

Sport

Scottish Premiership preview

Rangers the team to beat

GLASGOW, Oct 15: Russian international Andrei Kanchelskis is enjoying a new lease of life at invincible Scottish Premier League leaders Rangers, reports AFP.

The Ukrainian-born winger concedes he operated below-par for much of last term following his 5.5 million pound (9 million dollar) transfer from Fiorentina in July as he struggled to recapture the Manchester United form which made him a name.

Kanchelskis was careful to evade the question of whether he still owes something to the Rangers support who have doubted his value amid criticism he is beginning to look a spent force.

But he was honest enough to acknowledge his contribution to the club's Treble-winning success last year was less than it might have been and he wants to make amends.

"Last season I played at 75 percent," he said. "This season I'm concentrating on playing at 100 percent."

"I think my form now is okay. I played 90 minutes against St Johnstone and most of the game at Dundee and Rangers won them both. I don't feel any pressure to prove myself. I just go on the pitch and give everything."

Sometimes you have bad days in football but it's not a problem for me. I'm still going to work hard. Last season can hardly be considered a bad one for the club."

Rangers face a crunch home Champions League match against PSV Eindhoven next Wednesday and will hope to warm up by making it nine wins out of nine in the league when they visit Kilmarnock on Saturday.

Dick Advocaat's side already have a six-point lead over rivals Celtic, who have a game in hand and play host to Aberdeen, who managed their first point of the season in the 2-2 draw with Hibernian last time out.

Third-placed Dundee United, on 14 points, could find themselves seven points adrift of the Glasgow pair by the time they visit Dundee on Sunday.

Fixtures (kicks-offs 1400 GMT unless stated):
Saturday: Celtic v Aberdeen, Hearts v St Johnstone, Kilmarnock v Rangers, Motherwell v Hibernian
Sunday (1705 GMT): Dundee v Dundee Utd

Kluivert repents

BARCELONA, Oct 15: Barcelona striker Patrick Kluivert apologised to his teammates on Thursday for the outburst that led to his sending-off in the 2-2 draw with Real Madrid, reports Reuters.

Kluivert's angry reaction to a tackle from Ivan Campo — he was caught on camera kicking the referee — came as Barca were leading 2-1 in Wednesday's Spanish league game.

The Dutch international was repentant on Thursday, although he insisted he was not swearing directly at the referee.

"I'm sorry, not only for myself but for the team," Kluivert said. "It was a game of high emotions."

"I did say something but it wasn't directed at the referee. I didn't insult him."

Kluivert will find out today the length of his suspension for the red card, his first since joining Barcelona at the start of the 1998-99 season.

Ivanisevic bows out

VIENNA, Oct 15: Local hero Stefan Koubek sent a weary Goran Ivanisevic crashing out of the Austrian indoor men's tournament 6-7, 6-2, 6-4 yesterday, reports Reuters.

Sixth-seeded Dutchman Richard Krajicek made the quarter-finals with an easy 6-4, 6-2 win over Swede Magnus Larsson as seventh-seeded German Nicolas Kiefer eliminated Austrian teenager and Wimbledon junior champion Jurgen Melzer 6-4, 6-0.

Clay-court specialist Koubek, who captured his first ATP tournament win in Atlanta in May, became Austria's number one player after reaching the fourth round of the French Open.

He said: "It was very important that I won on a hard court. Especially because I beat two players (American Jeff Tarango and Ivanisevic) who play better indoors."

Koubek's nerves got the better of him in the opening set and he missed five set points before Ivanisevic took the tiebreak 7-3 to go a set up.

Beckham, FA hold talks

LONDON, Oct 15: Manchester United and England midfielder David Beckham has met the Football Association (FA) to discuss his behaviour on the pitch, reports Reuters.

