

Draw likely at Adelaide

Clarke steers Aussies to safety

Cricket

AFP, Adelaide

A stylish century by youngest team member Michael Clarke defused the prospect of a series-levelling victory by England in the second Ashes cricket Test at the Adelaide Oval Monday.

Clarke claimed his third Test century and first in Ashes with 124, as Australia whittled England's innings lead down to just 38 runs after batting for almost 12 hours and 165.3 overs on the most benign of pitches.

At Monday's close, England, batting a second time, were 59 for

one with Andrew Strauss not out 31 and Ian Bell on 18 to hold an overall lead of 97 runs heading into Tuesday's fifth and final day.

Seamer Stuart Clark claimed the only wicket to fall in the 19 overs to stumps when Alastair Cook was caught behind for nine.

Yorkshire seamer Matthew Hoggard produced the best English bowling performance at Adelaide Oval for 77 years with his lion-hearted 7-109 off 42 overs in Australia's first innings.

Australia in all probability have killed off England's winning chances after England had batted themselves into an unbeatable position with 551 for six declared in their first innings over the first two days.

England also have concerns over their skipper Andrew Flintoff, who only bowled four overs Monday after experiencing discomfort from the effects of recent heavy bowling in the wake of his ankle operation earlier this year.

"Andrew has played back to back Tests, he's done quite a bit of bowling and it's just having played a lot of cricket," coach Duncan Fletcher said.

"There are no worries at the moment, we are just going to have to wait to see how it fares over the next couple of days but from the advice I've been given we are not even going to send him for a scan at this stage."

Australia are one-up in the series after a crushing 277-run victory in

the first Gabba Test and are likely to head to Perth for the December 14-18 third Test having prevented England from cashing in on their massive first innings.

Clarke, who only returned to the Test side as a late replacement for injured all-rounder Shane Watson before the Brisbane Test, gratefully seized his opportunity with his century in 319 minutes with 10 fours.

A loose shot to Ashley Giles at short mid-wicket ended his 224-ball innings shortly after tea off Hoggard.

The 25-year-old NSW right-hander scored 56 in the first innings in Brisbane and his hundred in Adelaide to consolidate his place in the Australian side, while selection pressure builds on the under-achieving No.4 Damien Martyn.

"I knew that my opportunities were going to be limited in this series and I had to perform," Clarke said.

"I had to score runs to put forward my case to the selectors and I think I've done that."

"I'm rapt with the way I've been going personally, but it's completely up to the selectors."

Known as 'Pup' by his teammates, Clarke holds the distinction of scoring a century in his first away Test, with a debut 151 against India in Bangalore in October 2004, followed by 141 in his first home Test against New Zealand in Brisbane the following month.

It has been a heart-breaking Test match for the bowlers on the flat Adelaide deck with only 17 wickets falling in four days, two of them to spinners, for a total of 1,123 runs.

There was no sign of anything untoward in the pitch to suggest a clatter of wickets to change the course of the match in the final day.

"It's pretty difficult game, we'll have to see how the wicket plays first hour or two tomorrow," Fletcher said. "We will reassess it and see where we are and have a discussion tonight and then have a look at it tomorrow morning."

Clarke shared in healthy partnerships of 98 with Adam Gilchrist (64) and 118 with Shane Warne (43) to bat Australia to safety.

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PHOTO: AFP

Australia batsman Michael Clarke plays a textbook cover drive during his century on the fourth day of the second Ashes Test against England at the Adelaide Oval on Monday.

Milan falling free

REUTERS, Milan



Third-placed Palermo were held to a goalless draw at Parma on Sunday, falling eight points behind leaders Inter Milan, while AC Milan's poor season continued when they were held 2-2 at Cagliari.

Inter, who beat Siena 2-0 on Saturday, lead on 36 points and have a four-point advantage over AS Roma. Palermo, who have not won in their last three games, are third on 28.

Milan, who had Andrea Pirlo sent off at Cagliari, are way down in 15th position.

Carlo Ancelotti's side went ahead three minutes after the break when their Italy international striker Alberto Gilardino headed in a cross from French midfielder Yoann Gourcuff.

The Sardinians drew level when their Honduran striker David Suazo was brought down inside the area by Kakhia Kaladze and rose to convert the penalty.

Suazo had a big hand in Cagliari's second - his attempted lob was superbly saved by Milan's Australian keeper Zeljko Kalac but Antonio Capone was on hand to nod in the loose ball.

Marco Borriello's classy finish brought Milan back on level terms in the 70th minute and although five minutes later Pirlo was sent off for a foul on Suazo, the six-times European champions held on for a point.

"We didn't play badly and we could have even won the game," said Milan coach Ancelotti, whose team have managed just five wins from 14 games.

"We have had an unexpected start to the season but our aim remains the same - to get into the

top four. That is all we are focused on and we have to start making up the points," added Ancelotti, whose team began the season with an eight point penalty imposed by a sports tribunal which had investigated allegations of match-fixing.

