

A living legend

AFP, Madrid



Spanish media hailed Barcelona's Lionel Messi on Wednesday as "a living legend" and "eternal" after the Argentine striker became the club's highest goalscorer of all time.

"Messi rewrites history," daily newspaper La Vanguardia wrote on its front page below a picture of a smiling Messi celebrating one of his three goals during Barcelona's 5-3 win over Granada Tuesday in a Spanish league match.

"Historical!" said Barcelona-based sports daily Mundo Deportivo on its front page above a photo of the 24-year-old with both arms raised in the air with clenched fists.

"A living legend that is what Messi is. A 24-year-old youth who rides to infinity and who appears to have no limits," the newspaper added.

Messi's hat-trick took his tally to 234 goals for the club to overtake Cesar Rodriguez, who had a prolific spell for Barcelona in the 1940s and '50s and died in 1995 at the age of 74, as the club's all-time leading scorer.

It also turned him into the top scorer in the Spanish league with 34 goals, two more than Real Madrid's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo.

"You are indelible, infinite and eternal. The future belongs to you. The future is yours," La Vanguardia wrote of Messi.

Barcelona's win moved the defending champions to within five points of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

"Never before in recent years has a player given the sensation that what will happen on the pitch depends so much on him as is the case with Messi," sports daily AS wrote.

Messi, who made his debut for the first team in October 2004, has scored 153 goals in the Liga, 49 in the Champions League, 19 in the Copa del Rey, eight in the Spanish Super Cup, one in the European Super Cup and four in the Club World Cup.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi celebrates one of his three goals during their Primera Liga encounter against Granada at Nou Camp on Tuesday. Messi became Barcelona's all-time leading scorer with 234 goals.

PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea sack prankster

AFP, London

Chelsea announced Tuesday they have sacked a player who let off a smoke grenade at their training ground.

The Blues said they had "parted company" with 21-year-old Jacob Mellis, who played once for the first team, following a "full and thorough" investigation into the incident on March 2.

Midfielder Mellis's teammate, Billy Clifford, escaped with a fine after admitting to bringing the grenade into Chelsea's training ground in Cobham, south of London.

Clifford, 19, is a regular in Chelsea's reserves and signed a new four-year deal last year.

In setting off the grenade in the reserves' dressing room, Mellis triggered a full-scale evacuation procedure, with players and staff rushing from the building because of thick smoke.

It was not the first controversial incident at Cobham, with Chelsea and England defender Ashley Cole accidentally shooting and wounding a work experience candidate there with an air rifle in February last year.

Cole, it is believed, did not know the rifle was loaded and he subsequently apologised to the student.

Juve send Milan home

Football

AFP, Rome

Mirko Vucinic's extra-time strike sent Juventus into their first Italian Cup final since 2004 following a 2-2 draw with AC Milan on Tuesday, giving them a 4-3 aggregate victory.

Milan had forced extra-time by leading 2-1 after 90 minutes but ultimately paid for their semifinal, first leg defeat at home last month.

Veteran Alessandro Del Piero had given Juve a first-half lead but second period goals from Djamel Mesbah, his first for Milan, and Maxi Lopez forced the extra period.

Vucinic's goal ensured Juve still have not been beaten this season in 32 games, although they would have lost had the match ended after 90 minutes.

Milan started the game knowing they didn't just need to win but also needed at least two goals.

They certainly made the early running but created little of any danger.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic hit a cross-cum-shot

with little power that seemed to surprise Marco Storari in the Juve goal, but he pushed it away.

Thiago Silva then came up for a corner but headed over when well placed.

Veteran Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf set his sights from distance and had a whack but couldn't find the target.

The only moment of true quality in the first half came from the hosts and resulted in the deadlock being broken.

Andrea Pirlo chipped the ball down the right for the overlapping Stephan Lichtsteiner, who centred for Del Piero to nip in front of Marco Amelia, dink it over the 'keeper and slot into the empty net.

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri seemed almost to throw in the towel at half time and start to look to future league commitments as he removed star player Ibrahimovic and thrust on Maxi Lopez.

