

C'Ron destroys Celta

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo responded to missing out on the Ballon d'Or by hitting a stunning hat-trick as Real Madrid beat Celta Vigo 4-0 to reach the Spanish Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Trailing 2-1 from the first leg of their last-16 tie, Portuguese star Ronaldo hit two early openers before settling the tie with three minutes remaining to calm his team's nerves after Sergio Ramos had been sent off with 17 minutes to go.

Sami Khedira added the fourth in the final minute and Jose Mourinho's men will now meet Valencia in the next round before a potential semi-final tie with eternal rivals Barcelona who knocked Madrid out last season at the quarterfinal stage.

"Cristiano's performance was incredible -- the goals speak for themselves," said Real assistant manager Aitor Karanka.

Mourinho recalled goalkeeper Iker Casillas for the clash after he had contro-

versially dropped the club captain to the bench for the last two La Liga games.

It was Casillas's 650th appearance for the club.

Ronaldo, beaten to the Ballon d'Or by Lionel Messi on Monday, hit a sensational opener after only two minutes.

Receiving the ball from a short throw in the Portuguese hit an unstoppable shot from wide on the left that fizzed and then bent before beating Sergio in the Celta goal at his far post to give Madrid the lead on the night and level the tie.

It was the same man who hit a shot over the bar from long range 10 minutes later, before he doubled his side's lead with one delicate touch on 23 minutes to finish off a Luka Modric through ball.

Mesut Ozil went close from a tight angle before Sergio Ramos hit a free-kick just over the bar as the Galician side struggled to contain the Spanish champions.

Celta had to wait until the 53rd minute for their first advance on the home goal when Park Chu-Young came close

to connecting to a Quique de Lucas cross.

Celta coach Paco Herrera then replaced Park with his top-scorer Iago Aspas sensing his side were still in the tie.

The substitute immediately gave the away team more urgency and Casillas saved an Aspas shot on 63 minutes, before De Lucas gave him more of a test four minutes later.

The pressure increased for Madrid when Ramos was dismissed for his second yellow card and Casillas had to make important saves from Michael Krohn-Dehli and Augusto Fernandez before Ronaldo got his third with a crisp shot from the left to settle nerves on 87 minutes before Khedira made it four.

Also on Wednesday, Sevilla went through to the quarterfinals despite losing 2-1 at home to Mallorca, after they had won the first-leg 5-0.

They will now face Real Zaragoza who beat Levante 2-0 on the night, to make it 3-0 on aggregate.

Jong joins K-league

Football

AFP, Seoul

North Korean striker Jong Tae-Se finalised his move to South Korea's K-league on Thursday, vowing to score at least 15 goals for his new team the Suwon Samsung Bluewings before the end of the season.

Jong, 28, was bought by Suwon from FC Koln in the second division of the German Bundesliga for a reported transfer fee of 300,000 euros (\$395,850).

"I will use my experience in Germany to help Suwon win the league this season," Jong told reporters after finalising a three-year-contract that makes him the fourth North Korean to play in the K-League.

Jong, born in Japan to a South Korean father and a North Korean mother, has a North Korean passport and has said in previous interviews that he considered himself North Korean.

After passing his medical on Tuesday, he expressed his desire to serve as "an ambassador" for inter-Korean sporting exchanges.

Jong made his professional debut with Kawasaki Frontale in Japan's J-League in 2006 and won his first cap for North Korea in 2007. He was part of the national squad that qualified and played in the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Jong said his target was to score 15 goals over the rest of the season.

"There is no particular reason to set such a goal ... I just thought a striker of a winning team should achieve at least that much," he said.

Jong has racked up 15 goals in 28 games for North Korea, but his club scoring record has been lacklustre since moving to Germany in 2010.

Suwon is one of the most popular clubs in the country and has won the K-league championship four times since its founding in 1995 -- with its most recent title coming in 2008.

Juve edge Milan

AFP, Rome

An extra-time strike by Mirko Vucinic gave Juventus a 2-1 victory over AC Milan on Wednesday and a place in the Italian Cup semifinals.

Milan had taken a sixth-minute lead when top scorer Stephan El Shaarawy found the target after being set-up by fine approach work from Giampaolo Pazzini and Kevin-Prince Boateng.

But Juve were level six minutes later when Sebastian Giovinco curled a free-kick over the wall and into the top corner.

Juventus snatched an extra-time winner when second-half substitute Vucinic allowed an Emmanuele Giaccherini pass to reach Paolo De Ceglie whose return pass gave the Montenegro international time to slot home the vital goal.

Juve coach Antonio Conte said that the win was the perfect response to the weekend's shock 2-1 loss to Sampdoria in Serie A. "The lads knew what happened on Sunday should never happen again, not so much the defeat itself but for the manner in which it came," said Conte.

Neymar staying put

Football

AFP, Montevideo

Brazil star Neymar, who has been courted by some of the world's biggest clubs, says "it is not yet the time" to play in Europe as the Santos youngster won his second straight South American player of the year award.