Palermo went to Parma on the back of two straight defeats but were still short of the form that produced such an impressive start of the season.

Parma had the better of the game with Portuguese defender Fernando Couto having a second half effort disallowed for offside.

Italy international Luca Toni was on target for Fiorentina as they beat Lazio 1-0 while Torino celebrated their centenary with an 88th-minute winner from Gianluca Comotto earning a 1-0 victory over Empoli.

Udinese's 1-1 draw with Reggina featured the use of goal-line cameras as part of an experiment, endorsed by FIFA, to evaluate the use of technology to help refereeing decisions.

The match passed without any incident needing the help of the images from the four cameras.

Beckham's happy return

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham declared himself delighted to be back in the thick of the action after returning from injury to help Real Madrid record a comeback win on Sunday. Beckham was introduced as a half-time substitute after missing Real's last three games with a knee injury.

The former England captain replaced Emerson at the break to help Real fight back from 1-0 down against Athletic Bilbao to move in to second spot in the table.

"I am very happy to be back playing, for the win and because I have felt comfortable in the centre of the pitch," Beckham said after the match.

The 31-year-old, whose contract expires in the summer, was also quick to play down reports linking him with a summer move to Major League Soccer in America.

"The world's press are always talking, but I am happy at Real Madrid and I am not thinking about me going to the United States."

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PHOTO: AFP

PHENOMENON STRIKES: Real Madrid striker Ronaldo is ecstatic after scoring a goal on his comeback against Athletic Bilbao in their Primera Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Old guard reignite Real

REUTERS, Madrid



Goals from Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos moved Real Madrid up to second in the Primera Liga on Sunday, as they came from behind to beat struggling Athletic Bilbao 2-1 in the Bernabeu.

Bilbao, with new coach Mane at the helm, went ahead from Luis Prieto's deflected free-kick in the first half, but Real's Brazilians led the fightback after the break with the winner coming after the visitors had been reduced to 10 men.

Real moved into second place on 29 points, just one behind leaders and arch-rivals Barcelona who were held to a 1-1 draw away to Levante on Saturday.

Earlier Espanyol fought back from a goal down to beat Sevilla 2-1 at home, which meant the Andalusians slip back to third with 28 points.

Mali striker Frederic Kanoute had put Sevilla ahead from the penalty spot after 26 minutes, but former Spain striker Raul Tamudo engineered an outstanding equaliser in the second half.

Facing his own goal and with two defenders in attendance, Tamudo pulled the ball back and spun between his markers before beating the advancing Andres Palop with a cool near-post finish.

Striker Luis Garcia volleyed the winner with 10 minutes remaining and although Espanyol lost midfielder Albert Riera to a red card they hung on for the win.

Athletic Madrid are fourth on 24 points after beating Real Betis 1-0 away on Saturday, and are a point ahead of Real Zaragoza who fell 2-1 at home to Osasuna after a last-minute own goal from Leonardo Ponzio.

Further down the table, Celta Vigo came back from two down to draw 2-2 away at Real Mallorca while Paco Flores got off to a poor start in his first game at the helm of bottom club Gimnastic, who lost 2-0 away at Villarreal.

Real Madrid's counter-attacking

style has given them the best away record in the league but their problems at home were there for all to see in the Bernabeu as they laboured to break down Bilbao in the first period.

Brazilian forward Robinho sparked intermittently, setting up Michel Salgado for a shot early on which Inaki Lafuente did well to save at his near post.

But it was the visitors who struck first in the 34th minute when Luis Prieto's fierce free kick deflected off the chest of Igor Gabilondo enough to put off Iker Casillas.

Real coach Fabio Capello brought on David Beckham and Ronaldo at half time, and the home side stepped up the pressure.

After 65 minutes Ronaldo broke the outside trap to control Sergio Ramos's long pass and fire home the equaliser.

Bilbao's task was made more difficult when striker Ariz Aduriz was sent off for leading with the arm into a challenge with Mahamadou Diarra in the 75th minute.

Seven minutes later Roberto Carlos scored with a low shot from outside the area, but Real needed Casillas to make sure of the three points when he turned away Andoni Iraola's goalbound shot with his leg at the end.

Ronaldo back and scoring

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldo was delighted with his goal in Real Madrid's scratchy 2-1 victory over struggling Athletic Bilbao last night.

"I am very happy to be able to help the team," said the striker. "I have been training very well this week. It was very bad luck that I again injured myself in the Copa game."

"I did well today, although it is clear that I am not yet at 100 per cent. Now I am returning to my full fitness, the fitness that I had before injuring myself. I am healthy again and that makes me really very happy."

"It is good to score goals, whether it's here at home or away. I'm very happy."

On coach Fabio Capello, Ronaldo added: "He is the one that motivates me most. He's very good at that and I'm happy to be working for him."

Capello said of his striker: "He is far better. It is important to improve. He needs to play because he hasn't for a long time. He doesn't need more training, but playing. We already know about his quality and he has helped the team a lot."

