



Referee rested after Barca's controversial win at Betis

LONDON: La Liga referee Jose Maria Sanchez Martinez has not been allocated a game next weekend by the Spanish football federation following his officiating of the fixture between Real Betis and Barcelona on Sunday in which he angered both teams.

The Spanish champions won 3-2 at the Benito Villamarin in a thrilling match the official seemed to lose control of, sending off Clement Lenglet and Nabil Fekir but not dismissing Sergi Roberto or awarding Lionel Messi a penalty.

Fekir was sent off for two bookings in the space of a few seconds, one for a foul and the other for dissent. Lenglet followed but Betis were angry that Sergi Roberto, who had already been booked, was let off after scything

down Carles Alena.

"How can that not be a second yellow for Sergi Roberto's foul on Alena?" asked Betis coach Rubi. "Barcelona should have been left with 10 men, there's no doubt about it." Real Betis's vice-president Jose Miguel Lopez Catalan also criticised the officials after the game. "We are indignant and angry because once again refereeing has hurt Betis and it has not been fair," he said.

Barcelona had complaints too, with Messi pulled back in the area at the end but Sanchez Martinez did not point to the spot.

"In the end we could have won by more goals, if you look at the penalty they didn't give Messi," said Barca midfielder Frenkie de Jong. "It was clear, they pushed him over."



ICC introduces front foot no ball technology

LONDON: The on-field umpires have been instructed not to call any front foot no balls unless advised to do so by the third umpire.

Front foot no ball technology will be used in a major tournament for the first time at the International Cricket Council (ICC) Women's T20 World Cup in Australia later this month. The decision to use this system was made after successful trials conducted recently in both India and the West Indies.

The third umpire will monitor the front foot landing position after each ball and communicate to the

4717 balls were bowled and 13 no balls (0.28% of deliveries) were called. All deliveries were judged accurately. Geoff Allardice, ICC General Manager Cricket said: "Cricket has an excellent track record of introducing technology to support the decision making of our match officials and I'm confident that this technology will reduce the small number of front foot no ball errors at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup."

"No balls are difficult for umpires to call accurately, and even though the percentage of deliveries that



on-field umpire if the delivery was a no ball. The on-field umpires have been instructed not to call any front foot no balls unless advised to do so by the third umpire, although they will be responsible for calling all other types of no ball on the field.

The technology was recently trialed across 12 games, during which

are no balls is low, it is important to call them correctly. Since we first trialed this concept in the ODI series between England and Pakistan in 2016 the technology has improved significantly, enabling us to introduce it cost-effectively, and with minimum impact on the flow of the game."



INDIA SUFFER ODI CLEAN SWEEP IN NEW ZEALAND

WELLINGTON: India suffered a rare series whitewash as New Zealand posted a five-wicket win in the third and final one-day international at Mount Maunganui on Tuesday.

A KL Rahul century was not enough to save the tourists, who scored a respectable 296 for seven after losing the toss and being asked to bat.

But the Black Caps, stung by a 5-0 whitewash in the recent Twenty20 series, were determined not to let the chance of a retaliatory clean sweep in the

ODIs slip away.

Openers Henry Nicholls and Martin Guptill gave the Black Caps a flying start with 80 and 66 respectively before Colin de Grandhomme saw them home when he bludgeoned 58 off 28 balls. The hosts finished on 300 for five, reaching India's target with 17 balls to spare, despite a mid-innings wobble.

It is the first time India have been whitewashed in a bilateral ODI series of three or more matches since 1989 and the only time it has ever happened against

New Zealand. Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal was the pick of India's bowlers, taking three for 47.

Earlier, Rahul boosted India's hopes with his fourth ODI century, bringing up the landmark off 104 balls, before departing on 112.

He was supported by a gritty 62 from Shreyas Iyer but most of India's batters failed to live up to captain Virat Kohli's pre-match exhortation to play positively and post a big total.

Prithvi Shaw and Manish Pandey both reached the 40s but no other batters made double fig-

ures, with Kohli out for nine.

Still, Rahul looked set to steer India to a huge total before Black Caps paceman Hamish Bennett slowed the scoring with a late flurry of wickets.

Rahul had a life on 64 when Mitchell Santner's throw at the stumps went wide and the batsman made the most of it to score his fourth ODI century, bringing up the landmark off 104 balls, including nine fours and one six.

Bennett dismissed Rahul for 112 and then snared Manish Pandey for 42 off his next ball.

His fourth wicket came when Shardul Thakur sent a full toss straight to de Grandhomme, and the bowler was unlucky not to get another when Navdeep Saini almost edged the next delivery onto his stumps.

The focus now turns to Test cricket, with the first of two five-day matches scheduled to begin in Wellington on February 21.

