

WAZZA DONATES £750K TO CHARITY

Three Mersey children's charities have received a three-quarters of a million pound Christmas windfall from Everton striker Wayne Rooney. And Rooney personally delivered the cheques himself to Claire House Children's Hospice, Alder Hey Children's Charity and the NSPCC offices in Liverpool. The Blues ace handed £250,000 to each charity from monies raised by his Old Trafford testimonial match between Everton and Manchester United in 2016. Rooney said: "It's always a privilege to meet the children and families who are being really brave and positive during their illnesses. It's a particularly difficult time of year but I hope we were able to bring some Christmas cheer, as all the charity staff do throughout December."

—AGENCIES



Moniruzzaman breaks 27-year-old record

Sumita Rani still going strong

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammad Moniruzzaman of Bangladesh Navy set a new national record in men's javelin throw, wiping out a 27-year-old record, during the second day of the NRB Commercial Bank 41st National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Moniruzzaman cleared a distance of 64.04 metres, eclipsing the previous record of 63.74 metres set by Mohammed Rasheduzzaman of Chittagong in 1990.

Nazmul Hossain of Bangladesh Army grabbed the silver medal by clearing a height of 60.14 metres while Abdul Alim of Bangladesh Navy won the bronze at 59.87 metres. It was the only record of a day when veteran hurdler Sumita Rani continued her dominance by picking up the women's 100m hurdles title.

The 26-year-old representing Bangladesh Jail team clocked 15.00 seconds to win the title that she made her own a long time ago, beating the challenge from Mukta Khatun (15.40 sec) and Smriti Khatun (16.60 sec), both of whom are from Bangladesh Army.

The two-time South Asian Games silver medallist didn't participate in the national championships last year due to injury but did win gold in the summer meet last year. This was her 18th title, national and summer meet combined, in her pet event of 100m hurdles.

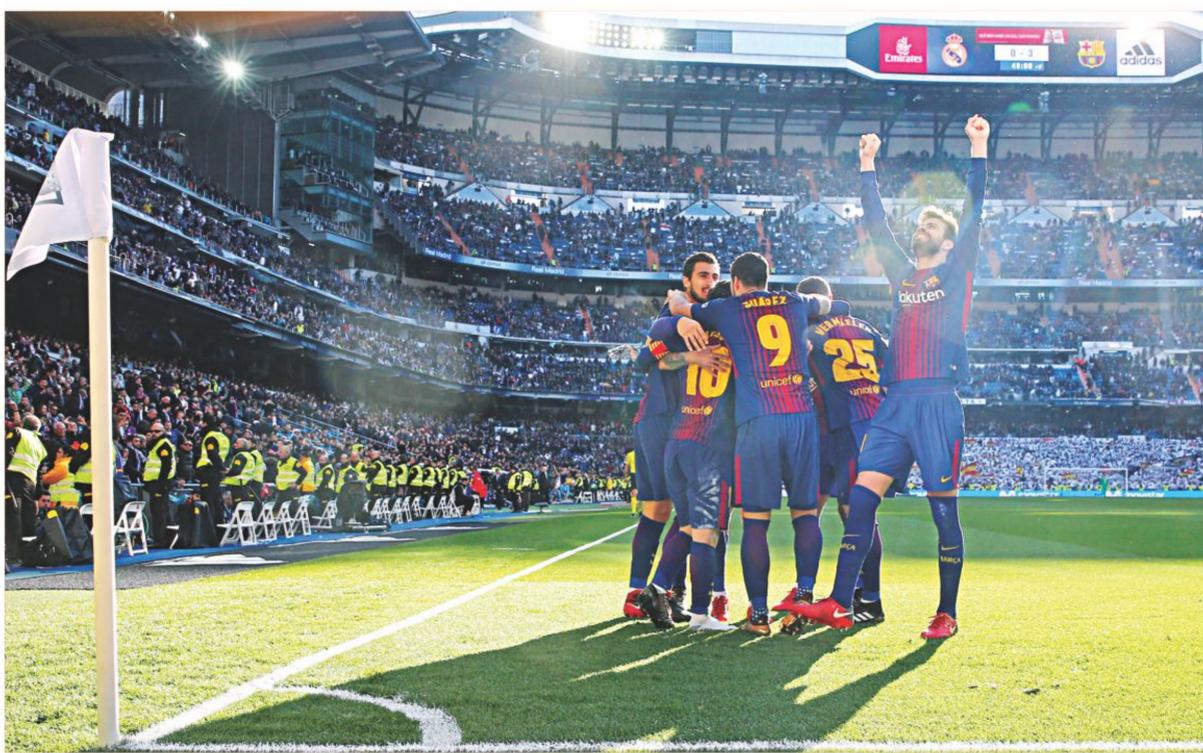
she claimed. "This is my 18th gold medal, the first of which I won in 2003. I've missed a few in between due to various reasons, but I'm still confident in my ability," Sumita told reporters after her victory.

