

Sociedad thrash Atletico to leave Barca on brink of title

Atletico Madrid slumped to a 3-0 defeat at resurgent Real Sociedad on Thursday which means runaway La Liga leaders Barcelona need one more victory to wrap up a 25th Spanish league title.

Second-placed Atletico were outplayed by the Basques from start to finish and fell behind in the 27th minute to a thumping strike off the post from forward Willian Jose after a cut-back from former Manchester United winger Adnan Januzaj.

Real Sociedad have been on a good run of form since Imanol Alguacil succeeded sacked coach Eusebio Sacristan and they welcomed Atletico after hammering Girona 5-0 and winning 1-0 at Las Palmas in their last two games.



They continued to create chances against Atletico, who were missing striker Diego Costa through injury, and sealed a deserved victory when forward Juanmi knocked in a pass from Willian Jose in the 80th minute. Juanmi struck again in stoppage-time to complete Atletico's heaviest league defeat this season, sending Real Sociedad up to 11th in the standings.

Second-placed Atletico have 71 points after 33 games while Barca have 83 and third-placed Real Madrid 68. Barca, who drew 2-2 with Celta Vigo on Tuesday and are still unbeaten in the league, will clinch the title if they win their next league game away to Deportivo La Coruna on April 29.

"We need to analyse what has happened and take steps to improve in our final few games because recently we have suffered a lot away from home," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone, whose side have lost three of their last four away games in all competitions.

"We had a bad first half and although we improved we couldn't manage to score and Real Sociedad finished the game stronger than us and we have to congratulate them on the victory."

Pakistan seeks \$70 million from India for unplayed cricket series

Karachi: Pakistan has kicked off a legal battle against India for not honouring a bilateral cricket series agreement, the sport's governing body confirmed Thursday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is seeking \$70 million in compensation from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) after the country failed to attend two series in 2014 and 2015 as part of a memorandum of understanding signed between the two boards.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed receiving the notice.

"The ICC has received a Notice of Dispute from the PCB's lawyers, which will be forwarded to the chairman of the Dispute Resolutions Committee next week," a spokesman of the ICC said.

The ICC Dispute Resolution Committee is headed by Michael Beloff QC who will appoint independent adjudicators to hear the case.

The PCB sent a legal notice to their counterparts earlier this year but Indian officials rejected the memorandum as “a piece of paper”.

The arch-rivals have not played a full bilateral series since 2007.

New Delhi halted all bilateral sports with Pakistan in the wake of 2008 Mumbai attacks, which India blamed on militants based in Pakistan.

Those attacks, which left eight people dead and seven Sri Lanka players and their staff injured, suspended international cricket in Pakistan and forced them to play at neutral venues of United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The two planned series between India and Pakistan were due to take place at a neutral venue.

South Africa brush aside Ireland

South Africa secured ninth-place finish in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup after they blew away Ireland by **eight wickets** today.

Chasing the paltry total of 186, South African top-order did the job professionally and proficiently in the end. They didn’t allow Ireland to come back in the match.

Ireland Under-19s v South Africa Under-19s
South Africa: 187/2 (46.0 over)
Ireland: 185/7 (50.0 over)

Kyle Verreynne was the highest scorer for Proteas with his knock of 77 runs. He was ably supported by Liam Smith with 49.

For Ireland, only Tucker and Dennison took a wicket each, while the rest of the bowlers toiled in vain to stall South Africa.

South Africa lost their second wicket at the cusp of victory when Verrryne was caught out for a match-winning 77.

His knock ensured Proteas could comfortably reach the target set by Ireland. He faced 109 balls, and smashed seven fours and a huge six to punctuate his innings.

The wicket was too little too late for the Irish camp.

Ireland tasted success after 26 overs when they finally managed to break the opening stand that yielded 104 runs when Smith was sent back for 49 runs.

Smith managed his innings well, faced 86 balls and struck three fours and a six during his stay at the crease.

South Africa were placed in a comfortable position in the context of the chase, and the game is now for them to lose.

