

Messi on the treble

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi struck a stunning hat-trick to ensure Barcelona maintained the pressure on La Liga leaders Real Madrid with a 4-0 win away to Deportivo la Coruna to cut the gap at the top to one point.

Atletico Madrid, who dumped Real out of the Copa del Rey in midweek, moved back to within four points of their city rivals in third as goals from Mario Mandzukic and Raul Garcia handed them a 2-0 win over managerless Granada.

"Messi has been at an extraordinarily high level all season," said Barca boss Luis Enrique, despite reports of a dressing room rift between the two in recent weeks.

"He hasn't dipped at any point. He has been world class."

In a change from his much criticised rotation policy, Enrique named the same side that beat Atletico 3-1 at home last weekend and was rewarded with another bright display illuminating the pitch.

RESULTS

Atletico Madrid 2 (Mandzukic 34-pen, Raul Garcia 87) Granada 0
 Deportivo la Coruna 0 **Barcelona 4** (Messi 11, 33, 62, Sidnei 83-og)
Elche 1 (Jonathas 12) Levante 0
Sevilla 2 (Bacca 36, Suarez 68) Malaga 0

nated by Messi's class in front of goal. The Argentine's first effort of the game was brilliantly saved by Fabricio after a well-worked corner, but the Deportivo goalkeeper was helpless when the four-time World Player of the Year opened the scoring after 11 minutes with a thunderous header from Ivan Rakitic's cross.

Messi then showed a more subtle touch for his second with a delicate chip over the prone Fabricio to double Barca's advantage from Neymar's pass.

However, by contrast, Luis Suarez's troubles in front of goal continued as he fluffed his lines twice in the first-half with just Fabricio to beat.

Messi showed the Uruguayan how it should be done once more when he rounded off his 30th hat-trick for the

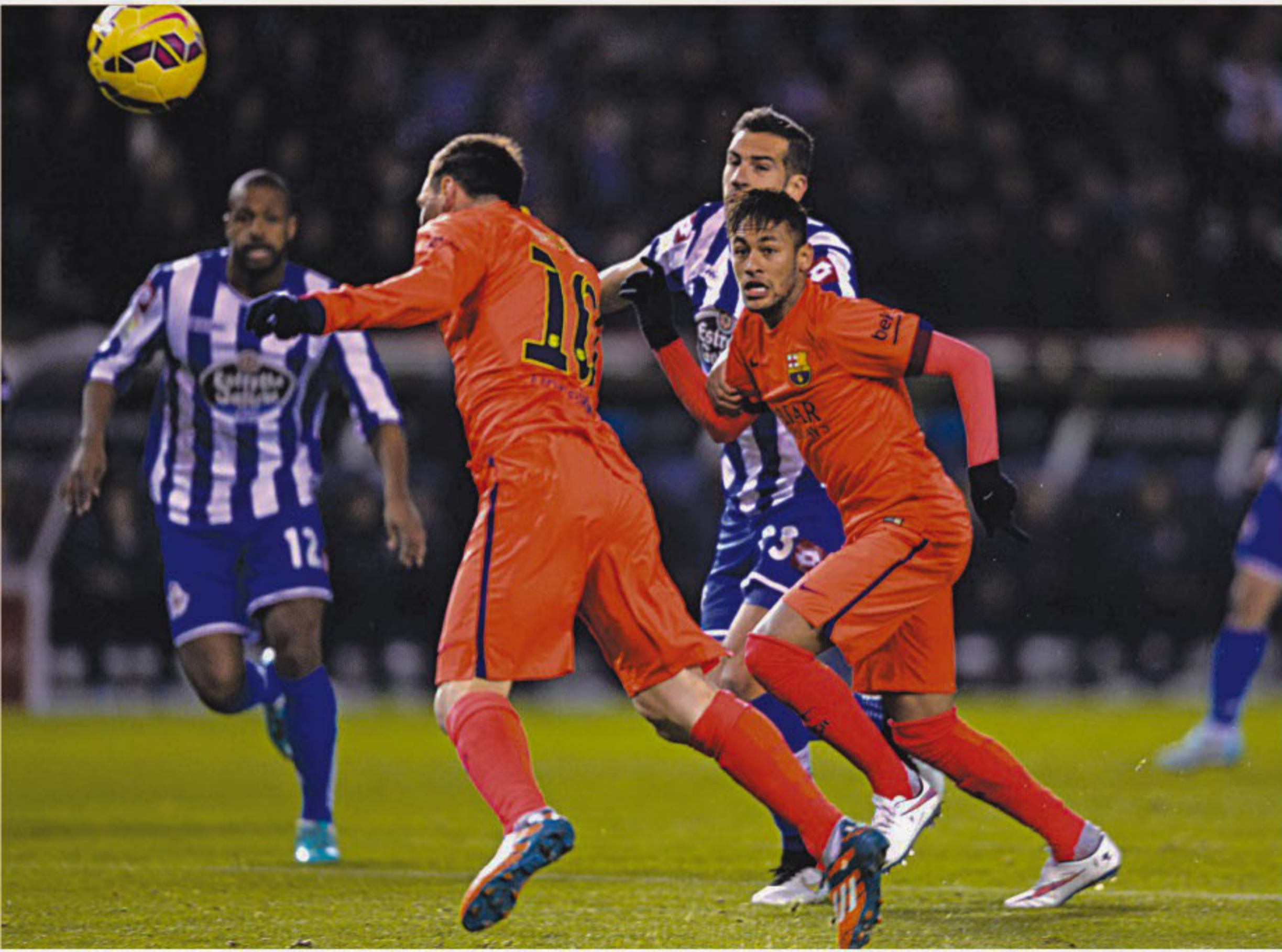
club after the break when he cut inside onto his favoured left foot and fired into the far corner before an own goal from Deportivo defender Sidnei rounded off the scoring.

