

**CANDREVA ESCAPES FLARE**

Lazio and Italy midfielder Antonio Candreva narrowly escaped stepping on an exploding flare as angry Palermo fans vented their frustration in a trouble-hit Serie A fixture that was halted twice by the referee on Sunday. Sicilian side Palermo are battling to beat relegation to Italy's second division and tensions had already boiled over prior to the fixture when rival fans clashed outside the stadium. According to a report on Gazzetta dello Sport's website, several Palermo fans stabbed a Lazio fan as he sat in a bar. The incident sparked a mass brawl, with police called in to stop fans throwing missiles and flares at each other before arresting five local men. Lazio took a 2-0 lead by the 15th minute of the game thanks to a double from German veteran striker Miroslav Klose.

-AFP



**Real up against it**

AFP, Paris

At a time when the established powerhouses of the continent are apparently keen to change the format of the Champions League, there is just a possibility that the semifinal order will be greatly shaken up this season.

The quarterfinal, second legs this Tuesday and Wednesday see Real Madrid up against it and both holders Barcelona and Bayern Munich defending narrow leads while one of Manchester City or Paris Saint-Germain will break into the last four.

There is a growing feeling that the Champions League format has gone stale and needs a rejig, with the group stage and last 16 offering few surprises and the line-up in the latter stages changing little in recent years.

Bayern and Barcelona have each reached the semifinals at least in five of the last six seasons, while Real Madrid

are targeting a sixth consecutive appearance in the last four.

However, Zinedine Zidane's side must overcome a 2-0 first-leg deficit when they entertain German side Wolfsburg, who are halfway to a shock victory in their first ever quarterfinal at this level.

Madrid fans and the media in the Spanish capital are clinging to the

we also know the difficulty in overcoming a two-goal deficit," said the Frenchman.

"We are capable of anything, we have been capable of doing this less well this season, but we are also capable of doing great things."

Meanwhile, Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking fired a warning shot to his players, saying: "If it was the case that Real had underestimated us in the first leg, they definitely won't do that again."

If Wolfsburg prevail, there will still be one Spanish side in the semifinals as Barcelona defend a 2-1 first-leg lead when they face Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon.

Meanwhile, Guardiola's future employers Manchester City have a first semifinal in their sights after a 2-2 draw at Paris Saint-Germain last midweek.

The clubs, revolutionised in recent years by super-rich Middle Eastern owners, both dream of winning this competition but basic errors marred their encounter at the Parc des Princes.

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Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo controls the ball on his chest during a training session at the Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday on the eve of their do-or-die Champions League match against Wolfsburg.

PHOTO: AFP

**Kompany out of PSG clash**

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany is not fit enough to face Paris Saint-Germain in Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal second leg, manager Manuel Pellegrini revealed on Monday.

The Belgium centre-back, 30, has not played since injuring his calf against Dynamo Kiev last month and missed last week's first leg in Paris, which saw City score two valuable away goals in a 2-2 draw.

He took part in City's final pre-match training session at the club's City Football Academy complex, but Pellegrini said that he would not feature against PSG.

"Vincent Kompany is not 100 percent," Kompany told his pre-match press conference, adding that it was "not possible" for him to play.

Kompany's fellow centre-back Nicolas Otamendi did not take part in full training, having hurt his ankle in Saturday's 2-1 win over West Bromwich Albion, but Pellegrini said he would be able to play.

"Nico twisted his ankle in the last game," said the Chilean. "He has some pain, but it's not dangerous."

Playmaker David Silva, who missed the West Brom game with an ankle problem, is also available, but Raheem Sterling remains absent with a groin injury and Samir Nasri is ineligible.

City are bidding to reach the Champions League semifinals for the first time, while French champions PSG graced the last four once in 1995.

**Di Maria out to exorcise ghosts**

AFP, London



Angel di Maria will attempt to exorcise some personal ghosts when he returns to Manchester for Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League quarterfinal second leg at Manchester City on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old Argentina international endured a miserable time in the city with Manchester United last season, with a traumatic burglary expediting his departure at the end of the campaign.

But whereas his position was constantly chopped and changed by United manager Louis van Gaal, he has benefited from being consistently selected on the wing at PSG, which has yielded a stirring return to form.

"It's not nice to say certain things, but it's more that they didn't let me settle properly than I couldn't settle," Di Maria said of his experience at United in a recent BBC interview.

"I started a game in one position, then the next game in another. I scored goals playing in one position, then suddenly the next game I was picked to play in a different position."