Proteas began the chase of 186 with a plan in mind, and both the openers played sensibly to deny the Irish bowlers early.

South African opening stand reached 84 in 22 overs, with both Smith and Verreynne on 42.

Earlier, a great show with the ball enabled South Africa to restrict Ireland to a paltry total of 185 runs in 50 overs in the ninth place play-off match of the ICC U19 CWC in Bangladesh.

Lorcan Tucker was the savior for the Irish on a miserable day, and he carried his bat to score 77 from 98 balls with seven fours and a six. He stood his ground when wickets fell all around him.

For the Proteas, Galiem and Ludick took two wickets each.

South Africa had their opponents down on the mat at 71 for five, but the Irish lower-order offered stiff resistance and enabled their side to come back in the game.

Fiachra Tucker was the seventh wicket to fall for Ireland, when Ludick got his second wicket of the match in the 46 th over. Tucker hung around for half an hour, managed 20 useful runs for his team.

His wicket fell at a decisive moment when Ireland needed some quick runs in the death overs.

Aaron Gillespie fell in the 37th over, and he was run out after playing 41 balls for 12 runs when the chips were down for the Irish lads.

South Africa kept tightening the screws on Ireland by executing their bowling plans extremely well.

South Africa took control of the ninth place play-off match against Ireland by removing the Irish top-order before the halfway stage at Cox's Bazar.

Ireland lost their fifth wicket, and with it the chance of salvaging their innings when William McClintock was caught for 14.

The twenty-odd runs, after the fall of the fourth wicket pulled back the reins somewhat, but South Africa's Sipamla struck at the worst possible time for the Irish.

Irish batsmen found boundaries hard to come by, but failed to keep the scoreboard ticking with the ones and twos, and found themselves in a rut of their own making.

Adam Dennison became the fourth Irish batsman to fall, when Willem Ludick struck in the 17 th over. Dennison scored 16 from 39 balls, and got bogged down at the crease.

South Africa piled on the pressure with tight spells, and Ireland looked vulnerable, their batsman playing too many dot balls in a row.

Gary McClintock fell in the 11th over, the third wicket down for the sorry Irish camp today. With only 36 on the board, they are reeling for sure.

Dayyaan Galiem took his second wicket of the day when he found McClintock in front of the stumps after the batsman scored six runs. Umpire didn't have a tough decision here.

Ireland lost their second batsman early, in the seventh over as the Proteas new-ball bowlers were immaculate in their length. Jack Tector managed 18 from 25 balls, but lacked the temperament to see out the difficult times.

South Africa got their first breakthrough in the sixth over, and their bowlers were rewarded for their persistence. Andrew Austin scored four runs from 11 balls, and was sent back by Wiaan Mulder.

Ireland captain Tector won the toss and decided to bat first against South Africa led by Tony de Zorzi in the ninth place play-off match of the ICC U19 CWC 2016.

Teams

South Africa U19: Tony de Zorzi (capt), Ziyaad Abrahams, Dean Foxcroft, Dayyaan Galiem, Willie Ludick, Wandile Makwethu, Conner McKerr, Rivaldo Moonsamy, Wiaan Mulder, Luke Philander, Farhaan Sayanvala, Lutho Sipamla, Liam Smith, Kyle Verreynne, Sean Whitehead.

Ireland U19: Jack Tector (capt), Rory Anders, Andrew Austin, Varun Chopra, Adam Dennison, Stephen Doheny, Aaron Gillespie, Josh Little, Gary McClintock, William McClintock, Tom Stanton, Harry Tector, Fiachra Tucker, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White.

ICC World Twenty20: What should be India's 15-man squad for the tournament?

Tomorrow will be a big day for Indian cricket as the Board of Cricket for Control in India (BCCI) selectors will announce 15-man squad for ICC World Cup Twenty20.

While there aren't many changes expected in the T20I squad that won a historic 3-0 series against Australia recently, Sandeep Patil & Co could pull off some surprises for the event.