"Everyone asks me the same question but I have a contract with Santos until 2014 and I am happy here with my family and my friends," the striker told journalists at the glitzy ceremony on Wednesday.

The 20-year-old also played down comparisons with Argentina's Lionel Messi, who won his fourth straight Ballon d'Or earlier this week, and said he considered that club and country were his priorities.

"That is not what I'm looking for," he explained in reference to being the best in the world. "My goal is to help Santos and

the Brazilian team. To be the best player in the world is a consequence of that work."

With the 2014 World Cup hosted in Brazil for the first time since 1950, Neymar and his father seem adamant that he is going nowhere -- at least for now.

"Neymar will stay with Santos until 2014. Afterwards, he can extend that deal if the club wish to do so," said his father Neymar Da Silva, who was also present in the Uruguayan capital.

Santos president Paulo Schiff compared his prize asset to legend Pele, who spent almost all his career at the club before a late spell with the New York Cosmos.

"In 30 years, no other Brazilian club has been able to keep onto a great player except us with Neymar. We have refused offers from Barcelona, Chelsea and other clubs," said Schiff.

"We want him to have a great career with Santos like the King Pele during his heyday," he told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP
Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his goal during their Copa del Rey match against Celta Vigo at Bernabeu on Wednesday.

Swansea stun Chelsea

Football

AFP, London

Michu's 16th goal of the season and an added time strike from Danny Graham ensured Swansea will take a convincing lead into the second leg of the League Cup semifinal after clinching a 2-0 win at Chelsea.

Both of visitors Swansea's goals at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday came following mistakes by Chelsea defender Branislav Ivanovic and this victory left the Welsh club in sight of a first appearance in a major cup final.

It was also the second shock semifinal result in as many days after fourth-tier Bradford City beat Premier League Aston Villa 3-1 on Tuesday.

Michu's clinical finish in the 39th minute summed up the difference between the two sides, with Chelsea paying the price for failing to make the most of their dominance before Graham struck a potentially decisive second goal ahead of the second leg at the Liberty Stadium on January 23.

A second straight home defeat for Chelsea ensured another uncomfortable night for interim manager Rafael Benitez, who was again jeered by Blues supporters.

There was little the manager could do, however, about Ivanovic's two mistakes or the succession of clear opportunities missed by his side during the game.

The continuing unrest at Stamford Bridge was evident when Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck was greeted with a chorus of boos and chants of 'Super Frank', a reminder many Chelsea fans are angered by the club's failure to offer Frank Lampard a new contract.

Lampard was again on the substitutes bench along with Demba Ba who made way for the returning Fernando Torres despite scoring twice on his debut in the emphatic 5-1 victory over Southampton in the FA Cup.

The opening period suggested Chelsea were ready to carry on where they had left off at St Mary's Stadium as they quickly found their stride with Oscar, Juan Mata and Eden Hazard combining well behind Torres.

Home pressure quickly brought about a corner and an appeal for a penalty when David Luiz appeared to be pulled back by Swansea midfielder Ki Sung-Yeung.

Referee Anthony Taylor ignored the claim, but with Chelsea unpicking the visiting defence with ease it seemed only a matter of time before they made the breakthrough.

Yet as slick as the home side's passing was, they couldn't find a finish to match.

Swansea had shown little going forward during the first 20 minutes before Michu offered the first sign of his threat with a low drive Chelsea goalkeeper Ross Turnbull gathered at the second attempt.

However, the Spaniard's second effort was much more clinical.

The chance came about when Ivanovic lost concentration after receiving the ball from Turnbull on the edge of his own penalty area and was dispossessed by Jonathan de Guzman.

He in turn squared the ball for Michu, who curled the ball beyond Turnbull and inside the far post to give Swansea a 39th minute lead.

Ivanovic almost made amends for his glaring error with a curling shot that was beaten away by Swansea keeper Gerhard Tremmel two minutes before the break.

Chelsea had dominated the half in terms of possession but lacked a ruthless edge in front of goal.

And the pattern continued after the break when Luiz twice came close before the hour.

The centre back-turned-midfielder drilled a powerful free kick just wide of Tremmel's right hand post before seeing a low drive almost squirm under the keeper's body.

Bulgaria to appeal punishment

AFP, Sofia

Bulgaria's football union said Wednesday it would appeal a FIFA decision that it has to play its next World Cup qualifying match behind closed doors because of racism by its fans.

The BFU admitted there was discriminatory and racist behaviour against Denmark's Patrick Mtiliga in a match between the two countries in October but said that "a very small share of the supporters" were responsible.

"In practice we are being sanctioned twice for one and the same thing, which is not right," BFU president Borislav Mihaylov said in a statement.

World football's governing body also fined Bulgaria 35,000 Swiss francs (29,000 euros, \$37,800) for the "offensive, denigratory and discriminatory actions" of its fans towards Mtiliga.

After four qualifying matches for the 2014 World Cup to be held in Brazil, Bulgaria is second in Group B and is facing Malta in the next round on March 22.

