

# Pepe apologises

**Football**  
AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Pepe embroiled himself deeper in controversy Friday after saying he stamped on Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi's hand by mistake.

A grim-looking Pepe declared in a video on Real TV that the incident during Real Madrid's 2-1 defeat in the Spanish Cup quarterfinal clash at the Santiago Bernabeu Wednesday was not deliberate.

"It was an unintentional act. All the same, if Messi was offended then I apologise to him," the 28-year-old defender said.

"All I mean to do is defend my team and my institution. I give myself to it body and soul. It never crosses my mind to hurt a fellow professional," Pepe added.

Television images of the clash showed Pepe walking towards the referee, glancing down quickly at Messi, who was lying on the ground, and then stamping on his left hand with his boot.

"He deceives, he stamps and on top of it all he lies," said the front page of Barcelona-based daily Sport.

An opinion piece in Spain's biggest-selling sports daily Marca, added: "If Pepe was trying to get a minimum of sympathy on Real TV for his stamp on Messi, he achieved the opposite. Describing as 'involuntary' an

act that the whole world saw is another serious act of rashness."

Much of the press recalled Pepe's past offences.

Barcelona-based Mundo Deportivo offered a gallery of six photos titled: "His collection of atrocities."

They included an incident from a league match against Getafe in April 2009 when Pepe shoved Francisco Casquero to the ground and stamped him several times, then palmed another player in the face and insulted the referee, earning a 10-match ban.

France great and current Real Madrid director of football Zinedine Zidane came to Pepe's defence in an interview with sports daily As.

"He is a charming, polite guy. But when he gets on to the pitch he is obsessed with victory and that anxiousness to win makes him commit errors.

"Of course he regrets what he did but Pepe is a player who gives everything on the pitch to win. And sometimes he brushes the limits," said Zidane.

Zidane defended Real Madrid boss Jose Mourinho over the Barcelona loss, saying the Portuguese coach was building a stronger team. To accept calls to change the coach would be "crazy," he said.

"I challenge all the coaches of the world to say what is the right system to beat Barca," Zidane said.



Real Madrid defender Pepe (L) vies with Barcelona forward Lionel Messi during their Spanish Cup encounter at Bernabeu on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Inter cruise past Genoa

**Football**  
AFP, Rome

Inter Milan rung the changes but still proved too strong for a virtual Genoa reserve team as the holders won 2-1 in the Italian Cup on Thursday.

Maicon scored a stunning opener and Andrea Poli finished off a clever move to give the nerazzurri a date away to Napoli in the quarterfinals.

Valter Birsa netted in injury time for Genoa but it was too little, too late for a side that never really got going.

Coach Claudio Ranieri wasted little time musing over the win, turning his attention to league matters this weekend.

"It was a good game, I'm satisfied but now we start thinking about Lazio," he said.

"The players are proud and want to do everything well. That makes everything easier.

"We have to keep doing what we're doing, we host Lazio on Sunday and they're doing well in the league, as are we.

"They've earned more points away than at home, it's a game that will give us important answers."

Ranieri gave the night off to the likes of goalkeeper Julio Cesar, centre-backs Lucio and Walter Samuel and strikers Diego Milito and Giampaolo Pazzini but Genoa went even further by dropping almost their entire first team.

It meant there was never much doubt who would prevail at the San Siro and the suspense was practically ended after just nine minutes.

Brazilian full-back Maicon set his sights from 25 yards and with no back-lift managed to somehow fire a rocket into the top corner, giving Cristiano Lupatelli no chance.

That was the only dangerous situation in a first half Inter strolled through and five minutes after the break they put the game to bed.

# Londoners eye revenge

AFP, London



Tottenham and Arsenal will be looking to avenge heavy early season defeats on Sunday as the north London clubs take on Manchester's Premier League pace-setters.

Spurs travel to Eastlands for a showdown with league leaders Manchester City, four months after Roberto Mancini's side established their title credentials with an impressive 5-1 demolition of Tottenham at White Hart Lane.

