

Italy drop
Balotelli

AFP, Undated

Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli was dropped from the Italy squad for Wednesday's friendly international against the United States in Genoa for breaking coach Cesare Prandelli's ethical code.

Balotelli scored in City's 3-0 win over Blackburn Rovers on Saturday, but he had previously been suspended for four matches after a stamp on Tottenham Hotspur's Scott Parker in January.

"I don't want players who commit reaction fouls and get sent off," Prandelli had already warned on Saturday. "He seems a little agitated to me. When I say we have to reach the European Championship prepared, I mean I don't want to see players who, at the first sign of difficulty, commit reaction fouls and get sent off, leaving their team-mates to struggle with 10 men."

Balotelli has been replaced in the squad by Roma's 20-year-old striker Fabio Borini.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli), Edoardo Viviano (Palermo)

Defenders:

Ignazio Abate (AC Milan), Federico Balzaretti (Palermo), Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini (both Juventus), Domenico Criscito (Zenit Saint-Petersburg/RUS), Christian Maggio (Napoli), Andrea Barzagli (Juventus), Angelo Ogbonna (Torino), Davide Astori (Cagliari)

Midfielders:

Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Thiago Motta (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Antonio Nocerino (AC Milan), Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)

Attackers:

Sebastian Giovinco (Parma), Giampaolo

Germany
lose Lahm

AFP, Berlin

Germany captain and defender Philipp Lahm is out of Wednesday's friendly international against France with a knee injury, national coach Joachim Loew confirmed Monday.

Lahm, 28, played in Bayern Munich's 2-0 win over Schalke 04 in the German league on Sunday, but contacted Loew after the match to report he had an infection in his right knee and must miss Wednesday's international in Bremen.

After consulting with Germany team doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt, Lahm has been advised to stay in Munich and receive treatment.

Loew must also do without midfielder Sven Bender.



What to
WATCH

Channel 9 & STAR Sports

BPL T20

Rajshahi v Chittagong

First Semifinal

Live from 2:00pm

Dhaka v Khulna

Second Semifinal

Live from 6:30pm

STAR Cricket

India v Sri Lanka

Tri-Series Match

Live from 9:20am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

DAY'S
EVENT

BPL T20

Rajshahi v Chittagong

First Semifinal

Time: 2:00pm

Dhaka v Khulna

Second Semifinal

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket

Stadium, Mirpur

Premier League

Sk Jamal v Arambagh

Time: 3:30pm



Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard (R) holds aloft the League Cup after their victory against Cardiff City in the final at Wembley on Sunday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Football

REUTERS, London

Liverpool won the English League Cup for the eighth time on Sunday but were given a huge fright by Championship Cardiff City who snatched a goal deep into extra time to salvage a 2-2 draw before going down 3-2 in a penalty shootout.

There were hugely contrasting emotions for Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard, who lifted the trophy in his first club appearance at Wembley, and his cousin, Cardiff substitute Anthony, whose missed spotkick handed Liverpool victory.

Liverpool's famous "You'll Never Walk Alone" anthem rang out and fireworks blasted into the sky as their players celebrated the club's first silverware since the 2006 FA Cup.

After Ben Turner's goal near the end of extra time took the 52nd League Cup final to penalties, Dirk Kuyt, Stewart Downing and Glen Johnson converted from the spot to complete Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish's collection of major English

domestic trophies, 14 months after he returned as manager.

"It's a first trophy for six years so it's a very good day for the football club," Dalglish told reporters.

"It was a difficult game and Cardiff represented their club very well. Even when Dirk (Kuyt) scored in extra time they were very tired but they dug in to get an equaliser."

Liverpool's massed armies of red clad fans arrived for their first visit to the new Wembley in party mood but it looked like going flat as Cardiff, bidding to become the first Welsh club to win the League Cup, threatened a huge shock.

The Premier League side had been served a warning of Cardiff's threat when Kenny Miller wasted an early chance but they did not learn and when Miller's slide rule pass dissected Liverpool's defence on 19 minutes Joe Mason drilled a low shot past Pepe Reina into the corner.