While Sumita faced little challenge before reclaiming the gold, her timing yesterday was far off the mark (13.99 sec) she had set seven years ago in the Dhaka SA Games on way to winning a silver medal. She blames this poor timing on the lack of training facilities available for the team. "We don't have a ground of our own at Bangladesh Jail. And we couldn't train at BKSP as there was some construction work going on. We trained at a single small lane in Kashipur. Sometimes we trained at the Bangabandhu National Stadium coming from Gazipur. So the training wasn't ideal."

Meanwhile, Sajib Hossain of Navy reclaimed his title in men's high jump after a neck-and-neck battle with teammate Mahfuzur Rahman. Sajib cleared two metres without any fault attempts while Mahfuzur, who won gold in the last national meet, also cleared the same height, but was adjudged second due to his failure in four attempts.

Bangladesh Army bagged the gold medal in men's 4X100m relay while Bangladesh Navy won the women's 4X100m relay title.

At the end of the second day, Army led the medals table with 10 gold, 15 silver and five bronze, followed by Navy with 10 gold, five silver and seven bronze medals.



The Barcelona players did not hold back in their celebrations after putting a third goal past Real Madrid on their archrivals' home turf yesterday. The 3-0 win at the Santiago Bernabeu took Barca 14 points clear of the La Liga holders going into the second half of the season. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hurting Real 'won't give up'

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane accepted responsibility for a bruising 3-0 El Clasico defeat on Saturday that left the European champions 14 points adrift of Barcelona at the top of La Liga on Saturday.

However, the Frenchman insisted Madrid will come back stronger in the new year after La Liga's winter break and refused to concede the league to Barca.

"We are down because it is a defeat that hurts," said Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane.

"Madrid never give up, whatever happens. It is a difficult moment because we've lost by three goals. I could say we don't deserve it, but that is football."

Defeat leaves Madrid still down in fourth with Barca now nine points clear of their closest challengers Atletico Madrid.

Zidane took the surprise decision to start Mateo Kovacic for the first time in La Liga this season to try negate the threat of Lionel Messi as the Croatian had so successfully when Real thrashed Barca 5-1 in the Spanish Super Cup on aggregate in August.

However, after Madrid missed a host of first-half chances, Kovacic was powerless to stop Messi wrestling control of the game as the Argentine netted from the penalty spot after Luis Suarez's opener and then teed up Alexis Vidal for

STATS

Lionel Messi surpassed Gerd Muller's record as the all-time top goalscorer in Europe's top five leagues (526).

With 54 goals, the Argentine surpassed Cristiano Ronaldo (53), Robert Lewandowski (53) and Edinson Cavani (53) and is now 2017's top goalscorer.

Barcelona have won three consecutive La Liga away games versus Real Madrid for the first time in their history.

With 17 goals, Messi equalised Telmo Zarra as the player with the most goals scored against Real Madrid in La Liga history.

Barca's third in stoppage time

"Tomorrow they are going to hammer me, that is football but it won't change how I think or what I do," added Zidane.

"I am the coach and I will continue like this as long as I am here."

Any chance of a Real recovery after Suarez's opener was dented as Dani Carvajal also saw a red card for punching the ball off the goal line before Messi's spot-kick.

"The first goal comes from an error by us and the sending-off completely changes the complexion of the game," added Zidane.

"Playing with 10 men 2-0 down is very difficult both mentally and physically."

A 3-0 defeat is also Zidane's heaviest since he took charge of Real nearly two years ago.

However, there didn't appear to be such a

margin between the sides in the first 45 minutes as Madrid dominated.

Cristiano Ronaldo miskicked with the goal at his mercy after just 10 minutes and Karim Benzema hit the post just before half-time.

"They pressed us very high and it forced us to play long," said Barca boss Ernesto Valverde.

"We couldn't play as we are used to. It was an open game with no side in command, but in the second-half we managed to impose our control on the game."

Valverde refused to accept he had tactically outfoxed Zidane and insisted Barca can't celebrate taking back the title from Madrid just yet with 21 league games still to come.

"Our intention is that no one beats us," he added when quizzed whether his side, on a 25-game unbeaten run, are capable of dropping enough points to lead Madrid back into the title race.

"Winning points is extremely difficult and losing them is easy. There is a long way to go."

However, whilst Messi once again shone, Valverde reserved special praise for Thomas Vermaelen who contributed to another clean sheet in the absence of the injured Samuel Umtiti.

Vermaelen has been much-criticised since joining from Arsenal in 2014 for poor performances and unfortunate history of injuries.

"People ask me a lot about Vermaelen as if it seems something bad is going to happen."

"What I see is a player who trains well, plays well, is strong and can play with the ball."