"His work-rate is a signal that we are a united team."

One month till Eto'o

INTERNET, undated

Samuel Eto'o claims he could return to action early in the New Year as he continues his rapid recovery from a knee meniscus injury.

The Barcelona man suffered the blow on September 27 and was initially ruled out for five months, but the striker is confident he will be back much sooner.

The 25-year-old Cameroonian told French television he hoped to make his competitive comeback in "a month, a month and a half".

"I miss football. Things are going better. Slowly but surely I am getting there."

If Eto'o manages to play by the end of January, he will be available for the entire second half of the Spanish league season, as well as the latter stages of the Champions League if Barca qualify.

We don't need Sheva: Galliani

AFP, Rome

AC Milan chief Adriano Galliani on Monday ruled out a January transfer return for under-achieving Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko.

Shevchenko, still regarded as a legend at the Milan club, has failed to produce the same kind of form for the English champions, sparking rumours that he would be ready to return to Italy.

However Galliani said the club would not take him back as it was the Ukrainian's wish to leave in the first place, and because they "already have four strikers and Kaka".

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Werder open to Klose offers

REUTERS, Berlin

Werder Bremen will consider letting striker Miroslav Klose leave at the end of the season, according to club sporting director Klaus Allofs.

The 28-year-old Klose, top scorer at the World Cup in Germany this year, has a contract until 2008 but he has expressed an interest in moving abroad.

Werder have not given up on getting him to sign a new contract but they appear ready to do a deal next year rather than see him leaving on a free transfer 12 months later.

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Totti misses Valencia tie

REUTERS, Milan

AS Roma captain Francesco Totti will miss Tuesday's Champions League game against Valencia due to an ankle injury.

"He is not in the squad because he has a sore ankle from a knock he picked up," Roma coach Luciano Spalletti was quoted as saying on Gazzetta dello Sport's Web site.

Spalletti said Totti should be fit

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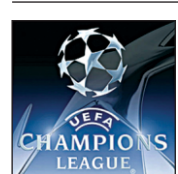


PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan's veteran defender Paolo Maldini (L) tries to hold back Cagliari forward David Suazo from getting to the ball during their Serie A clash in Cagliari on Sunday.

Barcelona face crunch tie

AFP, Paris



Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard is unlikely to entertain thoughts of conspiracy theories ahead of arguably the club's most crucial fixture of the season at home to Werder Bremen on Tuesday.

Nevertheless, more than a few Catalan eyebrows were raised after Chelsea's 1-0 home defeat to Bremen rekindled the Germans' hopes and left Barcelona's Champions League future dependent on victory at the Nou Camp.

Anything less than three points, and Rijkaard will be lumped with an unenviable sobriquet; of seeing his side become the first reigning champions not to make it past the group stages.

With eight fixtures on Tuesday, Barcelona's hosting of the high-flying German outfit by far the highlight of the night.

Six knockout phase places are up for grabs over two nights of Champions League action, but only two places have to be settled on Tuesday, when the fight to finish top of the group will also top many teams' agendas.

Roma skipper Francesco Totti will aim to shoot his side into the knockout phase when they face Valencia, who are guaranteed to finish top of group D, at the Olympic stadium.

The on-form Serie A side need only a draw against the Spaniards to put their name into the December 15 draw for the knockout phase.

On paper, there is little danger for Roma. Even if Shakhtar Donetsk, who have a two-point deficit to Roma, beat Olympiakos in Greece Roma would qualify on the head-to-head rule.

In group C Liverpool and PSV Eindhoven have already taken the top two qualifying spots, while Bordeaux are heading for the UEFA Cup having secured third place ahead of bottom side Galatasaray.

The Turkish club will be playing for pride when they host Liverpool in Istanbul, where Reds' boss Rafael Benitez could hand Jerzy Dudek a start in goal as an appreciation gesture for his efforts against AC Milan on their way to victory in the 2005 final.

PSV meanwhile host Bordeaux knowing that because of Liverpool's superior head-to-head record they cannot finish first in the group. The

race for first place in group B is wide open.

Bayern Munich and Inter Milan have already qualified but Hernan Crespo and co. will be hoping to close their two-point deficit to the Bundesliga giants when they meet in Munich.

Bayern need only a draw to secure top spot, but perhaps have their heads down having lost their lead of the Bundesliga when they were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly Borussia Monchengladbach on Saturday.

Sporting Lisbon, who sit third in

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TONIGHT'S FIXTURES

GROUP A	Chelsea (ENG) v Levski Sofia (BUL)
	Barcelona (ESP) v Werder Bremen (GER)
GROUP B	Sporting Lisbon (POR) v Spartak Moscow (RUS)
	Bayern Munich (GER) v Inter Milan (ITA)
GROUP C	Galatasaray (TUR) v Liverpool (ENG)
	PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Bordeaux (FRA)
GROUP D	Olympiakos (GRE) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)
	AS Roma (ITA) v Valencia (ESP)