

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

BTV World
Federation Cup Final
Sk Jamal v Muktiyoddha
Live from 5:00pm
STAR Sports1
Australia v England

Third Test, Day 1
Live from 8:30am
Sony Six HD
Pakistan v Sri Lanka
Second T20!

Live from 10:00pm
STAR Sports 4
Primera Liga
Levante v

Elche
Live from 2:00am (Saturday)
NEO Prime
Bundesliga
Hertha Berlin v Werder

Bremen
Live from 1:30am (Saturday)
New Zealand v West Indies
Second Test, Day 4
Live from 3:30am (Saturday)

Federation Cup Final
Sk Jamal v Muktiyoddha

Time: 5:00pm
Venue: BNS

Afridi brings Pakistan lead

AFP, Dubai

Pakistan beat Sri Lanka by three wickets in the first Twenty20 International in a thrilling finish at Dubai Stadium on Wednesday.

Shahid Afridi was the hero for Pakistan, scoring an unbeaten 20-ball 39, hitting the winning six off the last ball of the final over to give Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

In all Afridi hit three sixes and two boundaries to help Pakistan overcome a tough challenge from world number one Sri Lanka who had taken the match to the final over with Pakistan needing six runs.

Sri Lanka relied on a fighting 34-ball 50 by Angelo Mathews who added 58 for the fifth wicket with Lahiru Thirimanne (23 not out) after their top batsmen failed to capitalise on good starts.

Dinesh Chandimal (22), Kumar Sangakkara (21) and Kusal Perera (15) were other notable contributors.

For Pakistan Saeed Ajmal and Sohail Tanveer took two wickets apiece.

The second and final Twenty20 will be played in Dubai on Friday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: 145 for 5 in 20 overs (Chandimal 22, Sangakkara 21, Mathews 50, Thirimanne 23 not out; Tanvir 2-34, Ajmal 2-35)
PAKISTAN: 146 for 7 in 19.1 overs (Sharjeel 34, Hafeez 32, Afridi 39 not out; Malinga 3-26)

Result: Pakistan won by three wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Shahid Afridi.

Honda set for Milan

AFP, Milan

Japan midfielder Keisuke Honda is set to join AC Milan early in the New Year, the Italian club's vice-president Adriano Galliani has said.

Galliani broke the news about Honda after the player's current club, CSKA Moscow, were eliminated from the Champions League on Tuesday.

"Now we can talk. From the 3rd of January 2014 Keisuke Honda will be a Milan player," Galliani said on the club's official website.

"We had already set out a contract but put it to one side. Now we can talk, but it will be difficult as he is a non-EU player, and I don't know if he can already play from the 6th of January against Atalanta. Later he will make his debut away to Sassuolo."

Honda joined CSKA Moscow in 2010, moving to Russia after two years with Dutch side VVV Venlo.

The 27-year-old has been capped 52 times for Japan and scored 20 goals, two of which came at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona striker Neymar celebrates one of his three goals against Celtic during their Champions League match at Nou Camp on Wednesday.

Neymar on the treble

AFP, Barcelona



Neymar scored his first Barcelona hat-trick as the Catalans secured top spot in Group H of the Champions League with a 6-1 thrashing of Celtic at the Camp Nou.

Gerard Pique got the hosts off to the perfect start when he slammed home from close range after Celtic keeper Fraser Forster had done well to deny Alexis Sanchez.

Neymar then produced a magical piece of skill to ghost past Efe Ambrose to set up Pedro for the second and rounded off a fine team move with the simplest of finishes to make it 3-0 a minute before half-time.

The Brazilian striker then added a

brilliant fourth with a curling finish after a one-two with Xavi before completing his hat-trick with an individual effort 10 minutes later.

Cristian Tello made it 6-0 with a deflected strike 18 minutes from time before Georgios Samaras pulled one back for the Scottish champions.

Despite being already assured of a place in the last 16, Barca boss Gerardo Martino sent out the message that he didn't want a repeat of the lacklustre performance that saw the Catalans beaten 2-1 away to Ajax in their last Champions League outing as he named a strong side.

Barca could even have gone in front inside three minutes as only a last-ditch challenge from Virgil Van Dijk prevented Xavi from having a clear sight of goal.

