

Barca's title hopes dented by Betis

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's La Liga title challenge suffered a huge blow as the Spanish champions were controversially held 1-1 at Real Betis despite Luis Suarez's last minute equaliser on Sunday.

A point is enough to move Barca above Sevilla into second on goal difference after Sevilla also missed the chance to go top of the table as they were reduced to 10 men after just two minutes in a 3-1 defeat at Espanyol.

Real Madrid lead both by a point and have two games in hand on their title rivals, the first of which comes at home to Real Sociedad later on Sunday.

Aleix Alegria gave Betis the lead their dominance deserved 15 minutes from time when he bundled home from close range after Marc-Andre ter Stegen flapped at a corner.

However, Barca were rightly infuriated seconds later as the ball clearly crossed the Betis goal line, but no goal was given by referee Alejandro Jose Hernandez. Suarez did at least rescue a point in the dying seconds, though, as he slotted home Lionel Messi's through ball for his 21st goal of the season.

"We have to help the referees," Barca boss

Luis Enrique told BeIN Sports Spain. "The technology can help them. I say that for all situations not just ones that go for me, but against me too."

Suarez was less understanding as he claimed the ball "was a metre over the line."

Ultimately Enrique paid the price for again heavily rotating his side with Wednesday's Copa del Rey semi-final, first leg at Atletico Madrid in mind.

"The feeling I have is that we have won one point [not lost two]," he added.

Enrique made six changes in all, including three of the back four and Betis took advantage with a bright start.

There was also refereeing controversy at Espanyol as Sevilla's shot at moving top lasted barely two minutes when Nico Pareja was very harshly sent-off on top of conceding a penalty for a trip on Pablo Piatti.

Former Sevilla favourite Jose Antonio Reyes showed no mercy to his former club as he converted from the spot, although Reyes did hold his hands up in apology at the travelling support.

TOP FIVE

TEAM	P	W	D	L	PTS
Real Madrid	18	13	4	1	43
Barcelona	20	12	6	2	42
Sevilla	20	13	3	4	42
Atletico Madrid	20	10	6	4	36
Real Sociedad	19	11	2	6	35



Barcelona forward Luis Suarez silenced the crowd at the Benito Villamarín stadium in Sevilla yesterday, equalising at the death as the visitors secured a draw against Real Betis in their La Liga encounter.

PHOTO: AFP

United cruise into fifth round

AFP, Manchester

Heads from Marouane Fellaini and Chris Smalling, and second half efforts from Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Bastian Schweinsteiger ensured holders

Manchester United enjoyed a comfortable 4-0 fourth round FA Cup victory against Wigan on Sunday.

For German World Cup winner Schweinsteiger it was a rare sweet moment since Jose Mourinho took over -- he banished to train away from the first team before welcoming him back into the fold at the end of October -- scoring on his first start in 385 days.

The scoreline flattered Jose Mourinho's side slightly as his much-changed starting XI struggled to break down the Championship visitors for nearly all of the first half.

Ultimately, United still have a chance of becoming just the sixth team to retain the trophy following a routine win.

Fellaini struck in the 43rd minute of a first half in which the Premier League side failed to play with any real rhythm or pace.

That was probably not surprising given Mourinho had made nine changes from the side that advanced to the final of the League Cup despite losing at Hull in last Thursday's semi-final second leg.

United spent most of that first half looking like a team that had never played together before and, when the opening goal did finally come, it was from a very direct approach.

At the end of a long passage of play, which had United supporters showing their impatience, the ball was worked to Schweinsteiger on the right and his high, deep cross was met by the Belgian who beat marker Callum Connolly and headed powerfully into the goal.

It was Fellaini's second goal of the season, the midfielder having also scored an important cup goal in the first leg semi-final win over Hull.

Not until Smalling struck, in the 58th minute, could Mourinho relax after Wigan failed to clear a Wayne Rooney corner and Anthony Martial darted into the Wigan penalty area.

His perfect chip into the six-yard area was met by Smalling, still in position following the set-piece, and the England international made no mistake from close range.

Wigan began to wilt under the United pressure, especially when they pressed forward in search of a route back into the tie, and fell to a devastating counter-attack after 73 minutes.

Man of the match Mkhitaryan and Martial exchanged passes as they galloped into Wigan territory, leaving the former with the opportunity to practically walk the ball past Jakob Haugaard into the Wigan goal.



Manchester United midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger (R) scored on his first start in 385 days as the hosts cruised to a 4-0 win against Wigan in their FA Cup match yesterday.

