

**ALONSO FORGOT 20 YEARS OF LIFE**

After crashing his vehicle during pre-season testing in Catalunya on February 22, Formula One driver Fernando Alonso is said to have woken up having no memory of the past 20 years of his life. "I'm Fernando, I drive go-karts and I want to be a Formula One driver," the 33-year-old driver reportedly told doctors after waking up in the hospital from brief unconsciousness. According to the BBC, the McLaren driver was briefly "unconscious when rescue crews reached him" and was in a "confused state" when he awoke.

—INTERNET



**Salah brace stuns Juve**

AFP, Milan

Mohamed Salah struck twice as Fiorentina ended Juventus' 42-game unbeaten run at home on their way to a 2-1 win in the first leg, semifinal of the Italian Cup on Thursday.

On-loan Chelsea midfielder Salah has been in sparkling form since arriving in Florence last month, the Egyptian international hitting the net three times in four games in Serie A and scoring La Viola's second in a 2-0 Europa League win over Tottenham in Florence last week.

And the 22-year-old maintained his recent purple patch to hand Juve their first home defeat since a Champions League reverse against Bayern Munich in April 2013.

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri left preferred strikers Carlos Tevez and Alvaro Morata on the bench in place of Fernando Llorente and Kingsley Coman.

But 11 minutes into the game the Bianconeri handler was changing tack after Salah gave the visitors the lead in spectacular fashion.

Salah collected a clearance well before the half-way line and fended off the attention of three Juventus players on his way to firing a superb angled drive past Marco Storari and into the keeper's far top corner.

Llorente levelled for the hosts when he flashed a glancing header from Simone Pepe's delivery past Norberto Neto and inside the 'keeper's far post in the 24th minute, however Juventus were kept on their toes throughout.

Storari had to react quickly to palm Mati Fernandez's strike from under the bar and from the resulting corner Mario Gomez almost provided a great assist with his head only for Jose Maria Basanta's diving header to come off the post.

Tevez replaced Coman before half-time and immediately saw two quick snapshots blocked.

But Juventus were kept on the ropes throughout the second half.



Fiorentina midfielder Mohamed Salah (C) scores one of his two goals against Juventus during their Italian Cup semifinal first leg tie in Turin on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

**NAT'L SCHOOL HOCKEY Final round from today**

SPORTS REPORTER

The final round of the First Security Islami Ban National School Hockey Championship gets underway on the newly-laid blue turf at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today.

A total of 32 teams, who have qualified from amongst 120 schools of 11 zones and were split into eight groups, will compete in round-robin league format. Top teams from each of the groups will advance to the quarterfinals.

"The boys have been show better performance both technically and tactically compared to the last edition of the tournament. We have found some players with exceptional qualities and we hope to nurture them for future," said Mamunur Rashid, secretary of the tournament committee, at a press conference at the BOA Auditorium yesterday.

The champions, runners-up and third-place finishers will be awarded Tk three lakh, Tk two lakh and Tk one lakh respectively while the best player in each of four positions will be awarded Tk 20,000 each.

**Real face Bilbao test**

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's search for a return to form will be severely tested when the La Liga leaders travel to face an Athletic Bilbao side still high from reaching the Copa del Rey final on Saturday.

Madrid saw their advantage over Barcelona at the top of the table cut to two points after being held 1-1 at home by Villarreal last weekend.

Los Blancos have dropped seven points in their 10 La Liga matches since ending a trophy-laden 2014 on a 22-game winning run.

And with a potentially decisive El Clasico clash with Barcelona now just two weeks away, Madrid can't afford many more slip-ups in their quest for just a second La Liga title in seven seasons.

However, Bilbao is often a treacherous destination for the European champions with last season's 1-1 draw

in which Cristiano Ronaldo was sent-off a case in point.

After a difficult campaign, Athletic also came into the game in high spirits having set up a Cup final against Barcelona for the third time in seven years thanks to a 2-0 win at Espanyol on Wednesday.

The Basques have also managed back-to-back league wins against Rayo Vallecano and Eibar to ease any relegation fears.