After breaking a 27-year-old record in javelin throw, Mohammad Moniruzzaman (R) is embraced by previous record-holder Mohammad Rasheduzzaman. PHOTO: STAR

'Available till I'm eighty'



AGENCIES, Milan

Juventus and Italy legend Gianluigi Buffon says he will never really retire from playing and will be available for Juventus or Italy even when he is 80.

The goalkeeper is expected to hang up his gloves at the end of the season after 22 years at the highest level with Parma and Juventus, but he has continued to keep the door open ajar by stating that he was "99.9 per cent" certain of his decision.

Gianluigi Donnarumma may be heir-apparent for Italy but who replaces Buffon at Juventus is unclear, and the 39-year-old says he will be ready to turn out for the Bianconeri no matter what age he is.

"I just don't know how to answer these [retirement] questions," he told Der Spiegel. "Will I stop? Will I not stop? I feel like a soldier in the service of my club and my country. The big picture was always more important to me than my own. That's how I see my work."

"I am very likely to stop, but I am still available for Juventus and the national team. Even at 80, if suddenly no goalkeeper would be there, they should call me -- I would train briefly and then jump in."

One regret Buffon has is not finishing his career with a sixth trip to a World Cup.

"I will regret Italy missing the World Cup for the rest of my life," he added. "We took away that joy for children, that rapid heartbeat you get from watching your country play in an event like that."

Hamsik passes Maradona's scoring record

AFP, Naples

Marek Hamsik on Saturday scored his 116th goal in all competitions to overtake Diego Maradona as Napoli's all-time record goal scorer.

The 30-year-old has been at Napoli for 10 years and set the new mark just before the break in the Serie A leader's game against Sampdoria.

Hamsik picked up a Dries Mertens cross and slotted home the third in a 3-2 win.

Maradona took just seven years to score his 115 goals between 1984 and 1991, helping the team to their only two Serie A titles in 1987 and 1990.

Conte rues 'unfair' draw

AFP, Liverpool

Chelsea manager Antonio Conte felt the Premier League champions' 0-0 draw at Everton on Saturday was not a fair reflection of the game.

"I think we dominated the game and had lots of chances to score," Conte told Sky Sports. "I think this result is unfair. Everton deserve credit, but we deserved to win."

"We dominated the game and it is a pity to drop two points. It is normal to drop points with a poor performance, but not today."

"It is not simple to dominate here. We needed a bit of luck."

'That was for football lovers'

Says Wenger after Liverpool thriller

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger hailed Arsenal's breath-taking 3-3 draw

against Liverpool as a dream come true for football purists.

Wenger's side staged a thrilling second half fightback that combined with Liverpool's array of attacking talents to serve up a festive feast for millions of fans around the world.

Having trailed to goals from Philippe Coutinho and Mohamed Salah, Arsenal scored three times in five second half minutes through Alexis Sanchez, Granit Xhaka and Mesut Ozil.

One of the Premier League's

games of the season was capped when Roberto Firmino's equaliser rescued a point for Liverpool.

But rather than rue the alarmingly creaky defensive play from both teams, Gunners boss Wenger insisted he was pleased to have been part of such a memorable occasion.

"It was a thrilling game. I am frustrated at not winning but that is the type of game you want in the Premier League," Wenger said. "More for people who love football, let's give credit to the creative force."

"If you have no shots on goal the defences look good but that is not what people want to see."

Wenger admitted Arsenal had been out-classed in the first half at the Emirates Stadium, but he was impressed with the way they fought back with such verve.

"We played frozen with fear and not at our level in the first half. Maybe when you prepare for a game you want players to be ready but you make the opponent too big in their heads," Wenger said.

"In the second half we played at our level. The good thing is that overall we did not give up."

"The spirit is fantastic. On that front I am proud of the players."

"It shows a strong mentality. We have the capacity to respond. What you want is for the team to realise that we have to start from the first minute."



Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil rounded off a madcap five minutes which saw Arsenal score thrice to take a 3-2 lead against Liverpool on Friday. However, the Reds pulled one back as the thriller ended in a draw. PHOTO: AFP

City keep winning

REUTERS, London

Goals by Sergio Agüero, who scored twice, Raheem Sterling and Danilo enabled leaders Manchester City to extend their record-breaking run to 17 successive Premier League wins as they thrashed Bournemouth 4-0 on Saturday.

The run had begun with victory in added time away to the same opposition in August. This one was much more comfortable and dropped Bournemouth into the bottom three.

Agüero set Pep Guardiola's team on their way in the 27th minute. Goalkeeper Asmir Begovic lost possession with a poor clearance and Agüero met Fernando's pass with a diving header.

Sevilla sack Berizzo

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla sacked coach Eduardo Berizzo on Friday just a month after it was announced the Argentine is suffering from prostate cancer, the club said, citing poor results.

"The Sevilla board... has taken the decision to sack the coach of the first team due to the bad form of the team," Sevilla said in a statement.

The former Argentine international missed four matches as he underwent surgery on a tumour with his assistant coach Ernesto Marcucci taking charge.