Here is what we think selectors might opt for:

Playing XI: Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, MS Dhoni, Suresh Raina, Yuvraj Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, R Ashwin, Ashish Nehra, Jasprit Bumrah

Others in fray: Hardik Pandya, Manish Pandey, Ishant Sharma, Harbhajan Singh

Hardik Pandya might be new to international cricket, but considering the way he performed in the last IPL season and also considering he is a handy batsman lower down the order who can also bowl medium pace, selectors might stick with him.

Bumrah too is another name which doesn't have enough experience under his belt, but ever since he replaced injured Mohammed Shami during the Australia tour, he kept impressing everybody and his unorthodox action makes him a difficult nut to crack for the best of batsmen.

Since Umesh Yadav has been dropped for the three-match T20I series vs Sri Lanka, the selectors have possibly given up on the pacer considering his lack of control over line and length.

Pandya and Bumrah are two names who haven't left many options before the selectors, who will have to let go of some of the big names like Irfan Pathan, Robin Uthappa and Yusuf Pathan, who are all T20 specialists and could have easily been a part of India's plans to win their second World T20 title.

Zimbabwe strike early

Zimbabwe were gifted a wicket when disastrous running between the wickets by Bangladeshi openers saw the back of Soumya Sarkar.

Tamim didn't respond to Soumya's call, and both the batters ended up on one side of the wicket. Soumya scored seven runs before he was run out.

BANGLADESH VS ZIMBABWE 1ST T20I
Bangladesh: 41/1 (5/20 over)
Zimbabwe: 163/7 (20.0/20 over)

Earlier, Bangladesh managed to restrict Zimbabwe down to 163 at the end of 20 overs with wickets at regular intervals.

Mustafizur, Al-Amin and Shakib Al Hasan struck during the death overs, and were ably supported by the fielders to inflict two run-outs in the Zimbabwean camp.

Mustafizur and Al-Amin took two wickets each while Shakib picked one. For Zimbabwe it was the Hamilton Masakadza show all through!

He and Sibanda laid the foundation for the challenging total with their first wicket stand.

Mustafizur struck twice in the 19th over to hurt Zimbabwe's chances of a big total. The left arm sensation clean bowled Elton Chigumbura and Luke Jongwe of consecutive deliveries, and conceded only two runs in the over.

Bangladeshi pacer finished his quota of four overs, took two wickets and gave away only 18 runs.

The 18th over brought the downfall of Hamilton Masakadza, who had dominated proceedings from the start. Nurul Hasan found the Zimbabwean batter short with an accurate over-arm throw.

Masakadza hammered 79 from 53 balls. His brutal knock included nine fours and two sixes as well. He gave Zimbabwe the impetus for a big total today, and looked comfortable as long as he stayed at the crease.

Zimbabwe lost their second wicket in the 15th over due to an unnecessary run-out against the run of play.

With erroneous calling, a horrible mix-up resulted when the batters went for the second run, and saw Waller short of the crease by miles. The batsman scored 14 from 8 balls.

Shakib Al Hasan gave Bangladesh their first breakthrough when he sent back Sibanda for a well-made 46 from 39 balls.

Sibanda and Masakadza got stuck into the Bangladeshi bowlers, and smashed a century partnership in real quick time. Their opening stand lasted 12 overs and produced 101 runs.

Hamilton Masakadza was going strong at the crease, and had reached his fifty off 33 balls. He

was unbeaten on 58 from 37 balls with eight fours and a huge six after 12 overs into this match.

Masakadza and Sibanda gave Zimbabwe a blistering start, with boundaries flowing from both the openers' bat.

Zimbabwe batters racked up forty runs after only five overs on the board, and looked to take the attack to the Bangladeshi bowlers and unsettle them.

Zimbabwe captain Elton Chigumbura won the toss, and decided to bat first and put up a good total on the board in the first T20I of the series against Bangladesh at Khulna.

