



PHOTO: INTERNET

Barcelona defender Giovanni van Bronckhorst (R) fights for the ball with Badalona's David Sanchez during their King's Cup match at Nou Camp on Wednesday.

SPANISH CUP Espanyol crash out

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Third division Rayo Vallecano dumped holders Espanyol out of the King's Cup in the fourth round on Wednesday, progressing 2-1 on aggregate.

After drawing 1-1 at home in the first leg two weeks ago, Rayo's Miguel Michel scored the only goal of the game 11 minutes into the second half to stun Espanyol in their own stadium.

The Barcelona-based club were joined by other Primera Liga casualties Real Sociedad and

Gimnastic, who also lost to lower league opposition.

Struggling Sociedad recorded their first win of the season to beat second division Malaga 2-1, but it was not enough to overturn their 4-1 mauling from the first leg.

Alarm bells will be ringing at Gimnastic after they lost 3-1 at home to second division Valladolid, to go out 4-1 on aggregate. It was their seventh straight defeat in all competitions.

Two goals from Argentine striker Javier Saviola helped Barcelona to a 6-1 aggregate win over third division Badalona, while Valencia cruised to a 4-1 aggregate win over Portuense.

Getafe, Villarreal, Osasuna, Sevilla and last season's losing finalists Real Zaragoza all won their respective ties to see off lower league opposition.

Of the five, the only side to suffer were Getafe, who survived a scare at home to second division leaders Xerez.

Their 2-0 first leg advantage was cancelled out in the opening 35 minutes but they held firm and defender Alexis, who conceded a soft penalty from which Xerez scored early on, netted in the second half to give Getafe a 3-2 aggregate win.

Deportivo Coruna showed greater composure in a penalty shoot out to eclipse Racing

Santander, after having drawn 1-1 over two legs and after extra time.

Another two top-flight sides, Real Mallorca and Athletic Bilbao, could not be separated but despite being down to 10 men, Mallorca scored in extra-time to put the 23-times Cup winners out 3-2 on aggregate.

There provided relief for Real Betis coach Javier Irureta who ended a run of eight league and cup games without a win when his side beat Recreativo Huelva 2-0, to progress.

Levante's game against Atletico Madrid was postponed on Tuesday due to the poor state of the pitch and a date for the rematch has yet to be agreed.

Benitez dreams of Italy

INTERNET, undated

Coach Rafael Benitez would consider leaving Liverpool for a job in Italy, stated his agent on Thursday.

The Spanish tactician, who is considered one of the best Coaches on the market, is happy to stay at Anfield, although he would consider a Serie A switch in the right circumstances.

"Benitez is a Coach ideally suited to Italy and the country's style of football and he is one of the best three Coaches in the world," said agent Manuel Garcia Quilon to The Sun.

"If he receives an interesting offer from a club with a serious project, he will certainly consider it and in this case he could even leave Liverpool," continued Quilon.

"Benitez is a highly prepared Coach, he works 24 hours a day and is able to train in a way few others in the world can you just need to look at what he has won to see that."

Benitez joined Liverpool from Valencia in 2004, having led the Spanish side to the title and UEFA Cup.

Since then he has won the Champions League, European Super Cup and FA Cup with the Reds, although he has come under fire for his rotation policy this term.

Real to sign Marcelo

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid have secured the signing of Brazil fullback Marcelo from Fluminense for six million euros, according to AS newspaper. The transfer is expected to go through in January.

Madrid beat fellow Primera Liga club Sevilla to the signing of the player, who can also feature in attacking roles. The club will pay three million up front and the other three in two segments at later dates.

"The boy only wants to come to Madrid," said a source from within Real. "We do not think that anyone could have changed his mind."

There could have been other big offers for him, but Marcelo wants to become a Madrid-style footballer.

Marcelo, only 18, is regarded as the natural heir to the recently-retired Roberto Carlos in the Selecao. He has already secured his place in coach Dunga's plans, scoring a goal in the friendly international against Argentina in August.

Madrid are considering sending him out on loan to another European club for the second half of the season before incorporating him into their squad for the next campaign, but may yet decide to bring him straight into their plans.

The teenager is expected arrive in Madrid on Monday to be presented in the Estadio Santiago Bernabeu.

Poll in new controversy

Football

AFP, London

Graham Poll, England's top referee, has found himself embroiled in a fresh row over the way he runs matches after issuing his second bitterly-contested red card in the space of three days.

Everton boss David Moyes was incandescent after Poll issued a straight red card to James McFadden after only 18 minutes of Wednesday night's League Cup tie at home to Arsenal, who went on to win the match 1-0.

