



ROME: Inter Milan players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) final against Juventus on May 11, 2022 at the Olympic stadium. —AFP

Inter see off Juve to win Italian Cup

ROME: Inter Milan claimed their eighth Italian Cup on Wednesday after overcoming old foes Juventus 4-2 in an extra-time victory full of incident and controversy. Ivan Perisic secured a thrilling win with a double in the first half of extra time but the match hung on the awarding of a soft-seeming penalty which Hakan Calhanoglu smashed in to take the match past 90 minutes.

Juve had been deservedly leading through quickfire goals from Alex Sandro and Dusan Vlahovic early in the second half and referee Paolo Valeri's decision to give the spot-kick after Lautaro Martinez fell following a slight touch from Leonardo Bonucci enraged Massimiliano Allegri's team. "I always thought we could do it, even when we were 2-1 down... We lost our heads a bit for 10 or 15 minutes but we fought back and I think that we definitely deserved to win," Perisic said to Mediaset.

For Inter it is another success over Juve after another controversial win in Turin last month and beating them to the Italian Super Cup earlier in the season and is one which will boost them in their Serie A title defense. Simone Inzaghi's side trail AC Milan by two points and could hand their local rivals the Scudetto if they don't beat relegation-threatened Cagliari on Sunday.

Juve meanwhile have only Champions League qualifi-

cation to show for an up-and-down season, but they chose to say nothing about the penalty decision which denied them a trophy. "Inter are fighting for the league title and we're behind them. We need to close that gap with hard work and looking to sort out the team," said Allegri.

Nicolo Barella gave Inter the lead in the sixth minute with a long-range effort which would soon be forgotten amid the controversy to come. His thumping strike came after a blistering start from Inter which threatened to blow Juve away, the Italy midfielder collecting after a corner was cleared, cutting inside and unleashing a curling effort which Mattia Perin didn't even bother trying to stop.

Penalty drama

However from then on Juve were the better team and should have gone in at the break at least level, if not ahead. Paulo Dybala was the first to offer signs of life in the 23rd minute when his low shot was comfortably saved. Moments later the Argentine fed Vlahovic whose powerful, angled drive needed smart reactions from Samir Handanovic to be kept out.

Matthijs de Ligt had a header well saved on he half-hour mark and it looked for all the world that Dybala would bag a deserved leveller when the subsequent cor-

ner fell kindly to him, but he sliced his first-time strike wide. Juve soon turned the match on its head though, with Sandro levelling the scores five minutes after the break when his shot slipped through Handanovic's hands as Alvaro Morata tried to deflect the ball.

The Juve fans were jumping and their end of the ground exploded with joy seconds later, Vlahovic ending a four-match dry spell in front of goal after being sent flying through on goal by Dybala. The Serbia forward sent Danilo D'Ambrosio packing and although his first effort was kept out, the 22-year-old made no mistake on the rebound. Juve looked to have the game under control until referee Valeri handed Inter an ill-deserved lifeline.

Calhanoglu rifled home from the spot and an already fired-up Juve team then lost control when De Ligt was ruled after a VAR check to have chopped down Stefan de Vrij. Perisic stepped up to smash in the penalty in the 99th minute and once the Croat's decisive second flew in from distance three minutes later there was chaos, with Allegri sent off and players and officials tussling on the sidelines. However Juve couldn't turn that anger into a fightback and Inter took the honors to set up a potential league and cup double with the Serie A season heading to its climax. —AFP

Rugby opens new frontier by picking US as World Cup hosts

LONDON: The Rugby World Cup will be staged in the United States for the first time in 2031 after the game's governing body named the host nations for five men's and women's tournaments. Australia will hold the men's World Cup in 2027 with the women's tournaments going to England (2025), Australia (2029) and the United States (2033). By taking the showpiece to North America, officials hope to grow the sport in a non-traditional rugby nation. "Today, we have approved three exceptional Rugby World Cup host nations - England, Australia and USA - providing unprecedented certainty and an unparalleled opportunity to accelerate the growth and impact of rugby globally," said World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont. "It is great for rugby, for fans and for the host nations."

USA Rugby chief executive Ross Young said: "We look forward to partnering with World Rugby in the years ahead to ensure that our preparations for these tournaments and the events themselves are a paradigm-shifting catalyst for the growth of our sport, not only here in the United States but around the world."

World Rugby did not spring any surprises with their announcements on Thursday. Officials were determined to avoid a repeat of the situation when South Africa was chosen as the preferred venue for the 2023 World Cup by an independent assessment panel only to lose out in a subsequent vote to France.

US market

By taking the event to the United States, rugby chiefs hope to make a dent in a lucrative market dominated by homegrown sports such as American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey. The hope is that by 2031 the Eagles - as the US men's team are known - might be competitive enough to match the achievement of 2019 hosts Japan, another emerging rugby union nation.

Japan reached the last eight of their home World Cup three years ago in a tournament won by South Africa. The Eagles, however, have yet to qualify for next year's World Cup in France, with the team facing Chile in a two-legged qualifier in July. In order to help boost the competitiveness of teams such as the United States, officials are trying to restructure the existing July and November international windows to ensure they have more meaningful games between World Cups - a thorny issue since the sport turned professional in 1995.

Australia last staged the World Cup in 2003 when the Wallabies were beaten in the final by England. Eddie Jones, the then Australia coach, is now in charge of England. "We're beyond thrilled to be welcoming not one, but two Rugby World Cups to our shores," said Rugby Australia chairman Hamish McLennan. "It's a gamechanger for rugby in this country, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize and secure the future of the sport here and see the game we all love grow and thrive for years to come." —AFP



AMSTERDAM: Ajax players celebrate after winning the national championship at the end of the Dutch Eredivisie match against Heerenveen at the Johan Cruyff Arena on May 11, 2022. —AFP

Ajax seal 36th Dutch title

AMSTERDAM: Ajax secured a second straight Dutch Eredivisie title on Wednesday with a 5-0 thrashing of Heerenveen at the Amsterdam Arena. The club's 36th league crown is the third in charge for outgoing coach Erik ten Hag, who will end his five-year stint at the helm at the end of the season to become Manchester United manager.

Ajax have a four-point lead over second-placed PSV Eindhoven, who beat Nijmegen 3-2, with one match remaining. PSV missed the chance to cut the gap to two points last weekend when they conceded two late goals in a 2-2 draw at Feyenoord.

On Wednesday, Nicolas Tagliafico and Steven Berghuis calmed any home nerves by giving Ajax a two-goal lead. Sebastian Haller, the league's top-scorer, netted a penalty before half-time to score his 34th goal in all competitions this season. Brian Brobbey and Edson Alvarez added further gloss to the scoreline late on as Ten Hag's final home game ended in celebration. —AFP

Malaysia to host 2027 SEA Games, Singapore in 2029

HANOI: Malaysia will host the 2027 SEA Games and Singapore the 2029 edition, the two countries said on Thursday, hours ahead of the opening ceremony of the COVID-delayed 2021 showpiece in Vietnam. Olympic Council of Malaysia president Norza Zakaria said in a statement that a meeting at a Hanoi hotel saw the SEA Games Federation "unanimously" award his country the event for the seventh time.

Singapore's Olympic Council said on Facebook that the city-state will hold the biennial Games for a fifth time. "We are pleased to host the prestigious regional sporting event in Singapore again," council president Tan Chuan-Jin said in the social media post. The 2021 Games in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi

Celtic win 52nd Scottish title

GLASGOW: Celtic secured a 52nd Scottish league title on Wednesday despite being held 1-1 by Dundee United. Ange Postecoglou's men only needed a point to win a 10th league title in 11 years as they also booked their place in next season's Champions League group stage. The Hoops realistically already had the title sewn up as they began the evening with a six-point lead over Rangers and a 20-goal superior goal difference with two games remaining.

Postecoglou was plucked from Yokohama Marinos



HANOI: Performers take part in the opening ceremony of the 31st Southeast Asian Games at the My Dinh National Stadium on May 12, 2022. —AFP

were delayed six months because of COVID and officially opened later Thursday. The 2023 SEA Games are scheduled to be held in Cambodia and 2025 will be in the Thai capital Bangkok. —AFP

when Eddie Howe turned his back on Celtic's offer a year ago. The Australian has overseen a remarkable turnaround between the Glasgow giants, as Celtic finished a distant 25 points behind Rangers last season. After losing three of their first six games, Celtic are now unbeaten in 31 in the league. But they dropped points for just the third time in 2022 at Tannadice.

Georgios Giakoumakis' towering header early in the second half put the visitors on course for another three points. But on-loan Manchester United midfielder Dylan Levitt's sensational strike earned United a crucial point in their battle for European football. Daizen Maeda missed a glorious chance to win the title in style in stoppage time, but a draw was enough to spark celebrations among the travelling support. —AFP