Zimbabwe have a 16-man squad to choose from, which includes the return of Vusi Sibanda, Sean Williams and Brian Vitori, who in 2011 troubled Bangladesh at home, picking up a matchwinning first-innings four-for in the only Test and topping the wicket charts in the ODI series.

The visitors will want to bounce back after their recent series losses, in both ODIs and T20s, to Afghanistan in the UAE. Coach Dav



Bangladeshi ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan takes a wicket.

Whatmore said it was a closer contest than the result suggested but Zimbabwe would still be concerned by their current form.

Experimentation is the buzzword around the second Bangladesh-Zimbabwe T20 series in the 2015-16 season.

Both teams are looking ahead to the World T20 in March, and with the least exposure in this format among all Test-playing nations, it is hardly a surprise that they are trying to cram in as many T20s as possible before the major event.

Shakib Al Hasan and Soumya Sarkar are back in their squad, with three newcomers also given a chance to show their worth in the first two T20s. Bangladesh have handed debuts to Shuvagata Hom and Nurul Hasan. Imrul Kayes, Abu Hider and Arafat Sunny have been left out.

Teams

Bangladesh: 1 Tamim Iqbal, 2 Soumya Sarkar, 3 Mahmudullah, 4 Mushfiqur Rahim, 5 Shakib Al Hasan, 6 Sabbir Rahman, 7 Shuvagata Hom, 8 Nurul Hasan (Wicketkeeper), 9 Mashrafe Mortaza (Captain), 10 Mustafizur Rahman, 11 Al-Amin Hossain

Zimbabwe: 1 Vusi Sibanda, 2 Hamilton Masakadza, 3 Peter Moor (Wicketkeeper), 4 Sean Williams, 5 Malcolm Waller, 6 Sikandar Raza, 7 Elton Chigumbura (Captain), 8 Luke Jongwe, 9 Graeme Cremer, 10 Wellington Masakadza, 11 Brian Vitori

Sania Mirza-Martina Hingis win 29th consecutive match, surpass record set by Gigi Fernandez-Natasha Zvereva in 1994

The star pair has now begun to chase an even bigger record. Back in 1990, the dynamic duo of Jana Novotna and Helena Sukova won a whopping 44 matches in a row.

Indian tennis ace Sania Mirza, along with her Swiss partner [Martina Hingis](#) on Thursday created history by winning 29 matches in a row.

The World No. 1 pair defeated Yaroslava Shevedova and Raluca Olaru 4-6, 6-3, 10-8 in a rain-interrupted semi-final to advance into the final of Sydney International.

With this win, they have surpassed record of Puerto Rican Gigi Fernandez and Belarus' Natasha Zvereva in 1994 of winning 28 matches in a row.

The star pair has now begun to chase an even bigger record. Back in 1990, the dynamic duo of Jana Novotna and Helena Sukova won a whopping 44 matches in a row.

Earlier on Wednesday, the top seeds Mirza and Hingis got the better of China's Chen Liang and Shuai Peng 6-2 6-3 in less than an hour to enter the last-four stage and remain on course for a second successive title this year.

Since the beginning of 2015, Mirza and Hingis have won 10 WTA doubles titles together – Indian Wells, Miami, Charleston, Wimbledon, US Open, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Beijing and WTA Finals in 2015, and last week's Brisbane International.

1st ODI: Skipper Steve Smith's 149 overshadows Rohit Sharma's 171* as Australia beat India by 5 wickets

Barinder Sran got India off to a good start as he picked a wicket in his second over dismissing Aaron Finch and followed it with the huge wicket of David Warner.

Australian skipper Steve Smith's 149 overshadowed a brilliant ton by Rohit Sharma, as Australia defeated India by 5 wickets in the first ODI at the WACA ground in Perth.

On a batsman-friendly pitch, India posted a formidable 309-run total on board, courtesy a magnificent 171-run knock by opener Rohit Sharma.

Rohit, along with Virat Kohli (91), stitched a 207-run stand for the second wicket, after Josh Hazlewood dismissed Shikhar Dhawan for 9 in the seventh over of the innings. The partnership was finally broken by James Faulkner, when in the 45th over, Kohli holed one to straight to long-on.

