



I'm leaving him (Cristiano Ronaldo) at home, he had played a lot and he needs to rest. Right now it would be too risky to play him

MASSIMILIANO ALLEGRI  
JUVENTUS COACH ANNOUNCING RESTING RONALDO FOR THE NEXT MATCH

THUMBNAILS



Wayne Rooney had a hat-trick and added an assist to help DC United beat nine-man Real Salt Lake 5-0 on Saturday night.

**Indian eves storm into SAFF semis:** The Indian women's football team sealed its place in the semifinals of the SAFF Championship with a resounding 5-0 win over Sri Lanka at the Sahid Rangashala Stadium in Biratnagar on Sunday. This result has extended India's unbeaten run in the competition's history to 21 games and secured the top spot in Group B. In the semifinals, India will take on Group A runners-up Bangladesh on Wednesday while hosts Nepal will face Sri Lanka in the other fixture.

**FIFA to make public the vote for 2023 Women's WC:** FIFA has agreed to make public its vote on the host for the 2023 Women's World Cup. The organization's decision-making body is becoming more transparent after concerns were raised last month that the women's tournament wouldn't fully follow the new voting process for the men's World Cup. The United States, Canada and Mexico were chosen last year to host the 2026 World Cup. Previously, the decisions were taken in private.

# Zidane enjoys winning start In Real Madrid

AGENCIES  
MADRID, 17 MARCH

Zinedine Zidane brought Real Madrid's outcasts in from the cold and they repaid him with a win over Celta Vigo on Saturday but La Liga's title race could well be over after Atletico Madrid were beaten by Athletic Bilbao.

Isco and Gareth Bale each scored in Madrid's 2-0 victory over Celta before Atletico lost 2-0 at San Mames, giving Barcelona the chance to go 10 points clear if they overcome Real Betis on Sunday.

Barca's superiority has been clear for some time but Zidane's new era is up and running. Isco, who had not started a single league game under Santiago Solari, gave Real the lead shortly after the hour and Bale got the goal his own committed display deserved to put sorry Celta out of sight.

Bale was teed up by Marcelo, who was also dropped by Solari but recalled, while Keylor Navas pulled off a superb save in the first half, having been brought back in ahead of Thibaut Courtois.

"Nobody can erase what these players have done," Zidane about those players he recalled. "I will count on everyone." The victory ends a run of four consecutive home defeats for Madrid and means they are now two points behind Atletico, nine back on Barca.

That deficit will surely prove too big to close but Zidane's job was to restore morale in the 11 league games that are left and to find out what, and who, needs changing in the summer.



"My team-talk was really simple," Zidane said. "I told them to have fun, to play, to run together and to be united when we don't have the ball. When we have it, let's have fun, and that's what we did."

At times, it felt like a pre-season fixture, not just because of the baking hot sun but the relaxed atmosphere and the sense this is now a team on trial.

Bale, whose relationship with Zidane deteriorated to breaking point last season, was arguably the biggest winner, his performance proving there could yet be a place for him in what the club's president Florentino Perez has dubbed

"the glorious new era".

Marcelo impressed too while Courtois might well wonder what his next couple of months hold, given Navas, an old favourite of Zidane, looks to be back in favour. "There are 10 games left, today Keylor played, on another day it could be Thibaut," Zidane said. "Real Madrid needs two or three great goalkeepers. We'll see what happens next year."

There was a cosy feeling at the Santiago Bernabeu, where fans had a new song to the tune of 'Hey Jude', replaced by 'Zizou', and cheered their new coach's name when it was announced before kick-off.

Bale came closest to scoring in the first half with an acrobatic scissor-kick that crashed against the crossbar and later teed up Karim Benzema to tap in, only for the referee to book the Welshman for a foul in the build-up.

Celta found chances on the break but never looked like converting. Maxi Gomez, with only Ramos to beat, curled wide while Sofiane Boufal's finish had to be blocked on the line by Marcelo as Madrid were again caught upfield.

Benzema's goal was ruled out just before half-time and Luka Modric had one chalked off just after, this time VAR intervening to show Raphael Varane offside and close enough to be deemed active.

Isco's influence had diminished and Dani Ceballos was ready to replace him just before he scored the opening goal. Asensio made it, a superb run allowing Benzema to cross and Isco to bundle in.