India level T20I series

AFP, Nagpur

Fast bowler Ashish Nehra claimed three wickets as he combined with Jasprit Bumrah to choke the England batting and set up India's series levelling five-run win in the second T20I in Nagpur on Sunday.

Chasing 145 for victory, England needed eight off the final over but Bumrah claimed two wickets and gave away just two runs to help the hosts even out the three-match series at 1-1.

Joe Root, hit a run-a-ball 38, was given out lbw off Bumrah on the first ball of the 20th over as replays suggested the batsman got an inside edge before the ball hit his pads.

Bumrah bowled Jos Buttler on the fourth delivery and never allowed Chris Jordan and Moeen Ali to score the remaining runs on the final two balls as England ended on 139 for 6.

Earlier Lokesh Rahul hit a 47-ball 71 to help India post 144-8 despite England seamer Chris Jordan's three wickets after the visitors elected to field first.

The third match is slated in Bangalore on February 1.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 144 for 8 in 20 overs (Rahul 71, Pandey 30; Jordan 3-22)

ENGLAND: 139 for 6 in 20 overs (Root 38, Stokes 38; Nehra 3-28)

Result: India won by 5 runs.

Player-of-the-match: JJ

Bumrah.

West Ham give Payet move go-ahead

AFP, London

France international Dimitri Payet's long drawn out saga ended on Sunday as Premier League side West Ham agreed to sell him to Ligue 1 outfit Marseille for a reported 25 million pounds.

The 29-year-old -- who starred for the Hammers last season scoring 12 goals -- had effectively gone on strike at the beginning of the month.

He said he would not play for the club again and his wife's priority was a return to France and his former club.

However, having turned down two earlier bids -- reported to be £19m and £20m -- West Ham changed their tune with the higher offer and also having signed Scotland interna-

tional Robert Snodgrass from Hull.

"West Ham United can confirm that a £25m fee has today been agreed for the transfer of Dimitri Payet to Olympique de Marseille," tweeted the club on their Twitter page.

Payet, who also starred for France in last year's Euro 2016 championships where they lost to Portugal in the final, had been demoted to train with the Under-23 side as he was frozen out by Hammers manager Slaven Bilic and his team-mates after his refusal to play.

He was erased from their WhatsApp team conversations and excluded from team dinners.

Payet, who joined West Ham from Marseille for £10 million in 2015 and only last February signed a new £125,000 a week five-and-a-half-year contract, had also attracted the ire of the fans.



Apollo Hospitals, International School Dhaka (ISD) and Delhi Public School (DPS-STS) took part in the recently organised STS Cricket Carnival 2017. Apollo became champions while ISD became runners-up in the two-day cricket tournament where games were played in a league format.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Celtic break club record

AFP, Glasgow

Scott Sinclair scored twice as Celtic surpassed a 50-year-old club record in style with a 4-0 thrashing of Hearts on Sunday to extend their unbeaten domestic run to 27 matches.

The 17th league victory in a row saw the Hoops eclipse the record set in Celtic's greatest ever season -- the 'Lisbon Lions' 1966-67 campaign, which ended with a clean sweep of trophies including the European Cup.

The win moves Brendan Rodgers' side 22 points clear of Rangers at the top of the table as they remain firmly on course for a domestic treble.

The BFF boss, accompanied by senior vice

Salahuddin updates on football activities

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin yesterday expressed his satisfaction over one-and-a-half months' of activities of the game's governing body since the disclosure of the four-year development plan.

"Though I am a greedy person, I am satisfied with the way the plan has been going. Nobody can be hundred per cent satisfied but I am very happy because we are on the right track and we will be on the right track," Salahuddin said at a press conference arranged to update on football activities, development programmes and achievements since the revelation of the four-year plan on December 10.

Salahuddin said that they would brief media once every month to update on the activities and progress of the master plan.

President Abdus Salam Murshed, vice president Mohiuddin Ahmed Mohi, members Amirul Islam Babu and Mahfuza Akter Kiron, informed that the senior men's team is now in a conditioning and assessment camp; the under-16 women's team are touring Japan; the under-14 boys team emerged champions in a plate group of Supermokh Cup in Malaysia; senior women's team emerged runners-up in SAFF Championship for the first time; elite referee development and coach education courses have been completed; club licensing is on the process, and the under-15 talent hunt program in association with National Sports Council is going on while a few tournaments are about to get underway.

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