In reply, debutant pacer Barinder Sran got India off to a good start as he picked a wicket in his second over dismissing Aaron Finch and followed it with the huge wicket of David Warner.

But after that, wickets were hard to come by as George Bailey and Smith pummeled the Indian bowlers. The duo added a massive 242-run stand for the third wicket and by the time Bailey was dismissed for 112, Australia were already in the driver's seat.

Bangladesh girls become AFC U-14 champion

Bangladesh girls today beat hosts Nepal to win the AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship.

Marzia's 16th minute goal was the defining factor in the finals held at Army Physical Fitness and Sports Centre in Lagankhel, reports Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

This was the first time ever Bangladesh clinched the title.

The final was scheduled at the Dashrath Stadium on April 25 before it had to be called off due to the 7.9 magnitude earthquake that struck at 11:56am, reports The Kathmandu Post.

A total of seven teams including India, Bhutan, Maldives, Iran and Sri Lanka participated in the tournament.

Tough World Twenty20 draw excites Shahid Afridi

Shahid Afridi, Pakistan's T20 captain, on Thursday (December 17) said he hoped a tough World Twenty20 draw would motivate his team to win the title for the first time in seven years and beat arch-rival India along the way.

The 2009 champions are placed in Group 2 of the Super Ten round of the World T20 along with hosts India, Australia, New Zealand, and a yet to be decided qualifier.

The qualifier in this 'group of death' is most likely going to be Bangladesh, given that the Tigers emerge champions of Group A after three matches against Netherlands on March 9, Ireland on March 11 and Oman on March 13.

If Bangladesh qualify, they will face Pakistan in the Super 10 Group 1 match on March 15, 2016.

Tigers will next play on March 21 against Australia at Bangalore.

On March 23, Bangladesh's opponent will be hosts India at the same stadium.

On March 26, Bangladesh cricket team will face New Zealand at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata.

“We have a tough draw but I am hopeful that this challenge will pump-up my team to win the title and on the way beat India,” Afridi told AFP.

Pakistan lost to India in both the group round and final of the inaugural World Twenty20 in 2007



Nasir Hossain (R) celebrates with his teammates after the dismissal of the Zimbabwe cricketer Malcolm Waller during the second T20 cricket match between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. Photo: AFP

and then in

two subsequent tournaments. They have also lost to India every time they have faced them in six World Cups. But Afridi said it was time for a change. “I don’t want to live in history. Whatever mistakes we usually make in the matches against India we have to overcome them.”

Pakistan’s recent form, however, does not augur well. Last month, they lost to England 3-0 in a Twenty20 series in the United Arab Emirates, slipping to sixth in the rankings.

“We made school boy errors and despite putting up good fights in all three matches we lost by narrow margins so we have to be on our toes and should not repeat those mistakes,” said Afridi, who is set to draw the curtain on his two-decade long career after the event.

Pakistan who have three Twenty20 matches on their tour of New Zealand next month before featuring in the six-nation **Asia Cup Twenty20 in Bangladesh** in February.

“We have enough matches before the World Twenty20 so we have to find a settled combination and I hope we do well in these matches and carry that form into the World Twenty20.”

The sixth edition of the World T20 is scheduled to be held between March 8 and April 3, 2016 across eight venues in India.

Jose Mourinho sacked: Chelsea told him they no longer wanted to be the Nasty Party

The irony underpinning the whole, sorry car crash is that Chelsea told Jose Mourinho, from the moment he returned to them, that they no longer wanted to be the Nasty Party. That he should try to stand for something different, second time around.

He accepted this and it was in part with his own legacy in mind that he told them he wanted no longer to be seen as the bad man, or enemy, of football – albeit with some disquiet in the back of his mind. “I won’t have the same success if I cut out the conflict,” Mourinho said in one of the early conversations with those at the top of Stamford Bridge. They knew that when the pips started to squeak, the so-called Happy One would give way to the Machiavellian One. It would always be one of the “tools in the box,” says one who has seen this unravelling from the inside and points out that nice guys aren’t winners.

