

PAYET PACKED HIS TROPHIES

West Ham star Dimitri Payet was so confident of success at the club's awards night last week, he brought a suitcase to the ceremony to take home his trophy haul. It proved a wise decision too, with the Frenchman picking up five awards including the Player of the Year, Players' Player of the Year, Goal of the Year, Signing of the Season and Golden Boot. Payet's team-mates shared his confidence that he was in for a big night, Andy Carroll admits, but they did not expect to see the midfielder come prepared. "One of the lads said, 'Why have you brought that suitcase in?'" Carroll revealed. "And Dimi said, 'Well that's for all my awards!' We all knew he



PHOTO: REUTERS

Leicester City players and officials erupt with joy as they celebrate with the coveted Barclays Premier League trophy as they are crowned champions for the first time in their 132-year history at the King Power Stadium yesterday.

Leicester coronated

AFP, Leicester
Leicester City captain Wes Morgan hoisted the Premier League trophy aloft to a burst of pyrotechnics on Saturday as one of sport's most captivating stories reached its giddy climax. Following a 3-1 win over Everton in their final home game, the 5,000-1 outsiders, whose exploits have captivated fans around the world, got their hands on the prized trophy at an exultant King Power Stadium. After the players had been called up one by one to a hastily constructed on-pitch plinth -- the biggest cheers reserved for star players Jamie Vardy, Riyad Mahrez and N'Golo Kante -- Morgan was handed the trophy by competition winner Steve Worthy, a lifelong Leicester fan. The club's inspirational manager Claudio Ranieri was at Morgan's side as the Jamaica international centre-back raised the trophy above his head, to a backdrop of fireworks and spiraling blue and gold streamers.

The 25kg trophy was decorated with ribbons of blue, for Leicester, and yellow, representing the royal house of Thailand, home country of club owner Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, who looked on admiringly. As the players embarked on a lap of honour, Leicester's fans, who saw their team narrowly avoid relegation last season, burst into a chorus of "Leicester till I die!". It was followed by "Barcelona, we're coming for you!", in a nod to next season's hotly anticipated Champions League campaign. Vardy scored a brace and missed a penalty in the victory over Everton, which took Ranieri's men 10 points clear of second-place Tottenham Hotspur ahead of the London club's game with Southampton on Sunday. Banned for Leicester's two previous games, Vardy struck in each half, with Andy King also on target, and would have had a hat-trick had he not blazed a second-half penalty over the bar. Prior to kick-off, fans were treated to a performance by renowned Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, who prompted roars of approval from the flag-waving

home support by removing his jacket to reveal a blue Leicester shirt as he sang. Leicester play their final game of the season next Sunday at outgoing champions Chelsea, Ranieri's former club, before an open-top bus parade in Leicester on May 16. Tottenham's 2-2 draw at Chelsea last Monday, which gave Leicester the title, sparked a week of celebrations in the city and fans arrived at the stadium several hours before kick-off on Saturday to drink in the moment. Supporters formed a snake-like queue for blue team jerseys stamped with a gold and white "Premier League Champions 2015-16" sleeve badge, while souvenir scarves, flags and programmes were eagerly snapped up from stalls around the ground. Bright sunshine gave way to heavy spring downpours as kick-off approached, but the atmosphere inside the stadium remained fervent. The sell-out 32,140 crowd witnessed a stirring pre-match performance by Bocelli, who fulfilled a recent promise to his compatriot Ranieri by singing 'Nessun Dorma' and 'Time to Say Goodbye'.

Bayern's 4th in a row

AFP, Berlin
Robert Lewandowski netted twice as Bayern Munich became the first club to win four German league titles in a row on Saturday with a 2-1 victory at Ingolstadt. The result means Bayern have now won the Bundesliga title in each of Pep Guardiola's three years in charge in Munich before he leaves to coach Manchester City next season. Second-placed Borussia Dortmund's 1-0 defeat at Eintracht Frankfurt left Bayern an insurmountable eight points clear at the top of the table with one game left. Bayern's title triumph comes just four days after the heartbreak of their Champions League semi-final exit at the hands of Atletico Madrid. Bayern took the lead at Ingolstadt's Audi-Sport Park when Franck Ribery was fouled by home captain Marvin Matip in the area and Lewandowski drilled home the resulting spot-kick on 15 minutes. The Poland hot-shot, the Bundesliga's leading scorer, then added his second when he drilled home Xabi Alonso's superb pass

from a tight angle for his 29th league goal of the season. Ingolstadt's Australia striker Mathew Leckie was denied by Manuel Neuer but the hosts pulled a goal back on 42 minutes when Moritz Hartmann converted a penalty after a push from behind from Alonso. Meanwhile, Dortmund suffered their first league defeat of 2016 as they lost at relegation-threatened Frankfurt, who climbed out of the bottom three. Eintracht took a deserved lead when Stefan Aigner headed home a cross from Japan's Makoto Hasebe on 14 minutes after Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Buerki had already pulled off two reflex saves. Fourth-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach are set to qualify for next season's Champions League after their 2-1 comeback win at home to Bayer Leverkusen as Andre Hahn scored both of their goals. Sixth-placed Hertha Berlin lost ground in their fight for the Champions League when they lost 2-1 at home to Darmstadt, whose striker Sandro Wagner scored the winner against his ex-club and was then sent off for a second booking. Schalke stay on course for a Europa League place after their 1-1 draw at home to Augsburg.

