

Burkina, Nigeria advance

REUTERS, Rustenburg

Burkina Faso and Nigeria completed the line-up for the African Nations Cup semi-finals on Sunday as tournament favourites Ivory Coast again failed to live up to expectations.

Burkina Faso beat Togo 1-0 thanks to an extra-time goal from Jonathan Pitroipa in Nelspruit after Nigeria's upset 2-1 win over the much-vaunted Ivorians in Rustenburg had thrown the tournament wide open.

Nigeria play Mali in the semi-finals in Durban on Wednesday and Ghana and Burkina Faso meet in Nelspruit the same day to determine the teams for next Sunday's final.

Nigeria were given just a 20 per cent chance by their own coach Stephen Keshi of overcoming the Ivorians at the Royal Bafokeng Sports Palace.

But Sunday Mba's dramatic winner 12 minutes from time continued a nightmare sequence of tournaments for Didier Drogba and his Ivorian team mates who had been fancied to win the last five editions but came up short each time.

The goal ended the prospect of extra-time which both sides looked to have settled for.

Dream start for Balotelli

AFP, Rome



Mario Balotelli scored a brace on his debut, including a controversial late penalty, to secure a precious 2-1 win for AC Milan over Udinese on Sunday and move the resurgent Rossoneri up to fourth place in Serie A.

Champions Juventus remain top after restoring their three-point lead over Napoli, 2-0 winners at home Saturday against Catania, thanks to a 2-1 win away to Chievo.

Lazio's third place, however, is now under threat after a 3-2 reverse at Genoa which left Vladimir Petkovic's side only three points ahead of Milan and Inter Milan, with Fiorentina, in sixth, a further point off the pace.

As Inter dropped more points in a shock 3-1 defeat away to Siena, city rivals Milan stole the limelight thanks to a Balotelli double on what was the 22-year-old's debut following his transfer from Manchester City in midweek.

Balotelli, a former Inter Milan player, told the media on his presentation Friday evening he had come to Milan "to help the club win trophies".

After seeing a drive whiz just past the post on 35 seconds it took him just 25 minutes to show fans of his intentions when he latched on to a through ball to smash the ball past Daniele Padelli in the Udinese goal.

Udinese pulled level in the 55th minute when Giampero Pinzi beat Marco Amelia

in the Milan goal after being set up by Colombian Luis Muriel.

However, Balotelli made sure of all three points in the fourth minute of injury time when he beat Padelli from the spot after the referee deemed Thomas Heurtaux's challenge on Stephan El Shaarawy to be a foul.

"It's a great feeling to score, but I have to keep on going," Balotelli told Sky Sport. "I'm very happy despite the fact I'm just getting over what has been a difficult period. I didn't play a lot (at City) and I could feel it in my legs. But tonight I was relaxed and I was ready."

The win will send shivers through the Nerazzurri side of Milan, especially in light of Inter's shock defeat to Siena.

In four minutes of first-half madness, Nigerian-born Swiss international Innocent Emeghara put the home side in front on 21 minutes before Antonio Cassano swiftly equalised, only for Alessio Sestu to restore Siena's lead on 24 minutes.

Alessandro Rosina then made the points safe with a 55th minute penalty that lifted Siena off the foot of the table above Palermo, who suffered a 2-1 home defeat to Atalanta thanks to goals from Chilean midfielder Carlos Carmona and Argentine German Denis. In Verona, former France international Nicolas Anelka, a recent signing from Shanghai Shenhua, had barely taken his seat on the bench when Antonio Conte's side took a 10th-minute lead through Alessandro Matri, who cracked in a superb volley after good work from Arturo Vidal.

RESULTS	
Palermo 1 (Nelson 83)	Atalanta 2 (Carmona 54, Denis 71)
Pescara 2 (Weiss 30-pen, G. D'Agostino 45-pen)	Bologna 3 (Diamanti 34-pen, Gilardino 50, Kone 66)
Siena 3 (Emeghara 21, Sestu 24, Rosina 55-pen)	Inter Milan 1 (Cassano 22)
Genoa 3 (Borriello 16, Bertolacci 22, Rigoni 90+5)	Lazio 2 (Flocari 58, Mauri 82-pen)
Fiorentina 2 (Toni 27, Jovetic 50)	Parma 0
AC Milan 2 (Balotelli 25, 90+4-pen)	



AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli celebrates one of his two goals against Udinese during their Serie A encounter at San Siro on Sunday.

