

Emerton hangs up his boots

AFP, Sydney

Australia's third-most capped player Brett Emerton brought an end to a glittering career Thursday announcing his retirement due to chronic back injury.

The 34-year-old Sydney FC stalwart, who earned 94 caps for the Socceroos, has made just nine appearances this A-League season.

"Injuries have plagued my last couple of years," Emerton told a news conference.

The former Blackburn Rovers skipper played at the 2006 and 2010 World Cups and scored 20 times for his country.

Messi not picked

REUTERS



Lionel Messi, who lost his World Player of the Year crown to Cristiano Ronaldo this week, has failed to make the Team of the Year picked by users of European soccer governing body UEFA's website.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Cristiano Ronaldo were picked as forwards in the team which was dominated by players from the Bundesliga and Spain's La Liga.

Arsenal's Mesut Ozil was the only current Premier League player to make the line-up and there were none at all from Italy's Serie A.

UEFA said that 6.3 million people cast votes in the poll on its website.

Team

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich and Germany); Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid and Spain), Thiago Silva (Paris St Germain and Brazil), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich and Germany), David Alaba (Bayern Munich and Austria); Marco Reus (Borussia Dortmund and Germany) Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid/Arsenal and Germany), Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur/Real Madrid and Wales), Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich and France); Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid and Portugal), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Paris St Germain and Sweden)



World number one Rafael Nadal of Spain plays a forehand against Thanasi Kokkinakis of Australia during their Australian Open men's singles match in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

City destroy Rovers

REUTERS, London



Alvaro Negredo and Edin Dzeko scored twice each as Premier League high-fliers Manchester City comprehensively quashed second tier Blackburn Rovers' hopes of causing an FA Cup shock with an emphatic 5-0 third-round replay win on Wednesday.

After being held to a surprising draw 11 days ago, City proved far too strong for Blackburn with Negredo bagging his 20th and 21st goals of the season in two minutes either side of halftime before strike partner Edin Dzeko got in on the act.

His two goals came either side of one from Sergio Aguero, who netted a minute after coming on for his first appearance following a month-long injury absence.

"I don't think it was easy," Dzeko told ITV. "Especially, in the first half."

"The first goal was very important for us as well as the goal at the start of the second half. And as usual we then scored some more."

City fans who expected another goal-scoring procession would have been disappointed by a largely unexciting first half in which Blackburn dug in, with little

ambition to break.

The hosts made eight changes to their side and while the five-times Cup winners still fielded a stellar cast, without the injured Samir Nasri, string-puller David Silva and powerhouse Yaya Toure they lacked creativity in midfield.

City's passing and decision-making were sub-standard and chances were scarce before the hosts broke the deadlock in first-half stoppage time.

Negredo had been a willing runner up front and was rewarded with his 20th goal of the season, a towering header on the run after Fernandinho had whipped and excellent cross to the far post in a rare moment of quality.

The striker's 21st of the season arrived two minutes after the break, a neat finish from halftime substitute Aleksandar Kolarov's fantastic crossfield pass, with Negredo flicking the ball over Blackburn's advancing keeper with the outside of his left boot.

Dzeko's first goal on 67 minutes made the game safe and was an equally stylish finish with the Bosnia striker swivelling in the area to rifle Jesus Navas's near post cross into the top corner.

City are not in need of striking reinforcements, but Aguero came off the bench to bolster the attacking options and found the net immediately with a low finish before Dzeko added the final flourish with another near-post effort 10 minutes from time.

43.4 DEGREES C, SUSPENSION AND THEN RAINSTORM Big fishes swim through

AFP, Melbourne



Australian Open's most chaotic days Thursday when a rare extreme heat shutdown and then a surprise rainstorm threw the tournament into disarray.

After severe temperatures reaching 43.4 Celsius forced organisers to take the rare step of suspending play on the outside courts and closing the stadium roofs, the big trio were able to play in air-conditioned comfort.

So just hours after Maria Sharapova slogged through three sets in brutal heat on an open Rod Laver Arena, Spain's Nadal stepped up with the roof closed to blitz world number 570 Thanasi Kokkinakis in less than two hours.

Federer, playing with Hisense Arena closed to the elements, produced a classic display as he took apart Slovenia's Blaz Kavcic in front of enraptured Melbourne crowd to reach the third round.

And Murray later took apart France's Vincent Millot, including a memorable fightback from 5-1 down in the final set, to show he remains a force to be reckoned with after back surgery.

They were three of the big winners after the four-hour heat shutdown, the first in five years, forced a hasty revision of the schedule with several matches extending past midnight.

Just as players were returning to court, a freak rain and lightning storm erupted over Melbourne Park, further delaying the action.

Sharapova, Victoria Azarenka and Caroline Wozniacki were also glad to reach round three on a topsy-turvy day, with more in prospect on Friday when temperatures are forecast to hit 44 Celsius.

Following days of players fainting, vomiting and complaining bitterly about the heat, a suspension was finally announced at 2:00 pm.

Japan's Kei Nishikori was one of the early players but he dispatched Serbia's

Dusan Lajovic 6-1, 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) to escape the heat in straight sets.

Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga made tough going of his first set against Brazil's Thomaz Belluci, played in the blazing sun, but he steamed through the rest of the match after the Hisense Arena roof rolled shut.

