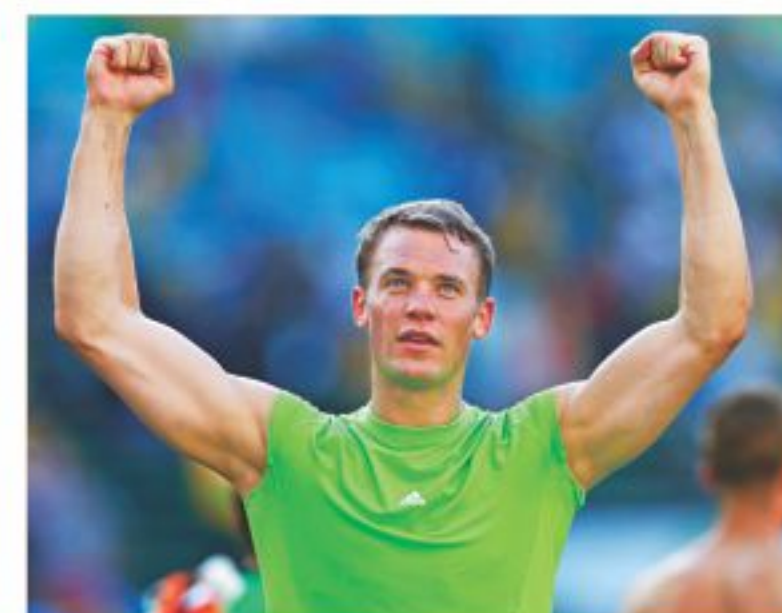


Bayern goalkeeper Neuer beat off competition from runner-up Gianluigi Buffon and third-placed Claudio Bravo to reclaim the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) award for the third time in a row. Experts from 50 countries cast their vote in the competition, and Neuer earned 188 points, a remarkable 110 ahead of his Juventus rival, while Bravo received only 45. "Of course I am happy about this triple. But titles with my team are more important to me," he told Bayern's official website. Premier League goalkeepers David De Gea and Thibaut Courtois came fourth and fifth respectively, with Petr Cech sixth. Marcelo Barovero, Marc Andre Ter Stegen, Iker Casillas and Daniel Subasic round off the top 10.

-- AGENCIES



All eyes on Zidane

AFP, Madrid



French legend Zinedine Zidane takes charge of Real Madrid for the first time when Deportivo la Coruna visit what is expected to be a sold out Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

The Madrid fans turned out in their thousands to welcome Zidane at his first training session on Tuesday, hours after he replaced the sacked Rafael Benitez, who paid the price for his unpopularity with the club's stars and fans alike after just seven months in the job.

By contrast, Zidane is beloved at the Bernabeu for his five years as a player in the Spanish capital, most notably scoring a sensational winning goal in the 2002 Champions League final.

Yet, Deportivo's visit will be his first match in senior management having only previously coached Madrid's feeder team Castilla for the past 18 months.

Zidane has a tough task if he is to deliver only Madrid's second league title in eight years with Real trailing league leaders Atletico Madrid by four points and Barcelona by two - having also played a game more than the European champions.

"This is a difficult but stimulating challenge, I want to take up the challenge and do my utmost to win titles," said Zidane.

"I will be satisfied with winning everything. Our objective is to win, we have two titles that we can win and we are going to try until the end of the season."

Zidane has signalled his intention to retain the star attacking trident of Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema up front and will have a fully-fit squad to choose from after captain Sergio Ramos returned to training on Thursday.

Despite their struggles under Benitez, Madrid have been lethal at home since suffering a 4-0 thrashing at the hands of Barcelona in November, scoring 25 goals in their last four games at the Bernabeu.

However, Deportivo's resurgence under former Madrid midfielder Victor Sanchez has been one of the revelations of the season. The Galicians have only lost three times in the league this season and have already taken points off Barcelona and Atletico.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday

Barcelona v Granada (1500), Getafe v Real Betis, Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao (1715), Real Madrid v Deportivo la Coruna (1930), Levante v Rayo Vallecano (2105)

Sunday

Villarreal v Sporting Gijon (1100), Real Sociedad v Valencia (1500), Eibar v Espanyol, Las Palmas v Malaga (1715), Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid (1930)



Real Madrid's new coach Zinedine Zidane (C) conducts a training session at the Valdebebas training ground yesterday. Zidane will take charge of Real Madrid for the first time today.

PHOTO: AFP

Aubameyang dethrones Toure

AFP, Abuja



Gabon and Borussia Dortmund star striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang on Thursday upstaged favourite Yaya Toure to win a first African Player of the Year Award.

In a vote of coaches and technical directors of Confederation of African Football (CAF) member-nations, Aubameyang tallied 143 points ahead of Manchester City and Ivory Coast star Toure, who scored 136 points and was bidding for a fifth successive award.

Swansea City and Ghana striker Andre Ayew was third on 112 points. It was sweet revenge for

Aubameyang after he lost the 2014 prize to Toure who scooped the prestigious individual accolade in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The 26-year-old Gabon skipper was in outstanding form for German Bundesliga club Dortmund in the year under review.

He has also had his best start to a season since arriving from Saint-Etienne in 2013, scoring 18 goals in 17 Bundesliga games and 27 in all competitions.

That kind of form has seen him linked with a winter transfer window move away from the Bundesliga with Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United all linked with him.

Frenchman Herve Renard, who led the Ivory Coast to the 2015 African

Cup of Nations, was named Coach of the Year.

This was his second such award after the 47-year-old also led Zambia to upset favourites Ivory Coast to lift a first-ever Nations Cup trophy in 2012.