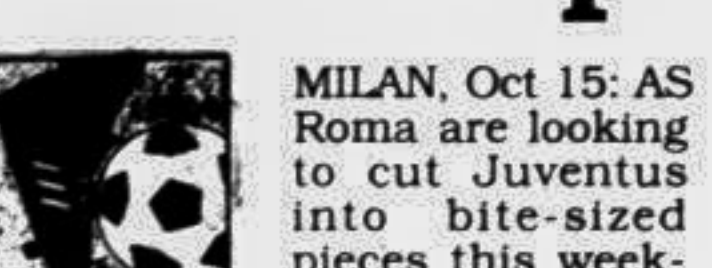
We can confirm there was a meeting on Tuesday. That's the end of the matter," the FA said on Thursday.

Soccer officials have said that the FA wanted to talk about incidents at recent matches. There was no question of the player facing any disciplinary action.

Beckham has been booked five times this season, including a yellow card in United's Champions League game in Austria against Sturm Graz when he kicked out at an opponent.

Serie A preview

Roma hope to cash in on Juve woes



MILAN, Oct 15: AS Roma are looking to cut Juventus into bite-sized pieces this weekend when Fabio Capello's men walk out for the most appetising fixture in the Serie A, reports AFP.

The Olympic stadium hosted one of the best matches ever seen in Italy two weeks ago when Lazio drew 4-4 with AC Milan, and there should be another thriller there on Sunday night.

Roma are joint second on points with Lazio and team morale is high despite a suspension for skipper Francesco Totti and an injury that is set to rule out striker Marco Delvecchio.

Roma would also earn three points from beating Piacenza, but a victory over the former world champions would be invaluable for building team confidence so early in the season.

Capello is counting on lone striker Vincenzo Montella to steer the ball home with the help of a packed midfield that needs to be mobile enough to create scoring chances as well as stop them.

Montella said: "It's important to give us an extra boost. We have to set our sights high, but without drifting into the realms of fantasy."

"I want to do well and to get at least one goal, seeing that Juventus are the only team I've never scored against," said the striker.

If Capello has men physically unavailable, Juventus' problem is all psychological.

Alessandro Del Piero and

Zinedine Zidane still haven't overcome the effects of a prolonged recovery from surgery, while Filippo Inzaghi is firing blanks and team spirit is at a low ebb.

The quality of the football is poor, by Juventus' own admission, and they were lucky to snatch a late winner against Venezia that has left them fourth in the table, one point behind Lazio.

Despite all the warning signals, coach Carlo Ancelotti insisted: "This match against Roma comes at just the right time. We need to play a top-level side."

"It will be an important test," he said, "though not a decisive one at this stage of the season."

"Del Piero isn't on form but I still say that he'll only get it back by playing. Zidane is a bit better off, while for Inzaghi the problem is a bit different because it's not related to a recovery from serious injury."

If Juventus and Roma were to cancel each other out in a draw, the first to celebrate would be Inter Milan, who stand to increase their top point lead at the top this weekend.

Marcello Lippi's men are away to Venezia and ought to take all three points. Ronaldo is fast recovering his former glory and strike partner Christian Vieri should pass a late fitness test on an injured foot.

If Lazio have to settle for a point away to Udinese on Saturday, and they will probably be without Argentinian midfielder general Juan Sebastian Veron, Inter stand to double their lead over the two Rome clubs.

Reigning champions AC Milan host Cagliari at San Siro on Sunday, while Saturday night's match pitches two of the seven pre-season tips for the league title - Fiorentina and Parma - both of whom are struggling.

Parma are slowly recovering from a disastrous start to the season which left coach Alberto Malesani's job hanging by a thread.

Fiorentina are showing nothing like last season's form and a disappointing showing in the European Champions League, where they languish behind Arsenal and Barcelona, is a fair reflection of the story so far.

Portuguese playmaker Manuel Rui Costa said: "We have two matches to change the course of the season. If we want to try and win the championship and to make progress in Europe we have to beat Parma and Aik Solna."

"If we don't beat Solna, then mathematically we're going to be out of it," he said. "As for the Serie A, this might be only the sixth match of the season but we are already at a crossroads."

"We need the three points, but we also need the morale boost that would help us make up the ground we've lost," he said.