There was still time for Bale to add a second, his touch making space for the shot after Marcelo had slipped him clear. The ball hit the post and then the net.

After going out of the Champions League to Juventus on Tuesday, Atletico's miserable week continued as they were undone by two late goals in Bilbao.

Jose Gimenez was at fault for the opener, gifting the ball to Inigo Cordoba who found Inaki Williams at the back post. Gimenez was unfortunate for the second too, as Kenan Kodro's shot deflected off his foot on its way in, leaving Barcelona with one hand on the trophy.

# Bengaluru FC crowned ISL champions for first time



PTI  
MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

Bengaluru FC clinched their maiden Indian Super League title as Rahul Bheke found a championship-winning header in the dying minutes of the final against FC Goa, here Sunday.

The two teams were locked 0-0 after 90 minutes. Even the first extra time saw no goals but Bengaluru got better of a 10-men Goa team 1-0, four minutes from the end of the second extra half.

Goa's mid-fielder Ahmed Jahouh was shown a second yellow card and he had to walk out as the side was reduced to 10 men.

It looked Goa defenders would take the game into the penalties but Bheke looped a header on a corner kick from Dimas Delgado and it went past custodian Naveen Kumar, triggering celebrations in the Bengaluru camp.

Earlier, both the teams began with caution. Goa earned a corner early in the game but Edu Bedia's header went wide at a nearly

packed Mumbai Football Arena.

Bengaluru had a chance when mid-fielder Nishu Kumar sent Sunil Chhetri through with a lobbed pass. The skipper passed it to Miku, who cut past three players and shot, but Goa custodian Naveen collected it safely.

In the 24th minute, Bengaluru had another chance. Xisco played Chhetri down the flank and the captain sent a cross in the box to Miku but his header sailed above the bar.

Two minutes later, Miku had another close chance, but Goa's defense did well to clear it.

Bengaluru strikers kept Goa's defense and Naveen Kumar on their toes, but still both the sides were searching for their first goal after 35 minutes. Goa received a set-back when their skipper and mid-fielder Mandar Rao Desai had to be stretchered out as he pulled his hamstring just before the conclusion of the first half.

Goa did have a few chances in the first half, but they

failed to convert any.

After the change of ends, Goa upped the ante and their best chance came in the 58th minute when Brandon Fernandes swung a cross for Bedia, but the Spanish mid-fielder couldn't get a touch on to it.

In the 67th minute, aggressive mid-fielder Jackichand Singh played the ball to Ahmed Jahouh outside the box, and the Moroccan tried to slot one in the top corner but ended up side footing to the keeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

In the additional time of the second half, Bengaluru had another close chance.

Nishu Kumar crossed the ball into the box and Miku zoomed past the defenders. He took a touch and shot but Mourtada Fall got into the way as Bengaluru earned a corner. After 90 minutes, the two sides were still locked 0-0. In the first extra time, Bengaluru survived a near scare when Luisma headed the ball back to Gurpreet but the experienced keeper collected safely.

# Man City hit back to reach FA Cup semis after Swansea scare

AGENCIES  
SWANSEA, 17 MARCH

Sergio Aguero kept alive Manchester City's hopes of an unprecedented quadruple as they survived a major FA Cup scare in a thrilling fight-back from two goals down to win 3-2 at Swansea in Saturday's quarter-finals.

Aguero had watched from the substitutes' bench as second-tier Swansea roared into a stunning first half lead through goals from Matt Grimes and Bersant Celina.

But the Argentine emerged as City's saviour on a rainy night in south Wales by setting up their first goal for Bernardo Silva, before completing the comeback with a last-gasp winner after Swansea keeper Kristoffer Nordfeldt scored an unlucky own goal from the Argentina striker's penalty to draw City level.

Having already won the League Cup and advanced to the Champions League quarter-finals, Premier League leaders City remain in the hunt for a clean sweep of all four major trophies.



It was a fortunate escape for City on Saturday however, as replays showed Raheem Sterling was fortunate to win the penalty that led to the equaliser, while Aguero was marginally offside for the winner.

City boss Pep Guardiola had named a strong starting line-up and Leroy Sane and Bernardo Silva both went close early on.

It only looked a matter of time before City took the lead but Swansea ensured it was anything but one-way traffic.

They showed they could give the visitors a run for their money with a neat passing game that pushed City on to the back foot.

