

## Dubai cop in Leo's passport storm released

AFP, Dubai

A Dubai court of appeal acquitted on Tuesday a policeman jailed one month for posting a video showing Lionel Messi's passport on social media, local media reported.

The man was jailed in February for breaching the Argentine footballer's privacy and for having "abused the telecommunications system".

But he was acquitted after his lawyer appealed the verdict, arguing that his client's action caused no harm to the Barcelona striker, The National daily reported.

The lawyer also said that the officer got the permission of Messi's business manager to shoot the video.

The policeman had pleaded guilty and admitted he was wrong to have uploaded the post of Messi's passport to Snapchat.

The incident occurred in December at Dubai airport, where Messi had landed to attend the Globe Soccer Awards, at which he received the best player award.

The Emirati policeman wanted a photo of himself with the footballer, but was told the star was tired from the flight.

"I then went to the passport control desk and noticed that Messi's passport had been left there, so I picked it up and shot a video of myself while holding it," The National quoted the policeman as saying.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and midfielder James Rodriguez fight for the ball during training at the Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday on the eve of their La Liga match against Villarreal.

PHOTO: AFP

# Barca on brink of implosion

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona must reverse an amazing loss of form to win all five of their remaining La Liga games to be assured of retaining their title, starting with a trip to Deportivo la Coruna on Wednesday.

The Catalan giants have taken just one point from their last four La Liga games and lost four of their last five in all competitions having previously enjoyed a 39-game unbeaten run stretching back six months.

Only Barca's superior head-to-head record separates them from their Champions League conquerors Atletico Madrid at the top of the table with Real Madrid lurking just

a point further back after a run of seven straight league wins.

All three face tough tests on a Wednesday evening of action that will go a long way to settling the title with the fixture list for all three favourable in the final four games.

Barca are up first as they travel to Galicia in a desperate search to snap their worst run of league defeats in 13 years.

Coach Luis Enrique and key defender Gerard Pique insisted Barca can and will win the league if they play like they did against Valencia on Sunday despite slipping to a 2-1 defeat thanks to a mixture of bad luck, poor finishing and a brilliant goalkeeping display by Diego Alves.

"If there is a team capable of doing it and much more given what they have done, it is this

Barca," said Enrique.

"We don't have any margin for error, but I prefer to lose like this than win playing badly," added Pique.

"Football is like this, sometimes it is marvellous, sometimes it is so cruel."

However, Pique's absence at the heart of Barca's defence through suspension will be a huge loss for Enrique with Marc Bartra expected to cover in the absence of Jeremy Mathieu and Thomas Vermaelen.

Atletico face a daunting trip to Athletic Bilbao with the Basques still eyeing Champions League football next season having moved to within six points of fourth-placed Villarreal at the weekend.

A 2-1 victory at San Mames propelled Atletico towards the title two years ago and Diego Simeone's

men could be further boosted by the absence of Bilbao's two top scorers this season in Aritz Aduriz and Inaki Williams through injury.

"We have the possibility to play an important game in Bilbao and continue competing in the four games left afterwards," said Simeone when quizzed on Atletico's title chances.

"It will be difficult, but we have to do what the schedule demands of us and that is win, win and win again."

Real will have the advantage of knowing what Barca and Atletico have done when they kick-off in the late game at home to Villarreal.

Zinedine Zidane could afford the luxury of resting the likes of Sergio Ramos, Casemiro and Luka Modric for Saturday's 5-1 rout of Getafe on Saturday with all three expected to return.

## Spurs maintain title charge

AFP, Stoke-on-Trent



Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino believes his side delivered the "perfect" message to Premier League leaders Leicester City after an emphatic 4-0 win at Stoke City saw them close the gap at the top of the table to five points.

Leicester's 2-2 draw at home to West Ham on Sunday gave Spurs the opportunity to reduce the deficit with four games remaining and they seized it in commanding style with a fourth win in five matches thanks to two goals each from the England duo of Harry Kane and Dele Alli.

"This is our dream. We need to believe," said Pochettino, who is attempting to lead the Londoners to their first English championship since 1961.

"It is good for the competition that we are in behind to try and put pressure on Leicester. I feel very proud.

"Our supporters were fantastic and they feel proud of us. I think it is an exciting moment for the club," the Argentinian added.

"In football all can happen and we need to be there. If Leicester fail we need to be there. That's what we are trying to do, put the pressure on Leicester.

"The most important thing is the performance we showed was perfect. It is a big signal we are there waiting and fighting," the former Southampton manager explained.

Tottenham have scored 13 goals and conceded just one in racking up 13 points out of the last possible 15.