Serie A fixtures:
Saturday: Udinese v Lazio, Fiorentina v Parma (evening kick-off)
Sunday: Lecce v Reggina, AC Milan v Cagliari, Piacenza v Bologna, Torino v Bari, Venezia v Inter Milan, Verona v Perugia, AS Roma v Juventus (evening kick-off)

'El Phenom' getting better



MILAN, Oct 15: Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo looks finally to have put his troubles behind him and is poised to start only his second Serie A game of the season against Venezia on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Ronaldo, who has struggled for both form and fitness for most of the past year, appeared to be almost back to his best in two games in the past week.

He played 70 minutes for Brazil against the Netherlands in a friendly on Saturday and then on Tuesday put in an impressive performance for Inter in a friendly against Grasshoppers.

With Inter's current number one striker Christian Vieri suffering from a nagging foot injury, it is widely expected that Ronaldo will start in Venezia.

"My condition is improving a little with each day," Ronaldo was quoted as saying by Gazzetta dello Sport. "Step by step I am re-finding my old form. I can now train longer and harder and I am getting the results of that."

The Brazilian has been restricted to just one league start this season — away to Roma on September 12. After a poor display he was substituted 13 minutes into the second half.

With Inter coach Marcello Lippi seemingly content with Vieri and Chilean Ivan

Zamorano in attack, rumours began to circulate that Ronaldo could leave Inter.

Newcastle United manager Bobby Robson wanted him on loan, while Italian press re-

sponded that Ronaldo was too young to be sold.

He said he was moved by the reception he was given when he came off the substitutes' bench in the 2-1 win against Piacenza in Inter's most recent game on October 2 and said he wanted to win a title for the fans.

His personal life also seems to be more settled. His girlfriend Milene Domingues is expecting their child in April and with his recent trip to Kosovo to lend support to children's projects, he appears to be working hard to rebuild his image and popularity.

Perhaps more importantly, the growing conflict between his club and country also seems to have been resolved.

After a meeting with Inter officials this week, Brazil coach Wanderley Luxemburgo agreed to use Ronaldo more sparingly and leave him out of less important friendly matches.

Brazil's high number of friendlies in recent years had led to concern at Inter that Ronaldo was playing too much and was heading for burn-out.

Luxemburgo believes Ronaldo will soon be back to his peak now that Inter and Brazil are coordinating their efforts on the player's behalf.

There is an opportunity for us to work hand in hand to bring Ronaldo back to the top of world football. I am sure that little is lacking now and he will soon be back to his best," the Brazil coach said.

ports claimed Lazio, who once tried to sign Ronaldo from Barcelona before he moved to Inter, were ready to make a bid.

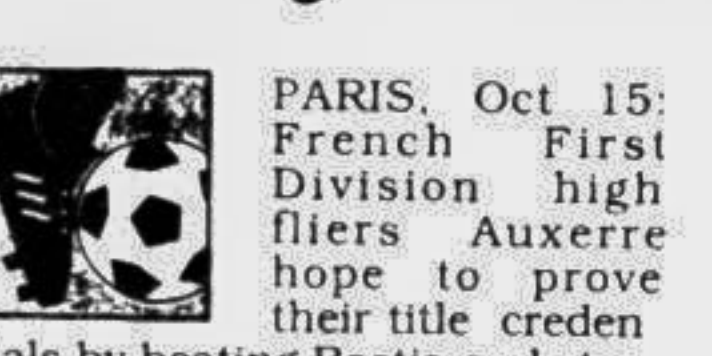
But Ronaldo has publicly committed himself to Lippi's



RONALDO

French First Division preview

Easy outing await leaders



PARIS, Oct 15: French First Division high fliers Auxerre hope to prove their title credentials by beating Bastia and staying top of the league on Saturday, reports AFP.

Auxerre's 3-1 triumph at Strasbourg on Wednesday was enough to ensure they became the fifth team to top the standings so far in this topsy-turvy season - Paris St Germain, Lyon, Monaco and Sedan have also hit the summit.

