

Sports

Valencia stun Barcelona to win Copa del Rey

'Beating Barcelona to win the cup is very special, we deserved to win'

SEVILLE: Barcelona wanted a trophy to ease their Champions League heartache but instead fell to another shock defeat as Valencia pulled off a thrilling 2-1 victory on Saturday to win the Copa del Rey.

Chasing a record fifth consecutive triumph, Barca were undone by a relentless and gutsy Valencia side, who hung on after Lionel Messi pulled a goal back to set up a dramatic finish in Seville. By then, Valencia were already two up, Kevin Gameiro and Rodrigo scoring twice in 13 frantic first-half minutes, after the latter spurned a golden early chance that could have spared them a nerve-shredding last 17 minutes.

Messi drove the comeback effort and Goncalo Guedes twice should have wrapped it up for Valencia, missing a one-on-one and then an open goal before the final whistle sparked pandemonium. Valencia's coach Marcelino, who might have been sacked when his team were four points off relegation in January, raced around the pitch in a frenzy. Barcelona's players sank to their knees.

"We always had faith," said Marcelino. "Beating Barcelona to win the cup is very special. We deserved to win." Messi admitted on Friday his team had still not recovered from the "hard blow" suffered against Liverpool and certainly they seemed too easily disheartened here, finding their fight only once it was too late. Messi also threw his support behind Barcelona's coach Ernesto Valverde but it remains to be seen whether the backing of the board remains after two dreadful defeats have now spoiled such a brilliant La Liga success.

"I'm fine," Valverde said. "When a coach loses you want to go again, to fight to overcome the next challenge. I know losing for this club is hard." "I do not think it's the coach's fault," said president Josep Maria

Bartomeu. "I think he has done a great job," added Gerard Pique. "But it does not depend on us."

They came here as favourites, but only just, their 1,457 consecutive days as Copa del Rey champions under threat, from their own sense of deflation, key players out injured and Valencia's recent surge.

If Barca's season all but ended three weeks ago, Valencia's arguably found life a few days later, as they moved into the top four for the first time and then held on to qualify for the Champions League.

Winning their first trophy since 2008, in the club's centenary year, completes a remarkable comeback campaign that, after 15 games, had them languishing in 15th. "We have made history," said captain Dani Parejo. Gameiro added: "In the difficult moments we stayed close. I don't have the words to describe it."

Some saw a metaphor in Barcelona's pre-match tifo, spelling out 'All Together' splitting down the middle, while there were key absentees from their starting lineup too, Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele all injured.

Valencia should have been ahead within five minutes, Clement Lenglet's error sending Rodrigo clear but his finish was brilliantly scooped off the line by the recovering Gerard Pique. Barca, with Sergio Busquets in the centre of a back three, settled but lacked zip and in the 23rd minute they were behind. Jose Gaya scuttled in behind Nelson Semedo and his pull-back wrong-footed everyone except Gameiro, who fired in.

Semedo had been beaten down the left and soon after Jordi Alba was outrun down the right, by Carlos Soler, whose cross needed only to be nodded down and in by Rodrigo for number two.

Barcelona stirred before the break. Ivan Rakitic volleyed and then headed wide, before Messi regis-



SEVILLE: Valencia players celebrate with their trophy after winning the 2019 Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) final football match between Barcelona and Valencia at the Benito Villamarin stadium in Seville. — AFP

tered their first shot on target in the 43rd minute. Malcom and Arturo Vidal came on for Semedo and Arthur during the interval, as Barca turned the screw. Messi might have turned the match but after wriggling through his sumptuous flick towards the far corner

brushed the post.

Pique fired wide as Valencia dropped deeper. Finally, Messi broke through, the post this time his friend after Lenglet's header struck the woodwork and landed kindly at his feet. — AFP

Lewandowski fires Bayern Munich to domestic double

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski dedicated victory to departing team mates Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery after Bayern Munich wrapped up a domestic double with a 3-0 win over RB Leipzig in the German Cup final on Saturday.

Goals from Lewandowski and Kingsley Coman sealed victory for Bayern in an enthralling game at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin. Both Robben and Ribery came off the bench to make their final appearance in a Bayern shirt, and Lewandowski hailed the iconic duo after helping Bayern to victory with a goal either side of half time.

"These titles are for Franck and Arjen, they have done so much for the club and we have to thank them," the Polish striker told public broadcaster ARD. The win sees Bayern lift the golden German Cup trophy for the 19th time in their history, just a week after securing a seventh successive Bundesliga title last Saturday.

"It was a difficult season at times, but I think we can now say that in the end, it was a very good season," said Lewandowski. The campaign has been particularly tough for Bayern coach Niko Kovac, who has faced constant criticism both from inside and outside the club in his first year in charge.

Yet the fans chanted Kovac's name before and after the final whistle as Bayern ended their season on a high. "It will take a few days to sink in that it is now actually over, but it was good to go out with the double," Robben told ARD.



MUNICH: Bayern Munich players celebrate with the trophy after the German Cup (DFB Pokal) Final football match RB Leipzig v FC Bayern Munich at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin. —AFP

Both sides probed rather frantically for an opener in the first half, and Manuel Neuer denied Yussuf Poulsen with a reflex save on ten minutes. It was Bayern who broke the deadlock, though, Lewandowski firing in a superb header in the 29th minute after a fine move on the left from Coman and David Alaba.

Coman had a free run at goal and rounded goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi shortly before half-time, but his shot was cleared on the line by Ibrahima Konate. Emil Forsberg had a similar chance for Leipzig just after the break, but came off second best in a one-on-one with Neuer. — AFP

Mets' Nido hits walk-off in 13th to beat Tigers

DETROIT: Tomas Nido homered leading off the bottom of the 13th inning Saturday night as the New York Mets finally outlasted the Detroit Tigers, 5-4. The Mets are 5-1 on a seven-game homestand. The Tigers have dropped 10 of 11. The Mets loaded the bases with one out and failed to score in the bottom of the 11th before the Tigers did the same thing in the top of the 12th. Nido, who was the last player on the Mets' bench when he entered in the 11th inning, capped a four hour and 11-minute duel when he hit his first walk-off homer off Buck Farmer (3-4). Hector Santiago (1-0) tossed two innings for the Mets, who received two homers and four RBIs from catcher Wilson Ramos, who left for a pinch-runner in the 11th and was replaced by Nido. The two-homer game was the eighth of Ramos' career and his first since last June 25.

ASTROS 4, RED SOX 3

Carlos Correa capped a three-hit night with a walk-off single, as Houston answered Boston's ninth-inning rally with one of its own. Correa singled to right field with the bases loaded off Red Sox reliever Matt Barnes (2-1), who allowed a leadoff double to Aledmys Diaz before issuing walks to Alex Bregman and Michael Brantley to load the bases. The Red Sox had rallied against Astros closer Roberto Osuna (3-0) in a blur, loading

the bases in the ninth inning on just three pitches, before Christian Vazquez roped a two-run single into left field on the second pitch he saw.

ANGELS 3, RANGERS 2

After giving up two runs in the top of the ninth, Los Angeles rallied for two to defeat Texas in Anaheim, Calif., and end a five-game losing streak. Angels pinch hitter Jared Walsh looped a single into shallow left with two outs, scoring Kole Calhoun from second with the winning run and giving Walsh his first major league RBI. Shawn Kelley (3-1) was aiming for his sixth save, but he gave up a one-out single to Luis Rengifo before Calhoun doubled to right-center, scoring Rengifo from first to tie the score at 2-2. Calhoun finished 3-for-3 with a walk, solo home run and the RBI double.

PADRES 19, BLUE JAYS 4

Austin Hedges hit his first career grand slam, Hunter Renfroe and Wil Myers each homered twice and visiting San Diego set a franchise record with seven homers while defeating Toronto. Ian Kinsler and Eric Hosmer also homered for the Padres. Hedges had five RBIs and Myers had four. Right-hander Cal Quantrill (1-2) struck out nine in six innings to earn his first career win for San Diego. Quantrill, who is from nearby Port Hope, Ont., and the son of former major league pitcher Paul Quantrill, allowed three runs on two hits, both home runs, and two walks in his fourth career start.

YANKEES 7, ROYALS 3 (GAME 1)

Luke Voit's two-run home run in the



NEW YORK: Pete Alonso #20 of the New York Mets is forced out as Josh Harrison #1 of the Detroit Tigers completes a double play in the eighth inning at Citi Field in New York City. — AFP

seventh inning helped lead New York past host Kansas City in the first game of a day-night doubleheader. J.A. Happ (4-3) picked up the win after giving up three runs on four hits in six innings. Relying mostly on his fastball, Happ struck out 10 Royals. Scott Barlow (1-1) took the loss. He gave up four runs on four hits in 1 1/3 innings. Starter Jakob Junis surrendered three runs over six innings.

YANKEES 6, ROYALS 5 (GAME 2)

New York scored five runs in the second inning, then held on for the vic-

tory and a doubleheader sweep over Kansas City. Cameron Maybin drove in three runs, and Austin Romine was 3-for-4 with two RBIs in the nightcap. The Yankees hit safely in five of their first seven opportunities with runners in scoring position and have now won seven straight and 11 of their last 12 games. They continued their dominance against the Royals in this century. Since 2000, the Yankees have won 16 season series, with three splits and just one Royals series win (2014). The Yankees are 100-43 in the 2000s against Kansas City. — Reuters

Kohli eyes WCup glory as captain

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli's reputation as one of cricket's great entertainers is well-established, but the India star will not be completely satisfied until he leaves an indelible mark by winning the World Cup as captain.

Kohli has been instrumental in building on Indian cricket's rich legacy after taking over the captaincy from Mahendra Singh Dhoni. After helping India reclaim the number-one Test ranking, the 30-year-old led his team to a first-ever Test series triumph in Australia in January.

But it is the possibility of winning the World Cup as skipper that most inspires the flamboyant batsman, who has amassed 10,843 runs in 227 one-day international matches, including 41 centuries and 49 fifties.

Kohli still fondly remembers being part of the 2011 World Cup-winning team under Dhoni, who lifted the title on Indian soil, and would love to emulate his predecessor by leading his country to their third world title.

"I would put the win in Australia at a par with the World Cup. Look, you cannot place a World Cup win below anything else," Kohli told the Times of India newspaper before departing for the tournament in England and Wales.

"It is a global tournament and the significance and the charm of the tournament is something else. It is always going to be the most important tournament in world cricket," Kohli defied critics who had questioned his poor showing on the team's 2014 tour of England by hitting 593 runs, including two hundreds, in the five-Test series last year.

But India still crumbled to a 4-1 defeat, showing he cannot will the side to victory on his own. Kohli's captaincy has often been criticised, with former India opener Gautam Gambhir saying the batsman has "loads to learn" as a leader.

Kohli scored 464 runs in the recently concluded Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament but his side Royal Challengers Bangalore ended last in the eight-team table. When captaining India, Kohli has never shied away from relying on the experience of Dhoni, who is often seen calling the shots from behind the stumps.

"It seems like he is happy to see Dhoni handle some aspects of his captaincy, especially in the last 10 overs when he can focus on his fielding and take important positions in the field," former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar told AFP.

"But he is not completely dependent on Dhoni, that would be wrong to suggest," Kohli, who became the fastest batsman to reach 10,000 ODI runs last year, is already tipped to overtake one of the many records held by Indian batting icon Sachin Tendulkar.

He has hit 66 centuries across all international formats since his ODI debut in 2008, with Tendulkar holding the record for 100 hundreds in his 24-year-old career. Kohli's aggressive on-field demeanour though has ruffled a few feathers.

His verbal duel with Australia skipper Tim Paine during the Perth Test in December was criticised by Manjrekar, who said the star should behave "responsibly". Regardless of his outspoken nature, Kohli's consistency, attacking style and supreme fitness levels make him the standout player in this edition of the 50-over World Cup. — AFP