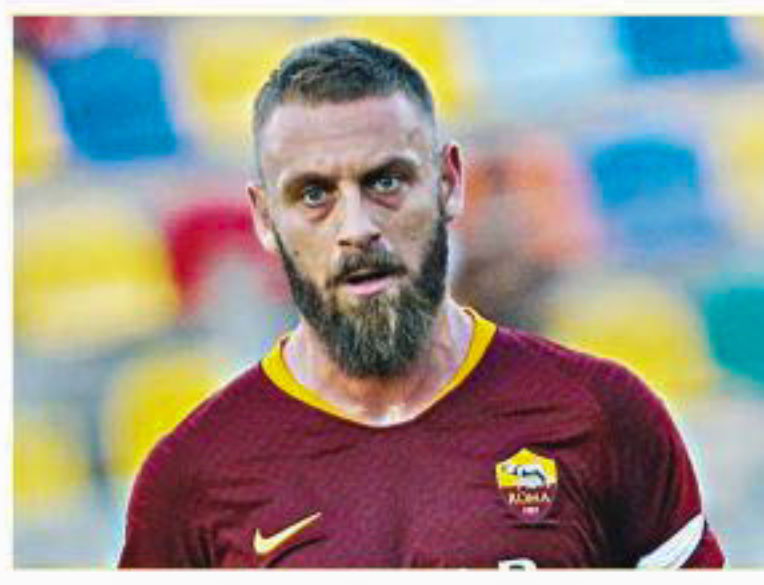


DE ROSSI ERA ENDS FOR ROMA

Captain Daniele De Rossi will bring the curtain down on his 18-year career with Roma at the end of the season, the Serie A side announced on Tuesday. The 35-year-old former World Cup winning midfielder will play his final game at home against Parma on May 26, but will not be retiring from professional football. "De Rossi plans to pursue a new adventure away from Rome," the club said in a statement. "It will be the end of an era." "For 18 years, Daniele has been the beating heart of AS Roma's team," said club president Jim Pallotta said.



—AFP

Injury-hit Abahani desperate for win

SPORTS REPORTER



STADIUM

Injury-hit Abahani will hope to stay in the AFC Cup race when they square off against leaders Chennaiyin FC in a crucial Group E encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. The match will get underway at 7:00pm.

Six-time professional league champions Abahani are three points behind Chennaiyin FC with four points from three outings. The Sky Blues are in a do-or-die situation and need an outright victory over the Indian outfit to stay in the race to advance to the next round for the first time in the club's history.

Even though the Dhanmondi-based outfit dominated Chennaiyin FC two weeks ago in their 1-0 away defeat, they might have it harder at home because of injury worries in defence. And the recent injury to defensive midfielder Atiqur Rahman Fahad has worsened the situation ahead of today's match against the two-time Indian Super League champions.

"If I told you we won't miss Tapu [Barman] and [Atiqur Rahman] Fahad, it would be a lie but football is this. Injury happens. I spoke about the defence before, the more time the players play together in defence, they get better. That's the point we are suffering from and conceding goals because we have been changing players a lot in defence due to injury problem, but I am hopeful they will play well tomorrow [Wednesday]," said Abahani coach Mario Lemos, who is seemingly in hesitation regarding picking his best eleven.

Whoever Lemos picks for today's match, the Portuguese coach knows that a defeat will throw his team out of the race.

"Tomorrow's match is a crucial one. If we lose the match, there is no chance. If we win, then we have same points with Chennaiyin and still have chance to advance to the final round. What we did



Seen here in training at the club ground yesterday, the Abahani team will rely heavily on their in-form strikers Sunday Chizoba (2nd from R) and Nabib Newaz Jibon (3rd from R) to get the goals when they host Chennaiyin FC in a AFC Cup fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

in India gave us confidence but I told the players to do more. We can't be happy with what we did in India because we played well but lost the match. The defenders must be more focused and not allow Chennaiyin to play and if they allow them to play, we will be in trouble," said Lemos.

However, the Portuguese coach is looking for a dominant performance from his charges upfront to reduce the pressure on the defence and keep more possession so that the opposition get lesser chance to score. He will bank on his on-song striking

duo of Sunday Chizoba and Nabib Newaz Jibon, both of whom scored in their last domestic match to steer Abahani to a 2-0 win over NoFEL SC. Jibon is confident about securing full points against the Indian club.

"There is supposed to be shortage of confidence if important players are ruled out due to injuries. However, we are not thinking of those players; rather we are thinking of executing the game plan that the coach relayed to us in training. If we can transform our practice-performance to the match, then we will get goals and win the

match," said the striker.

Lemos's counterpart John Gregory wants to continue their unbeaten run despite admitting that Abahani are a tough opponent.

