



Real Madrid's Eder Militao (left), and Barcelona defender jump for the ball during the Spanish Super Cup semi final soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid at King Fahd stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Sports

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Valverde gives Madrid 5th straight win over Catalans

Real beat Barcelona for 100th time, reach Cup final

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, Jan 13, (AP): Barcelona put on a good fight as an underdog, but in the end it was Real Madrid celebrating again after a thrilling "clásico" between the Spanish powerhouses in Saudi Arabia.

Federico Valverde scored in extra time to give Real Madrid a 3-2 win over Barcelona for their 100th victory over their storied rivals and a spot in the final of the Spanish Super Cup.

Barcelona twice equalized in regular time but couldn't recover after Valverde scored from close range on a breakaway eight minutes into extra time to give Madrid their fifth straight win over the Catalan club in all competitions.

"We competed well," Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué said. "It's not the result we wanted but we are a step closer to winning. I'm very proud of our team. We have to leave with our heads

up after the way we played against a Real Madrid team that is having a very good season."

The Spanish Super Cup is being played in Saudi Arabia again after the coronavirus pandemic transferred last year's edition back to Spain.

It was Madrid's 100th win over Barcelona in 248 competitive matches against their rivals. Barcelona have 96 wins, though none since 2019.

"I have to admit that Barcelona played well," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "It was an even match. We were efficient on the counterattacks."

It was a mostly even match but Madrid looked the more dangerous team throughout thanks to their counterattacks led by Vinicius Junior and Benzema.

The duo gave Madrid the lead in the 25th minute after Benzema stole the ball from Barcelona midfielder Sergio

Busquets near the midfield line and fed Vinicius, who made a run into the area and beat goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen with a shot into the top of the net.

Barcelona equalized with a fluke goal near the end of the half. Madrid defender Eder Militao tried to clear a ball from inside the area but his shot

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bounced off Barcelona striker Luuk de Jong and then off the post before going over the line.

Benzema hit the post in the 69th, then a couple of minutes later put Madrid ahead again from close range off the rebound of a deflection by Ter Stegen following a cross by Dani Carvajal. Ter Stegen had stopped another Benzema

shot just moments earlier.

Ansu Fati, who replaced De Jong in the 66th, leveled the match again in the 83rd with a header off a well-placed cross by Jordi Alba.

Valverde, who replaced Luka Modric in the 83rd, scored the winner in extra time after a fast counterattack by Madrid, converting a cross by Rodrygo from the right flank with Barcelona's defense heavily outmanned.

Madrid arrived as one of the hottest teams in Spain and were the favorites over a Barcelona side still rebuilding after the loss of Lionel Messi to Paris Saint-Germain. The Catalan club trail their rivals by 17 points in the Spanish league with a game in hand.

It was the first clásico for Xavi Hernández as Barcelona coach. Ronald Koeman was still at the helm when the Catalan club lost 2-1 to Madrid at the

Camp Nou in the first clásico of the season in the league last October.

Ferran Torres made his Barcelona debut after being signed from Manchester City. Torres and young midfielder Pedri González arrived in Saudi Arabia later than their teammates because they tested positive for the coronavirus. Torres, who was substituted at halftime, hadn't played since getting injured with Spain's national team in October.

Madrid were without defender David Alaba because of an injury.

Madrid made it to the "Final Four" after finishing second to Atlético in the league last season. Barcelona qualified as the Copa del Rey champions, which they won over Athletic.

Only about 30,000 fans were allowed at the 62,000-capacity King Fahd International Stadium because of the coronavirus pandemic.



Real Madrid's Federico Valverde celebrates after a goal during the Spanish Super Cup semi final soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid at King Fahd stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Inter win Italian Super Cup



Inter Milan's players celebrate after winning the Italian Super Cup final soccer match between Inter Milan and Juventus at the San Siro Stadium, in Milan, Italy. Inter Milan won 2-1. (AP)

Sanchez the hero

MILAN, Jan 13, (AP): Substitute Alexis Sánchez scored with the last kick of the match to help Inter Milan win the Italian Super Cup with a 2-1 victory over bitter rivals Juventus after extra time.

Sánchez's goal, helped by an error from the Juventus defense, sparked scenes of wild celebration at San Siro as almost every member of the Inter bench ran onto the field to embrace Sánchez in the far corner.

Lautaro Martínez had converted a penalty in the first half to cancel out American midfielder Weston McKennie's opener for Juventus in an entertaining game for the first piece of silverware of the season.

Sánchez has now scored three goals in his past five matches but was only brought off the bench in the 75th minute.

Defending champions Juventus have a record nine victories in the Italian Super Cup. But this was the first time since 2012 they qualified for the game as Italian Cup winners rather than league champions after they saw their run of nine successive Serie A titles ended by Inter and former coach Antonio Conte last season.

Inter lead Serie A again, 11 points ahead of Juventus, which had a difficult start to the season. Inter coach Simone Inzaghi extended his impressive record against Juventus in the Italian Super Cup, having won both of his previous matches in the competition

against the Bianconeri when he was in charge of Lazio in 2017 and 2019.

Juventus were without a number of players through injury and suspension, while goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny was on the bench as he has only recently had his second dose of the vaccine against the coronavirus and so was not able to come into contact with his teammates until shortly before kickoff because of new rules that took effect in Italy on Monday.

Inter wasted several chances to take the lead in the opening 10 minutes. The Nerazzurri also thought they should have been awarded a penalty when Nicolò Barella was shoulder barged by Giorgio Chiellini but, after a swift check with the video assistant referee, play continued.

Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic was so much of a spectator in the opening quarter of an hour that he resorted

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to doing some jumping jacks in the middle of his own half to try and keep warm on a chilly night in Milan.