Madrid will again be without the

injured trio of James Rodriguez, Sergio Ramos and Sami Khedira, whilst Luka Modric remains unlikely to feature despite stepping up the intensity of his training after a three month absence due to a high muscle problem.

Barcelona have an easier task on paper when they entertain Rayo Vallecano in the Sunday lunchtime kick-off.

The Catalans will be without Sergio Busquets, who suffered a high ankle sprain in the 3-1 win over Villarreal in midweek which sealed a 6-2 aggregate victory in their Cup semi-final, but the club remains hopeful he will be fit to face Madrid and Manchester City later this month.

Luis Suarez extended his scoring streak to five goals in five games in that match as he becomes an increasingly important part of a deadly front three also including Argentina and Brazil captains Lionel Messi and Neymar.

"Every week I try to help the team and I feel better on the pitch all the time," said Suarez.

**Cisse faces long ban**

REUTERS, London

Newcastle United striker Papiss Cisse will face a severe punishment after accepting an FA charge of spitting at Manchester United defender Jonny Evans in Wednesday's Premier League match.

"Both ourselves and Pappis agree this kind of behaviour is not acceptable," Newcastle managing director Lee Charnley said in a statement on Thursday.

The precise sanction the FA will hand out is not yet known but media reports said the Senegalese international faced a lengthy ban.

"In life when you do something wrong you have to front up, admit your mistakes and accept the punishment," Charnley added.

**Premier league starts on April 3**

SPORTS REPORTER



The Professional Football League Committee has deferred the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League by 25 days after the club officials backtracked from their previous decision to start the league from Monday, just three days after the completion of the Federation Cup.

The 8th edition of the premier league, comprising 11 clubs, will now start from April 3, two days after the completion of the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers in Dhaka.

The League Committee comprising BFF members and club representatives had earlier decided to complete the first two rounds before suspending the league for the preparation of the U-23 national football team, who will compete against Syria, Uzbekistan and India from March 27 to 31 in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers.

"We have deferred the league because of the club officials, who believe the tempo of their teams will be affected if the league is suspended after only two rounds. They want an uninterrupted league and that is why the league will start from April 3," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag.

Shohag believes that the league committee would be able to complete the league by July as there is no international engagement for Bangladesh in the meantime, expect for two FIFA Qualifiers on June 11 and 17.

**Spurs back on track**

AFP, London



Ryan Mason believes Tottenham have overcome the disappointment of last week's cup failures and are back on track in the race to qualify for the Champions League.

Mauricio Pochettino's side face QPR at Loftus Road this weekend with a Premier League top four spot their sole remaining target after exiting the Europa League at the hands of Fiorentina three days before Sunday's League Cup final defeat against Chelsea.

Tottenham's bruised morale was at least partially restored with the 3-2 midweek victory over Swansea that ensured Spurs kept pace with their main rivals towards the head of the table.

That result left them in seventh place, six points behind Manchester United who lie fourth, but having played a game less.

And with Louis van Gaal's side on FA Cup duty on Monday, victory over struggling QPR on Saturday will close the gap and give Pochettino's team another timely lift.

It may take more than a couple of wins to get the 2-0 Wembley defeat against Chelsea completely out of the system, but young midfielder Mason believes the hard-fought victory over Swansea was a major step in the right direction.

**'2022 will be game-changer'**

AFP, New York

The 2022 Qatar World Cup will be "a game-changer," tournament chief Hassan Al-Thawadi declared Thursday, facing down the many skeptics voicing serious reservations about the gas-rich Gulf state hosting the showpiece.

Al-Thawadi, appearing at a sports business conference in New York, was grilled on everything from corruption allegations dogging FIFA's pick of Qatar to worries that fans will not be able to get enough alcohol at the first World Cup in the Middle East.

Other questions focused on criticism of working conditions for migrant construction workers and a likely move in the calendar of the World Cup from the summer to the winter, a shift that has drawn howls from football leagues across the globe.

Al-Thawadi, who helped lead Qatar's bid committee and now oversees a massive building program in a country with little footballing infrastructure or history, sent a message of steely determination.