"We will have a very tough game tomorrow night here in Dhaka. We know that your team is very good and played very well against us [in Ahmedabad]. Tomorrow's match probably will be the toughest match in the group stage. It can be very, very difficult to play against [them]," said the Chennaiyin FC coach.

Federer preparing for French Open

AFP, Rome



Roger Federer insisted Monday his focus at this week's Italian Open was on getting more match practice on clay ahead of the French Open in two weeks' time.

The 20-time Grand Slam winner has not played on the red clay in the Foro Italico since 2015 when he finished runner-up for the fourth time, losing to Novak Djokovic in the final.

"Regardless of what happens here, I just think it's good for me to play matches at this stage," said world number three Federer before his first match on Wednesday.

He has a first-round bye as the number three seed, and will begin his tournament against either American Frances Tiafoe or Portugal's Joao Sousa.

The 37-year-old's performance in the Madrid Open last week has boosted his hopes of winning the French Open, a decade after his only title there.

He fell in the quarterfinals on Friday to Dominic Thiem, but twice held match point and for a set and a half was dominant against a player considered among the favourites for Roland Garros after Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"I think I was playing well in Madrid, so I just said, again, 'Let's come to Rome, a city I like so much as well'."

"Madrid is a tough place to play. I felt like playing somewhat maybe more sea level conditions would be good for me.

"There would be excitement, more excitement than me coming to a practice court in Switzerland.

"I think this week, then next week in Paris, it's going to be interesting to see how I play the points, how I do it all."

His arrival in the Italian capital has been a boost for organisers who doubled ticket prices after it was announced he would be playing.

"That's obviously disappointing to hear," said Federer.

"I just really hope it doesn't take away the fact I'm really happy to be here."

Federer is in the same half of the draw as eight-time Rome winner Rafael Nadal, who is looking for his first clay title this season before his French Open title defence.



Retirement an option for Robben

AFP, Berlin

Departing Dutch star Arjen Robben has said that he is still undecided about what to do when he leaves Bayern Munich, and admitted that he may still retire from football.

The 35-year-old winger is set to leave Munich after 10 years at the end of the season, and has been linked with clubs as diverse as Inter Milan and his hometown club Groningen.

At a press conference in Munich on Tuesday, Robben said that he still didn't know what life after Bayern held for him.

"I am late making my decision because of my injury. I wanted to get back on the pitch first," said Robben, who had been sidelined since November before returning to action against Hanover two weeks ago.

Inter on brink of C League

AFP, Rome



TIM

Matteo Politano and Ivan Perisic scored in either half as Inter Milan reclaimed third spot in Serie A on Monday with a 2-0 win over already-relegated Chievo to close in on Champions League football next season.

Politano opened after 39 minutes in the San Siro with Perisic adding the second four minutes from time, as Chievo played the last fifteen minutes a man down after Nicola Rigoni was sent off for a second yellow card.

Inter move back one point ahead of Atalanta as both teams edge closer to joining champions Juventus and second-placed Napoli in elite European football with two games left this season.

AC Milan and Roma are three points adrift of fourth place, with further back Torino in seventh, five points outside the Champions League berths.

Inter could seal their place with a win next Sunday at Napoli or at home against lowly Empoli on the final day of the season the following weekend.

Inter's win ended Lazio's Champions League ambitions with the Romans in eighth place with a slim hope of making the Europa League, which they could also reach by winning Wednesday's Coppa Italia final against Atalanta.

Bologna moved ahead of Fiorentina into 13th position with a 4-1 win over Parma which leaves the promoted side just three points clear of a return to Serie B next season.



Inter Milan forward Ivan Perisic (L) looks to the heavens after scoring the opening goal against Chievo during their Serie A encounter at the San Siro on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Woods sued over drunk staff's death

AFP, Bethesda

Tiger Woods faces a lawsuit from the parents of a staffer at his Florida restaurant who died in a drink driving accident after allegedly being overserved alcohol, TMZ reported Monday.

The parents of Nicholas Immesberger, who died last December at age 24, filed the lawsuit saying their son had worked as a bartender at The Woods in Jupiter, Florida, and knew the golf star personally, the celebrity website reported.

The restaurant's manager is Erica Herman, who is Woods's girlfriend and recruited Immesberger to the restaurant.

Immesberger finished his shift on December 10 but stayed at The Woods to drink at the restaurant and was allegedly served to the point of "severe intoxication" before being sent out to his car.

SHORT CORNER

Neuer in race to be fit for title decider

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer has admitted that he may not be fit to play in Saturday's Bundesliga title decider against Eintracht Frankfurt.

The Bayern captain has been sidelined with a calf injury since mid-April, and had hoped to return to full fitness in time for last weekend's visit to RB Leipzig.

He is now in danger of missing the last league game of the season on Saturday, in which Bayern hope to wrap up a seventh successive Bundesliga title.