Atletico were less impressive as they laboured to victory against a Granada side that hasn't won in La Liga since September leading to the sacking of coach Joaquin Caparros on Friday.

The opening goal arrived 11 minutes before half-time when Diego Godin was hauled down by Abdoul Sissoko as he tried to reach Fernando Torres's cross and Mandzukic smashed home the resultant penalty for his 16th goal of the season.

Atletico enjoyed more control of the game after the break and finally sealed the points three minutes from time when substitute Garcia bundled home Arda Turan's cross at the back post.

Sevilla moved to within two points of Atletico in fourth with a 2-0 win over Andalusian rivals Malaga thanks to goals either side of half-time from Carlos Bacca and Denis Suarez.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (2nd from L) heads in the opening goal against Deportivo la Coruna during their Primera Liga encounter at the Municipal de Riazor Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

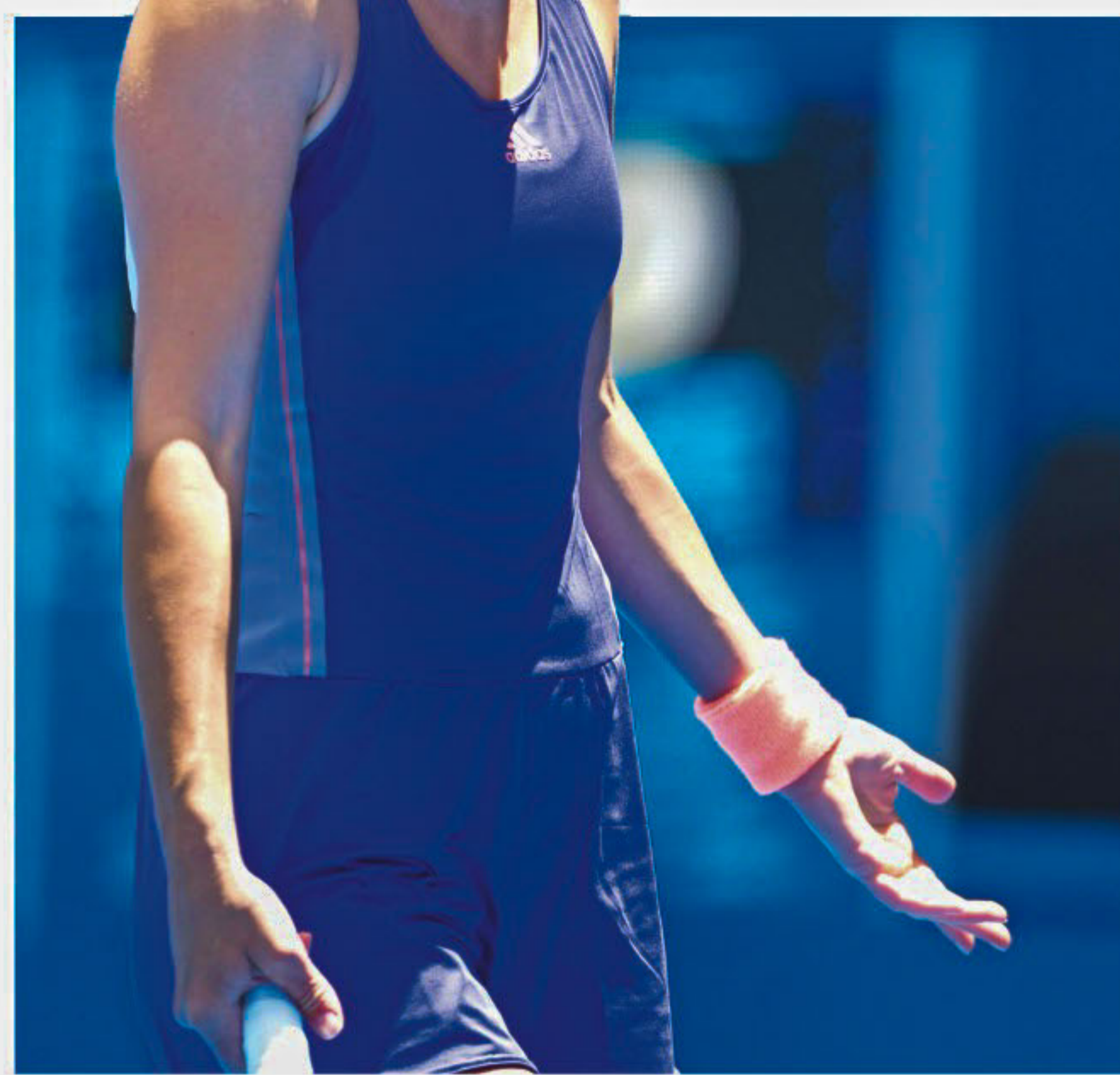


PHOTO: AFP

Ana Ivanovic of Serbia is in disbelief after losing her first round match of the Australian Open against Czech Republic's Lucie Hradecka in Melbourne yesterday.

Biggies sail thru'

AFP, Melbourne



Big guns Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Maria Sharapova successfully blasted their way into the Australian Open second round Monday but the Grand Slam dream of Ana Ivanovic was shattered.

Second seed Federer, third seed Nadal and sixth seed Andy Murray all enjoyed straight sets wins, with rising stars Simona Halep, Eugenie Bouchard and Grigor Dimitrov also progressing on a cool Melbourne day.

World number two Sharapova, looking for her first Australian title since 2008, swept aside Croat Petra Martic 6-4, 6-1.

It was a different story for fifth seed Ivanovic, a former world number one who came to Melbourne full of confidence after a stellar 2014 that saw her climb the rankings.

She started well against unheralded world number 142 Lucie Hradecka of the Czech Republic, easily winning the first set, but then went to pieces, eventually crashing 1-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Swiss great Federer, gunning for his fifth Australian crown and 18th Grand Slam title,

had no such problems and was in full control against Taiwan's Lu Yen-Hsun.

He went through the motions for a 6-4, 6-2, 7-5 win and welcomed the workout.

His long-time rival Nadal showed few signs of the injuries that disrupted his 2014 season in dispatching Russian Mikhail Youzhny 6-3, 6-2, 6-2, conceding just one break point on his serve.

Top seeds Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic and defending men's champion Stan Wawrinka are in action on Tuesday.

Women's champion Li Na of China has retired and is not taking part, although she is a guest of honour and announced to the Rod Laver crowd that she was expecting her first child.

Murray was given a testing workout by promising Indian Yuki Bhambri before emerging a 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) winner.

World number three Halep opened the 2015 proceedings with the wind swirling around Rod Laver Arena, carving out a 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Italy's Karin Knapp.

Seventh seed Bouchard, a semifinalist in 2014, posted a solid 6-2, 6-4 win over Germany's Anna-Lena Friedsam while 10th seed Dimitrov progressed with an easy 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 victory over German Dustin Brown.

'Jummon bhai above all'

SPORTS REPORTER

Colleagues, successors, admirers and well wishers poured in numbers to see the body of late hockey legend Jummon Lusai yesterday. The body of the iconic hockey player, who passed away on Sunday at the age of 59, was brought in the morning at the Abahani Club tent, which had long been his home.

The officials and players of Abahani paid their respects before the body was taken to the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium where Jummon had spent more than two decades of his playing career before becoming a coach.

Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, a legend of Bangladesh national football team as well as Abahani, spoke of Jummon's appeal to others.

"The footballers had a great relationship with Jummon. He used to celebrate any football victory with us," recalled the great goal-poacher of the '80s.

Jummon's death has seemingly made the hockey factions forget their differences for the moment. Officials of Mohammedan, Mariner Youngs and Bangladesh Boys - who boycotted hockey league last year and are still staying away from hockey activities alleging Abahani's clout over the federation - came to the stadium to show their solidarity.

"Jummon bhai is above all. We used to love him for his personality too, apart from his performances. Whenever we had any troubles on the pitch, Jummon bhai would come forward and everyone would listen to him," reminisced Hasan Ullah Khan Rana, the general secretary of Mariner Youngs.

Jummon's body was later taken to his hometown Sylhet, where his funeral is expected to be held at the Christian Cemetery on Thursday, informed the late hockey legend's younger brother Jubel Lusai.

Gucci wins it for Iran

AFP, Brisbane

Iran snatched a dramatic late winner against the United Arab Emirates at the Asian Cup on Monday -- but were careful not to celebrate by taking "selfies" with female fans.

Substitute Reza Ghoochannejhad, nicknamed "Gucci" by his club mates at Charlton Athletic, popped up to score in injury time to give Iran a 1-0 victory and secure top spot in Group C, meaning they are likely to avoid holders Japan in the quarterfinals.

"UAE perhaps deserved to win," Iran coach Carlos Queiroz told reporters. "I think they are the best team in West Asia -- they've been together a long time."

"But our substitutes had experience and did the job when they came on to win it for us." Iran's players have incurred the wrath of the country's authorities after posing for photographs with female fans who have turned out in droves to watch their games in Australia.

They have been formally warned to stop by the Iranian Football Federation's moral committee, which claimed players risked being used as a "political tool" if snapped with women.

Iran, who lifted the Asian Cup three times in a row between 1968 and 1976 but have failed to win it since, underlined their title credentials with a third straight victory.

Tevez fires Juve

AFP, Milan



Carlos Tevez hit a brace as unstoppable Juventus stretched their lead over Roma to five points at the top of Serie A on Sunday after a 4-0 rout of Verona.

Roma's bid to challenge for a first scudetto since 2001 hit the skids on Saturday when Palermo held Rudi Garcia's men to a 1-1 draw in Sicily.

It was the Giallorossi's second consecutive draw and Juve, who hammered Verona 6-1 in an Italian Cup last 16 tie in midweek, had no trouble capitalising.

Verona had never beaten Juventus in Turin and the visitors' chances of causing a major upset looked over inside three minutes when Frenchman Paul Pogba beat Rafael with a long-distance screamer.

Tevez, who was rested for Thursday's Cup tie, doubled Juve's lead four minutes later when he latched on to Alvaro Morata's deflected cross after a Pogba dummy to beat Rafael from 12 yards out.

Andrea Pirlo almost made it three soon after but his dipping free kick from 30 yards out came off the crossbar.

Claudio Marchisio, Tevez and Morata spurred further chances to add to the scoreline after the break but Roberto Pereyra seized his chance with both hands in the 66th minute.

Defender Giorgio Chiellini set up the midfielder down the left and Pereyra expertly fired past Rafael and into the far top corner for his first league goal in Juve colours, having opened his account in the Cup on Thursday.

Tevez's second came barely 10 minutes later, the Argentinian nutmegging Rafael from close range after Marchisio's short pass to net his league-leading 13th of the season.

Roma sit second at five points with Napoli and Sampdoria, in fourth, a further eight points behind.

Earlier, Sampdoria and Fiorentina scored precious away wins to maintain their hopes of European football next season as AC Milan saw their chances of Champions League football dented by a shock 1-0 home

RESULTS

Lazio 0 **Napoli 1** (Higuain 18)
 Cesena 2 (Brienza 43-pen, 85-pen) **Torino 3** (Benassi 20, Quagliarella 22, Lopez 87)
 Chievo 1 (Pellissier 72) **Fiorentina 2** (Rodriguez 35, Babacar 90+4)
 Genoa 3 (Iago 25, Fetfatzidis 53, 90+2-pen) Sassuolo 3 (Berardi 19-pen, 69, Missiroli 50)
 AC Milan 0 **Atalanta 1** (Denis 33)
 Parma 0 **Sampdoria 2** (Bergessio 54, Soriano 70)
 Udinese 2 (Allan 55, Theureau 56) Cagliari 2 (Pedro 39, Avelar 90+1-pen)
Juventus 4 (Pogba 3, Tevez 7, 74, Pereyra 66) Verona 0

loss to Atalanta.

Gonzalo Bergessio and Roberto Soriano pounced on poor Parma defending to score one apiece in the second half to hand Sampdoria a second consecutive win for the first time since October.

Having lost only twice this season and with strikers Luis Muriel and Samuel Eto'o reportedly on the verge of signing, coach Sinisa Mihajlovic was buoyant.

"No other Samp side has amassed so many points at this stage of the season. We've lost only twice in 19 games so I'm very happy," he told Sky Sport.

Fiorentina ended a two-month wait to string two wins together when Senegalese centre-forward Khouma Babacar sent a looping header over goalkeeper Benjamin Bizzarri to seal a last-gasp 2-1 win over Chievo.

La Viola's eighth win of the campaign moved them up to sixth, 13 points adrift of champions Juve but only three behind Napoli in the third and final Champions League qualifying place.

Montella was quick to praise Babacar, but told Sky: "I'm happy Babacar scored the decisive goal but I still believe he has so much more to offer."

Milan were stunned 1-0 at the San Siro by Atalanta when German Denis beat Spanish keeper Diego Lopez with the outside of his right boot just after the half hour.

Milan remain in eighth but are now seven points behind Napoli, who had Gonzalo Higuain's 18th minute strike to thank for a precious win away at Lazio in the day's early match.

Another Jamaican for Sk Russel

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra on Sunday night flew in Jamaican winger Akeem Priestley for the upcoming season and the 28-year-old had a training session with the former Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) champions at the BKSP yesterday.

Akeem, who played for different clubs in Russia, Azerbaijan, America and Argentina, is the second Jamaican in the BPL after Ricardo Cousins, who also played for Sheikh Russel last season.

He said that he represented the Jamaican national team in 10 matches. He also represented Jamaica youth and U-23 teams and has scored a total of 15 goals. Akeem prefers to play in left-wing and is capable of playing behind the striker.

'Sneijder pursuit over'

AFP, Milan

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri has confirmed the Italian champions have ended their pursuit of Galatasaray playmaker Wesley Sneijder.

Former Inter Milan midfielder Sneijder had been linked with a move to the Turin giants, but a day after his agent said the move would not materialise, Allegri told Sky Sport: "Galatasaray have been clear, they want to keep him."

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