

'Offside' goal propels Chelsea

REUTERS, London

An offside goal for Chelsea became a cruel twist of fate for Wigan Athletic and possibly Tottenham Hotspur after one of the biggest mistakes of the Premier League season had a knock-on effect at the top and bottom on Saturday.

The nature of Chelsea's last-minute winner was also harsh on Wigan, although they had overcommitted themselves in attack. Fernando Torres' wicked strike against the post hit fellow Spaniard Mata on the chest and trickled in.

"We fought until the last minute for the three points, having a lot of chances to score," said Mata, whose side reached the Champions League last four in midweek and visit Fulham on Monday before next weekend's FA Cup semi-final with Spurs.

"We got a little lucky in the last minute and the points are important for us. Chelsea never give up and today we did it."

Newcastle United, who won 2-0 at Swansea City on Friday to continue their strong form, are level with Chelsea on 56 points in sixth place. Spurs have 59 points with Arsenal on 58.

In the early kickoff, Sunderland and Spurs struggled to create clear-cut opportunities but the visitors felt aggrieved that Phil Bardsley and Michael Turner got away with handballs in the box, the first from a goalbound Emmanuel Adebayor header.

Beleaguered Liverpool salvaged a point in a 1-1 draw with strugglers Aston Villa having been behind to Chris Herd's 10th-minute goal after a mistake by goalkeeper Doni, standing in for the suspended Pepe Reina.

RESULTS table with columns for teams and scores. Includes Chelsea 2 (Ivanovic 62, Mata 90) vs Wigan 1 (Diame 82).

Chelsea grabbed a 2-1 victory over Wigan thanks to the clearly offside strike by Branislav Ivanovic and a last-gasp Juan Mata winner as they boosted their push for a top-four finish and even the third automatic Champions League berth.

Tottenham nudged up to third with a 0-0 draw at Sunderland but Arsenal can move back above them with a point at home to second-placed Manchester City on Sunday when leaders Manchester United, five points clear on 76, host Queens Park Rangers.

Wigan players surrounded the officials and manager Roberto Martinez later labelled the decision "horrific" and "disgusting" after Ivanovic's controversial 62nd-minute goal.

Mohamed Diame levelled for the visitors, who matched their more illustrious opponents for long spells, but Mata netted to send the fifth-placed hosts three points behind Spurs while Wigan were left second from bottom on goal difference.

Strauss back home, future secured

AFP, Colombo

Andrew Strauss heads home from Asia confident his future as captain is secure after England ended a miserable run in Tests by beating Sri Lanka to draw the series and retain their number-one ranking.

The tourists eased to an eight-wicket win in the second and final Test at the P Sara Oval in Colombo on Saturday to make amends for the 75-run loss in the first Test in Galle, which was their fourth straight Test defeat this year.

England's losses, including an embarrassing 3-0 whitewash at the hands of Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates, had left them teetering on the brink of losing their top ranking.

The one blemish in the hard-fought series against Sri Lanka was Strauss's own batting form. He made just 114 runs in four innings at an average of 28.50.

The left-hander appeared to have found his rhythm when he hit 61 in the first innings of the second Test, but he fell for a duck in the first over of the second innings as England chased a modest target of 94.

Strauss has not added to his 19 Test centuries in 25 innings and has just one three-figure knock in his past 50 innings, raising questions about his future in the side.

But the skipper said he had never doubted himself or his leadership role.

"I never had any doubts about whether this was the time for me to go," the 35-year-old veteran of 94 Tests said, adding he was focused on his side performing well.

"I am very determined and committed to seeing us improve as a side. It's been an interesting week or two, but we as a side should not get carried away with whatever the issue of the day is."

"We have done that very well over the last couple of years, and obviously I needed to do it in this Test. We needed to do it as a team and I thought we did it well."

Strauss admitted England had been under pressure after their four consecutive defeats but was delighted the hard work had eventually paid off.

"We had to make sure we learnt the lessons from our defeats over the last four Test matches," he said.

"I saw a steely determination on everyone's part to make sure we finished the winter on a high and it was fantastic to be able to do that."

Off-spinner Graeme Swann's match haul of 10 wickets left England chasing just 94 to win, which they achieved easily despite slipping to 31-2 after the dismissals of Strauss and Jonathan Trott.

Alastair Cook remained unbeaten on 49 and Kevin Pietersen, who hit a century in the first innings, smashed 42 not out off just 28 balls, bringing up the win with a six off Tillakaratne Dilshan.

"They are horrible chases because everyone expects you to win," said Strauss. "It's almost like trying to sink a three-foot putt. You know it should go in but it doesn't always."

The number one ranking will remain on the line as England return to the comfort of home conditions for Tests against the West Indies and number-two ranked South Africa.

Mahela, KP join DD

PTI, New Delhi

Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene and explosive England batsman Kevin Pietersen on Sunday joined their Indian Premier League team Delhi Daredevils after completing their national duties.