The only consolation for Spurs fans on that miserable early season afternoon back in August came in the form of Arsenal's record 8-2 humiliation against Manchester United at Old Trafford on the same day.

Since those twin thrashings, Spurs have made the more impressive recovery, reeling off 14 wins from 19 games, with four draws, and only two defeats to stand third in the table.

Although Harry Redknapp's side spurned the opportunity to go level on points with City last weekend when they were held to a 1-1 draw by Wolves, midfielder Luka Modric believes Tottenham can close the gap on the leaders on Sunday.

City have a 100 per cent home record in the league this season, but Spurs scored a famous victory at Eastlands two years ago to

clinch qualification for the Champions League.

"The last two seasons we have played massive games there and this will be another one. I hope we will do well and maybe win, why not? We are going there with a positive mindset and we will try to win the game," Modric said.

"We try to do that against every opponent. I think we are that good that we can go there and win them."

City meanwhile are in confident mood after bouncing back from FA and League Cup defeats to Manchester United and Liverpool this week with a gritty 1-0 win over bottom club Wigan.

City defender Joleon Lescott said his teammates had been bemused by suggestions the club's title charge was faltering following their cup defeats.

"People were saying we weren't going to win the league and we are thinking, 'Hold on a minute, we have lost two cup games'," Lescott said. "I don't think we are doing too badly."

Lescott also said despite Tottenham's form, which has taken them to within five points of the leaders, the club regarded second-placed Manchester United as their main threat.

"Tottenham have been talking us up but we haven't mentioned any other team," said Lescott.

# Hamann lost big money

**Football**  
AFP, London

Former Liverpool midfielder Dietmar Hamann has revealed that he once lost £288,400 pounds (\$445,853) in a single bet on a cricket match between South Africa and Australia.

Hamann became a big gambler in an attempt to block out the stress of problems in his personal life and the German international hit rock bottom when he squandered the vast sum in a spread bet on Australia's score in a Test against the South Africans.

"I was spread betting because it requires more thought, and the more my brain was engaged the less I thought about the devastation I was feeling inside," Hamann said, writing in his autobiography 'The Didi Man', which is being serialised in the Daily Mirror.

"That night I bought Australia for 2,800 pounds at 340 runs. That meant for every run over 340 you win 2,800 pounds, but for every run under you lose the same amount.

"Australia collapsed for 237. It is a score I remember well. It cost me 288,400 pounds.

"Every wicket felt like a stab in the heart. By the end of the night I felt like I'd been scalped.

"The next day, when I looked at the mess that was me in the mirror, I said 'Didi, things have got to change.'"

Hamann now works as a betting advisor for a sports website after a brief spell in charge of English minnows Stockport County.

The 38-year-old retired from playing in 2011 following an illustrious career that included spells with Liverpool, Manchester City, Newcastle and Bayern Munich.

His memorable substitute performance helped Liverpool recover from three goals down to beat AC Milan in the 2005 Champions League final.

# Pato out for a month

AFP, Rome

Pato may have been the match-winning hero in AC Milan's 2-1 Italian Cup victory over Novara on Wednesday but a day later he discovered he will face up to a month on the sidelines.

Pato has been injury prone over the last two and a half seasons and he has suffered yet another problem having been diagnosed Thursday with a slight hamstring pull.

Milan said he faces three to four weeks out.

What makes it even worse is that the vast majority of his injuries have come at Milan's San Siro stadium.

## SPORTS POLL

### WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think the BPL will be successful?

Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

**twitter**  
[www.twitter.com/dssport](http://www.twitter.com/dssport)



## ESPN

English Premiership  
Norwich City v Chelsea  
**Live from 7:00am**  
Fulham v Newcastle  
**Live from 9:00pm**  
Bolton v Liverpool  
**Live from 11:30pm**

## STAR Sports

Australian Open  
Third Round, Day 7  
**Live from 6:00am (Sunday)**  
English Premiership  
Everton v Blackburn  
**Live from 9:00pm**

## TEN Action+

### La Liga

Real Sociedad v Atletico Madrid  
**Live from 1:00am (Sunday)**

## TEN Sports

### Serie A



## Premier Div Cricket League

Victoria v Sk Jamal  
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur  
Surjo Torun v Prime Doleishwar  
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium  
Old DOHS v Brothers Union  
Venue: BKSP-2  
Federation Cup Football  
SECOND SEMIFINAL  
Sk Jamal v Sk Russel  
Time: 4:00pm  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium  
Bangladesh U-19s v England U-19s  
First One-dayer  
Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury

# Pele wants FIFA overhaul

REUTERS, Undated

The time has come to clean up soccer's governing body FIFA "from top to bottom", three-times world champion Pele said on Friday.

Asked in an interview with French newspaper Le Monde about corruption in Brazilian football, Pele said: "There is some clean-up that needs to be done, but not only in Brazilian football.

"Now is a good time to clean up FIFA, from top to bottom."

FIFA has been plagued by corruption allegations in recent years, most notably with former Asian Confederation chief Mohamed Bin Hammam serving a lifetime ban after being accused of bribery while he was bidding to succeed FIFA president Sepp Blatter last year.

Bin Hammam withdrew from the race and Blatter, who later sparked a furore over comments about racism, was re-elected unopposed for a third term.

Pele, who won the World Cup in 1958, 1962 and 1970, also dismissed Argentine prodigy Lionel Messi as a potential threat to his legacy as arguably the world's greatest ever player.

"He is a great player. When he'll have scored 1,283 goals and won three World Cups, we'll talk about it again," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil starlet Neymar holds a trophy given by Uruguayan newspaper El Pais, after a survey showed him as best South American player, in Montevideo on Thursday.

# Barca's perfect tonic

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona believe their latest El Clasico victory over Real Madrid will be the perfect tonic as they attempt to eat into their bitter rivals' five-point lead at La Liga summit.

Barcelona beat Real 2-1 in a bad-tempered King's

Cup quarter-final first leg clash in midweek and will start as favourites to wrap up the tie in the second leg at their Nou Camp home next week.

Before then, the defending champions travel to Malaga on Sunday while Real tackle Athletic Bilbao.

In Wednesday's feverish cup atmosphere, Jose Mourinho's Real looked nothing like the side which had won all but one of their last 23 matches and amassed 63 goals so far this season in the league.

That lone defeat had also come against Barcelona in December.

Real have been stuttering away from home recently where they have only won three out of eight games and looked defensively frail last weekend in the 4-2 win over Real Betis.

In midweek, Mourinho preferred to offer a more defensive display where Pepe was once again the villain.

The Portuguese attempted to stop Barca with some over the top challenges with the worst offence his crude stamping on the hand of Lionel Messi as the Argentine star lay on the ground.

Gerard Pique has not been a regular in the

Barca side this season due to injuries and has often been left out when coach Pep Guardiola has played three at the back.

He produced a solid performance against Real and said that when Barca play to their potential they are still the team to beat.

"That was one of our best performances and when we play like that then we are not going to lose. We have a style of football which we have been playing for many years and we play the same in whichever stadium," he said.

"In the head-to-head matches we have come out on top against Madrid which is great as it shows we are stronger than them but we must improve generally to win the league and we face a big match this weekend against Malaga."

Real Betis and Sevilla clash in a passionate local derby but the match has been overshadowed in recent years by crowd trouble and directors from both clubs have met this week in an effort to urge a more peaceful atmosphere.

Sevilla are a point below the European places with Valencia leading the chase behind the front two and they take on Osasuna.

Levante are still hanging onto the other Champions League berth despite losing 3-0 last weekend to Athletic Bilbao.

They haven't won in the league since early December but they will hope to end that run against bottom side Zaragoza who are five points adrift.

Espanyol are also in the European hunt and take on Granada while Atletico Madrid, who have responded well after the appointment of Diego Simeone, travel to Real Sociedad.