LFP president denies doping allegations

REUTERS, Madrid

The head of Spain's professional soccer league (LFP), Jose Luis Astiazaran, has denied allegations made in As sports daily on Monday that he was complicit in the provision of banned substances to players while president of Real Sociedad.

As published an interview with Inaki Badiola, who had a stint as Sociedad president in 2008, in which he said two club doctors had been given money off the books to buy banned drugs in the six years before he took over and possibly earlier.

The LFP published a lengthy statement from Astiazaran responding to the allegations in which he said he had neither knowledge nor suspicion of illegal practices by medical staff during his time as Sociedad president between 2001 and 2005.

"Real Sociedad has always, and obviously under my presidency, collaborated closely with authorities charged with testing for doping and there has never been any incident in the numerous anti-doping tests taken," Astiazaran said.

"Given the statements and falsities expressed by Mr. Badiola, I reserve the right to begin whatever legal proceedings will be necessary to defend my honour," he added.

Aguero thwarts L'pool

AFP, Manchester



Sergio Aguero helped Manchester City avoid a damaging home defeat by Liverpool with an impressive equaliser in a 2-2 draw at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

The result leaves the defending champions nine points behind leaders Manchester United, although Liverpool looked well capable of inflicting a loss that would have left the deficit in double digits.

Liverpool's former City youngster Daniel Sturridge cancelled out an Edin Dzeko effort, refusing to celebrate after scoring the first goal City had conceded in 2013, before Steven Gerrard fired the visitors ahead from 30 yards.

Aguero salvaged a point for City 12 minutes from time after Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina inexplicably chased him to the edge of the area, giving the Argentine the opportunity to chip over his head and into the open net from a difficult angle.

Dzeko's 23rd-minute opening goal had come somewhat against the run of play, but it was the Liverpool equaliser, six minutes later, that provided the biggest bone of contention in an absorbing game.

The first Liverpool goal stemmed from a City attack that broke down after Dzeko fell under a challenge from Daniel Agger, prompting home players and supporters

alike to appeal for the visitors to put the ball out of play.

However, referee Anthony Taylor allowed play to continue and Liverpool launched a patient attack.

It culminated in Gerrard finding Sturridge with a short, square pass and the in-form centre-forward sent a superb 18-yard shot flying past the dive of Joe Hart.

Significantly, Dzeko immediately rose to his feet after the goal, requiring no treatment, and was booked for verbally abusing the referee's assistant who had failed to award him a foul in the first instance.

Yet, however controversial the equaliser may have been, it was just reward for a Liverpool side who edged the first half in terms of chances created.

Reina was forced to tip a powerful 20-yard drive from David Silva over the crossbar after only 52 seconds but it was not until they took the lead that the defending champions carved out another meaningful opening.

Slick passes from Aguero and Silva sent James Milner sprinting to the left-hand by-line and, with Agger appealing in vain for offside, Dzeko was left with the routine task of tapping the ball into an empty net.

After the Liverpool equaliser, City struggled to get to grips with a Reds side unrecognisable from the one knocked out of the FA Cup by third-tier Oldham Athletic seven days earlier.

RESULTS	
Manchester City 2 (Dzeko 23, Aguero 78)	Liverpool 2 (Sturridge 29, Gerrard 73)
West Bromwich Albion 0	Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Bale 67)

Defoe to miss Eng friendly

AFP, London

Jermain Defoe has withdrawn from the England squad for Wednesday's friendly with Brazil after injuring his ankle in Tottenham Hotspur's 1-0 win at West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

Spurs coach Andre Villas-Boas revealed after the game that the 30-year-old striker would be pulling out of England manager Roy Hodgson's squad for the prestige friendly match at Wembley.

Defoe sustained the injury in the first half of Sunday's game at The Hawthorns when he appeared to turn his left ankle in a bid to evade a challenge from West Brom's Shane Long. He was substituted shortly afterwards.

Villas-Boas said Defoe would be sent for a scan to determine the extent of the damage.

"I am extremely happy with the win, apart from the injury to Jermain Defoe," he said.

