

Barcelona crowned La Liga champions

Villarreal qualified for next season's Champions League with a 3-2 win over newly-crowned champions

AFP, BARCELONA: Villarreal qualified for next season's Champions League with an entertaining 3-2 win over newly-crowned La Liga champions Barcelona on Sunday.

Elsewhere Kylian Mbappe struck as Real Madrid won 2-0 at nine-man Sevilla, while Leganes gave themselves a chance of survival with a win at Las Palmas.

Barcelona stars celebrated their 28th league title on an open-top bus on Friday but Hansi Flick warned that "those who party, can work" and selected a strong side.

However the visitors took the lead through in-form striker Ayoze Perez, who slotted past Marc-Andre ter Stegen after Nicolas Pepe set him up.

Lamine Yamal, who scored a vital goal as Barca clinched the league on Thursday at Espanyol, scored another stunner to level. The 17-year-old breezed past two defenders and arrowed a shot into the far bottom corner.

Yamal hit the bar before Fermin Lopez sent Barca ahead, walloping home from the edge of the box.

Santi Comesaana lofted over Ter Stegen to equalise



Barcelona's team members celebrate winning the La Liga after the Spanish La Liga match against Villarreal at Luis Company's Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain

for the visitors, who nosed in front through Tajon Buchanan in the 80th minute.

Barca fell to their first home defeat of 2025 and also their first league reverse this year, but chants of "champions" rang around the Olympic stadium, on potentially the team's last game there before a return to the renovated Camp Nou next season.

The domestic treble winners were presented with the league trophy at the end of the game.

Villarreal booked their return to Europe's top competition as they opened up a big gap on Real Betis, sixth, as they were thrashed 4-1 at Atletico Madrid.

Julian Alvarez scored two and created another as Diego Simeone's side, third, ran

LA LIGA RESULTS
Atletico Madrid 4 (Alvarez 10, 75, Le Normand 45+3, Correa 90+6) **Real Betis 1** (Fornals 67), **Barcelona 2** (Yamal 38, Lopez 45+5) **Villarreal 3** (Perez 4, Comesaana 51, Buchanan 80), **Celta Vigo 1** (Alonso 10-pen) **Rayo Vallecano 2** (Palazon 17, De Frutos 45+2), **Las Palmas 0** **Leganes 1** (Raba 6), **Mallorca 1** (Larin 90+3) **Getafe 2** (Arambarri 56, Uche 65), **Osasuna 2** (Budimir 17, Garcia 90+1) **Espanyol 0**, **Real Sociedad 3** (Marin 5, Oyarzabal 20-pen, Mariezkurrena 90+1) **Girona 2** (Stuani 10, Portu 77), **Sevilla 0** **Real Madrid 2** (Mbappe 75, 87), **Valencia 0** **Athletic Bilbao 1** (Berenguer 72), **Valladolid 0** **Alaves 1** (Garcia 18-pen)

out comfortable winners.

French superstar Mbappe netted his 29th league goal of the season to help Real Madrid to a narrow win over nine-man Sevilla in coach Carlo Ancelotti's penultimate match at the helm.

Loic Bade's 12th minute red card for a professional foul on Mbappe set back the hosts, and then Isaac Romero was dismissed at the start of the second half for a high tackle on Aurelien Tchouameni. Eventually the division's top scorer Mbappe drilled home Madrid's opener from range and Jude Bellingham nabbed a second from close range late on.

At the bottom of the table Leganes took their fight for survival to the last day of the season with a 1-0 win at downed Las Palmas, thanks to Dani Raba's early strike. The Madrid minnows, 18th, are two points from safety and face relegated Real Valladolid in their last game.

Espanyol's 2-0 defeat by Osasuna leaves them in danger of the drop and the Catalan side, 17th, welcome Las Palmas next weekend knowing a win would keep them up.

sportspopup

News about India pulling out of Asia Cup is speculative: BCCI

NEW DELHI: The BCCI on Monday termed as "speculative and imaginary" the report which claimed that it has decided to pull out of men's Asia Cup and women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup. A media report, quoting sources, said that BCCI won't let Indian teams compete in the two Asian Cricket Council (ACC) events at a time when the cricket body is being headed by a Pakistani and just days back the two neighbouring nations were involved in a military conflict. Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, who is also PCB Chairman, holds the position of President in the ACC. Defending champions India are the hosts for the Men's Asia Cup, to be played in the T20 format, in September while Sri Lanka have been allotted the Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup.