Hailing PSG head coach Laurent Blanc, Di Maria added: "From the beginning he was clear where he wanted to play me and has never changed his mind."

"He gave me total freedom to move where I needed to move. I'm very happy here and it wasn't the case over there."

Handed United's fabled number seven shirt after a club-record £59.7 million (\$84.3 million, 74 million euros) transfer from Real Madrid, Di Maria could scarcely have arrived at Old Trafford amid greater fanfare.

But despite a promising start, including a delicious lob at Leicester City, Manchester would not prove a happy home for the man nicknamed 'Fideo' (Noodle) on account of his skinny frame.

Van Gaal continually changed his role, even fielding him as a lone striker at one stage, and a succession of injuries prevented him from finding any rhythm.

The nadir arrived in late January last year when a group of burglars armed with scaffolding poles attempted to smash their way into Di Maria's luxurious home while he, his wife and one-year-old daughter cowered inside.

Di Maria promptly moved his family into a hotel and with Van Gaal admitting to feeling concerned about his star recruit's state of mind, the Argentine's form never recovered.

Sent off for manhandling the referee in an FA Cup defeat by Arsenal in March, he was unable to win his place in the team back and spent the rest of the season on the bench.

He left United having scored four goals and supplied 10 assists in 32 appearances. With PSG he has scored nine more goals and provided three more assists, despite having only played in six more games.

Aligned on the right flank in an attacking triumvirate completed by Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani, Di Maria has freedom to roam infield and has looked a far happier player in the French capital.

"You have to be intelligent to roam around like Angel does," says Blanc. "In particular, he has that ability to accelerate the tempo and an excellent vision of the game."

Man of the match in Real's victory over Atletico Madrid in the 2014 Champions League final, Di Maria was signed to give PSG's first XI an injection of the know-how required to win the competition.

He was decisive in the last-16 victory over Chelsea, delivering assists for Cavani and Ibrahimovic in either leg of a 4-2 aggregate success, but failed to sparkle in last week's 2-2 draw with City.

Ironically, given his complaints about his treatment at United, the suspension of Blaise Matuidi and injuries to Marco Verratti and Javier Pastore could see him moved into central midfield at the Etihad Stadium.

But should he inspire PSG to reach the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 1995, the city of Manchester will no longer represent quite such a stain on his CV.

**Messi stays top paid footballer**

AFP, Paris

Argentina and Barcelona star Lionel Messi remains the world's highest paid footballer with an annual income of 74 million euros (\$84.3 million, £59.3 million), according to a report set to appear in Tuesday's edition of France Football magazine.

Messi's earnings in 2015 rose by nine million euros compared to the previous figures, keeping the five-time Ballon d'Or winner ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo (67.4m euros) and Neymar (43.5m euros) as the top three stayed unchanged for the third year running.

France Football's estimates were based on players' pre-tax salaries, sponsorship revenues and various bonuses, it added.

Angel Di Maria was the top-earning player in France with 24 million euros following his off-season move from Manchester United, with the Argentine narrowly ahead of Paris Saint-Germain team-mates Thiago Silva and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

However, figures in France only accounted for player wages and contract bonuses, according to the report.

Despite his sacking from Chelsea in December, Jose Mourinho was the highest earning coach on 24 million euros, with Pep Guardiola and Fabio Capello rounding out the top three.

**Federer backs Totti**

AFP, Milan



Roger Federer has offered his backing to embattled Roma icon Francesco Totti, claiming both sportsmen belong to a special breed of athlete and should be protected, like pandas.

Uncertainty over the future of 39-year-old Roma legend Totti, who steered the Giallorossi to their third and last title in 2001, has overshadowed the club's Serie A campaign all season.

Now in his 23rd season at Roma, one-club man Totti is being pushed towards the exit door after an injury-hit season that has seen him make only a handful of appearances for Luciano Spalletti's side.

Roma are stalling on offering Totti a 24th and final year's contract, reportedly in the hope he hangs up his boots to take a director's role at the club.

But Federer believes Totti should be allowed to decide when to quit the game. The 17-time Grand Slam winner is a long-time admirer of Totti, who regularly meets with the Swiss star when he comes to watch him play at the Rome Masters event every June.

Asked jokingly if he and Totti should be given protection from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Federer told Corriere della Sera: "It's a good joke, but there's some truth in it because, in a certain sense, we belong to another species."

