

CENI LEADS FORTALEZA TO SERIE B TITLE

Legendary Brazilian goalkeeper Rogerio Ceni, who played at Sao Paulo for the entirety of his career but gained worldwide renown for his goalscoring abilities, has led second-tier club Fortaleza to their first-ever title in the Campeonato Brasileiro Serie B. Ceni, who is recognised as the goalkeeper to have scored the most goals in the history of the game, scored an astonishing 131 goals while playing between the sticks, mostly from penalties and free-kicks. He took over Fortaleza, who completed their centenary this year, at the start of the season and brought the club its first second division title with a 1-0 win against fourth-placed Avai in the season's third-last match. The now 45-year-old Ceni oversaw a great campaign, getting 20 wins and eight draws from the 36 games so far to clinch the title. Centro Sportivo Alagoano are currently second with 59 points.

— STAR SPORT DESK



Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero scored the winning goal in yesterday's Manchester Derby three minutes into the second half, latching onto a pass and firing a bullet shot past opposing goalkeeper David De Gea. The hosts added a third goal following a brilliant 44-pass sequence to condemn their cross-city rivals to a 3-1 defeat at the Etihad.

PHOTO: AFP

City outclass toothless Man Utd

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City opened up a 12-point gap on Manchester United just 12 games into the Premier League season and returned to the top of the table with a convincing 3-1 win in Sunday's derby at the Etihad. Early goals in each half from David Silva and Sergio Aguero put City in command and Ilkay Gundogan condemned United to a fourth league defeat of the season after Anthony Martial's penalty had given the visitors hope. City leapfrog Liverpool to move back two points clear at the top of the table, while United remain in eighth. The English champions have now won 11 and drawn one of their last 12 games with the only blip in that run coming in a credible 0-0 draw away to Liverpool -- one of only two fixtures they lost in the Premier League last season.

The other was at home to United when City spurned the chance to seal the title against their local rivals by blowing a 2-0 half-time lead to lose. City settled that score and ensured that if they are to be denied in their quest to be the first side in a decade to retain the Premier League, the challenge is likely to come from Liverpool or London rather than across Manchester. Pre-match United's chances suffered a blow when Paul Pogba was ruled out by injury. Despite an upturn in results in recent weeks to dampen speculation surrounding Jose Mourinho's future, United have still continuously started slowly and were again punished early on. Bernardo Silva sent a warning shot flying just wide of David de Gea's goal before the opener arrived on 12 minutes as City's two Silvas combined. Bernardo was the provider for his namesake to register his seventh goal of the season with a shot that had just too much power for De Gea. City enjoyed upwards of 80 percent possession in the opening 20 minutes as the visitors struggled

to gain any sort of foothold in the game. But United at least stemmed City's flow and the hosts didn't threaten again until Aguero fired into the side-netting just before half-time. Handed a slightly better angle three minutes after the break, the Argentine made no mistake as he blasted high past De Gea to move out on his own as the Premier League's top scorer with eight goals. Yet, just as City threatened to run riot as they have done so often already this season, their momentum was halted when with his first involvement since coming on as a substitute Romelu Lukaku was upended by Ederson for a United penalty. Martial kept his cool to slot home for the fifth straight league game and give United belief another great escape was possible. Mourinho summoned Juan Mata and Alexis Sanchez from the bench in the hope of another late show. However, it was City who sealed the points five minutes from time as Gundogan finished off a 44-pass move that dragged United all over the pitch.