Huge fixing scandal

REUTERS, The Hague

European investigators have uncovered evidence that hundreds of soccer matches at club and national level were fixed around the globe in a scam run from Singapore, police said on Monday.

A joint inquiry by Europol, the European anti-crime agency, and national prosecutors has identified about 680 suspicious matches including qualifying games for the World Cup and European Championships, and for the Champions League for European club sides, Europol head Rob Wainwright said.

The matches, some of which have already been subject to successful criminal prosecutions, were played between 2008 and 2011. About 380 of the suspicious matches were played in Europe, and a further 300 were identified in Africa, Asia, and south and central America.

A German investigator described a network involving couriers ferrying bribes around the world, paying off players and referees in the fixing which involved about 425 corrupt officials, players and serious criminals in 15 countries.

"We have evidence for 150 of these cases, and the operations were run out of Singapore with bribes of up to 100,000 euros paid per match," said Friedhelm Althans, chief investigator for police in the German city of Bochum, told a news conference.

Investigators said no names of players or clubs would be released while the investigation proceeded. However, the fixing also included top flight national league matches in several European countries, as well as two Champions League matches, including one played in Britain.

Althans said that, though German police had concrete proof of 8 million euros (\$11 million) in gambling profits from the match fixing, this was probably the tip of the iceberg.

Investigators described how gang members immediately subordinate to the Singapore-based leader of a worldwide network were each tasked with maintaining contacts with corrupt players and officials in their parts of the world.

Laszlo Angeli, a Hungarian prosecutor, gave an example of how the scam worked. "The Hungarian member, who was immediately below the Singapore head, was in touch with Hungarian referees who could then attempt to swing matches at which they officiated around the world," he said.

Accomplices would then place bets on the internet or by phone with bookmakers in Asia, where bets that would be illegal in Europe were accepted. "One fixed match might involve up to 50 suspects in 10 countries on separate continents," said Althans.

"Even two World Championship qualification matches in Africa, and one in Central America, are under suspicion," Althans added.



Channel 9 BPL
Duronto Rajshahi v Sylhet Royals Live from 3:30pm
Dhaka Gladiators v Rangpur Riders Live from 7:30pm
STAR Cricket ICC Women's World Cup India v Sri Lanka



BPL
Duronto Rajshahi v Sylhet Royals Time: 3:30pm
Dhaka Gladiators v Rangpur Riders Time: 7:30pm
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Bangladesh Premier League Mohammedan v Sk Jamal Time: 6:30pm



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (R) reacts after scoring during their Primera Liga match against Valencia at the Mestalla on Sunday.

Messi saves blushes

AFP, Madrid



over Real Betis.

The four-time World Player of the Year extended his record scoring run to 12 matches in the league with a penalty after 39 minutes with Valencia having taken the lead through Ever Banega.

Although Barca won their last league game at home to Osasuna, they lost a fortnight ago against Real Sociedad and this was a lacklustre display at the Mestalla.

Like Real Madrid, who lost to Granada on Saturday, Barca seemed to be suffering the effects of their 1-1 Spanish Cup semi-final first-leg but they still have a significant lead over Atletico.

RESULTS	
Malaga 1 (Isco 23-pen)	Real Zaragoza 1 (Postiga 13)
Sevilla 2 (Rakitic 45+2, Negredo 54)	Rayo Vallecano 1 (Dominguez 51-pen)
Valencia 1 (Banega 33)	Barcelona 1 (Messi 39-pen)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Diego Costa 61)	Real Betis 0
Real Sociedad 3 (Castro 55, Vela	

Barcelona rested captain Carles Puyol as former Liverpool player Javier Mascherano was thrown into central defence alongside Gerard Pique while Andres Iniesta was once again chosen in attack instead of David Villa and Alexis Sanchez.

Apart from a 5-0 thumping by Real Madrid, and their elimination by the same side in the domestic Cup, Valencia have been in good form with four wins from five matches in the league.

While Barca probed in typical fashion looking for an opening, Valencia broke with speed down the wings with Jose Guardado and Juan Bernat.

Guardado had a snapshot which went wide in an even contest and another break from the home side saw Roberto Soldado brought down by Mascherano after 22 minutes while the resulting free-kick was fired into the wall by Tino Costa.

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