"I still have the Frankfurt game in my sights," said Neuer on Monday at a ceremony in which he was presented with a Bavarian state medal for the work of his children's charity, the Manuel Neuer Kids Foundation.

"Whether I can play or not I can't say. I am working hard on it and we will have to see how it looks from one day to the next," he said.

Mikel will lead Nigeria at Africa Cup of Nations

John Obi Mikel has confirmed he is available to return

to Nigeria's Super Eagles for next month's Africa Cup of Nations in Egypt, according to a team official.

The former Chelsea star last played for Nigeria at the 2018 World Cup in Russia and was not involved in the qualifying for this year's Nations Cup.

"Mikel has met with coach (Gernot) Rohr in England and he has confirmed he will feature at the Nations Cup in Egypt," said a top team official.

The 32-year-old Obi, now with English Championship side Middlesbrough, has won 85 caps and scored six goals since his full international debut in 2005 against Libya.

The tournament in Egypt is widely seen as the last hurrah for the player in international football. --AFP

Man City could be banned from Champions League

European football's financial regulators are poised to recommend that newly minted Premier League champions Manchester City be barred from the Champions League, the New York Times reported Monday. Members of the investigatory chamber of UEFA's financial control board met two weeks ago in Switzerland to finalize their conclusions, the newspaper said.

"The investigatory panel's leader, the former prime minister of Belgium Yves Leterme, will have the final say on the submission to a separate adjudicatory chamber, which could be filed as soon as this week. The body is expected to seek at least a one-season ban," the Times said.

It was unclear if such a ban, if levied, would be enforced next season or in the 2020-21 campaign, the Times said, noting that with qualifying for Europe's most prestigious and lucrative club championship set to start in June there is little time to finalize a sanction.

Manchester City would also have the right to appeal such a ban to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. --AFP

Herrera believes in Solskjaer

AFP, London



LEAGUE

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer possesses the qualities necessary to restore Manchester United as a genuine title contender, according to departing midfielder Anders Herrera.

The 29-year-old Spanish international -- who has been linked to a move to French champions Paris Saint-Germain -- believes the common decency of Solskjaer will be rewarded with better performances on the pitch.

Solskjaer's star faded almost as soon as he was given the job full-time after a terrific spell as caretaker manager following the sacking of Jose Mourinho in December.

The former United striker guided them to 14 wins in 17 games but the end of the season has been nothing short of a disaster as they lost eight of their last 12 -- ending up 32 points off city rivals and champions Manchester City -- and missed out on Champions League football next term.

"He is one of the best people I have ever met in football," said Herrera, quitting United after the club declined to offer him a new contract when he demanded increased wages of £300,000 (\$388,000) a week.

"Everyone loves him in the dressing room. Everyone wants to fight for him.

"When you have the players behind you and wanting to fight for you, part of the job is done.

"I believe in karma and if you are a good person, if you are honest and sincere with the players and the fans, sooner or later it will work.

"I think Ole is the right person because he has qualities and knowledge but also he is a great man and a great person."

Herrera, who is likely to be followed out the door by a slew of players in the close season, added Solskjaer and his coaching staff needed the fans to be patient as the turn around will take time.

Neymar scores name win in EU court

AFP, Brussels



FOOTBALLER

Brazilian superstar Neymar scored a legal win on Tuesday as a top EU court ruled against a businessman who tried to claim copyright on the world's most expensive footballer's name.

The General Court of the European Union said that Carlos Moreira had acted in "bad faith" when he tried to trademark the name "Neymar" in 2012, confirming a decision by the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) to invalidate the registration.

The court rejected arguments from Moreira, who applied to register "Neymar" as a trademark for clothes, footwear and hats in December 2012 that he had little knowledge of football and simply liked the sound of the word.

"The Court upholds the decision of EUIPO that Mr Moreira was acting in bad faith when he filed the application for registration of the mark 'NEYMAR,'" the court said.

EUIPO ruled in Neymar's favour when he challenged Moreira's registration in 2016, prompting the Portuguese businessman to take the case to the General Court, the EU's second-highest tribunal.

Moreira claimed that when he registered the name, he did not know Neymar --



who had been named South American Footballer of the Year in 2011 and attracted interest from a host of top European clubs -- was a rising star.

The court dismissed the argument, saying it was clear Moreira had "more than a little knowledge of the world of football."

This was proven, the court said, "by the fact that he filed an application for registration of the word mark 'KER CASILLAS', a mark corresponding to the name of another famous football player, on the same day he sought registration of the mark 'NEYMAR'."

"Mr Moreira puts forward no convincing argument to disprove the finding of EUIPO that there was no explanation for his application for registration of the contested mark other than the desire to 'free-ride' on the footballer's renown," the court said.