McFadden was dismissed over his verbal reaction to Poll's decision to reject Everton's appeal for a penalty following what they regarded as a Philippe Senderos foul on striker Andy Johnson.

It later emerged that Poll believed McFadden had called him "a ... cheat." The Scots winger told reporters he had said "That's ..."

Even if he had not been labelled a cheat, Poll was within his rights to dismiss the Everton

forward for using foul and abusive language.

But the suggestion that Poll might have got the wrong end of the stick could not have come at a worse time for him following a similar dispute over his sending off of Chelsea captain John Terry during their defeat by Tottenham on Sunday.

Terry has claimed he was given two different versions as to why he received a second yellow card and other Chelsea players have claimed that Poll's comments during the match indicated that he was determined to "teach them a lesson."

The Football Association are examining whether there is any substance to that claim.

Moyes suggested that Poll may have been influenced by the attempts of rival managers, including Arsenal's Arsene Wenger, to suggest that Johnson goes down too easily in the box.

"Andy told me afterwards that he felt he was fouled in the box and it was a penalty," said Moyes. "I now feel he is being punished for what other people are saying about him."

"He is being punished because other people are talking about our player when they should be keeping their mouths shut."

Wenger made no comment after the match, opting to deny the media the opportunity to question him over last weekend's touchline bust-up with West Ham boss Alan Pardew.

Despite being recognised as one of the most reliable referees in English football, Poll has frequently been criticised for a perceived tendency to court publicity for himself.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho accused him on Sunday of trying to make himself the star of the show while it was reported on Thursday that the official had been spotted signing autographs before the Everton-Arsenal match.

Poll's international reputation is unlikely to ever recover from a blunder at the World Cup in Germany, where he issued three yellow cards to Croatia's Josip Simunic before finally sending him off. He has since retired from officiating at international tournaments.

I won't change: Zlatan

Football

INTERNET, undated

Internazionale forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic has insisted he will not change his ways, despite coming in for criticism after run-ins with Sweden coach Lars Lagerback as well as his elaborate, intricate playing style.

Ibrahimovic was banned from the national squad after breaking a curfew along with team-mates Olof Mellberg and Christian Wilhelmsson, but unlike the other two, refused to apologise for his actions.

"I play the way I am, and the

way I am is in my blood. You cannot change it," he insisted.

"A lot of people told me when I was young 'Zlatan, you do not listen'. It is true, I like to do things my way. But time is teaching me that I also have to bear the needs of others in mind. Both on and off the field."

"People tell me to play a more simple game, but if I did not follow my instincts then I would not be myself."

Valencia reject several offers for Francesco Tavano, according to the club's sporting director.

"We have received a lot of incredible offers from big clubs, but have refused them," sporting director Amedeo Carboni said on Thursday.

"We want to see how he fits in. He understands that he must adapt to the squad and not the other way around."

The attacking midfielder joined Los Che from Empoli last summer after being linked with a move to Real Madrid, but has failed to hold down a regular place at the club.

He came on in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday for Mario Regueiro, when the Uruguayan suffered injury, and entertained the crowd with some excellent touches, helping the side to a 2-0 win over third division Portuense.

There has been recent speculation that Tavano, 27, is subject to interest from Internazionale.

Cassano won't say sorry

Football

INTERNET, undated

Antonio Cassano's time at Real Madrid seems to be at an end after he refused to apologise to Fabio Capello.

The striker has been frozen out of the squad following a row with his tactician, although Capello said yesterday that he would let him back in if he said sorry to the club, his team-mates and fans.

"I didn't say sorry to Roma and I won't apologise to Real Madrid. The word 'sorry' does not exist in my vocabulary," Cassano told Sky Italia this evening.

"To say sorry and admit you've made some mistakes are two different things. I made errors, but I've not used the word 'sorry' since the day I was born and I never will until the moment I die."

The fiery forward has always had a career chequered by controversy and discussions with his Coaches, particularly ex-Under-21 boss

Claudio Gentile and former Roma boss Gigi Del Neri.

There are now reports emerging that he has also argued with his personal trainer, Massimo Neri, but Cassano denied the suggestion.

"Every day there are new vicious rumours spread about me. I am eager to point out I didn't argue with anyone. I spoke to Massimo earlier and he was also amazed at the stories."

"I don't know who puts these things about, but now Cassano is insulted day and night. There's

never anything positive people say about me."

He allegedly refused to pick up the pace during training at Real, insisting there was no point as he wouldn't be at the club much longer.

While Inter and Milan have been heavily linked with bids, Cassano again reiterated his desire to return after his bitter departure from the Giallorossi in January.

"If I could turn back time, I'd never have left Roma," he added in the television interview.



FRANCESCO TAVANO