

Mandzukic fiddles as Rome burns

AFP, Milan

 Mario Mandzukic scored the only goal for Juventus to dump further hurt on crisis club Roma and keep the champions unbeaten and on track for an eighth straight Italian league title.

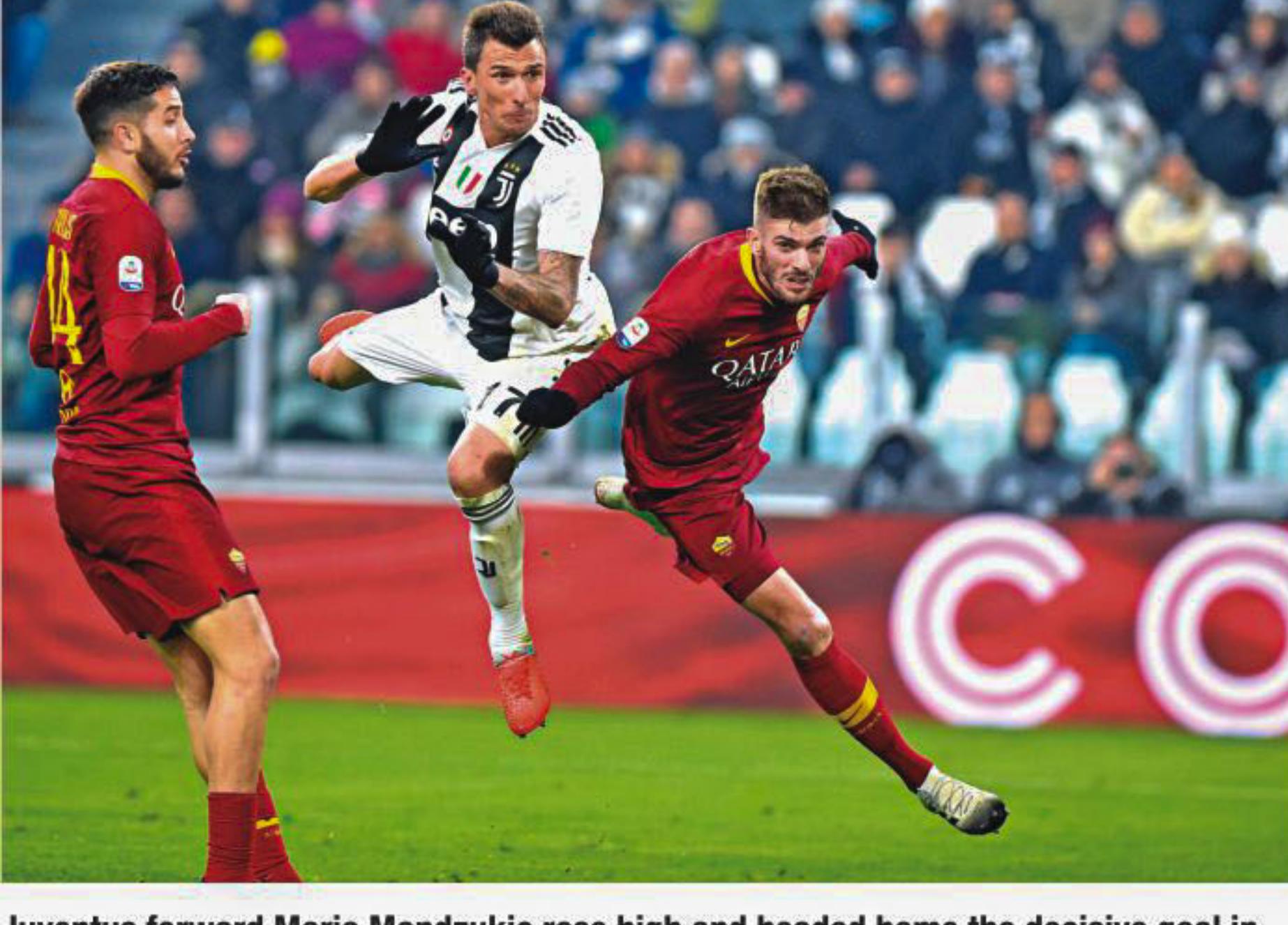
The World Cup runner-up headed in the winner 34 minutes into the match in Turin to put Juventus back eight points clear of Napoli.