Charlie Adam, who scored for Blackpool in a Championship playoff final against Cardiff at Wembley in 2010, went close for Liverpool when his low blast from 25 metres whistled past the post but chances

were few and far between for the front duo of Luis Suarez and Andy Carroll.

The sides traded chances at the start of the second half with Miller firing wide for Cardiff and Suarez's shot from an acute angle turned out by Tom Heaton.

Just before the hour mark Craig Bellamy replaced the ineffective Jordan Henderson and the Cardiff native who played for his home town club on loan last season from Manchester City before joining Liverpool for a second time was warmly applauded on by both sets of fans.

Within a minute Liverpool were level. Downing's corner was met powerfully by Andy Carroll whose header was diverted on to the post by the head of Suarez and when the ball came back to Martin Skrtel he fired past Heaton.

The relief at the Liverpool end was palpable and Dalglish's side enjoy some clear superiority as extra time loomed. Downing's powerful shot drew a sprawling save from Heaton while Suarez buzzed around menacingly.

Adam forced another fine save from Heaton but there were two late scares for

Liverpool, first when Turner headed just wide and then when Miller found himself with a clear sight of goal after being played in by an astute Don Cowie pass but the Scot lashed a dipping right foot shot inches over the bar.

After the flurry of chances at the end of the 90 minutes, extra time took a while to ignite. Carroll looped a header wide before being replaced by Kuyt and Bellamy jinked across the area before hammering a shot over the bar.

Many Cardiff players lay stretched out on the turf during at halftime of extra time as physios and coaching staff massaged some life back into their aching limbs.

They looked down and out when Dutchman Kuyt rattled a shot past Heaton at the start of the second period of extra time after his initial effort was blocked by a Cardiff defender.

Kuyt made a goal-saving clearance at the other end before Cardiff's massed ranks of fans were sent into delirium when Turner prodded in from a corner.

The Welsh club's joy turned to despair, however, as their nerve failed them in the shootout.

Gerrard
feels for
cousin

REUTERS, London

Before heading up the Wembley steps to collect the League Cup on Sunday Steven Gerrard made sure he sought out cousin Anthony, whose penalty miss gave Liverpool a dramatic victory over Championship side Cardiff City.

The match had ended 2-2 after extra time and when the nerve-jangling shootout ended with Cardiff substitute Anthony firing his spotkick wide of the Pepe Reina's post it produced a stark contrast in emotions.

While Liverpool's players celebrated wildly, Cardiff's Gerrard stood transfixed in misery as his side's hopes of becoming the first Welsh club to win the League Cup ended in heartbreaking fashion.

"It's always cruel when it comes to penalties, but there has to be a loser," said England international Gerrard, who has inhabited a different footballing universe to his cousin.

"It was always going to be that one of us was sad and one celebrating. I've got mixed emotions.

"Obviously I'm delighted to win the cup for our supporters, but I feel for Anthony and Cardiff.

"It doesn't matter what I say to him - he's going to be down. I'll be there for him and all the family will be behind him."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Atletico Madrid during their Primera Liga encounter at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Sunday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Real keep winning

REUTERS, Madrid



LFP

Sharp thinking and brilliant execution by Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo lifted Barcelona and Real Madrid to wins at Atletico Madrid and Rayo Vallecano respectively on Sunday that maintained Real's 10-point lead over their great rivals at the top of La Liga.

Messi caught the Atletico defence napping to score with a breathtaking 81st-minute free kick and secure a 2-1 success for Barca, while an audacious Ronaldo backheel gave Real a 1-0 victory against Madrid neighbours Rayo.

It was a 28th league goal of the campaign for Messi, who succeeded Ronaldo as World Player of the Year and has won the award three times on the trot, leaving him one behind the former Manchester United forward at the top of the La Liga scoring chart.

With 24 of 38 matches played, Jose

Mourinho's Real have 64 points, with Pep Guardiola's Barca on 54 in second and Valencia, who lost 2-1 at home to Sevilla on Sunday, 14 points further back in third.