However, the reprieve only last a

further four minutes for the visitors as Pique coolly volleyed home his second goal of the season.

Forster had to be alive to deny Pique his second midway through the half as Barca continued to swarm forward with ease.

And the only surprise was that it took until the 39th minute for the La Liga leaders to double their advantage as Neymar skipped past Ambrose on the right side of the area before squaring for Pedro to slot home.

Neymar then scored his first Champions League goal just before the break as a lovely move involving Sanchez, Sergi Roberto and Martin Montoya found the later in behind the Celtic defence and he rolled the ball into Neymar's path to slot into an ungarded net.

The flurry of goals continued

after the restart as Neymar got his second of the evening just three minutes into the second period with a precise finish into the top corner from 20 yards.

And the 21-year-old then embarrassed Ambrose once more as he nutmegged the Nigerian before rolling the ball past a helpless Forster.

Neymar ought to have had his fourth of the night 26 minutes from time when he rounded Forster only for Pedro to take the ball off his teammate and fire the ball of Van Dijk with the whole goal to aim at.

Substitute Tello did add a sixth as his shot from outside the area deflected in off a stary Celtic leg.

However, there was time for Celtic to salvage some pride as Samaras headed home Charlie Mulgrew's free-kick a minute from time.



PHOTO: AFP

Napoli striker Gonzalo Higuain is inconsolable at the end of their Champions League encounter against Arsenal at the San Paolo Stadium on Wednesday.

Arsenal sneak thru'

AFP, Paris



Arsenal sneaked into the last 16 of the Champions League by the narrowest of margins while Napoli dramatically missed out as the group stage concluded on Wednesday evening.

Napoli beat Arsenal 2-0 in their final game in Group F with second-half goals from Gonzalo Higuain and Jose Callejon as the Gunners finished with 10 men following the sending-off of Mikel Arteta.

Meanwhile, last

season's beaten finalists Borussia Dortmund won too, downing 10-men Marseille 2-1 in France thanks to a late strike from Kevin Grosskreutz after Souleymane Diawara had cancelled out Robert Lewandowski's opener.

That ensured a three-way tie atop the section, with Dortmund, Arsenal and Napoli all finishing on 12 points, and the German side progressed as group winners thanks to their better head-to-head record.

Arsenal, meanwhile, qualified for the knockout stages for the 14th year running, but one more Napoli goal would have

taken the Italians through at their expense.

Instead, Napoli become the first team to finish third with 12 points in a Champions League group and the first to be eliminated with such a tally since 1997.

Then, Paris Saint-Germain failed to progress with the same number of points at a time when only the group winners were guaranteed to go through.

Meanwhile, Marseille, who had Dimitri Payet sent off in the first half, became the first French side to finish a Champions League campaign without registering a single point.

In stark contrast to

Napoli's pain, Zenit St Petersburg finished as runners-up in Group G, becoming the first side to progress to the last 16 despite collecting just six points.

The Russians took the lead away to Austria Vienna through Aleksandr Kerzhakov only to eventually lose 4-1, Philipp Hosiner scoring twice for the hosts with Tomas Jun and substitute Roman Kienast also on target.

Two-time European champions Porto would have gone through at Zenit's expense had they won away to group winners Atletico Madrid, but they went down 2-0 in

RESULTS

Schalke 042 (ENG) 2 (Draxler 50, Matip 57) **Basel (SUI)** 0
Chelsea (ENG) 1 (Ba 10) **Steaua Bucharest (ROM)** 0

Marseille (FRA) 1 (S. Diawara 14) **Borussia Dortmund (GER)** 2 (Lewandowski 4, Grosskreutz 87)

Napoli 2 (Higuain 73, Callejon 90+3) **Arsenal (ENG)** 0

Austria Vienna (AUT) 4 (Hosiner 44, 51, Jun 48, Kienast 90+3) **Zenit St. Petersburg (RUS)** 1 (Kerzhakov 35)

Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Raul Garcia 14, Diego Costa 37) **FC Porto (POR)** 0
AC Milan (ITA) 0 **Ajax (NED)** 0
FC Barcelona (ESP) 6 (Pique 7, Pedro Rodriguez 40, Neymar 45, 48, 58, Tello 72)

Jose shrugs off laser pen attack

REUTERS, London

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho shrugged off being targeted with a green laser pen during his side's 1-0 Champions League win over Steaua Bucharest on Wednesday.