FIFA also ruled on Tuesday that Hungary will have to play its next World Cup qualifier on March 22 against Romania behind closed doors.

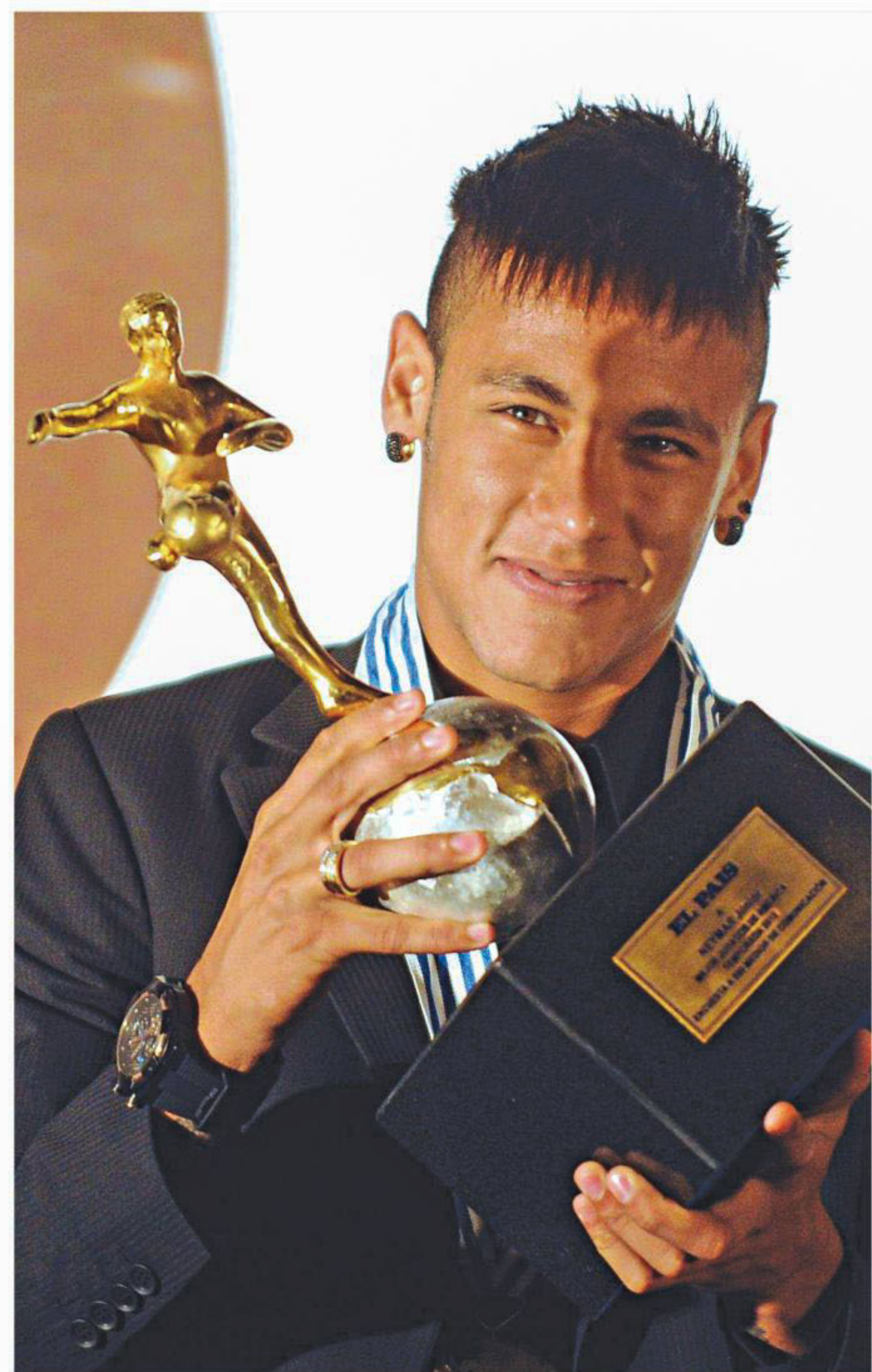


PHOTO: AFP
Brazil star Neymar holds the best South American football player award given by Uruguayan newspaper El Pais in Montevideo on Wednesday.

What to WATCH

BTV World

Bangladesh Premier League
Sk Russel v Sk Jamal
Live from 4:30pm

STAR Cricket

India v England
First ODI
Live from 12:30pm

STAR Sports

Australia v Sri Lanka
First ODI
Live from 9:30am

Primera Liga

Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano
Live from 2:30am (Saturday)

TEN Cricket

South Africa v New Zealand
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 2:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India
Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Cricket League

(Four-day match, Day-4)
Prime Bank South Zone v
BCB North Zone
Time: 9:15am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National
Stadium, Mirpur
Walton Central Zone v Islami Bank
South Zone
Time: 9:15am

Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium,
Bogra

Bangladesh Premier League

Sk Russel v Sk Jamal
Time: 4:30pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National