Kane, who took his season's tally to 27 goals, posted a social media image of a pack of lions closing in on their prey after Leicester had dropped two points against West Ham.

"It is a good thing because it shows how this group is, how our squad is," said Pochettino.

"We can win or not, but the desire and passion we show and how we enjoy the game is fantastic."

Kane opened the scoring at the Britannia Stadium with his 23rd league goal of the season, overtaking Leicester striker Jamie Vardy's tally in the race for the league's golden boot, and believes the Foxes can still be caught.

The in-form striker, 22, said: "We are not going anywhere. We scored four but could have had six or seven. It is one of our best performances all season but that's what we can do."

"We are ready to put the pressure on Leicester. We think we can do it. Leicester are five points ahead but we have closed the gap, that's all we could do."

Stoke have now won only one of their last six games as their season runs out of momentum with their hopes of qualifying for next season's Europa League almost gone.

Mark Hughes, the Stoke manager, paid tribute to Tottenham and believes they can win the title.



Novak Djokovic poses with his Laureus World Sportsman of the Year trophy at the 2016 Laureus World Sports awards ceremony in Berlin on Monday.

## 6 arrested for IPL betting

PTI, Sambhal

Six persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in betting in IPL matches, police said on Tuesday.

Ravi Kumar, Govinda, Pradeep Kumar, Arun Kumar, Vikram and Monu Raghav were arrested on Monday during an IPL match, they said.

Four mobile phones, a TV set and Rs 2000 cash were seized from the spot, police said, adding, a case has been registered.

## Hastings out of IPL

AFP, New Delhi

Australian all-rounder John Hastings has been ruled out of the rest of the Indian Premier League with an ankle injury, raising concerns about his fitness for the upcoming tour of the West Indies.

Hastings played two matches for his IPL side Kolkata Knight Riders before flying back home after picking up the injury during a practice session.

"He bowled through a fair bit of pain during the game (last week against the Mumbai Indians)," Simon Katich, Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach, told reporters late Monday.

## Goal-line tech at Euro 2016

AFP, Paris

UEFA have announced that Hawk-Eye will provide the goal-line technology (GLT) at the European Championship in France in June and July.

European football's governing body approved the use of the technology in January and have now chosen Hawk-Eye.

Hawk-Eye (GLT), which deploys seven cameras in each goal, is already used in the English Premier League.

## Laureus double for tennis

AFP, Berlin

Tennis stars Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams won the Laureus World Sports Awards at a gala in Berlin on Monday.

The 28-year-old Serb Djokovic won sportsman of the year for the second successive year coming ahead of football's Lionel Messi and the sprinter Usain Bolt after winning three Grand Slams in 2015 at Australia, Wimbledon and the US Open and also picking up six Masters titles.

Williams won her third Laureus award for a similar feat having won the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon before falling short in the semi-finals at the US Open.

The American came out ahead of Ethiopian titleholder, the middle distance runner Genzebe Dibaba and skier Anna Fenninger of Austria.

There was also joy for New Zealand's Rugby Union World Cup winning side the All Blacks, who beat Australia 34-17 in the Twickenham final.

## FA charges Vardy

AFP, London



Jamie Vardy has been charged with improper conduct following the Leicester striker's angry reaction to his red card against West Ham, the Football Association announced on Monday.

Vardy was sent off by referee Jonathan Moss after earning a second booking for diving in an unsuccessful attempt to win a penalty in the second half of Sunday's 2-2 draw at the King Power Stadium.

The England international appeared to deliberately nudge his legs into West Ham's Angelo Ogbonna before throwing himself to the turf and when Moss flashed a red card, Vardy reacted by pointing and shouting angrily at the official.

Leicester have also been charged after their players' angry reactions to the awarding of a late penalty for Wes Morgan's shove on Winston Reid.

"Leicester City's Jamie Vardy has been charged with improper conduct for his behaviour following his second-half dismissal against West Ham United on Sunday 17 April 2016," an FA statement read.

"Leicester have also been charged for failing to control their players following the awarding of an 83rd-minute penalty to West Ham.

"Both the player and the club have until 6pm on Thursday 21 April 2016 to reply to their charge."

Vardy is due to be suspended for Sunday's home game against Swansea, but the ban could now be extended if he is found guilty of the charge.

That would be a major blow as Premier League leaders Leicester have just four games left as they bid to hold onto their lead at the top and win the English title for the first time.

Chelsea forward Diego Costa was sent off against Everton recently and served an additional one-game ban after admitting an FA charge of improper conduct following a clash with Gareth Barry and a rant at the referee after the dismissal.

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