The Portuguese came under fire from the device during the second half at Stamford Bridge, forcing the stadium announcer to broadcast a warning to fans in English and Romanian.

Asked about the incident, Mourinho was unruffled, saying he was more concerned about watching his team.

"I can't worry about that during the game," Mourinho told reporters.

"But during the game I felt it a couple of times."

Earlier this season, Swansea City goalkeeper Gerhard Tremmel was targeted with a laser pen during a Europa League match against Romanian side Petrolul Ploiesti.

Milan fly the flag of Italy

AFP, Milan



Ten-man AC Milan held out against a spirited Ajax in a scoreless draw at the San Siro to become Italy's sole survivors in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Earlier, Juventus exited the competition at the group stages after an 85th minute strike by Dutchman Wesley Sneijder handed Galatasaray a 1-0 win in Istanbul which secured second spot for the Turks in Group B behind Real Madrid.

And Milan were left as Italy's sole survivors in the knockout phase when Napoli went out on the head to head rule despite finishing level in the group with Borussia Dortmund and Arsenal.

It is the 11th season in succession seven-time champions Milan have made the last 16, knockout phase of Europe's premier club event and coach Massimiliano Allegri could not hide his relief.

"It's a huge relief. I think we lost a few kilos tonight," said Allegri, whose side played with 10 men for 71 minutes following the 19th minute sending-off of captain and midfielder Riccardo Montolivo.

Milan welcomed Frank De Boer's men to the San Siro stadium confident of claiming the point that would seal their entry to the knockout phase.

But after an auspicious start the Rossoneri's hopes suffered a huge blow when Montolivo saw red for a late tackle on midfielder Christian Poulsen.

Ajax shaded a fairly balanced first half and were unlucky not to have scored in the fifth minute when the woodwork saved Milan 'keeper Christian Abbiati after he had been beaten by Poulsen's header.

Yet despite Ajax enjoying most of the possession in a dominant second half and laying siege to the Milan goal, Allegri's men held firm to finish second in Group H behind Barcelona.

"The team really deserve this qualification. Against Ajax it was always going to be complicated, but it became even moreso after we were reduced to 10 men," said Allegri.

Ajax coach Frank De Boer said his side, held to a 1-1 draw by Milan in Amsterdam, did not deserve to exit the competition.

"Looking at the two matches, I would say we deserved more than to finish in third place," said De Boer, whose side drop into the Europa League.

Milan's only real chance of the opening half came in the fourth minute when striker Mario Balotelli tested Jasper Cillessen with a dipping free kick which the keeper got down low to collect.

Just a minute later Poulsen was unlucky to see his header from a corner sail over the Milan defence only to come off

'Brazil must aim high'

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said Wednesday his charges must aim high and target the title when they host next year's World Cup.

"I took on the national side to be champion -- do you think I am going to say anything else?" asked Scolari rhetorically in an address to the Footecon football trade fair in Rio.

Having overseen the Seleccion's fifth World Cup success in Japan in 2002, Scolari took the reins once more a year ago and promptly secured a resounding Confederations Cup success over world champions Spain last June on home soil.

That win has prompted domestic pundits to demand more of the same next June with Brazil desperate to win the tournament for the first time in front of their own fans -- they were stunned in the 1950 final in Rio

by little neighbours Uruguay.

Scolari has said for weeks he knows in essence who he will select in his 23-man squad and revealed that striker Fred, who dovetailed well with Barcelona starlet Neymar last June, will be fit despite an injury-plagued season at Fluminense.

"The cup is in June, so he will have time to recover," said Scolari, whose team will face Croatia in the opening World Cup match on June 12 in Sao Paulo.

The Brazilians will then take on Mexico and Cameroon in their other pool matches.

Players looking to earn places on the roster include Chelsea midfielder Willian and AC Milan's Robinho, who is set to profit from Diego Costa's recent decision to play for Spain.

Scolari, who said in the run-up to Friday's World Cup draw at Costa do Sauipe in north-eastern Brazil that the hosts had an "obligation" to take the crown.