"Francesco and I incarnate our respective sports. What he has done for football is unrivalled. He's an example, a contemporary icon."

Speaking ahead of the start of the Monte Carlo Masters, Federer added: "No one should tell you when to stop, it's such an intimate and personal decision."

"If he wants to keep on going, I'm right behind him. With me, he's always been super nice. This year, if I see him, I'll be asking him for some restaurant tips."

Roma sit in third place in Serie A, 13 points adrift of leaders and champions Juventus and seven points behind Napoli ahead of hosting Bologna later Monday.

But whether Totti plays or not remains to be seen.

The iconic captain fell foul of Spalletti six weeks ago after claiming he deserved more playing time and should be shown more respect.

Spalletti's firm reaction did little to help Totti's cause.

"He's Roma's biggest ever player, but it's my duty to make sure there is a balance in the dressing room," said Spalletti.

With 244 goals in Serie A, Totti is only second to retired, all-time record-holder Silvio Piola (274).

A World Cup winner with Italy in 2006, Totti has won two Italian Cups with Roma but has suffered finishing runner-up in the league an incredible eight times.

**Bravo, Finch lead Lions to easy win**

STAR SPORT DESK



A brilliant innings by Gujarat Lions opener Aaron Finch led the Lions to a comfortable five-wicket win over Kings XI Punjab at Chandigarh yesterday.

With the game taking place in Punjab, fans present at the stadium were hoping for a good finish by the home side. And for a moment it seemed as though they were going to get their wish after Punjab, riding on Murali Vijay and Manan Vohra's 78-run opening stand posted a decent 161.

However, the score was absolutely gulped by the Lions, courtesy of a brilliant knock from the Australian Finch. He smacked 12 fours during his knock and laid the foundation for Gujarat. By the time he eventually got stumped in the 12th over, the Lions were cruising at 117 for 3.

He seemed a bit angry and threw his gloves down while entering the dressing room, for not having been able to finish the game. However, there were no jitters as a calm Dinesh Karthik, scored a 26-ball 41 to ensure that Gujarat go home.

Despite the ease with which they chased down the total, at the start, it didn't seem as though it was going to be that easy. Finch lost his partners early in the game. The first to depart was New Zealand's Brendon McCullum. He was stumped in the very first over.

What followed was a half-century stand between Suresh Raina and Finch. The duo put on 51 runs in 4.3 overs and turned the game around. Raina smacked a 9-ball 20, with two sixes and a four. After Raina got out, Kartik joined Finch and the hitting continued. Eventually, they cruised home in 17.4 overs.

Earlier, a four-wicket haul from West Indies allrounder Dwayne Bravo ensured that Punjab didn't run away with the game following their brilliant opening stand. Bravo mixed his deliveries well and finished with figures of 4 for 22. It was Ravindra Jadeja who broke Punjab's opening stand in the ninth over, but from there on it was all Bravo. He bowled both David Miller and Glenn Maxwell and then took two more to further trouble Punjab.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KINGS XI: 161 for 6 (Vijay 42, Vohra 38; Bravo 4-22, Jadeja 2-30)

GUJARAT LIONS: 162 for 5 (Finch 74, Karthik 41 not out; Sandeep 1-21)

Result: Gujarat Lions won by five wickets

**Leaks reveal Neymar's €45.9m deal**

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona star Neymar will make a minimum 45.9 million euros from his five-year contract with the European champions, football whistleblowing site Football Leaks revealed on Monday.

The Brazilian's bonus incentives deal also commits the 24-year-old to learning the local Catalan language.

The controversy over the transfer led Barca to already make certain figures from Neymar's playing contract public in a bid for transparency in 2014.

**Double crown for Dipu Lal**

SPORTS REPORTER

Dipu Lal earned a double crown in the Independence Day Runner Open Tennis Tournament clinching the men's singles and doubles titles at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday.

Dipu Lal won the men's singles title beating Amol Roy 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 in the final while he shared the doubles title with Anwar Hossain beating Mahmudul Haque and Hasibul Haque pair in 7-6, 3-6, 10-8 in the final.

Afrana Islam Prity won the women's singles title beating Popy Akhter 6-3, 6-4 in the women's final. The women's doubles title went to Eshita and Joya, who beat Prity and Laxmi in straight sets.



Manchester City striker Wilfried Bony (C) kicks the ball kung-fu style during a training session in Manchester yesterday. Manchester City will take on PSG in a Champions League clash tonight.

PHOTO: AFP