Grimes put Swansea ahead from the penalty spot in the 20th minute after Fabian Delph carelessly fouled Connor Roberts after the City defence was wrong-footed by Mike van der Hoorn's crossfield pass.

Grimes had not scored in his three-and-a-half years at the Liberty Stadium but took over penalty duties following Celina's embarrassing spot-

kick miss in a 3-0 midweek defeat at West Bromwich Albion.

The 23-year-old centre back made the most of Delph's misjudgement by confidently driving the ball high into the roof of the City net.

It went from bad to worse for City nine minutes later as Guardiola's defence disintegrated following a nine-pass move involving seven Swansea players.

This time Swansea attacked with pace and purpose and, after fine play on the edge of City's box by Nathan Dyer and Daniel James, space opened up for Celina to curl the ball delightfully beyond Ederson.

Guardiola looked flummoxed in the technical area as he mulled over finding a way back into the tie while Aymeric Laporte lost his head following referee Andre Marriner's half-time whistle and was booked for shoving Swansea winger Wayne Routledge in the chest.

It was a dire situation that left City in danger of a repeat of last season's embarrassing FA Cup exit at Wigan.

# Wolves shock Man U to reach FA Cup semis

AGENCIES  
WOLVERHAMPTON, 17 MARCH

Wolves inflicted a second straight defeat on Manchester United on Saturday, outplaying Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side to secure a 2-1 win and reach the FA Cup semi-finals.

United lacked spark throughout and were overcome by an eager Wolves side with two goals in the space of six minutes in the second half from Raul Jimenez and Diogo Jota.

Marcus Rashford's injury-time effort was a mere consolation. Solskjaer had presided over a run of just two defeats in 18 games since replacing Jose Mourinho in December, progressing to the quarter-finals of the Champions League and the last eight of the FA Cup.

But now they have suffered two losses in a row after their Champions League exertions at Paris Saint-Germain.

United were favourites but the Midlands' form against the top six that has carried them to seventh position in the Premier League gave home fans hope.

The early signs were that



United, not Wolves, were going to live up to the hype of the warm-up, dominating early possession. The visitors created the first opening when Paul Pogba gained a yard of space in the box and curled wide.

Goalkeeper John Ruddy was happy to let the ball drift away but was forced to make a falling save to his left soon afterwards when Rashford let fly from 30 yards.

Wolves' first threat came in the 28th minute when Ruben Neves' slow drive was well held by the United goalkeeper Ser-

gio Romero, but the United goalkeeper beat his curling shot away.

United had the first opening of the second half when Rashford got away from Conor Coady on the right side of the box but could only whistle a fierce angled drive a few feet wide.

Wolves replied with a rising, diagonal effort from Jimenez that looped comfortably over the bar.

Nuno Espirito Santo's side were gaining in confidence however and created two chances that required some superb goalkeeping from Romero.

First he reacted sharply to tip over a bullet header from Jimenez from Joao Moutinho's corner. The Argentine keeper then palmed over a rising chip from Moutinho from 25 yards as Wolves got on top.

Wolves scored the goal they had been threatening in the 70th minute. The chance seemed to be lost when Jimenez was forced backwards with his back to goal after being crowded out following a superb run by Moutinho, who breezed through three challenges cutting in from the left.

# Bottas upstages Hamilton at Aus Grand Prix

AGENCIES  
MELBOURNE, 17 MARCH

Valtteri Bottas upstaged his Mercedes world champion team-mate Lewis Hamilton Sunday to win the season-opening Australian Formula One Grand Prix in a sizzling performance that he called his "best ever".

The flying Finn started second on the grid but got a jump on the pole-sitting Briton at the first corner and never looked back, scorching round the Albert Park circuit to take the chequered flag a massive 20.9 seconds ahead of Hamilton.

Red Bull's precocious Max Verstappen came third to join them on the podium after audaciously overtaking Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel midway through the race.

"How about that! Yes!" said Bottas over the team radio after also taking the new bonus point for the fastest lap.

"I don't know what just happened. I don't know what to say. It was definitely my best race ever," he said after. "I felt so good and the car was so good."



Four-time world champion Vettel had to settle for fourth, trailing in 57.1 seconds behind Bottas. Ferrari partner Charles Leclerc was fifth, with Kevin Magnussen in a Haas sixth.