"We are going to be ready," he said in an on-stage interview over 40 minutes, part of the "Leaders Sport Business Summit."

"Hopefully with every day that people see progress on the ground, they'll come round to the idea that the 2022 event is a game-changer."

**Pressure on Pippo**

AFP, Milan



The coaching future of former AC Milan star Filippo Inzaghi could hinge on the ailing Italian giants' home fixture with Verona on Saturday, as Juventus look to tighten their grip at the top of Serie A.

Two days before Juventus host Sassuolo looking to reinforce their nine-point lead over Roma - in action away to Chievo on Sunday - Milan host Andrea Mandorlini's visitors in full crisis mode.

Despite avoiding defeat in their past two games, a win against relegation-threatened Cesena and a scoreless draw last week away to Chievo have done little to appease Milan's detractors.

The injury list is growing, too, with captain Riccardo Montolivo and fellow midfielder Nigel De Jong expected to be sidelined for Saturday after suffering thigh injury knocks last week.

Milan are already 24 points behind Juventus and 11 behind Napoli in the third and last Champions League qualifying place, prompting an emergency visit to the club's Milanello training ground by joint CEO Adriano Galliani in midweek.

Galliani was said to have left unimpressed with Inzaghi's explanations for the club's current mediocrity, with some reports suggesting the former Rossoneri striker could be sacked if Milan fail to beat Verona.

Verona have conceded defeat to Milan on their last two visits to the San Siro but veteran striker Luca Toni is in fine fettle having scored the winner in a precious 2-1 away defeat of Cagliari last week.

Milan defender Luca Antonelli warned: "The match against Verona will be tough. Toni is deciding matches at the moment."

Antonelli is under no illusions about Milan's work load if they are to return to European competition next season: "From



**FIXTURES**

(all times GMT)

**Saturday**  
Sampdoria v Cagliari (1700), AC Milan v Verona (1945)

**Sunday**  
Cesena v Palermo (1130), Chievo v Roma, Empoli v Genoa, Parma v Atalanta, Udinese v Torino (all 1400), Napoli v Inter (1945)

**Monday**  
Lazio v Fiorentina (1800), Juventus v Sassuolo (2000)

here to the end there will be thirteen finals for us, we'll do everything we can to get back into Europe."

Juventus host Sassuolo on Monday looking to maintain their charge towards a fourth consecutive title, but the visitors will be buoyed after Fiorentina beat the champions 2-1 in the first leg of their Italian Cup semifinal on Thursday to end the Bianconeri's 42-game unbeaten run at home.

Juve drew 1-1 away to injury-hit Roma last week to further underline their status as champions-in-waiting and could end the weekend with an even bigger cushion if the Giallorossi fail to account for Chievo in Verona.

**The joy of low**

FROM PAGES 1

scoring games suddenly been spiced up with neck-high bounce and unexpected swing.

While those two matches at Mirpur, which saw India get bundled out for some of their lowest ODI scores, were a surprise, the pacer's display yesterday was not.

The WACA is considered as a haven for pacers. Of the 1079 wickets that fell here, 857 have been taken by pacers. It's not a surprise that the legendary Wasim Akram is the highest wicket-taker in this ground. Funny enough though, Ravi Shastri's figures of 5 for 15-courtesy of his slow left-armers-- remain the best ever figures here. Perhaps a few more games here and at the Gabba could have made the World Cup a lot more interesting.

**Van Gaal denies Giggs rift**

REUTERS, London



Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal reacted angrily on Thursday to suggestions he had fallen out with assistant Ryan Giggs.

"We have a very bad relationship," the Dutchman said with heavy sarcasm when asked about their relationship at a news conference ahead of the FA Cup quarterfinal against Arsenal at Old Trafford on Monday.

"I am very irritated because of this question because everybody can see we have a very good relationship.

"We work very hard together and not only with Ryan, with all the staff and players. I am not pleased."

British media had questioned the relationship between the manager and Giggs after the United great, sitting alongside Van Gaal at Wednesday's 1-0 Premier League win over Newcastle United, showed little reaction to his side's late goal.

The Daily Star

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