Auxerre could lose that position briefly Friday night when two of their closest challengers Marseille and Lyon clash. Auxerre would be enough to see them sitting pretty at the top of the pile.

It has been a remarkable season for the Burgundy club - and their legendary coach Guy Roux - in light of what has happened last season.

Only on the last day of the season did Auxerre avoid relegation just two years after their League and Cup double.

During the past season Roux contemplated ending his astonishing 38-year stint as coach of the club that were in the equivalent of the French sixth division when he took the reins in 1961 - the year the Soviet Union made cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin the first man in space.

Roux had been forced to sell his best players including French World Cup winners Stephane Guivarch and Lionel Charbonnier and playmaker Sabri Lamouchi. He was also furious when he was prevented by his club chairman from replacing Alime Jacquet as coach to the French national team after the victorious World Cup campaign.

To the relief of Auxerre - and French football in general - Roux stayed on for a 39th campaign. And this season, without ever investing the huge funds made available to his rivals, Auxerre are at the right end of the table.

Roux, who has a lucrative sideline as a popular TV pundit, made only one significant move

in the market when he brought Guivarch back to the club after a dreadful year with Newcastle and Rangers.

Brittany-born hitman Guivarch, formerly of Guingamp and Rennes, has repaid Roux's faith by scoring seven goals so far this term, second only behind Monaco's David Trezeguet.

And Auxerre's other remaining World Cup star Bernard Diomede is back in the team after missing the early matches of the campaign as he was out of contract and trying to negotiate a move abroad.

Unlike rival rivals Marseille and Lyon, Auxerre do not have the distraction of European football this term.

A home match with Bastia would seem an easy fixture but the Corsicans have their own

Hagi lets it out

BUCHAREST, Oct 15: Romanian soccer captain Gheorghe Hagi on Thursday hit out at national coach Victor Piturca for what he called unjustified tensions within the team, reports Reuters.

The latest tensions between the coach and players are a result of Piturca's unfair behaviour," Hagi told Reuters by telephone from Istanbul.

"He always argues with the media and he is against creating a good mood in the team," Hagi said.

Recent reports in the local media said Piturca had been preventing journalists from getting access to the national team, especially before important matches.

Hagi, who led Romania to the 1994 World Cup quarter-finals, returned from international retirement last May and Romania, qualified for the Euro 2000 finals after an unbeaten run in group seven.

Piturca was quoted this week by a local newspaper as saying Chelsea's Dan Petrescu had asked to replace Hagi as Romanian captain. Petrescu has denied the claim.

man in shape this season in the form of Frederic Nee.

Marseille's home date with Lyon - the only match to be played Friday - is the other top tie of the weekend but both teams go into the match on a high.

Marseille are still celebrating their midweek away 2-0 win over hated rivals Paris St Germain while Lyon saw off French Cup holders Nantes 2-0 with both goals from big money Brazilian buy Sonny Anderson.

A draw could give Auxerre the opportunity to steal a march on both teams.

However, Monaco and Paris St Germain are also within striking distance.

Monaco host Strasbourg on Saturday while PSG visit Nancy eager to make amends after their Marseille reverse.

St Etienne, recovering after a poor start to their campaign, will fancy their chances at home to Troyes.

But if Auxerre are the good news story of the French first division then Lens are streets ahead in the "could do better" stakes.

The team that was crowned champions the season before last is now bottom of the league having seen star players Tony Vairelles (to Lyon), Frederic Dehu (to Barcelona) and Stephane Dalmat (to Marseille) depart in the summer.

The team known as "the Blood and Gold" - one of the few clubs in France that can count on a large support - will be looking for a tonic when Montpellier visit Saturday.

Le Havre, also in dire straits, host Rennes, lifted by a 5-0 midweek win over Sedan while Nantes host champions Bordeaux, who produced their best performance of the season Wednesday by beating Monaco 3-2.