Levante, the lowly Valencia-based club who are this season's surprise package, climbed to fourth on 35 points thanks to their 2-1 win at Espanyol on Saturday, although only eight points separate them from Villarreal in 17th.

Messi's genius settled an intense battle at the Calderon after Atletico's Radamel Falcao had cancelled out Daniel Alves's opening goal.

As the home defence lined up to defend a free kick wide on the left, Messi noticed Atletico goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois out of position and curled a stunning strike over the Belgian's head into the far top corner.

The goal gave Barca only their fifth win in 12 games on the road, a poor run of away form that has effectively scuppered their bid for a fourth straight title and put Real within touching distance

of a first La Liga title since 2008.

Real's victory at Rayo's tiny stadium in the south east of the Spanish in the earlier kickoff equalled the club record of nine straight away wins from the 2009-10 season.

The decisive moment came when Ronaldo pounced on a loose ball at a 54th-minute corner and with his back to goal sent it through a crowd of players into the net.

Mid-table Rayo, hosting their more illustrious neighbours for the first time in nine years, had the best chance of the first half when forward Piti crashed an angled shot past Iker Casillas that hit the inside of a post and bounced along the line.

Real were missing winger Angel Di Maria and striker Karim Benzema, both injured, and struggled to create chances against a resolute Rayo, who were coming into the game on a run of three consecutive wins and were roared on by their flag-waving faithful.

They made Real suffer in the closing stages and squandered three clear chances for an equaliser.

Lavezzi sinks Inter

REUTERS, Undated



LEGA CALCIO

Napoli's late push for Serie A's third Champions League place was aided by a 1-0 home victory over beleaguered Inter Milan on Sunday but wins for Udinese

and Lazio kept the gap at five points.

Ezequiel Lavezzi, who scored twice in Napoli's 3-1 Champions League last 16 first-leg win over Chelsea in midweek, was again on target as Inter suffered a seventh defeat in eight matches.

Inter boss Claudio Ranieri has been given the backing of president Massimo Moratti after dragging the 2010 European champions away from the drop zone since his appointment in September but seventh spot will not placate angry fans.

Fifth-placed Napoli had the better of the first half although Inter's Wesley Sneijder, whose return from injury has coincided with a shift in system and a flood of defeats, went close with a curling free kick.

Argentine striker Lavezzi netted with a superb one-touch finish on 59 minutes after good running from Blerim Dzemaili and Napoli held on despite Salvatore Aronica being harshly dismissed for a foul and Inter's Giampaolo Pazzini flashing a header wide.

Udinese, in third, took advantage of leaders AC Milan drawing 1-1 with second-placed Juventus on Saturday by cutting the gap to the top to six points following a 3-1

win at Bologna.

Lazio, who went out of the Europa League on Thursday and almost lost coach Edy Reja, are on the same points as Udinese after ending a difficult week on a high thanks to Miroslav Klose's 12th league goal in a 1-0 win over Fiorentina.

Napoli's win meant they leap-frogged AS Roma, who had a day to forget as Atalanta's German Denis bagged a hat-trick in a 4-1 win for the mid-table hosts.

Roma's Francesco Totti was banned while fellow talisman Daniele De Rossi was left out for arriving late to a tactics session and watched from the stands as his side crumbled.

"De Rossi was late for a team meeting and we have clear rules. The coach did not want to pardon this tardiness, the rules must be respected," Roma sporting director Walter Sabatini told the club's TV channel.

Guido Marilungo was set up by Denis to grab a 10th-minute opener for Bergamo-based Atalanta, thriving back in Serie A despite a six-point deduction for match-fixing.

Another counter-attack led to Denis making it 2-0 and although new Italy call-up Fabio Borini hit back on 36 minutes, the second half belonged to Denis with Atalanta also helped by the dismissals of Roma's Pablo Osvaldo and Marco Cassetti.

Palermo were also reduced to 10 men but after just two minutes when Federico Balzaretti was sent off for a professional foul in a 4-1 defeat at Siena, who stay two clear of the drop zone after Lecce's 2-1 win at Cagliari.

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