Verratti blow for Italy

AFP, Paris
Italian midfielder Marco Verratti was Friday ruled out of Euro 2016 after his Paris Saint-Germain club revealed he will undergo groin surgery on May 16. Verratti's absence from the June 10-July 10 tournament in France is a major blow for Italy coach Antonio Conte with the 23-year-old joining Juventus's Claudio Marchisio on the sidelines. Marchisio was ruled out of the Euros with a left knee injury and won't play again until September. "It's always his groin problem, he has made progress but he is still feeling some discomfort," said PSG coach Laurent Blanc. "We do not want to take any risks with Marco. He is an exceptional player. He has had the problem for two and a half months."

Boro strike it rich

AFP, London
Middlesbrough struck it rich as they were promoted to the Premier League after a 1-1 draw in their £170 million (\$246 million) shoot-out with Brighton and Hove Albion on Saturday. Aitor Karanka's side survived a nervous encounter at the Riverside Stadium to end their seven-year exile from the top flight and bank the huge cash windfall due to Premier League clubs as a result of the new television contracts that kick in next season. Needing just one point from their last game of the Championship season to guarantee they would finish above third-placed Brighton on goal difference, second-placed Middlesbrough took the lead through Christian Stuani's first-half strike. Dale Stephens equalised for Brighton after the break, but the midfielder was sent off moments later and Middlesbrough held on to spark wild celebrations on Teesside.

Title on the line

AFP, Barcelona
Barcelona coach Luis Enrique insisted his side won't be distracted by local rivals Espanyol's desire to dethrone their La Liga title chances in the Catalan derby on Sunday. Luis Enrique's men hold the slenderest of advantages in the title race with two games remaining as they lead Atletico Madrid thanks to their better head-to-head record while Real Madrid lie a point behind in third. In eerily similar circumstances Barca were embroiled in a three-way title race with Sevilla and Real when Espanyol travelled to the Camp Nou on the penultimate day of the season nine years ago. Then, a last-minute equaliser from Raul Tamudo, which came to be known as the "Tamudazo", snatched the title from Barca's grasp and allowed Real to be crowned champions the following weekend. "The Tamudazo doesn't interest me at all. I don't remember what happened four weeks ago let alone nine years," Luis Enrique said on Saturday. "I am only worried about being better than Espanyol. They are different games. It is a derby where the league is in play so it is even more transcendental. It is our last game at home and we have

to go for it from the off." Barca's once commanding nine-point lead was whittled down due to three consecutive league defeats last month. However, they have scored 16 goals without reply in winning their last three matches and the coach believes his side have shown the character needed to turn the situation around and retain their title. "I don't see there being a delicate situation here. The only thing is that we have lost our advantage. In the first three games we have won 8-0, 6-0 and 2-0. We have lost the advantage because our rivals keep winning, but the league is won in 38 games not in 30, nor in 10." Indeed, Barca could even be proclaimed champions on Sunday if they win, Atletico lose at already relegated Levante and Real drop points at home to Valencia. Both Atletico and Real booked their places in the Champions League final in midweek and Luis Enrique is hoping for a European hangover for the sides from the Spanish capital to avoid Barca needing to win at a Granada side fighting for their lives next weekend. "Tomorrow we have the chance to be champions. Why not? We are the only ones with that possibility," he added. "I am only interested in tomorrow's game. We will then see what happens and if Granada are safe or not. We are concentrating on Espanyol and the chance to win three points which could make us champions."

Bucharest player dies on the field

REUTERS, Bucharest
The Romanian Football Federation (FRF) has postponed all soccer this weekend following the death of Dinamo Bucharest and Cameroon midfielder Patrick Ekeng on Friday. Ekeng, 26, collapsed on the field after suffering a suspected heart attack shortly after coming on as a 62nd-minute substitute during a league match against Viitorul Constanta and was pronounced dead two hours after the incident. The FRF said in a statement on Saturday that all matches in the top three divisions, the junior championship, futsal (indoor football) and women's games that were scheduled to take place between May 7 and 9 were postponed. The Romanian Cup final between Dinamo and CFR Cluj, which was due to be played on Tuesday, was also postponed until May 17.

Andy ends Rafa run

AFP, Madrid
Defending champion Andy Murray registered just his second ever win over Rafael Nadal on clay to reach the Madrid Masters final 7-5, 6-4 on Saturday. Murray also beat Nadal on home soil to win his first ever Masters event on clay in Madrid last year. The Scot will face world number one Novak Djokovic or Japan's Kei Nishikori in Sunday's final. Defeat brings to an end Nadal's 13-match winning run on the European clay this season after looking back to his best on his favoured surface with victories in Monte Carlo and Barcelona in recent weeks. Nadal had come from a set down to beat Murray in the semi-finals of Monte Carlo and was forced to try to do the same again as the Scot edged a tight first set. The world number two surrendered a 5-2 lead, but responded perfectly by breaking the Nadal serve to love with a searing forehand return winner to take the set 7-5. The second set was a tale of break points as Murray saved eight of the nine he faced and pounced on his two opportunities to leave the home crowd silenced. Nadal missed out on three break points in the opening game of the set and two more as Murray held to lead 3-2. Murray then moved to within a game of



Andy Murray pumps his fist after beating Rafael Nadal in the Madrid Open semifinals at the Caja Magica sports complex yesterday. PHOTO: AFP