Jayawardene and Pietersen, who headed the batting averages for Sri Lanka and England respectively, during in the Test series in Sri Lanka, arrived from Colombo on Sunday.

"I am looking forward to a good season with the team," Jayawardene said.

WI slow

FROM PAGE 16 was clearly delighted to have broken the 104-run second wicket partnership.

Siddle was probably the pick of a pace attack that had kept things tight all day and he was rewarded when Brathwaite played one loose shot too many.

He played at a ball slightly wide of the off stump and was caught behind for 57, an innings that had lasted over four hours and 199 balls.

It gave wicket-keeper Matthew Wade special cause for celebration as he had been presented with his baggy green before play and it was his first Test dismissal.

Steady rain arrived with 17 overs left in the day and with the light getting worse the umpires called an early end.

West Indies are aiming for their first Test win against Australia for nine years and for their first series win over the visitors in 19 years.

SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES: First innings (overnight 179 for 3). Table with columns for batsmen and runs. Includes Barath c Siddle b Harris 27, Brathwaite c Wade b Siddle 52.

Bowler table with columns for bowler, overs, maidens, runs, wickets. Includes Harris 23.3 7 63 2, Hiffenhaus 23 8 39 0.

AUSTRALIA: Clarke (captain), Warner, Cowan, Watson, Ponting, M Hussey, Wade.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 16 lone-goal win over Bagmara High School of Sadar Upazila. Jahangir scored the all-important goal.

Inter-district cricket

Mymensingh joined the rest in the second round of the 32nd inter-district cricket championship through a 27-run win over Faridpur in Madaripur yesterday.

Batting first, Mymensingh were bowled out for 112 runs in 39.2 overs with Majid making 34 and Arafat contributing with 19 runs. Mahfuz took five wickets for Faridpur, who were in turn shot out for just 85 runs in 33.2 overs.

Tamim took four wickets while Sunny picked up three.

Threats loom

FROM PAGE 16 from the existing number of eight has also not been received positively.

Lutfar Rahman Badal, chairman of Victoria's governing body, said that they had not decided whether to play or not.

"I haven't said whether we will play or not but we have re-appealed [to let five foreigners play in a match]. We didn't want four foreigners but five since our captain [Shakib Al Hasan] and vice-captain [Tamim Iqbal] are not available. I think it will be difficult for us to put together an eleven-member line-up in this situation," said Badal.

With such heavy statements coming in, the threat on the Super League is tremendous. But league coordinator Aynul Islam Tiash has said that whoever will not turn up will face punishment.

"We will resume the league on April 10. If any team refuses to take to the ground then as per bylaws, they will be giving a walkover," said Tiash.

Serena avenges sister's loss

AFP, Charleston

Serena Williams, playing what she called one of the best matches of her career, steam-rolled Samantha Stosur 6-1, 6-1 on Saturday to reach the WTA's Charleston final.

Williams needed just 59 minutes to subdue the second-seeded Australian, who beat the American in the US Open final last September but has now lost to her twice in two events.

In Sunday's final on the green clay court at Charleston, the fifth-seeded American will face ninth-seeded Czech Lucie Safarova, who notched her own lopsided semifinal win, 6-0, 6-0 over Slovenia's Polona Hercog.

"I have to say, this is probably the best match I've played in my career, either in a long time or it's up there in the top five," said Williams, owner of 13 Grand Slam titles and 39 singles titles overall.

"It was one of those days I could have done anything against anybody," added Williams, who belted 29 winners.

She seized control by winning the first eight points, broke Stosur five times and saved both break points she faced.

"It didn't really seem to matter what I did," said Stosur, who won the Charleston title in 2010. "She



Serena Williams of the United States waves to her fans after winning the Family Circle Cup semifinal against Samantha Stosur of Australia in South Carolina on Saturday.

Williams had a relatively sedate seven aces on Saturday, but that was plenty to prevent Stosur from becoming just the eighth player to beat both Williams sisters in the same tournament.

Williams had a relatively sedate seven aces on Saturday, but that was plenty to prevent Stosur from becoming just the eighth player to beat both Williams sisters in the same tournament.

Aussie contracts soon

AFP, Brisbane

Australia's cricketers are satisfied with the new performance-based components of their forthcoming pay deal and expect the MOU to be signed by Cricket Australia and the players' union within the next two weeks, Michael Hussey has said.

While Paul Marsh, the chief executive of the Australian Cricketers' Association and the players' chief negotiator, was more guarded in his assessment of talks, Hussey indicated confidence that the potentially tricky bargaining between the players and CA, represented by the team performance manager Pat Howard, would soon be at an end.

"I think they've agreed on most things, they're just trying to nut out a couple of issues that are left. I believe by the middle of this month they're expecting everything to be negotiated and completed and the MOU finished," Hussey said.

