

Barca's late comeback stun Atletico Madrid

AFP, MADRID: Barcelona battled back from two goals down to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 and land an important blow in the Spanish title race on Sunday.

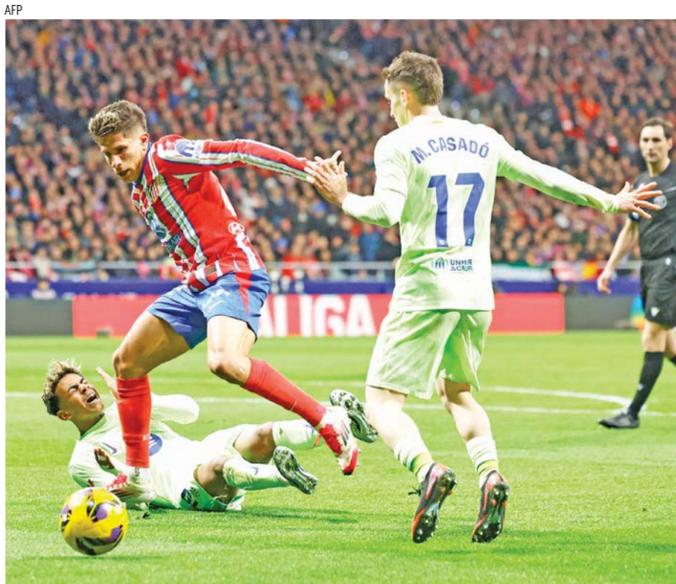
Lamine Yamal struck in the 92nd minute and Ferran Torres in the 98th to help take the Catalans back to the top of the table after Real Madrid beat Villarreal on Saturday to briefly claim pole position.

Barcelona have a game in hand on the champions with both sides level on 60 points, while Atletico trail the top two by four after they crumbled at home against Hansi Flick's side to end a disastrous week following their Champions League elimination.

Having twice been caught out late by Atletico this season, this time it was Barcelona's turn to provide the sting in the tail, extending their unbeaten streak to 18 matches across all competitions.

Julian Alvarez and Alexander Sorloth put Atletico ahead before Robert Lewandowski and Torres hit back for Barca, who went on to win in stoppage time.

Flick had warned his players to stay focussed after they conceded a 96th



FC Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Marc Casado and Spanish forward Lamine Yamal fight for the ball with Atletico Madrid's Argentine forward #22 Giuliano Simeone during the Spanish league match at Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid

minute goal in December to surrender the lead at the top of the table to Atletico in a 2-1 home defeat.

Barcelona also conceded two late goals in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg to draw 4-4 against Diego Simeone's side in February.

LA LIGA RESULTS
Leganes 2 (Raba 29, 44) Real Betis 3 (Isco 64-pen, Bakambu 78, Hernandez 82), Sevilla 0 Athletic Bilbao 1 (Alvarez 84), Osasuna 1 (Budimir 45-pen) Getafe 2 (Terrats 55, 71), Rayo Vallecano 2 (Trejo 58, Diaz 72) Real Sociedad 2 (Zubimendi 20, Marizkurrena 80), Atletico Madrid 2 (Alvarez 45, Sorloth 70) Barcelona 4 (Lewandowski 72, Torres 78, 90+8, Yamal 90+2)

Sindhu, Lakshya hope to regain form at Swiss Open

PTI, BASEL: Star shuttlers PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen will continue their quest to regain top form when the USD 250,000 Swiss Open gets underway here on Tuesday, featuring draws that are crowded with Indians.

Two-time Olympic medalist Sindhu, who is seeded seventh, will take on Malvika Bansod, India's number-two female shuttler, in a clash between two generations.

Lakshya will also face a compatriot in HS Prannoy, who is a 2016 winner here, in his men's singles opening match of the BWF Super 300 tournament.

The Indian shuttlers have a formidable record at the Swiss Open. Past champions include Sindhu, K Srikanth, Prannoy, Sameer Verma, Saina Nehwal, and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

This will be the first encounter between Lakshya and Prannoy, who were a part of the 2022 Thomas Cup-winning team, since the Paris Olympics.