However, Milan hit back in surprising fashion as centre-back Philippe Mexes launched a long ball over the defence and full-back Mesbah lost his marker Simone Pepe to send a diving header into the top corner, leaving Storari helpless.

Adriano in doubt for Milan tie

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona defender Adriano could miss the Champions League quarterfinal first leg against AC Milan after being sidelined for 10 days due to a muscle strain in his right leg.

The 27-year-old Brazilian suffered the injury during Barcelona's 5-3 win over Granada on Tuesday in the Spanish league and was forced off at half-time.

"The worst piece of news from this Tuesday's match against Granada is that Adriano Correia will be on the sidelines for 10 days," the club said in a statement.

"FC Barcelona's medical staff have diagnosed the Brazilian defender with a semimembranosus muscle elongation in his right leg."

The semimembranosus is a muscle in the back of the thigh, and the most medial of the three hamstring muscles.

Barcelona face Mallorca in the Spanish league on Saturday before heading to Italy to play AC Milan on March 28 in the Champions League quarterfinal. The second leg takes place at Camp Nou on April 3.

The Catalan club are already without French international defender Eric Abidal who is awaiting a liver transplant.

Havelange in serious condition

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Joao Havelange was described as being in a "serious condition" Tuesday by doctors treating the former FIFA president for a bacterial infection at a Rio hospital.

"The condition of the honorary president of FIFA is serious and must be treated with caution," doctor Joao Mansur Filho was quoted as saying in a statement released by the Samaritano hospital.

Echoing a statement released on Monday, it added that tests revealed "a serious bacterial infection, with the presence of cellulitis in the right ankle".

Havelange, who served as FIFA president from 1974 to 1998, is held in high esteem by some but is regarded as a controversial figure by others.

He is credited with turning football into the money-making industry it is today but resigned as a member of the International Olympic Committee after 48 years just days before an ethics hearing into allegations of corruption.

Messi, 234 & counting

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi scored a hat-trick to become Barcelona's all-time leading scorer on 234 goals in a 5-3 win over Granada Tuesday which moved the champions to within five points of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

It was Barca's sixth consecutive league win and puts pressure on Madrid ahead of their trip to Villarreal Wednesday, three days after Jose Mourinho's side dropped two points in a 1-1 draw at home to Malaga.

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola praised the record-breaking Argentinian.

"We have to congratulate Messi, he has scored so many goals and is only 24, he does not just score ordinary goals but great goals and we hope he gets lots more for us, we can compare him perhaps to Michael Jordan in football," he said.

Xavi Hernandez and Messi hit the net for Barcelona in the first half before Diego Mainz reduced arrears for the Andalusians on 55 minutes.

In doing so, Messi equalled the record of 232 goals held by club legend Cesar Rodriguez.

Guilherme Siqueira levelled from the spot for the away side seven minutes later after Dani Alves pulled down Dani Benitez, raising the prospect of a possible upset.

However those fears lasted only minutes as Messi produced a trademark chip over Granada's Brazilian 'keeper Julio Cesar in the 67th minute to put Barcelona 3-2 ahead.

Cristian Tello then drove the ball into the net after Messi's shot was parried by Cesar to make it 4-2 for the hosts, and Messi followed up with another fine piece of individual skill to make it 5-2 in the 86th minute.

Dani Alves received a second yellow card on 88 minutes for handling the ball in the area and Siqueira scored from the spot again, moments before the final whistle.