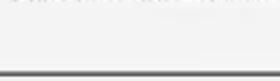
The defeat could have been harsher but for Roma goalkeeper Robin Olsen denying Cristiano Ronaldo, with Douglas Costa having a late goal ruled out following a video assistant referee check because of a foul in the build-up.

"We are doing good things, we have reached the Champions League last sixteen and we're winter champions," said coach Massimiliano Allegri, referring to the name given to teams top before Christmas.

Serie A is however holding a round of fixtures on December 26 and 29, before pausing for three weeks.

"We haven't won anything yet," added Allegri. "The important thing is to be a few ahead of Napoli on the 29th of December."



Juventus forward Mario Mandzukic rose high and headed home the decisive goal in the 34th minute in a Serie A encounter against AS Roma on Saturday. 

Barca 3 clear going into new year

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona held off Atletico Madrid to ensure they will be three points clear at the top of La Liga going into the winter break after beating a spirited Espanyol 2-0 at the Camp Nou on Saturday.

First-half goals from Ousmane Dembele and Lionel Messi were enough to move Ernesto Valverde's side up to 37 points and keep them ahead of Atletico, who earlier drew level with Barca with a 1-0 win over Espanyol thanks to an Antoine Griezmann penalty.

"In the first half we got behind their defence well, we saw that with any play, playing with the space [left behind] we could score," said Valverde.

Dembele put the hosts into the lead after just nine minutes when he lashed home on the rebound after Messi's first-time shot was pushed into his path by Celta keeper Ruben Blanco.

Messi doubled his side's advantage just before half-time, bursting through competently unmarked to meet the excellent Jordi Alba's through ball and wrong-foot Blanco as he slotted in his 15th league goal of the season.

The Argentine and Alba linked up nicely throughout, with the left-back providing the pass for the Messi shot that led to Dembele's opener.

"They [Messi and Alba] are a duo that have been together for some time, they understand each other perfectly," added Valverde.

Earlier, Griezmann smashed home from the spot 10 minutes after the break to earn Atletico three points from a match with mid-table Espanyol.

Solskjaer awakens vintage Man Utd

AFP, Cardiff

 Ole Gunnar Solskjaer insisted having "good players" was the key to his instant impact as Manchester United caretaker manager in a 5-1 thumping of Cardiff on Saturday.

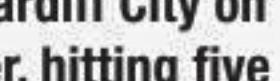
Not since Alex Ferguson's final game in charge in 2013 had United scored five goals in a single Premier League game and the Red Devils looked a side transformed from the turgid football of Jose Mourinho's final days in charge.

"One of the things I talked about is that a Manchester United team should never ever be outworked," Solskjaer said, after his team outran the opposition by 5km. "It doesn't matter what team you play: you should run more than them and then your skills will give you a chance of winning again."

"They are very good players, talented players, they've approached the game properly and worked hard."

The Norwegian has been put in charge until the end of the season after Mourinho was sacked on Tuesday and could not have asked for a better start.



Manchester United roared back to their swagging best in a Premier League encounter against Cardiff City on Saturday night. The Red Devils looked a new team in Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's first game as manager, hitting five goals in a top-flight encounter for the first time since Sir Alex Ferguson's final game. 



The Rangpur Division players bring out the 'Nagin Dance' after beating Rajshahi Division 2-1 in the final of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman National Gold Cup (U-17) Football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Rangpur win U-17 Gold Cup

ANISUR RAHMAN



Rangpur Division emerged champions in the inaugural Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman National Gold Cup (U-17) Football tournament with a 2-1 win over Rajshahi Division in an entertaining final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The match was witnessed by President Abdul Hamid, who distributed prizes among the teams after the final.