No one quite anticipated how relentlessly those implements would be used, though. In one four-week period last spring, Mourinho’s vials of poison were administered to Brendan Rodgers, accused of failing to appreciate his own goalkeeper; Graeme Souness, impugned for his managerial record; Sky Sports, blackballed for providing a critical appraisal; and an unsuspecting Chelsea ballboy, bollocked for throwing a ball to a Manchester City player.



Mourinho expected to be given £12m severance package by Chelsea

Well, unfortunately for Mourinho, the club were determined to move on, even if he wasn’t. They meant it when they said they actively wanted to represent something positive, as Arsenal and the Manchester clubs do, and you certainly give thanks for that. There’s a contradiction at the heart of Stamford Bridge, you see. When you meet the front-desk staff, become acquainted with the communications staff, encounter the stewards, you discover a club which stands for modernity, dignity, hospitality. And then the manager pops up behind the press conference table and hauls us all the way back to the bad old Chelsea.

The modernity runs all the way through to the way the club conducts its contractual business, actually. Marina Granovskaia, the long-time head of Abramovich’s family office, does its negotiating and, the agents will tell you, has formidable powers in that field and a fierce grasp of financial detail. No more of those Wild West days, with the club being taken to the cleaners. As the Eva Carneiro saga deepened last autumn, with Mourinho incapable of contrition, you wondered how on earth Granovskaia felt about the unreconstructed image of Chelsea it was creating.

The search for something better is bigger than Mourinho. That much was clear when, having told Petr Cech that he would be allowed to leave for the club of his choice if he gave them one more year's service, Roman Abramovich sanctioned it being Arsenal – even though Mourinho hated that. And when, as Manchester City's opaque accountancy work left them in default of Uefa's financial fair play regime, Chelsea accepted its spirit – even though it meant selling André Schürrle to buy Juan Cuadrado, catastrophic though that calculation proved to be.

Amid the broader picture of where Chelsea have been trying to head, with painstaking public consultation over plans to expand their stadium, Mourinho's attempts to adhere to the new code seemed pitifully meagre. It was noted within the four walls of the club that the manager's relationship with Michael Emenalo, the club's technical director, was substantially better than the one the Portuguese shared with Frank Arnesen during his first spell at the club. The two were said to be in and out of each other's offices. Small beer. Just like the regret Mourinho privately expressed in retrospect after describing Arsène Wenger as a "specialist in failure".

What we now know is that he was like a kid on his best behaviour, as incapable as any of us of materially changing his philosophy and personality when he is into his sixth decade. Chelsea could accept that for as long as he was annihilating the opposition in a desperately poor Premier League last season. But the trouble with the ways of Mourinho are that when the winning stops and the pretty lines – "little horses need milk" and all that – cease, there is nothing underpinning the structure except the spite and bile he perpetrates. "His method generates media conflict almost permanently and it is also a potential source of conflict within the club," the Manchester City CEO, Ferran Soriano, has written of Mourinho. So wise.

It was the inner desire for modernity which informed some of the Chelsea chat-room conversations, after news of Mourinho's sacking broke. Just when a wave of sentiment for him surfaced, the response went along the lines of: "Will you stop? It's not about him." The dignified and comparatively expansive 150-word Chelsea statement announcing the departure – listing Mourinho's achievements, heralding him as the club's best, thanking him for what he has brought – seemed to be cut from the same sentiment about doing things the right way. Not every club would have issued that.

So the Chelsea train rolls on. The stadium redevelopment will soon start. The accounts reveal financial self-sufficiency. The club clearly wants to represent and stand for something more than unadulterated wealth, in the way that the other English giants do. For this reason, Pep Guardiola will seem more attractive than ever. The plan beyond this season should certainly not include asking another inherently unpleasant individual to take them over the threshold of a new promised land.