Bottas, whose last triumph was at the Abu Dhabi season finale in 2017, was overshadowed last year by Hamilton, failing to win a race, hampered by mechanical problems and bad luck but was fast in qualifying and only narrowly edged out of pole position.

"In the beginning it was all about managing the race and

building the gap," Bottas said. "I knew I could do it, I've done it before, it was about being at my best level."

Bottas, now in his third year with Mercedes, knows he must perform with promising Frenchman Esteban Ocon, 22, waiting in the wings as the team's reserve driver. He delivered in spades on Sunday for his fourth Grand Prix win in his 119th race.

"It's a good weekend for the team," said Hamilton. "Valtteri drove an incredible race today so he deserved it."

"We have some work to do, (but) it is more than we could

have hoped for as a team." Starting on soft tyres on a fine day, Bottas got an electric start and built a gap of 1.153 seconds on Hamilton after the opening lap, with Vettel, Verstappen and Leclerc trailing in their wake.

The gap kept growing, and when Vettel pitted on lap 14 to swap for medium tyres Mercedes called in five-time champion Hamilton soon after.

Bottas stayed out, pumping out fastest laps, and when seven laps later he pitted he emerged more than 10 seconds ahead of his team-mate, who was clearly bemused.

"What was the reason for stopping so early?" Hamilton asked over the team radio, to be told it was to cover Vettel's early stop.

With Bottas having an unsurmountable lead the battle was on for second, with Verstappen hounding Hamilton but unable to find a way through.

"I had to overtake Sebastian to get onto podium which is not easy here but was happy to pull that move off," said Verstappen, who was ecstatic at beating the Ferraris.

# KT Irfan become first Indian from athletics to qualify for Tokyo Olympics

PTI  
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

National record holder KT Irfan Sunday became the first Indian from athletics to qualify for the next year's Olympics while finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan.

The 29-year-old Irfan clocked 1 hour 20 minutes and 57 seconds to better the Tokyo Olympics qualification standard of 1 hour 21 minutes.

The Olympics qualification period for race walk events and marathon race has begun from January 1 this year and will run till May 31, 2020. The Olympics qualification period for all other athletics events will start from May 1 this year and will run till June 29, 2020.

No other Indian from athletics has so far qualified for Tokyo Olympics.

Irfan, who has a personal best as well as national record of 1:20:21 which he did during his 10th place finish in 2012 Olympics, also qualified for



this year's World Championships (September 27-October 6) in Doha, Qatar as he bettered the qualifying mark of 1:22:30.

The Kerala race walker had won the 20 km event in the National Open Race Walk Championships in Chennai last month with a time of 1:26:18.

He was one of the two Indian athletes who were expelled from the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games for not adhering to the 'no needle policy' of the Games. He was disqualified in the 20 km race walk event of the 2018 Asian Games after receiving his third warning for "loss of

contact".

Japan's Toshikazu Yamashi won the 20 km race walk event with an impressive time of 1:17:15 while Kazakhstan's Georgiy Sheiko and Korea's Byeongkwang Choe were second and third in 1:20:21 and 1:20:40 respectively.

The Asian and World record in men's 20 km race walk stands in the name of Japanese Yusuke Suzuki who clocked 1:16:36 in the 2015 edition of the same championships in Nomi.

Two other Indians, Devinder Singh and Ganapathi Krishnan also qualified for the World Championships as they clocked 1:21:22 and 1:22:12 respectively. They had finished second and fifth in the Chennai National Race Walk Championships with timings of 1:26:19 and 1:26:43.

In the women's 20 km race walk event, Soumya Baby finished fourth with a timing of 1:36:08, well outside Olympics qualifying standard of 1:31:00 and World Championships qualifying standard of 1:33:30.

# Thiem books Indian Wells final against Federer

AGENCIES  
INDIAN WELLS, 17 MARCH

Austria's Dominic Thiem defeated Milos Raonic 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 on Saturday to book a title clash with five-time champion Roger Federer at the ATP Indian Wells Masters.

Thiem, ranked eighth in the world, withstood 17 aces from the rangy Canadian, gaining the only break of the contest in the third set.

He'll fight for a maiden Masters 1000 title against Swiss great Federer. Federer, seeking a record sixth Indian Wells crown, reached the final when semi-final opponent Rafael Nadal withdrew from the tournament with a right knee injury. Thiem, 25, has split four prior meetings with the 20-time Grand Slam champion 2-2.