Ever since the publication of the Argus review into the performance of the national side, the players' major concern about its findings has surrounded the addition of greater performance weighting to the central contract system. The review was critical of the landscape created by the current system, suggest-

ing Australian cricket had lapsed into a "county cricket mentality" where simply doing enough to earn another annual retainer was enough.

"The panel has real concerns, shared by many stakeholders, that the MOU is not fully aligned with the current needs of Australian Cricket," the review said. "In particular it rewards relative performance among CA-contracted players, but not absolute performance of the team and its players against international peers."

The result is that today's players are being paid substantially more in real terms than their counterparts in the dominant teams of recent times, despite far inferior results. A number of stakeholders have suggested that this is negatively affecting the culture of Australian Cricket, in that players can make a very comfortable living without necessarily achieving excellence.

Both parties quickly agreed that the number of CA contracts should be reduced, and will likely be pared down from 25 to 18. However the issue of performance-based contracts took time to be smoothed over, leaving Marsh and Howard to discuss the matter in great detail after the players responded coolly to CA's first offer, explained to a general meeting of the team on the day of the Allan Border Medal towards the end of the home summer.

"From what I hear I think both sides are going to get what they want out of it," Hussey said. "I know through the Argus review there was a strong performance-

Stosur had beaten Venus Williams in the quarterfinals to spoil the chance of an all-Williams semi, but Serena said she went into the match expecting a tough day.

"She's a great player. She has a Grand Slam under her belt, and she beat me in the final of that and played unbelievable. When you're playing someone like her, you have to play well or you're going to lose. So that was my mindset... go big or go home."

Stosur said she wasn't feeling any ill-effects of her long day on Friday, on which she had to complete a rain-disrupted third-round victory over Galina Voskoboeva, then battle past Venus in three sets.

"To be honest, I actually felt pretty good out there," Stosur said. "My body wasn't aching or really all that tired, so unfortunately I can't use that as an excuse."

Safarova, owner of four WTA Tour titles, will try to add a first victory in one of the WTA's premier level events.

Her emphatic victory over Hercog, in 64 minutes, ended a dream run for the Slovenian that included a first career win over a top-10 player with her upset of third-seeded Marion Bartoli in the third round, and a quarter-final triumph over former Charleston champion Nadia Petrova.

However, Safarova will be a heavy underdog against Serena, seeking a first win against the American after four career defeats.

Fury over Shakib exclusion

FROM PAGE 16

"This is very normal for any kind of club football or cricket. He is now property of the club. If the club management feels he should be dropped, it is their opinion. Now whether it is right or wrong (is) purely a cricketing decision."

(The KKR team management) may have some things in mind... I feel Shakib is professional enough to understand this part of life. So it is useless to see this issue (from an) emotional point of view."

However, former India batsman Aakash Chopra tweeted: "Isn't there a case to start playing two Bangladesh cricketers -- Shakib and Tamim

[Iqbal]? KKR shall do it in the next game and PWI [Pune Warriors India] may do it tonight!"

Tamim did not eventually play but fans from Bangladesh in particular will hope that the bright, smiling face of Shakib be noticed.

SCORES IN BRIEF RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 164 for 5 (Hodge 44, Menaria 40, Dravid 26, Goswami 23, Shah 23 not out; Lee 2-29)

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 142 (Tiwary 59, Lee 25; Cooper 3-28, Chavan 2-23, Trivedi 2-25) Result: Rajasthan Royals won by 22 runs. Man-of-the-match: Brad Hodge.



Table tennis legend Zobera Rahman Linu (standing, 4th from L) poses with the winners of the AB Bank 1st National Junior Table Tennis Championship at the Dinajpur District Sports Association on Sunday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 English channel? 4 Peeve 8 Film sample 12 "Go, team!" 13 Blood-hound's clue 14 Start over 15 Foreman foe 16 Spelling of reality TV 17 Always 18 Weaken a bit at a time 21 "Impossible" 22 Stickum 23 Poolroom needs 26 Plead 27 Hot tub 30 Tend a text 31 Scepter 32 Seckel or Bosc 33 Bygone pesticide 34 "The Simpsons" network 35 Metallic sound 36 Apiece 37 Greek P 38 Cramped space 45 Luxuriant 46 Loosen 47 Cistern 48 — podrida 49 Teensy bit 50 Mound stat 51 Radiate 52 Un-escorted 53 Kan. neighbor DOWN 1 Cereal choice 2 Island near Java Solution time: 27 mins.

Crossword grid with numbers 1-53 indicating starting positions for words.

CRYPTOQUIP

L X F V Y F P Y T G X G Y G L Q L S P S P K L H Y O L D O V H C I L K J P Q D Y F V X G Q Z P J P I G S G I G Y B P Q T C G Q Z T L K : O L Q C P O L Q Z P .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IN SENDING LETTERS TO EACH OTHER, DO YOU SUPPOSE SLIMY GASTROPODS CHOOSE TO USE SNAIL MAIL? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals F