

Sports

Suarez scores as Barcelona condemn Espanyol to relegation

Teenage forward Ansu Fati sent off for reckless tackle

BARCELONA: Barcelona kept up their pursuit of leaders Real Madrid in the La Liga title race by beating city rivals Espanyol 1-0 at home on Wednesday, also condemning their neighbours to relegation from the top flight.

Luis Suarez struck the only goal of the game in the 56th minute, lashing a loose ball into the net for his 195th goal with Barca which took him past Hungarian Laszlo Kubala as the club's third top scorer of all time.

The goal came shortly after both sides had been reduced to 10 men in a frantic start to the second half.

Barca's teenage forward Ansu Fati was sent off for a reckless tackle five minutes after coming off the bench but Espanyol's numerical advantage lasted only three minutes as Pol Lozano was dismissed, also following a VAR review.

Barca, chasing a third consecutive Spanish title, are on 76 points after 35 games while Real Madrid are top with 77 and can restore their four-point advantage when they host Alaves on Friday.

Espanyol, one of Spain's most prestigious clubs, were relegated for the first time since winning promotion back to La Liga in 1994. They are bottom of the table on 24 points after 35 games.

Barca had produced one of their best per-

formances of the season by hammering Villarreal 4-1 away on Sunday but they looked sluggish at an empty Camp Nou, which normally would have been in full voice on derby day.

"We knew how difficult this game would be because of Espanyol's situation and we were tired from Sunday's game and we played with less intensity," Suarez said.

"But the important thing is that we won the game and picked up more points." Espanyol frustrated their more illustrious neighbours in the first half with a five-man defence and created the better chances.

Barca keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen had to be aware to prevent his team mate Clement Lenglet from scoring an own goal just before halftime and Espanyol's Didac Vila fired the loose ball against the post.

Ter Stegen had also come to Barca's rescue earlier, spreading his body and keeping out a low strike from Adri Embarba with his leg.

"We did not play well today," Barca coach Quique Setien said.

"Their defensive shape made life very difficult for us as they were very tight and compact and we weren't precise enough to find a way around it."

Barca found a way through with the help of their three forwards, as Antoine Griezmann raced to the byline and passed to Lionel Messi



BARCELONA: Espanyol's Spanish forward Javier Puado (L) vies with Barcelona's Spanish defender Jordi Alba during the Spanish League football match between Barcelona and Espanyol at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. —AFP

whose shot deflected into the path of Suarez and the Uruguayan made no mistake.

Suarez now only trails the late Cesar,

who netted 232 goals for Barca and record-holder Messi who has scored 630 for the club. —Reuters

Japan's boxing nurse dreaming of Olympics

TOKOROZAWA: Olympic boxing hopeful Arisa Tsubata is used to taking blows in the ring but it is during her work as a nurse that she faces her toughest opponent: coronavirus.

The 27-year-old juggles a brutal training regime in boxing gloves with long, irregular hours in surgical gloves at a hospital near Tokyo. Tsubata mainly treats cancer patients but she said the virus was a constant threat, with medical experts warning at the peak of the pandemic that Japan's health system was close to collapse.

"We always face the risk of infection at medical facilities," she told AFP. "My colleagues and I have all worked under the stress of possibly getting infected." Like most elite athletes, the virus played havoc with Tsubata's training schedules, meaning she welcomed the postponement of this year's Tokyo Olympics until 2021.

"It was a plus for me, giving me more time for

training, although I wasn't sure if I should be so happy because the reason for the postponement was the spread of the infectious disease," she said. Tsubata took up boxing only two years ago as a way to lose weight but quickly rose through the ranks.

"In a few years after becoming a nurse, I gained more than 10 kilos (22 pounds)," she laughed. "I planned to go to Hawaii with my friends one summer, and I thought I wouldn't have much fun in a body like that. That is how I started boxing."

'I WAS SCARED'

She quickly discovered a knack for the ring, winning the Japan national championship and a place on the national team. But juggling her medical and sporting career has not always been easy and the first time she fought a foreign boxer came only in January, at an intensive training camp in Kazakhstan.

"That made me realise how inexperienced I am in my short boxing career. I was scared," she admitted. Japanese boxing authorities decided she was not experienced enough to send her to the final qualifying tournament in Paris, which would have shattered her Tokyo 2020 dreams — if coronavirus had not given her an extra year. —AFP

Scrabble players look to bar racist or homophobic slurs

TORONTO: The world of tournament Scrabble is split over whether to remove racial and anti-LGBT+ slurs from official dictionaries, as governing bodies debate the rules in light of the global Black Lives Matter protests. A decision on removing the "N-word" as well as homophobic and transphobic terms including "bum-boy" from the North American Scrabble Players Association (NASPA) list of accepted words is due this week, its chief executive John Chew said on Monday.

Language has become a hotly debated topic after protests against racism following the death of George Floyd in US police custody on May 25, with bands, consumer brands, and buildings and roads named after slave traders renamed. "We are told when we get for the first time to a Scrabble club or tournament that words have no meaning on a Scrabble board. Most people accept that without question," said Chew, who is Canadian.

"Some people find they cannot accept ... the 'N-word' being treated as though it has no meaning," he said. "Those people end up not

being part of our community, which is the fundamental problem we're trying to address." Chew said he was concerned that people were put off joining because of offensive language in the organization's dictionary.

A poll open to both NASPA's roughly 2,000 members and the general public received about 1,000 responses, with members split over removing the N-word and the public in favour of doing so, Chew said. Scrabble, invented in 1933 by unemployed American architect Alfred Mosher Butts, is played competitively in North America by almost 15,000 people, said Chew. The official Scrabble Go app has been downloaded more than 10m times on Android phones.

The World English Language Scrabble Players Association (WESPA), which runs international tournaments, is discussing whether to remove slurs with its dictionary's publisher Collins. "These are terrible words and you don't want people coming in to be exposed to them if necessary," said WESPA chairman Chris Lipe.

But some felt simply changing the dictionary would not address the real issues, he said. "There are real issues about diversity and representation within the Scrabble community and they mainly have to do with issues in society," said Lipe, who is American. "Removing words from the word list doesn't actually address any of those issues." Collins did not respond to a request for comment. —Reuters