Not out of the blue

BISHWAJIT ROY

It is no surprise that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's political journey has been dominating discussions in the country's sports fraternity. All were keen to know whether the Bangladesh ODI captain reached Awami League's Dhanmondi office on Sunday to collect the nomination papers. Even Mushfiquur Rahim and Mominul Haque's masterful rescue act at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur could not drown out the buzz around Mashrafe's new adventure towards the bumpy road of politics. Soon after the news was brought to light, there have been opinions in favour and against his decision. The rights and wrongs of his decision to join politics at this moment has also become the centre of discussions in social media. There have even been whispers about whether Mashrafe was going to quit cricket as many close associates of his know that he does not relish having too many things on his plate at once. Mashrafe's iron resolve to do well in next year's World Cup in England is also common knowledge in the cricket community

year, his interest in social work, future plans about his political journey and dreams of making a "better Narail". It was then that he made it clear that he is on a mission to do something for society and gave enough indications about the importance of politics to fulfil the dreams about his native district. Below are excerpts of the long discussion which can give our readers an idea about how he looks at the business of politics. "You have to have some passion if you want to do something. I have passion for cricket and I have also the passion to do something for society. I am pretty confident that if I get help from everybody and I am sincere enough it would be possible for me to make something happen regarding those issues that are really serious in the society. "I made the foundation and this is a non-political organisation. But it is not possible to do anything without the help of political people -- if they come, it will make things easy. I want them to be involved. Honestly speaking, cricket is my life and I cannot think about anything beyond cricket and as long as I am still playing cricket, it [joining politics] has never come to my mind.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) seeks Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's blessings before buying nomination papers for the Awami League ticket at Gono Bhavan yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

and that is another reason that many have termed his timing of joining politics as inappropriate, but it is also true that the most lionhearted of Tigers is now standing at the fag end of his career. Once Mashrafe enters the world of politics, he has to deal with debates and criticism over all the political realities as it is a very different dominion from the universal adulation in the world of cricket, especially as the country's political allegiances are sharply divided between the loyal supporters of two major parties. But has politics come to Mashrafe out of the blue? When a man believes that without political involvement it is not possible to solve any social problem, including the burning issue of environmental problems and when a man has time and again said that freedom fighters, not cricketers, are the real heroes of the country, one should not doubt his political consciousness. In March this year, this reporter had an opportunity to talk with him at length regarding his vision with the Narail Express Foundation launched in September last

Nobody can predict the future but right at this moment, I am only thinking about cricket. "Celebrities coming into politics is now a new phenomenon in the world of politics but in Bangladesh's context it is different. I however firmly believe that none can match what a political person is capable of when it comes to helping the people. "At this moment I am totally focused on my cricket. You know I have to follow a daily plan and I need a lot of preparation everyday because of one injury after another -- it has made the task difficult for me but it has become like a dream to make a campaign for bringing back those days of Narail that existed in the '90s... affection, love for each other... health and environmental beauty." These few observations of Mashrafe during the lengthy discussion perhaps provided sufficient evidence that politics did not suddenly enter his mind. There may be debates over the timing of his decision but there should not be any doubt over his desire to join the country's politics. However, one thing is now settled -- life will not be the same as before for 'Politician Mashrafe'.

Handball c'ship from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The Exim Bank 28th National Men's Handball Championship gets underway tomorrow at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium in Paltan. Bangladesh Insurance Association's president Sheikh Kabir Hossain will inaugurate the championship at 3:00pm as the chief guest. The championship will be contested by 33 district teams, informed speakers at a press conference at the Handball Stadium conference room. The speakers also informed that the 29th Exim Bank National Women's Handball Championship will start from January 12, 2019.



Despite Lionel Messi's return from injury, Barcelona fell to their first defeat at the Nou Camp in more than two years. The La Liga encounter went down to the wire, but in the end Real Betis held on for a 4-3 win.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Barca crash despite Messi's return

