

DOUBLE DELIGHT FOR DE LAET

Saturday was a day to remember for Ritchie de Laet, who managed the unprecedented feat of winning the Premier League and securing promotion to the Premier League on the exact same afternoon. The Belgian full-back played 12 times for Leicester City before moving to Middlesbrough on loan in January, where he made a further 10 appearances -- thus entitling him to both a Premier League winner's medal and a similar trinket for tying up automatic promotion to the league he'd just won! "It's crazy, a great day for me," De Laet told BBC Radio 5 Live after Boro's promotion-clinching draw against Brighton. "It's crazy, I'm still a Leicester player so I'll be on my way to catch the



Barca one win from title

Madrid up to second as Atletico lose to Levante

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona are one win away from retaining their La Liga title after Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar all scored as they thrashed Espanyol 5-0 in the Catalan derby on Sunday.

Real Madrid moved into second place, a point behind Barca with one game remaining, as they racked up an 11th straight La Liga win, 3-2 over Valencia, thanks to two goals from Cristiano Ronaldo.

However, Atletico Madrid's title hopes are over as they lost 2-1 at already relegated Levante.

Barca will be champions with victory at Granada next weekend, who crucially are now mathematically safe from relegation after a 4-1 win at Sevilla.

Real Madrid travel to Deportivo La Coruna on the final day of the season.

Elsewhere, Sporting Gijon remain out of the relegation zone thanks to

their superior head-to-head record with Getafe after the two drew 1-1.

Rayo Vallecano also remain in the bottom three after losing 2-1 at Real Sociedad.

Barca were out to avoid a repeat of their title collapse in 2007 when a last-minute equaliser from Espanyol at the Camp Nou on the penultimate day of the season handed Real the title.

The world club champions got off to a perfect start when Messi curled a delightful free-kick into the top corner.

Ivan Rakitic had a second ruled out for offside minutes later as Barca tried to kill the game off as early as possible.

However, they had to wait until seven minutes into the second half for the second as Messi teed up Suarez to fire high past Pau Lopez.

Suarez maintained his four-goal lead over Ronaldo as the league's top scorer as he powered home his 56th goal of the season from Neymar's corner.

A howler from Lopez handed Rafinha an open goal to tap home his first goal since suffering a serious knee injury at the start of the season, before Neymar rounded off the scoring.

Madrid shrugged off the absences of Gareth Bale and Luka Modric through injury to move above Atletico for the first time in 2016 with victory over Valencia.

Ronaldo missed a huge chance to open the scoring, but he made amends with his next opportunity moments later when he fired into the far corner for his 48th goal of the season.

LA LIGA TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	PTS
Barcelona	37	28	4	5	88
Real Madrid	37	27	6	4	87
Atletico	37	27	4	6	85

RESULTS

Real Madrid	3 - 2	Valencia
Ronaldo 26, 58, Benzema 42		Rodrigo 55, Andre Gomes 81
Barcelona	5 - 0	Espanyol
Messi 8, Suarez 52, 61, Rafa 74, Neymar 83		
Levante	2 - 1	Atletico Madrid
Casadesu 30, Rossi 90		Torres 2



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi opened the floodgates against Espanyol yesterday, scoring the opener from a perfectly-placed free-kick, before his team went on to score four more.

PHOTO: AFP



Novak Djokovic claimed a record 29th Masters title in Madrid yesterday, defeating Andy Murray for the 12th time in their last 13 meetings in the Madrid Masters final.

PHOTO: AFP

Djokovic fends off Murray

AFP, Madrid



Novak Djokovic claimed a record 29th Masters title when he defeated Andy Murray 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 on Sunday to win the Madrid crown for a second time.

The world number one captured his fifth trophy of 2016 as he defeated defending champion Murray for the 12th time in their last 13 matches to stand at an overwhelming 23-9 in their career head-to-head.

Djokovic has defeated the world number two Scot in all four of their clay-court meetings as he added the 2016 Madrid trophy to the title he earned five years ago in the Spanish capital.

Murray saved a match point in the eighth game of the deciding set and another in the 13-minute ninth game while also seeing the Serb save seven break points.

The 28-year-old Djokovic has now won 33 of the past 35 sets against top 10 opponents -- a stretch of 15 matches.

He's also won five of the past six and 10 of the past 14 Masters titles.

The Belgrade native won 912,900 euros and victory in Rome next week will make him the first man to win \$100 million in prize money.

Murray will fall to three in the world in the new rankings behind Roger Federer after failing to defend his title.

Djokovic, who has now gone past Rafael Nadal's record of 28 Masters trophies, had to fight hard for a victory in over two hours on Sunday against Murray, who appeared out of contention after losing the opening set in half an hour.

"I've been three years away from Madrid and I missed it," said Djokovic, who last played the event in 2013.

Murray, who saved a first match point with a 10th ace and played his role in a dramatic final game, paid tribute to the rival who has dominated their career series since their first ever meeting in Madrid a decade ago.

"It was a fantastic win for Novak, congratulations to him. I've had a lot of success here the last two years," said Murray.

