

Napoli punish nine-man Nice



Napoli's Dries Mertens controls the ball

Paris
Napoli took a big step towards the Champions League group stage with a 2-0 win over outclassed nine-man Nice in their play-off, first-leg in Italy on Wednesday.

The Riviera side were down to nine men after 79 minutes when Alassane Pléa was sent off for a second yellow card just after Vincent Koziello's straight dismissal.

Belgian midfielder Dries Mertens had slotted in the opener after 13 minutes with Jorginho doubling the hosts' account with a penalty after 70 minutes. It was a third straight defeat for Lucien Favre's side who have lost their first two French

Ligue 1 matches, and travelled without Mario Balotelli and new signing Wesley Sneijder.

Napoli, third in Serie A and in the Champions League last 16 last year, were a class above the French punishing defensive errors in front of a delighted 50,000 home fans at the San Paolo Stadium.

Napoli took control of the game early with Mertens outwitting the Nice defence and taking advantage of an error by Yoan Cardinale to slot past the advancing Nice goalkeeper. And in the 70th minute it was again Mertens, brought down by Christophe Jallet, who earned the penalty which Jorginho slotted in. (AFP)

Ronaldo leads nominations



Cristiano Ronaldo

Paris
Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo leads the nominees unveiled yesterday for the Best FIFA Men's Player 2017 award.

The 32-year-old Portuguese captain is favourite to retain the title he won last year after success in both the Champions League and La Liga. Among the 24 men's nominees are Ronaldo's Real Madrid teammates Dani Carvajal, Toni Kroos, Marcelo, Luka Modric, Keylor Navas and Sergio Ramos.

The list also includes Barcelona rivals Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez, as well as Paris Saint-Germain's record signing Neymar.

Champions League finalists

with Juventus, Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and teammate Paulo Dybala are also in the running, alongside former Juventus player Leonardo Bonucci, who has since signed for AC Milan.

The other nominees include Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Borussia Dortmund), Eden Hazard (Chelsea), Antoine Griezmann (Atlético Madrid), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Manchester United), Andres Iniesta (Barcelona), Harry Kane (Tottenham), N'Golo Kante (Chelsea), Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich), Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich), Alexis Sanchez (Arsenal) and Arturo Vidal (Bayern Munich). (AFP)

Ton-up Root shines bright for England

Birmingham

Joe Root led from the front with a century as England took charge against the West Indies on the opening day of the inaugural day/night Test on English soil at Edgbaston yesterday.

England were 215 for two at tea with Root, who won the toss, unbeaten on 103.

Former captain Alastair Cook was closing in on a century of his own at 85 not out.

The skippers past and present had added an unbroken 176 for the third wicket.

They had joined forces with England faltering at 39 for two after Test debutant Mark Stoneman and Tom Westley were both dismissed for eight.

But from then on the West Indies found life tough against two proven world-class batsmen.

Root's fifty was his 11th in successive Tests -- a new England record and just one shy of South Africa star AB de Villiers's all-time leading mark of 12.

But while his conversion rate of fifties into hundreds has sometimes been a source of frustration to Root, this time the Yorkshireman went on to score his 13th century in 58 career Tests.

The fifth day/night Test worldwide saw Root win the toss under blue skies and on a good pitch.

He decided to bat first, for all the concerns about facing the pink ball and the difficulties of batting in twilight later on.

Left-hander Stoneman's first two scoring shots in Test cricket were both fours.

The 30-year-old eased Kemar Roach through the covers before clipping him off his pads.

It was an encouraging start by the Surrey batsman -- Cook's 12th England opening partner since Andrew Strauss retired five years ago.

But that was as good as it got for Stoneman, brought in after England dropped Keaton Jennings following a run of low scores during the preceding 3-1 home Test series victory against South Africa.

Roach produced a superbly sharp delivery that pitched on middle stump and clipped the top of off to clean bowl



Stoneman and leave England 14 for one.

Westley, still to cement his place at number three, was then lbw on review after missing a drive off first-change Miguel Cummins, with replays showing the ball would have smashed into the middle and leg stumps.

But Cook, who had a lucky break when he edged West Indies captain Jason Holder through a gap in the slips, and Root repaired the damage with a succession of boundaries.

Just before the lunch interval left-hander Cook, England's all-time leading Test run-scorer, completed a 74-ball fifty including 10 fours. (AFP)

SCOREBOARD

England 1st Innings	
D.A. Cook not out	85
M. Stoneman b Roach	8
T. Westley lbw b Cummins	8
J. Root not out	103
Extras (lb8, nb1, w2)	11
Total (2 wkts, 55 overs, 232 mins)	215