

Royals cruise, Indians end losing streak

AGENCIES

Rajasthan Royals produced one of their better batting performances this season as they cruised past Delhi Daredevils' total of 152 in 18.3 overs at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in Delhi yesterday.

Sanju Samson played a steadying hand of 34, but it was another young batsman, Karun Nair, who hit an unbeaten half-century to see his team complete the chase comfortably.

In the day's first match, Mumbai Indians' batsmen held their nerve at the death to give their franchise their first victory of the season in six attempts on home turf at the Wankhede Stadium.

Chasing Kings XI Punjab's score of 168, Mumbai Indians needed 41 off the last three overs but Kieron Pollard and Aditya Tare catapulted their side home with five deliveries to spare and ended Kings XI Punjab's victorious five-game run.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KINGS XI PUNJAB: 168 for 5 in 20 overs (Saha 59 not out, Maxwell 45; Harbhajan 2-34)

MUMBAI INDIANS: 170 for 5 in 19.1 overs (Rohit 39, Anderson 35, Gautam 33, Pollard 28 not out; Dhawan 2-23)

Result: Mumbai won by 5 wickets

Player of the match: Corey Anderson

DELHI DAREDEVILS: 152 for 5 in 20 overs (de Kock 42, Duminy 39; Tambe 2-25)

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 156 for 3 in 18.3 overs (Nair 73 not out, Samson 34)

Result: Rajasthan won by 7 wickets

Player of the match: Karun Nair



West Ham midfielder Stewart Downing (R) is ecstatic after scoring the second goal against Tottenham Hotspur during their Premier League encounter at Upton Park yesterday.

Man City claim top spot

AFP, London



Manchester City claimed top spot in the Premier League and took a significant step towards the title by coming from behind to edge Everton 3-2 on Saturday.

Ross Barkley's stunner put hosts Everton ahead in the 11th minute, but Sergio Aguero quickly equalised and a brace from Edin Dzeko secured victory for Manuel Pellegrini's side despite Romelu Lukaku reducing the arrears.

City now lead previous leaders Liverpool on goal difference -- +59 to +50 - and will therefore be practically assured of winning the title if they win their two remaining games.

Chelsea and Liverpool each have opportunities to take over at the summit over the

next two days, but if City beat Aston Villa on Wednesday and win at home to West Ham United next weekend, they are unlikely to be caught.

Everton's defeat, meanwhile, means that Arsenal are guaranteed to finish at least as high as fourth, guaranteeing them a place in next season's Champions League play-offs.

Everton's fans were in the uncomfortable position of knowing that victory for their side would hand the title initiative to their city rivals Liverpool, but Barkley's strike was a goal that demanded to be celebrated.

After Steven Naismith rolled Leighton Baines's pass into his path, the 20-year-old England midfielder looked up and arced a magnificent first-time shot into the top-right corner from 25 yards.

Aguero equalised just 11 minutes later,

RESULTS

Aston Villa 3 (Westwood 1, Weimann 41, 45) **Hull 1** (Bowery 28-og)

Everton 2 (Barkley 11, Lukaku 65) **Manchester City 3** (Aguero 22, Dzeko 43, 48)

Manchester United 0 **Sunderland 1** (Larsson 30)

Newcastle 3 (Ameobi 18, Remy 87, Taylor 90+1)

Cardiff 0

Stoke 4 (Odemwinge 39, Arnautovic 54, Assaidi 73, Walters 82) **Fulham 1** (Richardson 80)

Swansea 0 **Southampton 1** (Lambert 90+3)

West Ham 2 (Kane 27-og, Downing 44) **Tottenham 0**

however, rattling home at the near post from Yaya Toure's pass, and although he was then forced off with an apparent groin injury, City powered on.

Dzeko put the visitors in front in the 43rd minute with an imperious header from a James Milner cross and after Joe Hart had saved from Naismith early in the second half, the Bosnian stabbed home Samir Nasri's cross to make it 3-1.

Lukaku's 65th-minute diving header brought Everton back into the game, but City survived a nail-biting last half an hour -- Hart notably saving from substitute Gerard Deulofeu -- to close on the title.

Meanwhile, Fulham and Cardiff City were both relegated after defeats in their penultimate games of the season left them unable to reach safety.

Fulham's 13-year run in the English top flight was ended by a 4-1 defeat at Stoke City, while Cardiff went straight back down to the Championship following a 3-0 loss at Newcastle United.

Pele terms it storm in a teacup

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil legend Pele said on Friday that outrage at the throwing of a banana toward compatriot and Barcelona defender Dani Alves was a social media storm in a teacup.

Alves ate the fruit thrown on the pitch near him during a match at Villarreal and the host club banned the culprit who lobbed it for life, while the twittersphere buzzed with acclaim for the player's cool reaction.

But for Pele, speaking at an agricultural forum in the southeastern town of Riberao Preto, the incident has been blown out of proportion.