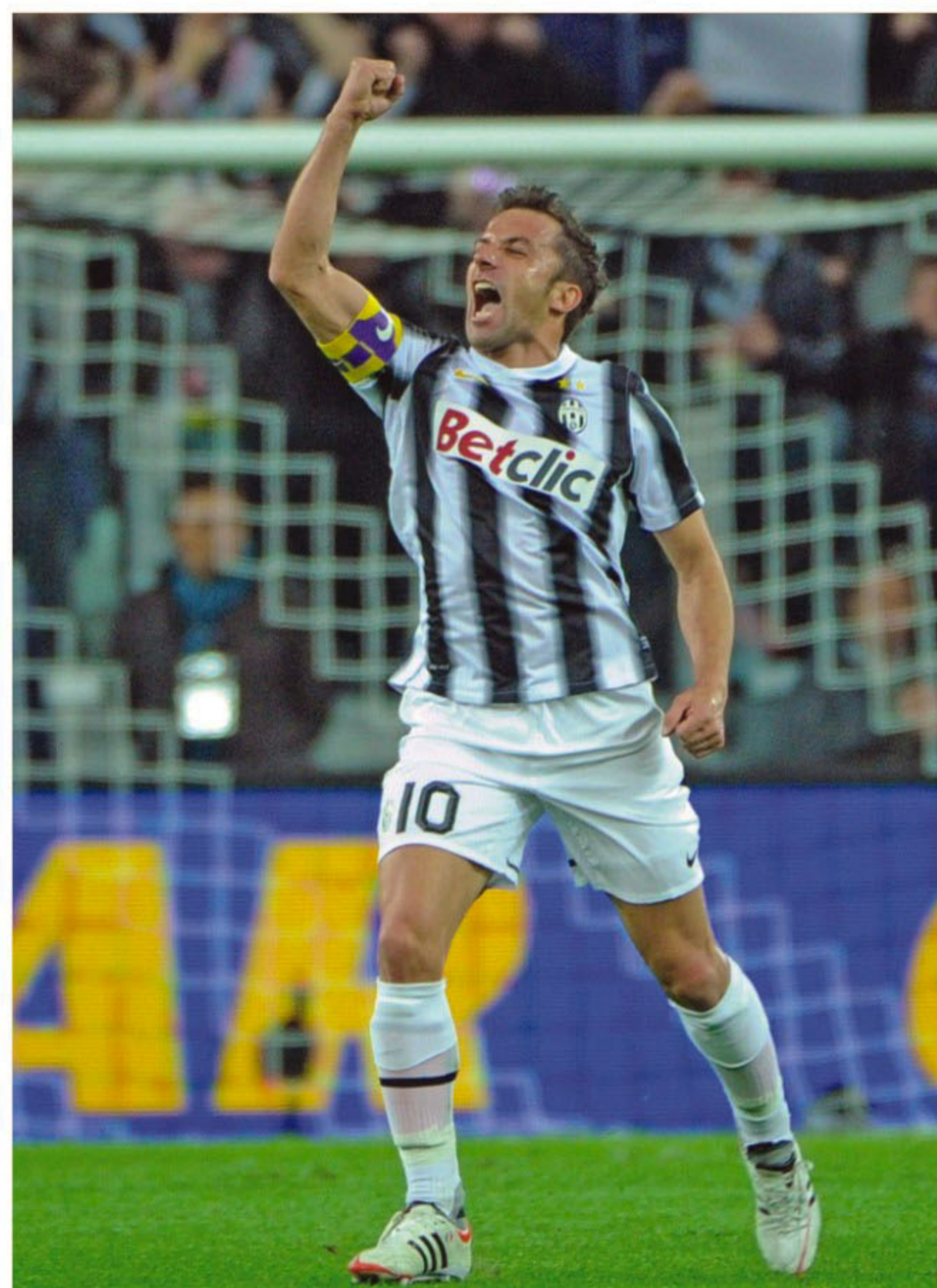
Previously, Cesar was believed to have scored 235 goals for Barcelona, but a study had revealed that the 1950's striker had in fact scored 232 goals -- a statistic confirmed earlier on Tuesday on Barca's website.

Messi's latest hat-trick, taking his Barca total to 234, also made it 34 goals so far in the league, two more than Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo.

Earlier on Tuesday evening Osasuna and Getafe drew 0-0 in an uneventful match.

RESULTS

Osasuna 0 Getafe 0
Barcelona 5 (Xavi 4, Messi 17, 67, 86, Tello 82) Granada 3 (Mainz 55, Siqueira 62-pen, 89-pen)



Juventus forward Alessandro Del Piero celebrates his opening goal against AC Milan during their Italian Cup semifinal in Turin on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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BTV & NEO Cricket

Asia Cup Cricket Final
Bangladesh v Pakistan
Live from 2:00pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa
Third Test, Day One
Live from 3:30am (Friday)

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