Among others, Aakash Kashyap and Anupama Upadhyaya will also aim for a decent run in women's singles. While Kashyap is facing a qualifier, Upadhyaya will take on

Denmark's Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt. Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj will meet another Danish player, Line Christophersen, in her opening match.

In men's singles, Kiran George will look to live up to his potential when he faces Denmark's tricky Rasmus Gemke. Priyanshu Rajawat will take on Switzerland's Tobias Kuenzi.

After a quarterfinal finish at the All England Championship, Treena Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, seeded fourth here, will square off against Aline Muller and Kelly Van Buiten in their opening match.

Other Indian women's pairs in fray include Priya Konjengbam/Shruti Mishra and Arathi Sara Sunil/Varshini Viswanath Sri.

National Games gold-medallists Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Varyiyath will square off against Koceila Mammeri and Tanina Violette Mammeri in mixed doubles.

In the men's singles qualifiers, five Indians -- 2015 champion Kidambi Srikanth, Ayush Shetty, Tharun Manneppalli, S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, and Sathish -- will compete.

Isharani Baruah, Tasnim Mir, and Anmol Kharb will battle it out in the women's singles qualification.

sportspopup

Bangladesh to tour Pakistan for white-ball series in May

KARACHI: The Bangladesh cricket team will tour Pakistan for a white-ball series in May, which will include three T20Is and as many ODIs. The series will be held after the conclusion of the 10th edition of the Pakistan Super League scheduled to take place from April 11 to May 18. Originally, the series was part of the Future Tours Program but had to be postponed due to the busy schedules of both teams. However, following recent discussions during the visit of Bangladesh Cricket Board Chairman, Farouq Ahmed, to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, both boards have agreed to go ahead with the series in May. Bangladesh had previously toured Pakistan last year for a two-Test series, which they won comprehensively 2-0. The white-ball series is expected to be held in Faisalabad, Multan, and Lahore.

Delhi Capitals name Faf du Plessis vice-captain

NEW DELHI: South African batting stalwart Faf du Plessis was Monday appointed vice-captain of Delhi Capitals team for the upcoming Indian Premier League season beginning on March 22. The former South Africa captain will be Axar Patel's deputy in the Delhi-based franchise. Axar was named DC captain on Friday. "I am very excited. Delhi has been great and the boys have been fantastic. Definitely, I feel happy and ready," the right-handed batter said in a video uploaded by the franchise. The 40-year-old du Plessis led Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last three seasons of the IPL. However, he was not retained by RCB ahead of the mega auction last year. He was bought by Delhi Capitals for Rs 2 crore in the accelerated round of the bidding process after he did not get any takers in the opening round. Delhi Capitals had failed to reach the play-offs round last season.

Indian trio sets new national record in UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup

NEW DELHI: The Indian trio of David Beckham, Esow Alban and Rojit Singh set a national record in the men's team sprint event at the UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup in Konya, Turkey. The Indian trio clocked 44.187 seconds in the event which was held from March 14 to 16. They bettered the previous national record of 44.451s, set at last year's Asian Track Cycling Championship. "Super proud of our talented cyclists David Beckham, Esow Alban & Rojit Singh for setting a new National Record, clocking 44.187s in Men's Team Sprint at the UCI Track Cycling Nations Cup in Turkey. Super proud of you champs!" Sports Authority of India wrote on 'X'. The Indians, though, finished 11th in the team rankings. Great Britain won gold with a time of 42.060 seconds while Japan (42.194) and Australia (42.352) took home silver and bronze medals respectively.

Omarzai's arrival at Punjab Kings delayed

PTI, NEW DELHI: Afghanistan all-rounder Azamatullah Omarzai's arrival at Punjab Kings has been delayed due to personal reasons ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League.

The foreign players of Punjab Kings are arriving from Monday onwards but Omarzai, the ICC ODI Player of the Year, would be able to join the squad only on March 20.

Punjab Kings play their season opener against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad on March 25.

The season also marks the start of captain Shreyas Iyer and head coach Ricky Ponting's journey at Punjab Kings. Ponting linked up with the team in Dharamsala.

The Indian players of the squad, including new recruit Yuzvendra Chahal, reached Chandigarh on Sunday night after a training camp in Dharamsala where they will play three home games this season.