"It's not just in football where there's racism. It's been around in all sectors of society for a long time," Pele said.

"Such banality. A guy threw a banana. It's a storm in a teacup."

Barcelona and Brazil star Neymar was one of those who praised Alves after launching an anti-racist campaign on social media with the hashtag #somostodosmacacos (we are all monkeys).

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff likewise hailed Alves's reaction.

But Pele insisted: "I do not agree there is a wave of racism."

"In my day, people threw guanabana fruit and mangoes" at players, he added.

Pirlo extends Juve stay

AFP, Milan

Juventus midfielder Andrea Pirlo has signed a new two-year deal that will see him remain with the Italian champions until 2016, reports said Friday.

Gazzetta dello Sport said Juventus, who crashed out of the Europa League semifinals on Thursday have tied the Italy midfielder to a new deal that will expire in June 2016.

Bayern crush Hamburg

REUTERS, Berlin



Bayern Munich midfielder Mario Goetze scored twice to help the champions beat struggling Hamburg SV 4-1 on Saturday and bounce back in style from their 4-0 demolition by Real Madrid in midweek.

It took a long time for the Bundesliga champions to get started with Bayern needing more than half an hour to carve out their first chance against the battling hosts.

That was, however, all Goetze needed to score after he played a quick one-two with Arjen Robben, charged into the box and slotted in for the lead in the 32nd minute.

The Germany international, who was not in the starting lineup in their Champions League defeat to the Spaniards, played a part in the second goal early in the second half with Thomas Mueller getting the last touch.

Goetze struck again in the 70th minute, rifling in from a Mueller header.

Hakan Calhanoglu pulled one back for the hosts with a low drive from 18 metres in the 72nd but substitute Claudio Pizarro quickly restored order with a bicycle kick three minutes later.

Bayern were left with ten men when defender Jerome Boateng was sent off for headbutting Hamburg's Kemel Demirbay.

The result leaves Hamburg anchored in the relegation playoff

spot with one game left.

Former European champions Hamburg, who are the only team never to have played in the second division since the creation of the Bundesliga in 1963, have 27 points in 16th place with Nuremberg, who lost 2-0 to Hanover 96, on 26.

Eintracht Braunschweig lost 1-0 at Augsburg thanks to a stoppage time chip by Raul Bobadilla to remain in last place with 25 points.

Schalke 04 took a big step towards securing automatic qualification to the Champions League, easing past Freiburg 2-0 with goals from defender Kaan Ayhan and forward Klaas-Jan Huntelaar to move up to 61 points, three ahead of Bayer Leverkusen in fourth.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich winger Mario Goetze (R) celebrates one of his two goals with teammates during their Bundesliga match against Hamburger SV in Hamburg yesterday.

Wenger rules out spending spree

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has warned supporters that while he will look to improve his squad during the close season, they should not expect a "massive" influx of new players.

"It will be busy, but the main thing for us will be to keep the stability because we feel we are close (to the title)," said the Frenchman, in comments reported by several British newspapers on Saturday.

"We want to add something that makes us even stronger, but number-wise it will not be massive."

Wenger feels that this year's World Cup in Brazil, which runs from June 12 to July 13, will force clubs to delay moving for players until later in the transfer window than usual.

"At the moment I have people around me who start to look," he said.

"From my experience, the World Cup years have always been very quiet until the end of the World Cup, with no players reachable."

"Everybody is focused in the country on their national team and there is not a lot happening. People are away, so I believe this year again you will have to wait until July 15 to start going."

Wenger was speaking ahead of his side's home game with West Bromwich Albion on Sunday, when a victory would confirm their place in next season's Champions League play-offs.

Arsenal also face Hull City in the FA Cup final on May 17.

Title hopes in tatters

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's slim hopes of retaining their La Liga title were all but ended after they were held 2-2 at home by struggling Getafe on Saturday.

The Catalans now trail leaders Atletico Madrid by three points with just two games remaining and having played a game more, whilst Real Madrid are just three points further back but with two games in hand over Barca.

Lionel Messi opened the scoring with a fine finish, but Barca were pegged back when Angel Lafita levelled just before half-time.

The Spanish champions improved going forward after the break and deservedly went back in front when Alexis Sanchez drilled

the ball home 23 minutes from time, but they were stunned in injury time as Lafita rose to head home Jaime Gavilan's cross to secure a vital point for Getafe.

A video tribute was played along with a minute's silence to mark the death of former Barca coach Tito Vilanova before kick-off in the Catalans' first home game since he passed away at the age of 45 on April 25.

Possibly affected by that emotional start to the game, the hosts began slowly but went in front with their first clear opening on 23 minutes when Messi swept home Dani Alves' low cross to register his 41st goal of the season.

Pedro Rodriguez should then have made it 2-0 when he raced onto a wonderful through ball from Messi, but Getafe 'keeper Julio Cesar did well to narrow the angle and turn the Spanish international's effort behind.

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