The previous finals of similar tournaments have rarely been impressive due to the lack of technique, tactic and skill of the players, but the final of this newly introduced tournament turned out to be different – there was an entertaining display of football from the players including good passing, nice build-up, good understanding and good fitness. And all three goals scored were spectacular, with the scorers showing intelligence in their finishing. It would not be an overstatement if yesterday's final can be termed better than the final of the Premier League Clubs' Youth U-18 tournament.

And the performance is not surprising at all since most of these booters have been playing at different levels in and outside the capital with

the dream of flourishing at the top level.

The Youth and Sports Ministry felt the need to introduce this tournament in a bid to give a platform to the youth, who once played the Bangabandhu Gold Cup Primary School football tournament, filling the void left by the absence of the Suhrawardi Cup Youth tournament, which was held for the last time in 2006, with the participation of district youth teams.

The introduction of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Gold Cup seems to have compensated for the lack of youth football as well as built a footballing bridge between the primary school and high school students.

Players like Bimal Roy of Rangpur and Jogen Lakra of Rajshahi started playing football through the Bangabandhu Gold Cup Primary School football tournament and they are now part of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup (U-17), which started from union level in September this year before graduating to upazila, district, divisional and the final round in Dhaka, with the participation of some 125,000 players from 5,508 teams.

"There are a lot of talented players at grassroots level as I played from the union level before coming to the final match. If the players are given proper training and facilities, they can go to the top level," opined Bimal from Kursha union of

Taraganj under Rangpur district.

"I trained these boys for only seven days before coming to Dhaka. The game plan worked nicely because they are matured players who are playing at different level in Dhaka and some of them are even part of premier league youth squads such as that of Saif SC," said Rajshahi Division coach Jahir Iqbal, adding that they have fielded players from all eight districts of Rajshahi.

"If the U-17 Gold Cup is held regularly, I believe the shortage of footballers will end and it will inspire budding footballers," said champions Rangpur Division's coach Shamim Khan Miskin.

Former national footballer Rakibul Islam, who was part of the organising committee, was amazed to see the big turnout of spectators at union and upazila levels. He was also encouraged by the deep involvement of upazila chairmen, UNOs and DCs.

"The name of the tournament has had a huge impact in regards to the involvement of teams and government officials. Besides, there was joyous presence of spectators at union and upazila level. If the government can continue this tournament, I think a football environment will come back all over the country," said Rakibul.

SHORT CORNER



In a heartwarming gesture, Australia captain Tim Paine announced that Archie Schiller, a seven-year-old who has undergone multiple surgeries due to a heart condition will lead his nation as 'co-captain' in the iconic Boxing Day Test, starting Wednesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Thiago Silva's home ransacked

Thiago Silva became the latest Paris Saint-Germain player to have his property robbed during a match, police confirmed on Sunday.

Robbers broke into the Brazilian's home in the upmarket 16th arrondissement of Paris while he was playing in PSG's Ligue 1 match against Nantes at the nearby Parc des Princes.

The thieves are believed to have got away with items worth hundreds of thousands of euros.

Last month, burglars broke into the apartment of striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting while he was in action for PSG against Liverpool in the Champions League. On that occasion, a police source said thieves escaped with loot worth around 600,000 euros. In December 2017, the Paris apartment of then PSG coach Unai Emery was burgled as his team played Strasbourg in the French Cup. -- AFP

Summit golf underway

The 9th Summit Open and 23rd Summit Cup Golf Tournament got underway at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

Bangladesh Professional Golfers Association (BPGA) and KGC are organising the tournament which is being sponsored by Summit Group.

More than 700 amateur and professional golfers are participating in the six-day tournament, with two days of pro-am and four days of professional event. The pro event will have a prize purse of 15 lakh taka. The prize giving ceremony of the tournament will be held on December 28.

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I don't think he [new manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer] has stopped smiling. He was like that as a player. He always has a smile on his face and I think that can reflect down on to the team, which is a good thing. Ole has come in and we were preparing in the right way for a game, even though it's been a crazy week.

ASHLEY YOUNG
MAN UNITED CAPTAIN