The results of both matches will count toward the inaugural ICC World Test Championship, in which India are runaway leaders at the top of the ladder.

Pele depressed, reclusive because of poor health: son



LONDON: Football legend Pele is experiencing "a kind of depression" and barely leaves home anymore because health problems have left him unable to walk normally, his son said in an interview published Monday.

"He's pretty fragile in terms of his mobility... and that makes him suffer a kind of depression," Edinho said of his 79-year-old father, who has had a series of health problems in recent years.

"Just imagine, he's the 'King,' he was always such an imposing figure, and now he can't walk normally. He gets very shy, very embarrassed about that," his son said in an interview published on the sports news site Globoesporte.com.

Pele, the pride of Brazilian football and the only player to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970), is considered by many to be the greatest footballer of all time.

He has been in and out of hospital in recent years for various health issues.

He never fully recovered from one of his hip operations, leaving him dependent on a walker, Edinho said.

"He's doing a bit better than when he was in a wheelchair recently, but he still has a hard time getting around," said Edinho, 49.

Pele's public appearances have grown increasingly rare with age. Last April he traveled to Paris for a promotional appearance with French rising star Kylian Mbappe, but had to be hospitalized shortly after for kidney problems.

In 2014, he was placed in intensive care for dialysis after contracting a severe urinary infection.

The Brazilian great, whose real name is Edson Arantes do Nascimento, has only one kidney, after a broken rib during a match forced doctors to remove the other. He has also suffered a series of hip problems.



Saudi giants Al Hilal cruise past Iran's Shahr Khodro

LONDON: Andre Carrillo and Bafetimbi Gomis were on target as Saudi giants Al Hilal began the defence of their Asian Champions League title with a 2-0 victory over Iran's Shahr Khodro on Monday.

Al Hilal's superiority was never in doubt as they controlled proceedings from the start at the Zabeel Stadium in Dubai.

But the Saudis struggled to breach the Shahr Khodro defence, with goalkeeper Mehdi Rahmati produc-

ing a string of some good saves in their Group B clash.

Just when it appeared the deadlock would continue into the second half, Shahr Khodro, who are making their Champions League debut, caved in to the pressure.

Italian international Sebastian Giovinco cut in from the left and passed for Salem al-Dawsari, who in turn set up Carrillo neatly and the Peruvian made no mistake with his half-volley.

Carrillo turn provider in the 69th minute as he received al-Dawsari's pass inside the box and squared for Gomis and the Frenchman, who was the top-scorer in the tournament last year, scored from just three yards with a simple tap-in.

Shahr Khodro could have pulled one back but Al Hilal goalkeeper Abdullah al-Mayouf made a fine save three minutes from time to thwart a powerful shot from Milad Sarlak.

Ronaldo, Ibrahimovic set for Italian Cup clash

LONDON: Cristiano Ronaldo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic are set to go head-to-head in Thursday's Italian Cup semi-final, first leg between Juventus and AC Milan at the San Siro.

Both Ronaldo and Ibrahimovic scored at the weekend in defeats as Juventus fell 2-1 at Hellas Verona, while AC Milan threw away a two-goal lead in a 4-2 defeat by city rivals Inter.

"It wasn't the result we wanted," said the 35-year-old Ronaldo despite becoming the first Juventus player to score in 10 successive league games, just one game short of the Serie A record.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has scored 23 goals in all competitions this season.



Ibrahimovic, 38, has scored three goals since returning to Milan last month.

The Swede headed in the second goal on Sunday after setting up the first, but Inter hit back with four sec-

ond-half strikes.

"I showed that I can still make a difference, even at 38," he said.

But Inter striker Romelu Lukaku will be looking to upstage the two other former Manchester United

players against Napoli in the other last-four first leg on Wednesday.

Gennaro Gattuso's Napoli, despite their current slump, ousted holders Lazio in the quarter-finals.

"There's a new king in town," a jubilant Lukaku wrote on Twitter after scoring the fourth goal for Inter in Sunday's derby.

"We run this town."

The Belgian was replying to Ibrahimovic's pre-derby post saying that "lions don't compare themselves to humans".

Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri has reason to be worried by his side's away form, with the defending Serie A champions having lost their last two games on the road.

"I hope that someone will help me,

it's something we have to resolve," Sarri said after the loss to Verona.

"Right now we have a difference in performance between home and away."

Juventus are bidding to reclaim the trophy which they held for four seasons until losing to eventual runners-up Atalanta in the quarters last year.

Antonio Conte's Inter are the only one of the four semi-finalists to win in Serie A at the weekend, with Napoli crashing to a 3-2 defeat by lowly Lecce.

Inter's victory lifted them ahead of Juventus on goal difference at the top of the table, as they target their first Scudetto since 2010.

The second-leg ties will take place on March 4 and 5.