



Athletic Bilbao defender Inigo Lekue (L) challenges Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior in a La Liga encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Sunday. The match ended in a 0-0 draw.

PHOTO: AFP

Real frustrated by Athletic

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid hit the woodwork three times but could only draw 0-0 at home to Athletic Bilbao in a frustrating final game of 2019 on Sunday, which meant they slipped two points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona.

Real's top scorer Karim Benzema had a shot cleared off the line in a lively first half while Toni Kroos came within inches of scoring when he waltzed through the defence and hammered a shot which Athletic keeper Unai Simon deflected on to the bar.

Substitute Nacho Fernandez rattled the bar in the second half while Serbian forward Luka Jovic left Simon flat-footed with a late header but watched as the ball bounced off the post and Sergio Ramos scuffed the rebound back at the goalkeeper.

Athletic, who beat champions Barca earlier this season, gave an astute

performance in defence and also gave their hosts a few scares, with Kenan Kodro having a goal ruled out for offside and Inaki Williams forcing Thibaut Courtois to make a diving save.

It was Real's third draw in a row after 1-1 and 0-0 stalemates away to Valencia and Barca respectively, games in which they also played well but lacked composure in front of goal.

"I feel bad for the players because of the effort they put in. We are annoyed that we couldn't score with all the chances we had," Real coach Zinedine Zidane told reporters. "The ball isn't going in for us at the moment but there's no need to be pessimistic. We have to remember this has been a good season for us. We've had a little bit of a sour ending to the year but we can't wait for 2020 to start."

Zidane's side are second in the standings on 37 points after 18 games, two behind Barca who beat Alaves 4-1 on Saturday. Athletic are seventh with 28.

Arteta demands accountability

REUTERS, London

Arsenal have a squad that can be improved but the players must take up responsibility and be accountable for their actions on the pitch if they are to be a part of the club's future plans, new manager Mikel Arteta said yesterday.

In his first news conference last week, Arteta had demanded "passion and energy" from the players and the Spaniard said he was satisfied with what he saw during Saturday's 0-0 draw at Everton.

SA Games' medallists set for cash awards

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is all set to make good on their promise to provide cash-awards to the medal winners of the just concluded South (SA) Games on January 11 at a city hotel, confirmed BOA secretary general Syed Shahed Reza yesterday.

About Tk 3.77 crore will be disbursed among the athletes with BOA president and Army chief General Aziz Ahmed expected to attend as chief guest of the reception.

Bangladesh broke their previous record by winning 142 medals -- 19 gold, 33 silver and 90 bronze -- at the

regional multi sports extravaganza, held in Nepal from December 1 to 10.

Ahead of the SA Games, the BOA announced that cash awards amounting to Tk six lakh, Tk three lakh and Tk one lakh would be provided to the gold, silver and bronze medal winners in individual events respectively. Meanwhile, each member of the gold silver and bronze medal winning teams would receive Tk one lakh, Tk 50 thousand and Tk 30 thousand respectively.

"We are determined to keep our promises. We believe as soon as we hand over our promised money to the medal-winning athletes, they will be encouraged more," said Reza at the

BOA Office yesterday.

Although, Reza might be pleased with Bangladesh's over-all performance since it led to their all-time best results in the SA Games, he does regret that the country missed out on gold medals in a few disciplines.

"We expected to win gold medals in some disciplines such as football, swimming, shooting, wushu and boxing but we could not achieve it. However, I'm not disappointed with the over-all performance because the athletes produced their all-time best results in SA Games," said Reza, adding that they actually need long-term and short-term training to keep this success intact for future.



Vandals defaced the Zlatan Ibrahimovic statue in Malmo quite literally yesterday as it was found with its nose cut off.

PHOTO: AFP

Pak thank SL for bringing Tests back

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan thanked Sri Lanka Monday for helping them bring Test cricket back to the country for the first time since the 2009 attack on the same visitors led to international matches being suspended. Pakistan's players went to the Sri Lanka dressing room to thank them soon after the home team posted a convincing 263-run win in the second Test of their first home series in a decade.

The victory gave Pakistan a 1-0 series win following the rain-ravaged draw in the first Test in Rawalpindi.

Pakistan captain Azhar Ali said his country owed a big thank you to Sri Lanka. "They have given us immense happiness by playing in Pakistan," said Azhar after his team wrapped up victory in just 14 minutes of play on the fifth day.

Sri Lanka -- set 476 to win -- were bowled out for 212, with teenaged Pakistan paceman Naseem Shah taking five for 31.

At 16 years and 307 days old, Naseem became the second youngest bowler overall and youngest quickie to claim five wickets in a Test innings.

Azhar said the occasion and win brought

happiness to all his players, who had never taken part in a Test match at home.

"It's a great occasion for happiness for all of us that we won the series. It carried great importance and was very significant because we were playing our first home Test," said Azhar.

Pakistan became off-limits for visiting sides after Islamic militants attacked the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009.