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona lost at home in La Liga for the first time in more than two years as Real Betis pulled off a stunning 4-3 victory on Sunday, despite Lionel Messi scoring twice on his return from injury. Barca last endured a league defeat at the Camp Nou against Alaves in September 2016 but, following 42 games unbeaten, their run was ended by a brilliant, counter-attacking display from Betis. After five matches out injured, Messi returned but his two goals, one from the penalty spot and another deep into injury-time, proved little more than consolations. Junior Firpo and Joaquin had put Betis two up at the interval before Messi sparked hopes of a comeback from the spot. Giovanni Lo Celso then capitalised on a mistake from Marc-Andre ter Stegen only for Barca to come again, Arturo Vidal making it 3-2, having come on as a substitute. Ivan Rakitic was sent off, however, with nine minutes left and Sergio Canales added a fourth for Betis before Messi poked home at the end of an enthralling encounter. It was the first time ever that Messi scored twice and Barcelona lost. Ernesto Valverde's team stay top of the table but their lead is down to one point on Atletico Madrid, whom they play at the

Wanda Metropolitano after the international break, and Alaves, who had beaten Huesca 2-1 in the day's early match. Espanyol could jump both and move level on points with the Catalans when they visit Sevilla later on Sunday. "We don't leave with the feeling Betis were the better team," Valverde said. "I don't want to take any credit away from our opponent but we could have countered them better." Betis, meanwhile, climb to 12th. Quique Setien's side may have pulled back on the sumptuous, attacking football that earned them a sixth-place finish last term but, in full-flow, they remain one of Spain's most difficult opponents to stop. "We have been a brave team in every way," former Spain international Joaquin said. "Winning at the Camp Nou requires concentration and doing everything very well. We played a great game." Barca had the momentum and in the 68th minute, they pulled one back, with Jordi Alba tugged down by Tello, and Messi converting the penalty for his eighth league goal of the season. But the comeback stalled three minutes later as Betis restored their two-goal advantage. Barca were not done yet. Two substitutes combined for a second, Vidal making it 3-2 but no sooner had the recovery began again, it was halted.

A chastening defeat for women

SPORTS REPORTER

Gauging the improvement of neighbouring India and Nepal was one of Bangladesh's aims in the first round of Women's Olympic Qualifiers, and what Bangladesh team experienced in a 7-1 defeat against India at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon yesterday would perhaps leave them with lots of reasons to be apprehensive. The 7-1 defeat against India following on the 5-0 defeat against hosts Myanmar has extinguished Bangladesh's hopes of qualifying for the second round of the qualifiers. More than the qualification, though, it was the margin of defeat which should be really worrying for the Bangladesh team as they had previously held India to a 0-0 draw in group-stage match before losing 3-1 in the final of SAFF Women's Championship two years ago. The charges of Golam Rabbani Choton had promised to give India tough time, but instead they were helpless on the pitch against the Indians, who turned the match into a one-sided affair. Veteran strikers Bala Devi and Kamala Devi were dead up front as Bala slotted four goals while Kamala scored twice including the opening one. Sanju Yadav scored the other while Krishna Rani Sarker netted a consolation goal for Bangladesh, who trailed the first half 3-0. Bangladesh coach Choton was critical of his charges after the heavy defeat. "Our team was overwhelmed with India's physical capability and control of the game during the important moments. Our young players must learn to avoid unnecessary mistakes at this level." "I urge all to be patient with our players. We will continue to work with them and make sure we make those important steps forward," Choton added.

Next Gen ATP Final Tsitsipas caps breakout year

AFP, Paris

Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas capped a breakthrough season by rallying from a set down to beat Australian Alex de Minaur in the Next Gen ATP final on Saturday. The 20-year-old, ranked 15th in the world, came through 2-4, 4-1, 4-3 (7/3), 4-3 (7/3) against 19-year-old de Minaur after one hour and 41 minutes for his second title after Stockholm last month. Tsitsipas, one of the sport's most improved players this year after starting the season ranked 91st, also finished runner-up to Rafael Nadal in Barcelona and Toronto. "It's been a long season, a season I'll never forget," Tsitsipas said. "I've played some incredible tennis throughout the whole year. And both mentally and physically, I feel like it's time to take a break. But really proud with myself, and I really owe it all to the team of people I've put around me."

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- The results of previous examinations are highly satisfactory.

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