But Inter were made to pay for its profligacy when, following a series of crosses, Alvaro Morata floated the ball back in for McKennie to head into the far side of the net.

However, Inter did get a penalty shortly after.

Juventus defender Mattia De Sciglio tried to clear the ball but didn't realize Edin Džeko was running up behind him and brought down the Inter forward. Martínez blasted the penalty into the top right corner. Juventus almost restored their lead right at the start of the second half but Federico Bernardeschi fired just wide of the right post.

Inter went even closer on the hour mark as Denzel Dumfries' header from Hakan Çalhanoğlu's cross appeared to be going in but Mattia Perin managed to palm it onto the frame of the goal.

Pant hits brilliant 100 not out for India on difficult pitch

SA 101-2, need 111 more to win series

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Jan 13, (AP): Rishabh Pant hit a brilliant 100 not out for India on a difficult pitch on Thursday but the decisive final Test was still in the balance as South Africa went to stumps on 101-2, needing 111 more runs to win the match and take the series.

South Africa made good progress toward that victory late on Day 3 as Dean Elgar and Keegan Petersen put on a 78-run stand after the early loss of opener Aiden Markram.

But Elgar was out to an edge down the legside on what turned out to be the last ball of the day to give India renewed hope in their quest to finally win a Test series in South Africa.

South Africa captain Elgar's dismissal was confirmed via a review and India captain Virat Kohli jumped for joy when it was clear that his opposite number was on his way for 30. Elgar was South Africa's match-winner in

the second Test to level the three-match series 1-1 and set up the decider at Newlands in Cape Town.

The series has been tight and low-scoring throughout. In this Test, top-ranked India batted first and made 223, South Africa replied with 210 and India made 198 in their second innings to set the home team a target of 212 to take the series.

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Petersen was 48 not out at the close. Earlier, Pant's fourth test century was priceless for India. No other India batsman could master the Newlands surface, with Kohli's 29 the next-best score and the only other score over 10.

Pant hit six fours and four sixes in a flashing innings typical of his style, and also after coming in with India under

pressure at 58-4 having lost two wickets in the first two overs of the day.

The left-hander reached his century just in time, with India nine wickets down and last man Jasprit Bumrah hanging in alongside him. Bumrah was out soon after for 2 and South Africa took six wickets in the second session to set up an intriguing finish to the series.

The Proteas could win with a successful fourth-innings chase just like they did to level the series in Johannesburg.

India's lead didn't come easily.

South Africa struck twice in the first two overs of the day in a blistering start. Cheteshwar Pujara was out for 9 on the second ball of the day and to a flying catch at leg slip by Petersen. Ajinkya Rahane followed for 1 in the next over.

Kohli played an exceptionally cautious innings as his 29 came from 143 deliveries at a strike rate of just 20, an unusually defensive effort from one of the world's most talented batsmen.

But it was what India needed after those early blows. With Kohli being careful, and Pant playing his natural attacking game, they put on 94 for the fifth wicket to make sure India had a chance.

Kohli fell soon after lunch and the rest of the India lineup followed quickly, with the exception of Pant. He blazed a lofted shot down the ground when on 94 and was dropped by Temba Bavuma, who dived forward to attempt a tough catch and the ball burst through his hands.

Pant got to his 100 soon after with a dab down to square leg for a single.

India set an unusual record when Bumrah was caught by Bavuma to end the innings. It became the first team in Test cricket history to lose all 20 of their wickets in a match to catches.

Saga continues

Djokovic in Open draw

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 13, (AP): Novak Djokovic now knows he'll face fellow Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round of his Australian Open title defense, if he's allowed to play.

Djokovic's visa status dominated attention until the moment the draw was conducted Thursday, after a postponement of 75 minutes, to determine the brackets for the men's and women's singles draws at the first major tennis tournament of 2022.

He was still in limbo after it.

The Australian immigration minister was still considering whether to deport the nine-time and defending Australian Open champion, who is not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Top-ranked Djokovic had his visa canceled on arrival in Melbourne last week when his vaccination exemption was rejected, but he won a legal battle on procedural grounds that allowed him to stay in the country.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke has been considering the question since a judge reinstated Djokovic's visa last Monday. The tournament starts next Monday.

If he's allowed to stay, Djokovic's bid for a men's record 21st major title could mean a quarter-

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final against No. 7-ranked Matteo Berrettini and possibly a semifinal against Rafael Nadal or third-seeded Alexander Zverev.

He is tied with Nadal and Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slam titles, missing a chance for the all-time record when he lost the U.S. Open final to Daniil Medvedev last year.

Medvedev, who also ended Djokovic's run at a calendar-year Grand Slam with that win in New York, is on the opposite end of the draw as the No. 2 seed in Australia. A finalist here last year, he could meet local favorite Nick Kyrgios in the second round, and also No. 5 Andrey Rublev. No. 9 Felix Auger-Aliassime, John Isner in his quarter of the draw. He's seeded to meet No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas in the semis.

On the women's side, top-ranked Ash Barty and defending champion Naomi Osaka ended up in the same section of the draw, meaning two of the best players in the tournament could meet in a fourth-round match that could have the feeling of a final.

After that, No. 5 Maria Sakkari or No. 9 Ons Jabeur could be waiting in the quarterfinals.

Osaka, who has been ranked as high as No. 1, slid down the list because of her lack of matches in 2021 and is seeded 13th.

French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková and No. 8 Paula Badosa are in the same half of the draw, along with 2020 champion Sofia Kenin, who has a tough opener against fellow American Madison Keys and could meet No. 18 Coco Gauff in the third round.



Djokovic