Sri Lankan skipper Dimuth Karunaratne said his team had felt safe in Pakistan.

"Security was 200 percent," said Karunaratne, one of ten players who withdrew from the limited over tour over security fears.

"Security people were like fathers to us. They kept talking to us and they were right behind us every time. When we were going out to eat or shopping, they were there."

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 191 & second innings 555 for 3 (Abid 174, Masood 135, Azhar 118, Azam 100 not out; Kumara 2-139)

SRI LANKA: First innings 271 & second innings 212 all out (Fernando 102, Dickwella 65, Mathews 19; Naseem 5-31, Yasir 2-84)

Result: Pakistan won by 263 runs

Player-of-the-match: Abid A

YOUNGEST TO BAD TEST FIFERS					
Player	Age	Figures	Opp	Venue	Year
Nasim-ul-Ghani (Pak)	16y	303d	West Indies	Georgetown	Mar 1958
Naseem Shah (Pak)	16y	307d	Sri Lanka	Karachi	Dec 2019
Mohammad Amir (Pak)	17y	257d	Australia	Melbourne	Dec 2009
Nayeem Hasan (BD)	17y	355d	West Indies	Chattogram	Nov 2018
Enamul Haque Jr (BD)	18y	32d	Zimbabwe	Chattogram	Jan 2005



Pakistan's 16-year-old pacer Naseem Shah celebrates after delivering a historic win and also becoming the second-youngest player to take a fiver on the fifth morning of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the National Stadium in Karachi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Drogba, Maldini to come for Gold Cup?

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is mulling over whether or not to bring football legends like Brazil's Ronaldinho, Netherlands' Ruud Gullit, Marco Van Basten, Italy's Paolo Maldini or Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba to lend their star presence to the upcoming Bangabandhu Gold Cup, scheduled to be held from January 15 to 25.

"Nothing has been confirmed as K-Sports is still working on it. We are expecting to let you know about it before the draw of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, adding that the draw for the six-nation tournament will take place on January 4 at a city hotel.

Explaining the reasons behind such a highly ambitious initiative, Shohag said, "We brought two famous female footballers during the Bangamata U-19 Women's Football tournament and it had good impact on football as they attended different programmes. So, we also want to bring one or two big football stars to for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup as well to inspire youth talents."

Five teams -- Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan -- have already confirmed their participation alongside Bangladesh, however, Shohag informed that they are still working on finalizing the participating teams.

SHORT CORNER

Barca remain best paid team

Barcelona have retained their position as the world's best paid professional sports team while National Basketball Association (NBA) sides took seven out of the top 10 places this year, a study by research body Sporting Intelligence has revealed.

Data from the annual Global Sports Salary Survey shows the average basic pay at the Spanish giants this season is 9.8 million pounds (\$12.75 million), dipping slightly from last year's 10.5 million pounds.

Barcelona holding onto top spot is largely down to Argentina forward Lionel Messi's gross basic annual pay of more than 50 million pounds.

Real Madrid are second on the list with an average basic pay of around 8.9 million pounds while Serie A champions Juventus -- who signed Messi's great rival Cristiano Ronaldo in 2018 -- are in third place.

English soccer champions Manchester City are 13th at 6.9 million pounds -- below France's Paris St Germain in 12th (7.1 million pounds) -- but ahead of local rivals Manchester

United who are 33rd (6.1 million pounds). —REUTERS

Rugby star follows Ozil

New Zealand rugby superstar Sonny Bill Williams followed Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil in criticising China's treatment of its Uighur minority yesterday, while lamenting that some had chosen money over "humanity".

As the fallout from Ozil's condemnation of China's crackdown on Muslim minorities continues, Williams -- a double rugby union World Cup winner with the All Blacks who converted to Islam -- weighed in. —AFP

Mourinho bemoans Son ban

Son Heung-min's unavailability due to a three-match ban for a red card in Sunday's 2-0 Premier League defeat by Chelsea is a big loss for Tottenham Hotspur, manager Jose Mourinho said yesterday.

Son kicked out in retaliation at Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger and referee Anthony Taylor produced a straight red card after a VAR review, leaving Spurs with 10 men for the last half hour. —REUTERS

Espanyol fire Machin

AFP, Madrid

Espanyol, who are languishing at the bottom of La Liga, yesterday fired chief coach Pablo Machin after just over two months in the job, the club said.

"The club have decided to end his role as coach... as a result of the first team's performance," said an official statement on its website.

The club, which also gave marching orders to the other three members of Machin's coaching team, said the aim was "to change the current situation of the white-and-blues" within La Liga.

Machin, who had a brief career as a Segunda Division player in the 1990s, was brought in to manage the Catalan team in October, replacing David Gallego who was also sacked over the team's performance after just four months on the job.

Lazio end Ronaldo's run

AFP, Rome



Lazio returned to a heroes welcome in Rome on Monday after their thrilling 3-1 Italian Super Cup victory over Juventus in Riyadh which ended Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo's five-year victorious run in finals.

