

CELEBRATING

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THE YEAR OF

SPORTS

15

Star SPORT

Viola reach Cup final

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina moved to within one win of their first trophy since 2001 as they beat fellow Serie A side Udinese 2-0 in their Italian Cup semifinal, second-leg clash on Tuesday to win 3-2 on aggregate.

Goals by captain Manuel Pasqual and Colombian star Juan Cuadrado set up the Viola for a final against either Napoli or AS Roma, who play on Wednesday with the side from the capital leading 3-2, and the chance of completing a remarkable revival.

Just 11 years ago their fall from grace looked complete as they languished in the fourth tier as a result of serious financial difficulties before being rescued by brothers Andrea and Diego Della Valle.

Fiorentina, who beat Parma 2-1 on aggregate in the 2001 final with a side that then boasted the quality of Portuguese duo Rui Costa and Nuno Gomes, took just 14 minutes to level the tie on aggregate thanks to a wonderful strike by Pasqual.

Bellamy gets 3-game ban

AFP, London

Craig Bellamy was banned for three games with immediate effect on Tuesday after accepting a Football Association charge of violent conduct.

The charge arose out of the Cardiff forward's clash with Swansea midfielder Jonathan de Guzman in last weekend's south Wales derby.

As the former Wales striker, who had until 1800GMT Tuesday to respond, has accepted the charge, he will receive a three-game ban.

Bellamy appeared to catch de Guzman with his arm during the second half of Swansea's 3-0 victory at their Liberty Stadium ground on Saturday.

The incident was not seen by referee Andre Marriner and his linesmen but, under a new disciplinary procedure, a three-man panel of former referees reviewed the incident and, following their unanimous agreement, the FA charged Bellamy on Monday.

A brief FA statement issued Tuesday said: "Cardiff City's Craig Bellamy will serve a three-match suspension with immediate effect after he accepted an FA charge of violent conduct."

118TH IFA SHIELD Sheikh Jamal celebration on hold for final

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club players had surprise guests after their historic win over East Bengal in the 118th IFA Shield semifinal on Tuesday as Mumbai actresses Munmun Sen and her daughter actress Riya Sen turned up at the dressing room and congratulated the players on their superb performance. The actresses spent some time talking to the players and handed over the incentive bonus of 10,000 dollars, which was announced by one of the club directors on the previous day, informed team manager Abdul Gaffar over phone yesterday.

There was mild celebration after the victory at the dressing room among the players, as they felt celebration will be more appropriate once they win the historic title, which was their aim to begin with.

And if they do become the first Bangladeshi team to lift the IFA Shield title, there will be no shortage of celebration and rewards for the Dhanmondi outfit as the club management has already announced an incentive bonus of 25,000 dollars if they win the final.

"We did not throw any party to celebrate the triumph on Tuesday night. Today (Wednesday) the players had a rest day, except for those who did not take part in the match and the players for shopping with the club president Manjur Kader," said Gaffar.

Despite notching the unique feat of beating Kolkata giants Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, Sheikh Jamal players had their feet firmly on the ground, but at the same time are confident about beating Kolkata Mohammedan in the final on Saturday.

The players will be back to business today and they will have only two sessions of practice in the two days prior to the final, in a bid to give them maximum rest to keep them hundred percent fit. Coach Joseph Afusi is likely to work only on match situations and rectify the mistakes that the players made in the previous matches, informed Gaffar.

Meanwhile, the Kolkata dailies were full of praise of Sheikh Jamal players, especially the three foreign strikers while at the same time lambasted the lethargic performance of the East Bengal players and the tactics of coach Armando Colaco.

'East Bengal devastated by cyclone' headlined one Bengali daily while another went 'The Red and Gold torch doused by Dhanmodi storm'. One of the news reports opined that Sheikh Jamal were worthy of the jersey they wore, which was designed after the Argentina stripes.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo scores a penalty during their Copa del Rey semifinal against Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Tuesday.

Ronaldo fires Real

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice from the penalty spot and was also hit on the head by a lighter thrown from the crowd as Real Madrid sealed their place in the Copa del Rey final with a 2-0 win (5-0 on aggregate) over holders Atletico Madrid.

Any chance of Atletico recovering from their 3-0 defeat at the Santiago Bernabeu last week was extinguished after just seven minutes when Ronaldo opened the scoring after being upended by Manquillo.

The Portuguese star doubled his tally nine minutes later from another penalty as this time Gareth Bale was felled by Emiliano Insua.

Ronaldo's eventful evening continued as, moments after being booked for a clash with Manquillo, he was then hit by a lighter thrown by the

Atletico fans as the players headed to the dressing rooms at half-time.

The Ballon d'Or winner was however fit to continue at the start of the second-half before being substituted late on.

Real will face either Barcelona or Real Sociedad in the final on April 19.

Atletico boss Diego Simeone appeared to have given up any hope of an unlikely comeback from the off as he rested Juanfran, Diego Godin, Arda Turan and captain Gabi, whilst four more first-team regulars missed out through injury and suspension.

Real coach Carlo Ancelotti by contrast named a strong side and was rewarded with the away goal that killed the tie off when Ronaldo converted from the spot after tumbling under Manquillo's clumsy challenge inside the area.