World number three Sharapova was not so lucky after the suspension was announced during her third set against Italy's Karin Knapp, meaning she could not leave the court until the match was over.

The set went to 10-8, lasting nearly two hours, before the Russian won 6-3, 4-6, 10-8.

Top seed Nadal admitted he was "very glad" to play under the stadium roof after his campaign accelerated with a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 victory against willing but outgunned local hope Kokkinakis.

A serve-volleying Federer showed distinct shades of his new coach, Stefan Edberg, as he overwhelmed Kavcic 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) win in one hour 47 minutes.

Matic returns to Chelsea

AFP, London

Chelsea re-signed Serbia midfielder Nemanja Matic on a five-and-a-half-year contract from Portuguese giants Benfica on Wednesday, the two clubs announced.

In a statement to the Lisbon stock exchange, Benfica said that they will receive 25 million euros (20.8m pounds, \$34m) for the sale of Matic, who is now set for his second spell at Stamford Bridge.

After arriving from MSK Kosice in 2009, he made three substitute appearances in the 2009/10 season and left in January 2011 as part of the deal which brought David Luiz from Benfica to west London.

News of the transfer came the day after Matic had stated his intention to move on in an interview with Portuguese sports daily A Bola.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City striker Alvaro Negredo (R) scores the second goal against Blackburn Rovers during their FA Cup encounter at the Etihad Stadium on Wednesday.

Real cruise past Osasuna

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid secured their place in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey with a 2-0 win away to Osasuna on Wednesday to progress 4-0 on aggregate.

Cristiano Ronaldo celebrated winning his second Ballon d'Or earlier in the week with the opening goal, but he had Andres Fernandez to thank as the Osasuna 'keeper parried the Portuguese's long-range free-kick through his own legs and into the net.

Angel di Maria then wrapped up victory on the night with a neat finish from Jese Rodriguez's cross to set up a meeting with Espanyol in the last eight.

Real boss Carlo Ancelotti had made six changes to the side that beat Espanyol in La Liga at the weekend as Gareth Bale dropped to the bench.

However, there was to be no scares

RESULTS

Espanyol 4 (Simao 9, Sergio Garcia 23-pen, Alvarez 83, Pizzi 86) Alcorcon 2 (Plano 4, Javito 80)

Espanyol win 4-3 on aggregate

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Mikel Rico 23, 67)

Real Betis 0

Athletic Bilbao win 2-1 on aggregate

Osasuna 0 Real Madrid 2

(Ronaldo 21, Di Maria 56)

Real Madrid win 4-0 on aggregate

Levante 1 (Barral 43) Rayo Vallecano 0

as Ronaldo killed the tie as a contest when his dipping free-kick proved too hot for Andres to handle on 21 minutes.

Alvaro Cejudo was then unlucky not to take Osasuna in level at the break as he struck the post with a low left-footed drive before seeing Iker Casillas turn behind a similar effort moments later.

Madrid were in complete control after half-time, though, and Di Maria doubled their advantage with a side-footed finish after a determined run down the right by Jese.

Bale was introduced for Ronaldo with half an hour remaining, but once again the Welshman failed to impress as the visitors settled for what they had in the latter stages.

And Madrid even finished the game with 10 men when Manchester United target Fabio Coentrao needlessly picked up a second yellow card six minutes from time.

Espanyol needed two goals in the last 10 minutes to overcome second division side Alcorcon 4-2 on the night to go through 4-3 on aggregate.

Athletic Bilbao also set up a meeting with holders Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinals with a 2-1 aggregate win over Real Betis.

Meanwhile, Barcelona's opponents in the next round should they see off Getafe on Thursday will be Levante after they overcame Rayo Vallecano 1-0.

Milan bounce back

AFP, Milan



Japanese international midfielder Keisuke Honda scored his first goal for AC Milan and Jose Callejon struck a double for Napoli as the Serie A giants sealed their places in the quarterfinals of the Italian Cup on Wednesday.

Honda's goal helped Milan see off second tier La Spezia 3-1 while Callejon's double came in Napoli's 3-1 win over Atalanta.

Serie B side Siena stunned Catania 4-1 to also reach the last eight of the competition, in which Lazio, Roma, Udinese, Fiorentina and Juventus won their respective ties played previously.

Honda made his debut for Milan in Serie A last week when he came off the bench and came close to scoring in a 4-3 defeat to Sassuolo which prompted the sacking of coach Massimiliano Allegri.

Caretaker coach Mauro Tassotti was in charge Wednesday at the San Siro and gave

Honda his first start although new coach, Dutchman Clarence Seedorf, arrived in time to see the second half of the game.

Brazilian Robinho opened the scoring for the hosts on 28 minutes, with striker Giampaolo Pazzini doubling the lead three minutes later.

Honda struck two minutes after the restart to all but wrap up the win, with Nicola Ferrari hitting a consolation for the visitors in second-half injury time.

Napoli were a class above Atalanta although there was controversy at the San Paolo, where Lorenzo Insigne's second goal was perhaps offside and protests from Atalanta led to the expulsion of veteran Colombian defender Mario Yepes.

Atalanta opened the scoring on 13 minutes thanks to a Giuseppe De Luca tap-in following a counter-attack, only for Callejon to level a minute later with a superb volley from a tight angle from Anthony Reveillere's cross.

Insigne, who had earlier smashed a free kick against the crossbar, put Napoli ahead in the

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