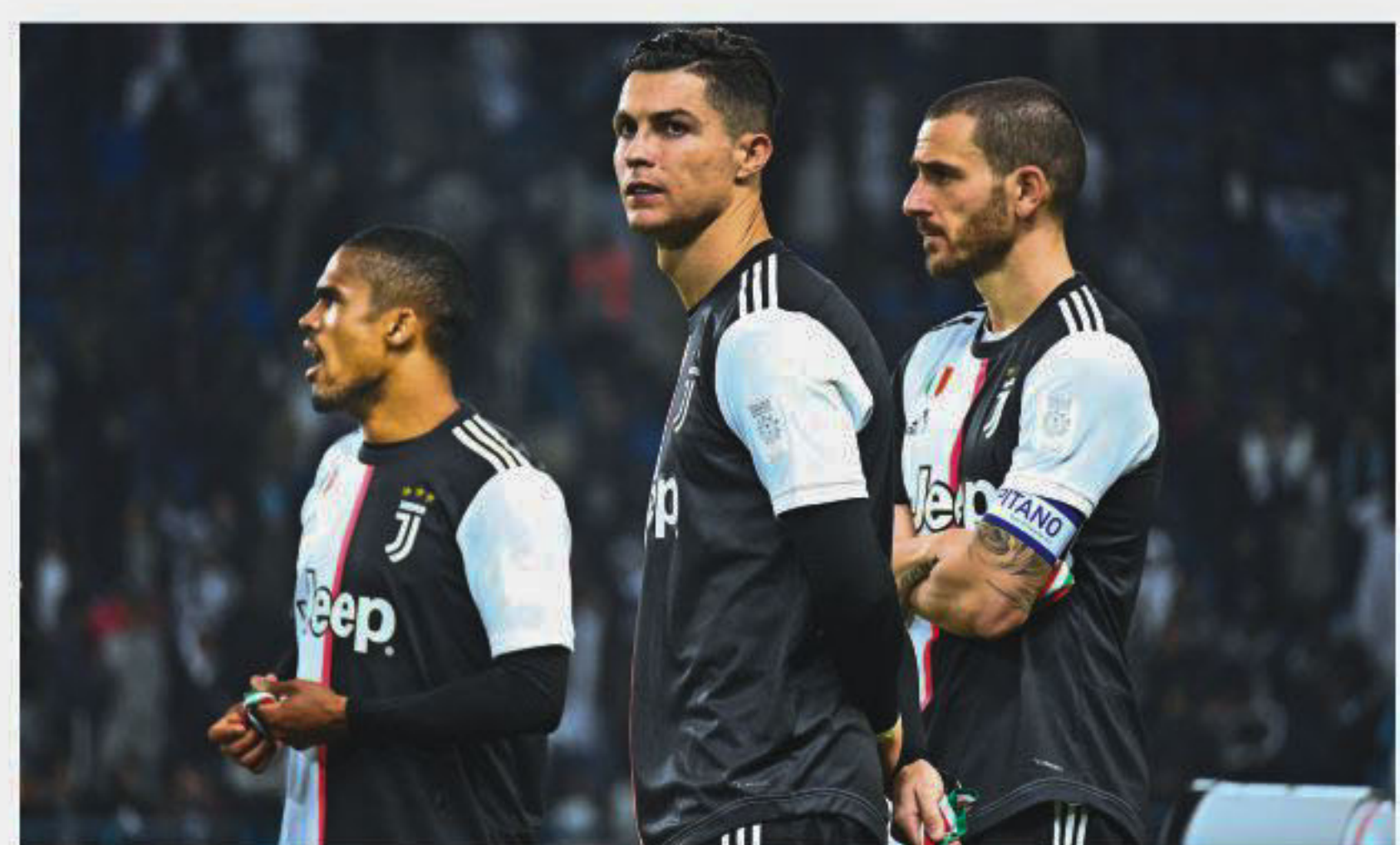
Ronaldo had been on a run of 12 consecutive wins with Portugal, Juventus and Real Madrid going back to the Spanish Super Cup in August 2014.

And the 34-year-old five-time Ballon d'Or winner's frustration was obvious as he quickly took the silver medal off his neck and did not wait to see Lazio lift the trophy for a fifth time.

Simone Inzaghi's side have won the Cup twice in the past three years, having also beaten Juventus 3-2 in 2017.

The Roman-based team landed in the early hours at the city's Fiumicino airport where they were greeted by 1,000 fans, waving the club's white and blue flags, scarves and banners.

"We're doing something incredible,



Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo (2nd from L) looks on dejectedly after his side succumbed to a 3-1 loss in the Italian Super Cup final in Riyadh on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

between the eight wins in a row (in the league) and this victory in the Cup," said Luis Alberto, who scored the opening goal.

"Lazio have confirmed that they are a great team, with a winning mentality

and great players."

Ronaldo has played two finals since joining Juventus from Real Madrid in 2018, scoring the winner to beat AC Milan 1-0 in the Italian Super Cup in January 2019.