Lead pacer Arshdeep Singh and captain Iyer, who were part of India's Champions Trophy squad, have also joined the team in Chandigarh. The Indian players were given a week off post the Champions Trophy triumph.

Chennai Super Kings CEO Kasi Viswanathan said on Monday that Australian pacer Nathan Ellis is the only foreign recruit yet to join the team.

Bowling strategies at IPL: KKR, SRH & MI have most balanced attacks

PTI, NEW DELHI: In a tournament that has fans flocking the grounds to see batters smash everything out of the park, bowlers have gradually established themselves as the cornerstone of success and the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League is going to be no different.

If one looks at the bowling units of various IPL outfits, defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders, five-time champions Mumbai Indians and last year's runners-up Sunrisers Hyderabad have the most balanced line-ups.

With all-rounders rendered less useful due to the Impact Player Rule, most teams now look at playing five specialist bowlers. Some even have luxury of playing the sixth bowler if needed while defending a total.

So, what makes KKR special in terms of bowling?

In Harshit Rana, who has the uncanny ability of taking wickets with sheer pace and extra bounce, they have a potent Indian fast bowling option.

He would be supported by Varun Chakravarthy, who has been India's T20 trump card in recent years.

Add to that mix Anrich Nortje's blistering pace and Sunil Narine's guile, and 16 overs will be sorted for the side on most days.

The uncapped Vaibhav

Arora was impressive last year and there is Andre Russell too who can always chip in with an over or two. In all of KKR's seven home games at the Eden Gardens, this attack can be expected to be lethal.

In addition, Ramandeep Singh, and vice-captain Venkatesh Iyer can chip in with an over or two as per the team's requirements.

In case Nortje doesn't



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fire, there is the six-foot left-armed Spencer Johnson. On tracks like his off in Chennai, Moeen Ali's one breaks could also be handy.

By the look of things, KKR does have the best bowling attack on paper.

Mumbai Indians have had a torrid last four years even. But they have managed to retain their bowling core. In skipper Hardik Pandya, they have a proper bowler who can win matches with a sharp spell of fast bowling.

But MI's campaign will also depend on how the attack performs till Jasprit Bumrah joins them in April.

The momentum shifts very quickly in IPL but a fit-again Deepak Chahar could be a handful with his incisive swing bowling during Powerplay overs.

He will have support of Trent Boult, who can bring the ball back into the right-handers at the start of the innings.

Mitchell Santner has mastered in the Indian conditions although MI would

higher economy rate, is a good death overs bowler.

While they have a wrist spinner in Adam Zampa, it would be difficult to include him in all conditions. In this scenario, Rahul Chahar and Abhishek Sharma's slow bowling would be handy.

Talking about multiple utility bowlers, Ashish Nehra's Gujarat Titans is also a fine unit with World's best T20 bowler Rashid Khan

there to support Kagiso Rabada, Mohammed Siraj, and Prasad Krishna.

To support Rashid in slow bowling, Tamil Nadu captain R Sai Kishore and also Washington Sundar will have crucial roles to play.

For Rajasthan Royals, they have got a better spin attack with one among Wanindu Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana set to play.

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Welfare Department has built Freedom Center Football (Academy) in Vicharpur, of which Lakshmi Sahis is the coach. Similarly, a sports complex has also been built by the Tribal Affairs Department," Ahmed pointed out.

During his podcast with Fridman, the Prime Minister said people of the village have been playing football, widely called 'The Beautiful Game', for almost four generations, with 80 national level players hailing from there.

The Prime Minister praised the unflinching passion of the residents, which has led to the village being hailed as Mini Brazil.



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli presents a shield to skipper Rajat Patidar during the RCB Unbox event at M Chinnaswamy Stadium, in Bengaluru, on Monday

Andreeva topples World No. 1 Sabalenka for Indian Wells title

INDIAN WELLS (US): Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva came back to beat No. 1-ranked Aryna Sabalenka 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the BNP Paribas Open to make the 17-year-old the tournament's youngest champion since Serena Williams in 1999. The 11th-ranked Andreeva improved to 19-3 this season -- the most wins by a woman on tour -- and collected her second Masters 1000 title of 2025. The other came at Dubai in February, which earned her a top-10 ranking for the first time. Andreeva will return to that upper tier in Monday's WTA rankings. In the men's final later Sunday, 13th-seeded Jack Draper of Britain defeated 12th-seeded Holger Rune of Denmark 6-2, 6-2 to earn his first Masters 1000 championship. Draper, who is 23, upset two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-finals.

