Valencia on Wednesday.

Second-placed Real Madrid saw a glimmer of hope as Barca appeared to struggle in recent weeks but at the weekend they rediscovered their form against Mallorca despite missing several key players.

Without Xavi Hernandez, Victor Valdes, Carles Puyol and Dani Alves they took their

stadium.

"They are definitely going to be in high spirits after winning at a ground as difficult as Athletic's but we need to keep concentrating on ourselves and we know that seven points is not a particularly big lead," added Alves.

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho was left criticising the calendar after his team could only draw 0-0 with Deportivo la Coruña on Saturday night.

He felt they should have had an extra day to recover after their mid-week Champions League fixture. As they prepare to face Racing Santander, director Emilio Butragueno has backed the team saying they can still win the league.

"There is no way that the league is lost as there are still a lot of games to be played. We deserved to win against Deportivo but we didn't have the luck," he explained.

Villarreal, who play Hercules, scrambled a 2-2 draw in the final minute against Racing Santander but despite a poor run in the league they have a comfortable seven-point cushion over Espanyol below them.

Espanyol and Athletic are leading the chase for the Europa League places and take on Mallorca and Zaragoza respectively.

Below them Sevilla and Atletico Madrid remain inconsistent and drew 2-2 in a disappointing game at the Calderon with little entertainment despite the quality players in both sides.

Sevilla meet Sporting Gijon while Atletico have a local derby with Getafe.

Real Sociedad need to pick themselves up from their hammering by Espanyol as they face a Levante side which have won four of their last five games with their only defeat away to Real Madrid.

FIXTURES

Wednesday

Real Zaragoza v Athletic Bilbao, Getafe v Atletico Madrid, Villarreal v Hercules, Osasuna v Deportivo la Coruna, Real Sociedad v Levante, Valencia v Barcelona

Thursday

Almeria v Racing Santander, Real

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS 1 Tea time 5 Beaver's creation 8 Prior nights 12 Competent 13 Indivisible 14 Infamous lyre player 15 Time-consuming 16 Cistern 17 On 18 About three miles 20 Interlace 22 Suitable 23 Always, in verse 24 Heard the alarm clock 27 Expression of praise 32 Grand Cherokee, e.g. 33 Altar affirmative 34 Neither partner 35 He may be hard to pin down 38 -friendly 39 Confucian path 40 U-Haul rental 42 Potpourri pouch 45 Sign up 49 Turkish VIP 50 Still 52 One of HOMES 53 Lascivious look 54 Favorite 55 Taj Mahal city 56 Icelandic epic 57 - out a living 58 Changed color 19 Carl Fredrickson's story 21 Ultra-modernist 24 Away from ENE 25 " - Town" 26 Complained 28 B-F link 29 Snazzy Chevy 30 Fawn's mom 31 Mess up 36 Vast desert 37 Pirouette pivot 38 Illiterate 41 Indefinite article 42 Mall attraction 43 On in years 44 Category 46 Wild revelry 47 Old Italian money 48 Graphite, so to speak 11 Former frosh

Solution time: 25 mins.



Grid for Cryptquip puzzle

CRYPTOQUIP

I Q A W D G V Q I Q I G V D TDKZDWG GQUD ZEK IQAYQAY HA HKQH, Q YBDII QG'I HA ETDKH -GBAD UEUDAG.

Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHEN MOLES DWELL IN MANHATTAN AND BROOKLYN, I ASSUME THEY LIKE MAKING BURROWS IN BOROUGHS. Today's Cryptquip Clue: G equals T