Ben Stokes quits alcohol to aid hamstring injury rehabilitation

LONDON: England's Test captain Ben Stokes has quit drinking alcohol during his ongoing hamstring injury rehabilitation in an effort to be battle-ready for the upcoming Ashes series against traditional rivals Australia. The flamboyant cricketer said he gave up drinking at the start of the year in the hope abstinence would hasten his recovery from the injury. The 33-year-old Stokes had surgery on his left hamstring in December after suffering a tear during the third Test against New Zealand, which ruled him out of action for a prolonged period. "After my first major injury, I remember the shock of it and after the initial adrenaline had stopped I was thinking, 'How has this happened?'" Stokes told the Untapped podcast. The English skipper is set to make his comeback on Thursday in England's one-off Test against Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge.

Fakhar, Hasan and Faheem expected to earn PCB central contracts

LAHORE: Fakhar Zaman, Hasan Ali and Faheem Ashraf are expected to be included in Pakistan Cricket Board's central contracts list for the 2025-26 season after being dropped last year. The PCB had delayed the announcement of the central contracts last year until October although these contracts run from July 1 to June 30. These three players were excluded from the previous list due to poor performances and fitness issues, but their impressive performances in the Pakistan Super League have brought them back into reckoning. "The PCB management and national selectors have already started deliberations on the players to be given the new central contracts in July," a source in the board said.

Ballon d'Or to be awarded on September 22

PARIS: The Ballon d'Or ceremony to award the most coveted individual honors in soccer finally has a better date for women nominees to be there. The awards for 2025 will be presented on Sept. 22 in Paris, UEFA said Monday. This time, the ceremony does not clash with international match dates in women's soccer when players are on mandatory duty in camp with national teams. Those ceremonies were on Oct. 30, 2023 and Oct. 28, 2024 — Monday evenings in weeks when there were no men's games in the Champions League or for national teams. September 22 is again a Monday in a free week for the Champions League, plus no qualifying games for the 2026 World Cup. And not for the women either. Nominations for the 2025 awards will be announced in August, UEFA said.

Sindhu, Prannoy eye turnaround at Malaysia Masters

PTI, KUALA LUMPUR: Star Indian shuttlers P V Sindhu and H S Prannoy will look to script a turnaround in fortunes when they lead the country's campaign at the USD 475,000 Malaysia Masters Super 500 tournament beginning here, on Tuesday.

Both Sindhu and Prannoy have endured a tough phase of late, struggling with form and fitness. The duo lost their respective matches against Indonesia and Denmark in the Sudirman Cup last month — their last competitive outing.

With a two-week break under their belt, the experienced shut-

tlers will now be eager to rediscover their rhythm at the Axiata Arena. Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, currently ranked world number 16, will open her campaign against Japan's Natsuki Nidaira, ranked 20th in the world.

Prannoy, who has slipped to world number 35, faces a tough opener against fifth seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan. In women's singles, 2024 Hylo Open runner-up Malvika Bansod will take on Chiu Pin-Chian of Chinese Taipei, while Unnati Hooda — a semifinalist at the Taipei Open Super 300 — will face compatriot Lin

Hsiang Ti. Aakarshi Kashyap has drawn eighth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia.

In men's singles, Sathish Karunakaran, champion at the 2023 Odisha Masters and 2024 Guwahati Masters, will take on top seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark.

World junior champion bronze medallist Ayush Shetty, who reached the Taipei Open semifinals, will face Canada's Brian Yang, while Priyanshu Rajawat opens against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh.

In mixed doubles, world num-

ber 19 Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto will face a qualifier. Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gade will begin against fourth-seeded Chinese pair Guo Xin Wa and Chen Fang Hui, while Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramuthesh meet top seeds Jiang Zhen Bang and Wei Ya Xin.

Sathish will also pair up with Aadya Variyath in mixed doubles to face Malaysia's Roy King Yap and Valeree Siow. In men's doubles, the pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi will be in action.

Women's doubles will see In-

dian participation from Kavipriya Selvam and Simran Singhi, Vaishnavi Khadkekar and Alisha Khan, as well as Prerana Alvekar and Mrunmayee Deshpande.

In the qualifiers, Kidambi Srikanth, S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, and Tharun Manneppalli will vie for spots in the men's singles main draw, while Anmol Kharb and Tasnim Mir will aim to qualify in the women's section.

Other Indians featuring in the qualification rounds include Mohit Jaglan and Lakshita Jaglan, and the pair of Shivam Sharma and Poorvisha S Ram.

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