"It's a shame I could not come back and defend the title -- it wasn't to be

today. But Novak showed that he is doing great things."

Djokovic admitted that he just scraped to the win in a tight match where he fired 25 winners and the same number of unforced errors while breaking four times.

"It was a great match to be a part of," the winner said. "Congratulations to Andy for a big fight. It was all decided by just a few points at the end."

"I don't know how I dug my way out, but that's how it happens when you play against one of the best in the world. I'm just happy to have overcome this challenge."

Djokovic began the final on a tear, sweeping the opening set in 30 minutes only to see Murray rise to the occasion by winning the second.

The third was a dogfight with six deuces in the final game, with Djokovic winning on his third match point.

"It was such an intense match," Djokovic said. "I started well, but had a slow start in the second. Andy also changed his game to take advantage."

"The third set was very even, I just managed to stay tough."

Pellegrini held on Etihad adieu

AFP, London

Manuel Pellegrini could not conceal his disappointment after his final home game as Manchester City manager ended in a damaging 2-2 draw with Arsenal on Sunday.

The result means that City's hopes of finishing in the Premier League's top four and qualifying for the Champions League are no longer in their own hands, raising the prospect that Pellegrini's successor, Pep Guardiola, will start life at the club in the Europa League.

Addressing the Etihad Stadium, Pellegrini told fans: "It was not the way we wanted to finish the season. We wanted to qualify for the final of the Champions League and win our game today."

"But for me they were three unforgettable years. So all I can say to the fans is thanks for all. I will never forget you."

'I almost quit coaching'

IANIS, Leicester



New English Premier League champions Leicester City's coach Claudio Ranieri has revealed that a tough start to his career almost led him to quit coaching because of too much politics.

Ranieri secured his first top-tier title this season after Leicester City's remarkable campaign saw them crowned football champions of England.

However, the Italian admitted he came close to giving up early in his career following tough stints with Italian football clubs Vigor Lamezia and then Puteolana.

"At the beginning at Puteolana and Lamezia, I was top of the league without losing any matches but there was something strange that I didn't like - I don't want to tell you what - and I said: 'Bye bye, I'm going home.' And I left," Ranieri was quoted as saying by goal.com on Saturday.

"The second year started more or less the same. I took a little team Puteolana in Serie C without players: I played one match with 10 players, if I remember well, not 11."

"But you know, something strange arrived and they sacked me. And I said: 'This is not my job, I love the pitch, I love football but there is so much politics and I am not a politician. I'm a clear man.' So I said: 'It's not my job.'"

Ranieri arrived at Leicester in summer 2015 after a disappointing stint in Greece, where he was sacked as national team boss after just four months, following a home loss to the lowly Faroe Islands.

But the 64-year-old admitted the lowest point of his managerial career came when he took over at Valencia for the second time in 2004, who had just been crowned La Liga champions and UEFA Cup winners under Rafael Benitez.

"Somebody said to me 'the worst moment was Greece' but no, the worst moment was the second year in Valencia," Ranieri said.

"I said to the owner and sporting director: 'This will be a hard, hard season because last season we achieved something more than should have been possible.' They won the title in Spain and the UEFA Cup under Benitez, and now it will be a very difficult season," the 64-year-old concluded.



After finally winning the first top-flight title of his career, Leicester City Manager Claudio Ranieri (L) kisses the English Premier League trophy. Inspirational striker Jamie Vardy (Top R) had been painted as a partying and reckless person prior to this season, but he showed a softer side to himself as he celebrated the Foxes' first Premier League title with his daughter. Another architect, Riyad Mahrez also brought his family to the party.

PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS



Brotherly love inspired win

AGENCIES, London



Jamie Vardy is savouring an "unimaginable" Premier League title win made all the more special by playing with his Leicester "brothers".

Nine months on from starting the season as 5,000-1 shots for the title, captain Wes Morgan and manager Claudio Ranieri lifted the trophy to a backdrop of fireworks and cheers at a packed King

Power Stadium.

Not only is this the first top-flight league title in City's 132-year history but one of the greatest achievements in sporting history, with former non-league player turned England international Vardy at the heart of things.

He broke Rudd van Nistelrooy's long-standing record for the most number of goals scored in consecutive games and the 29-year-old top scorer took his goal tally to 24 on Saturday, netting a brace in the 3-1 defeat of Everton as Leicester

celebrated their coronation in style.

"It is unbelievable," Vardy said. "I don't think words can describe it, to be honest with you."

"You can just see with the celebrations with all the fans and the players, it is unimaginable, frightening."

Leicester have shown impressive attitude this campaign and an aptitude that belied their performances that last season saw them spend most of the campaign towards the bottom.

Vardy puts the spectacular turn-

around down to the family spirit within the club. "It's unbelievable - you've seen the team spirit that we've got," he told Foxes Player.

"It is a scandal how we all are together. We literally are like brothers."

"When training and matches are finished, we'll all go out and have food together, we're always in touch with each other."

"That just shows how much as a unit we all are as a team and it shows in our performances week in, week out."