Atletico briefly threatened a revival when Raul Garcia struck the post moments later.

Anichebe holds Chelsea

AFP, West Bromwich



Substitute Victor Anichebe struck a dramatic late equaliser on Tuesday to earn West Bromwich Albion

a 1-1 draw as Chelsea were forced to settle for a lead of two points, not four, at the top of the Premier League.

Jose Mourinho's team were far from being in the fluent and formidable form which has characterised their recent ascent to the summit, however once they led via Branislav Ivanovic's goal in first-half added time at The Hawthorns they had looked on course for victory.

Yet Anichebe, on the pitch 14 minutes as a replacement for Morgan Amalfitano, had other ideas, with the

Nigeria striker heading home in the 87th minute to secure a precious point which lifted the Baggies out of the bottom three.

West Brom, meanwhile, will take confidence from their third successive draw at home under new head coach Pepe Mel ahead of a meeting with fellow relegation battlers Fulham on Saturday week.

They have, though, still won just once in 16 league matches.

New arrival Thievy Bifouma, on loan from Espanyol, was handed a first Baggies start, yet the major piece of team news surrounded the inclusion by Chelsea manager Mourinho's decision to field Ramires, who replaced Frank Lampard.

The Brazil international was roundly booed by the home crowd in

what was the sides' first meeting since he controversially won a penalty which earned the Blues an injury-time equaliser in November.

Despite their vastly contrasting recent form, it was a surprisingly even start to proceedings with Mel's renowned pressing game frustrating the visitors.

It took Mourinho's team until the 22nd minute to threaten when Samuel Eto'o's cutback from the byline almost found the onrushing Ivanovic, with a combination of Gareth McAuley and Claudio Yacob doing just enough to avert the danger.

Mel had previously claimed victory over Mourinho when his Real Betis team pulled off a shock 1-0 victory over Real Madrid in November 2012.

Pitch the talking point

Second NZ-Ind Test from Friday

CRICINFO, Wellington



Tim Southee was asked whether he could tell the pitch from the outfield at the Basin Reserve. He smiled, saying it was "tough" to do so at the moment. You had to squint to make out the pitch from the boundary. It was the slightly thinner grass rectangle amid all the green. Much before the start of the India tour, New Zealand coach Mike Hesson had demanded green, seaming pitches for the visitors.

The pitch in Auckland for the first Test had some grass cover, but it eased out considerably after only one session. There is still some time to go for the Friday start of the second and final Test, and there is no saying

whether all the grass on it will stay, but this one is likely to do a lot more than the drop-in surface at Eden Park.

There has been some rain in Wellington past few days, and pitch preparation has not been ideal. It also means there will be at least some moisture underneath that grass going into the Test, even though days are warm and long at this time of the year. The last Test at the Basin a couple of months ago lasted three days, as West Indies were shot out for 193 and 175 to lose by an innings.

Brett Siphthorpe, the curator, said he was targeting a similar pitch for India. "It's had good pace and bounce in it this summer and basically we're aiming for exactly what we had for the West Indies one," Siphthorpe told local media.

Marsh leads fightback

AFP, Centurion



Shaun Marsh marked his return to Test cricket with a fighting century as Australia overcame a poor start on the first day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Wednesday.

Australia were 297 for four at the close. They were reeling at 98 for four after being sent in to bat but Marsh (122 not out) and Steve Smith (91 not out) added an unbeaten 199 for the fifth wicket with positive stroke play.

It was Marsh's first Test in two years. He made 141 and 81 in his first two Test innings in Sri Lanka in 2011 but was dropped after his next nine innings yielded only 79 runs.

Marsh started his innings when Australia were 24 for two in the ninth over. David Warner hit two boundaries off Dale Steyn in the first over of the match but made only 12 before he was bowled by Steyn, edging an attempted cut into his stumps.

Chris Rogers made four before he was caught at short leg off Morne Morkel. New cap Alex Doolan and Marsh added 48 for the third wicket before Doolan was caught at midwicket off Ryan McLaren for 27.

Captain Michael Clarke became Steyn's second victim when he top-edged a hook to fine leg after scoring 23.

Marsh, who survived a sharp chance to Hashim Amla at gully off Morkel when he had 12, went through a quiet period when he scored only nine runs in 18 overs on either side of lunch but reached his half-century off 101 balls.

Batting with increasing fluency, he notched his century off 174 deliveries, with 11 fours.

Marsh batted with discipline, resisting any risky strokes outside the off stump, and took 118 balls to reach his half-century, with seven fours.

He batted particularly impressively after South Africa took the second new ball late in the day.

Cosmos to honour Pele

AFP, New York

Brazilian football legend Pele will return to the New York Cosmos in April for a championship celebration and to accept an honorary degree for humanitarian work, the team said Tuesday.

The 73-year-old icon inspired Brazil to World Cup glory in 1958, 1962 and 1970, then played for the original Cosmos from 1975 through 1977, winning the title in his final season and sparking an American surge in football interest.

The Cosmos were revived last year and won a title in the second-tier North American Soccer League, a level below Major League Soccer.

Pele will join the Cosmos in celebrating that title at a pre-game ceremony on April 13.

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