Compatriot Bruno Metsu has also clinched two Coach of the Year Awards when he was in charge of Senegal in 2001 and 2002.

Ivory Coast were named Team of the Year.

Other award winners included Cameroon's Gaell Enganamouit (Women's Player of the Year), TP Mazembe (Club of the Year), Nigeria Under-23 midfielder Oghenekaro Etebo (Most Promising Talent) and Nigeria's Under-17 star Victor Osimhen (Youth Player of the Year).

TV journos assaulted

SPORTS REPORTER

A cameraperson and a car driver of private satellite television Channel 24 were admitted to Jessore Medical College Hospital yesterday night after being assaulted by local activists of Bangabandhu Sainik League, according to a Jessore correspondent.

The incident reportedly took place at around 8:45pm at the Chitra Mor (intersection) in the city after the car carrying the television channel's personnel, including cameraperson Ripon Hossain and driver Alauddin, had brushed against a motorcycle belonging to the Sainik League activists.

Jessore Kotowali Thana Police arrested Abdur Rahman Kakon, a local Bangabandhu Sainik League leader, from the scene.

Local journalists as well as those who had gone from Dhaka to cover the Bangabandhu Gold Cup staged a protest before high-ups of local police came to pacify them. The journalists have also threatened to boycott today's match of the football tournament unless the culprits are brought to book by 11:00am today.

Platini drops candidacy

REUTERS, Zurich



Banned European soccer boss Michel Platini has withdrawn his candidacy from the race for the presidency of soccer's scandal-plagued governing body FIFA, as he told French sports daily L'Equipe on Thursday.

Platini, the head of European soccer body UEFA, was handed an eight-year ban from the game along with outgoing FIFA president Sepp Blatter by the federation's independent Ethics Committee on Dec. 21.

Both have been engulfed by the worst corruption scandal in FIFA's history as the sport faces criminal investigations in Switzerland and the United States, where 41 soccer officials and sports entities have been indicted on corruption-related charges.

Former French international Platini has insisted he has done nothing wrong and was still hoping to win an appeal in time to have been allowed back in time for the election on Feb. 26, but said he had changed his mind.

"I withdraw my candidacy. I can no longer [go through with it]. I have neither the time, nor the means to go and see the voters, to meet people, and to fight with others," he said in an interview which L'Equipe published on its website.

"By withdrawing, I chose to fully focus on my defence on a case where there's no talk of corruption, falsification anymore, in which there's nothing left.

"It's a matter of schedule, but it's not just that. How do you win an election when you're prevented from campaigning?" Blatter and Platini were both banned over a payment of 2 million Swiss francs (\$2 million) made to the Frenchman by FIFA with Blatter's approval in 2011 for work done a decade earlier.

The committee said the payment, made at a time when Blatter was seeking re-election, lacked transparency and presented conflicts of interest, though both men denied wrongdoing.

Suarez handed 2-match ban

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona striker Luis Suarez has been given a two-match cup ban for using provocative language after their King's Cup clash against Espanyol.

"I am waiting for you, come here. You are a waste of space," Suarez said, according to the referee's report following the game.

Barcelona will appeal against the verdict, they said in a statement.

Costa, Oscar in training ground row

AFP, London

Chelsea stars Diego Costa and Oscar had to be separated by teammates as a training ground clash threatened to turn into an ugly brawl, according to reports.

Costa reportedly reacted angrily to an aggressive challenge from Oscar, who was said to be furious with a previous tough tackle from the notoriously temperamental Spain striker.

A newspaper claimed "the pair squared up and had to be pulled apart by their shocked teammates before it turned into a physical scrap".

Barca dominate team of the year

REUTERS, London



Players from European champions Barcelona made up nearly half of UEFA's Team of the Year which was revealed on Friday, while Cristiano Ronaldo made the lineup for a record 10th time.

Eight players from La Liga were included in the final XI, voted for by 7.2 million UEFA.com users from a 40-strong shortlist.

Lionel Messi, Dani Alves, Gerard Pique, Andres Iniesta and Neymar were the Barcelona players included, while Real Madrid provided Ronaldo, Sergio Ramos and James Rodriguez.

Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich had goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and David Alaba while the only player to make the cut from Italy's Serie A was Juventus's Paul Pogba, one of three players selected for the first time along with Neymar and Rodriguez.

England's Premier League was not represented, despite its enormous financial clout and stellar names such as Manchester City's Sergio Aguero and Yaya Toure, Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez and Chelsea's Eden Hazard and Diego Costa.

UEFA'S TEAM OF THE YEAR

Goalkeeper: Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich and Germany).
Defenders: David Alaba (Bayern Munich and Austria), Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid and Spain), Dani Alves (Barcelona and Brazil), Gerard Pique (Barcelona and Spain).
Midfielders: Andres Iniesta (Barcelona and Spain), Paul Pogba (Juventus and France), James Rodriguez (Real Madrid and Colombia).
Forwards: Lionel Messi (Barcelona and Argentina), Neymar (Barcelona and Brazil) and Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid and Portugal).

LEAVE THEM CURIOUS

SYMPHONY H250 - stunning looks and a striking price that makes everyone want to know more

SYMPHONY. H250

- Android 5.1 Lollipop
- 5" HD IPS Display
- 1.3 GHz Quad Core Processor
- 13 MP + 5 MP Camera
- 2 GB RAM + 16 GB ROM
- 2350 mAh Li-poly Battery

Price: Tr. 10,990

64 bit Processor

SYMPHONY. new experience

A Product of EDISON Group

www.facebook.com/symphonymobile Call center: 16272, 09666/00666 *Call center: 8am - 10pm (except Friday & Govt. holidays) www.symphony-mobile.com