Men's national hockey camp begins with focus on analysing recent performances: Fulton

BENGALURU: The men's national hockey camp, featuring a 36-member core probable group, began at the SAI Centre here on Monday, with chief coach Craig Fulton saying the focus will be on "introspecting" on recent performances. The camp will conclude on March 28. "It has been a busy season for the players with back-to-back events and high-quality matches. During this camp, our focus will be more on fitness and conditioning apart from introspecting on the recent performances and where we stand in terms of key focus areas," Fulton was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release. "Our efforts now will be towards building up for the matches in the next phase of Pro League in Europe and I will also be interested in seeing how some of the fresh talents live up to the billing," he added. The Indians are currently placed third in the Pro League standings with 15 points, behind England and Belgium, who occupy the first and second place respectively with 16 points each.

Supreme Court calls sports associations in India 'ailing bodies'

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday observed that sports associations in India are "ailing bodies". A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh made the observation while hearing a plea filed by the Maharashtra Wrestling Association challenging an October 8, 2024, order of the Bombay High Court which dismissed the state body's petition against its de-affiliation by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). "All these sports associations, there is nothing like sports in them. They are all ailing bodies..." the Bench observed, as it posted the matter for hearing on March 24. On January 15, the top court issued notices to the Centre and the WFI, seeking their response on the plea filed by the Maharashtra wrestling body.

'Mini Brazil', a village in Madhya Pradesh widely known for the love of 'The Beautiful Game' making waves at State and National level

In a podcast, Prime Minister Modi praises the unflinching passion of Vicharpur residents for football

PTI, SHAHDOL (MP): A village in Madhya Pradesh renowned as 'Mini Brazil' due to its residents' love for football once again hogged the limelight after Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned it in his conversation with American podcaster Lex Fridman, which was aired on Sunday.

Modi had met some players from this village, Vicharpur in Shahdol District, during a visit to MP in early 2023 and had also spoken about it in his radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' in July that year. The Prime Minister had spoken about coach and national level player Raees Ahmed, whose

training has seen the love for the game getting complemented by technique.

The Prime Minister had also spoken about how Ahmed's dedicated coaching was producing top flight footballers from a village once infamous for drugs and alcohol.

Beaming over the Prime Minister mentioning Vicharpur in his podcast a day earlier, Ahmed said the village always had passion for the game but not the resources earlier.

"I started football coaching in Vicharpur village in 2002. I formed a boys team first and then a girls team. After a few years, the situ-

ation was such that a child from every house was playing football. As girls too began taking part in school and national level tournaments, the village started getting called Mini Brazil," Ahmed told PTI.

Citing an example, he said resident Lakshmi Sahis has participated in nine national competitions, while her brother Dhanvantari Sahis and sister Dhanvantari Sahis have taken part in national level competitions.

Others who have demonstrated their skills at national tournaments include Anil Singh Gaur, Om Prakash Kol, Rakesh Kol, Naresh Kunde, Shaileendra Kunde, Indrajit, Kewat Satyram Kunde, Hanuman Singh, Mukesh Kol, Bhim Singh, Shankar Dahiya, Rajni Singh, Yashoda Singh, Lakshmi, Yagwati Singh and Renu Singh, the coach said proudly.

"The then Divisional Commissioner of Shah-

dol Division Rajiv Sharma started this football revolution on September 26, 2021. The objective was to make the country a potent force in the game. A total of 85 football competitions were organised from 2021 to 2023. These included games at panchayat, district, division, State and national levels," Ahmed said.

During this time, some 1000 football clubs were formed in Shahdol division, resulting in 24 national level players becoming coaches after completing e-licence courses, he said, adding many have got jobs in the railways, police and military. "The Sports and Youth

Welfare Department has built Freedom Center Football (Academy) in Vicharpur, of which Lakshmi Sahis is the coach. Similarly, a sports complex has also been built by the Tribal Affairs Department," Ahmed pointed out.

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