That game confirmed the return to form of strike partner Lilian Laslandes (level with Guivarch on seven goals) and Sylvain Wiltord, who are currently also the preferred front pair of France coach Roger Lemerre.

Sedan host Metz in the only game to be played Sunday.

Samaranch to testify Dec 15

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch will testify before a United States Congressional hearing into the Olympic corruption scandal on December 15.

US House of Representatives Commerce Committee chairman Tom Bliley, a Republican representative from Virginia, said Thursday the Spaniard who has been at the helm of the IOC during the gifts-for-votes Olympic bid scandal will speak here.

"I look forward very much to hear Mr. Samaranch on the 15th of December," Bliley said, saying the panel's aim is to "guarantee the end of this culture of corruption, a culture leading to a system that appears to suggest that a whole city is not judged on its merits but rather on its gifts."

Samaranch had agreed to speak with US lawmakers but said he would not be available until after December 12, when post-scandal reforms are scheduled to be completed in an IOC meeting in Switzerland.

When Samaranch does appear in two months, he will face an audience that is already aligned against him as creator of an atmosphere of corruption.

"Samaranch has to be removed sooner or later," said Commerce Committee member Joe Barton, a Texas Republican.

"We need to work on an international level to stop the abuses, to clean up the IOC," said Colorado Democrat Diana DeGette.

Stage set for Bergomi

MILAN, Oct 15 (Reuters): In an era when even schoolboys have agents to tout their services, the local boy who goes on to captain his city team and lead his country seems to be part of soccer's romantic past.

So when Giuseppe Bergomi took his final bow at the San Siro stadium this week it appeared to mark the end of an age, a last for the former Inter Milan defender but perhaps for European football.

In a professional career spanning 19 years, Bergomi, born and bred in Milan, only ever wore two shirts — the blue and black stripes of Inter and the blue of the Italian national team.

The 35-year-old Bergomi, who said farewell to the Inter fans in a charity match on Monday, could be the last one-club man in a sport where money plays an over-increasing part in determining career paths.

A largely injury-free career meant he was still remarkably fit when he left Inter at the end of last season and he could have picked up a lucrative signing-on fee and commanded a top salary with a move within Serie A.

Bergomi received numerous offers from Italian clubs keen to take advantage of his vast experience and trademark man-marking skills. But he turned down all bidders.

"It wouldn't have been right after all these years to play for another Italian team," Bergomi said. "I wouldn't have wanted to line up against Inter at the San Siro."

Instead he decided to finish his career in the United States where he is expected to play for New York-New Jersey MetroStars in the upcoming Major League season, alongside former Inter team mate Lothar Matthaus.

Owen warns Scotland

LONDON, Oct 15: England striker Michael Owen has warned Scotland that he aims to repeat the greatest goal of his life against them in next month's Euro 2000 play-offs, reports AFP.

Not that one in France 98 scored back in 1995 for England Schools to beat Scotland at Newcastle.

The Liverpool ace puts the strike he managed for the under-15 schools team above the stunner that made him a world star in France.

"My best ever goal was scored against Scotland Schools at Newcastle," he said. "I wouldn't swap that goal against Argentina for anything, but the schools goal was still my best."

"I was given the ball on halfway and told to just run at them. I went past about three defenders and cracked it into the top corner. It was a great feeling, the TV cameras were there and I was treated like a star for the first time."

"Anything like a repeat of that would be just fine. If I could score one like that against Scotland in the play-offs, that would be great. In fact, if it just bobbles in off my knee that would be OK by me. I'd settle for that."

Owen scored the 50th goal of his Liverpool career in the 2-1 League defeat at Southampton on Wednesday.

Despite that, Owen's failure to score from two glittering openings was highlighted as the reason for another shattering blow to Liverpool's season.

But Owen claimed he was happy with his progress back from injury. He said: "I'm back to my best, it's always difficult after four or five months out."

"I'm happy with the way I'm playing, I feel much sharper. You will always miss chances, but at least I was there to get those chances."

But the forthcoming clashes with Scotland are already beginning to occupy his mind.

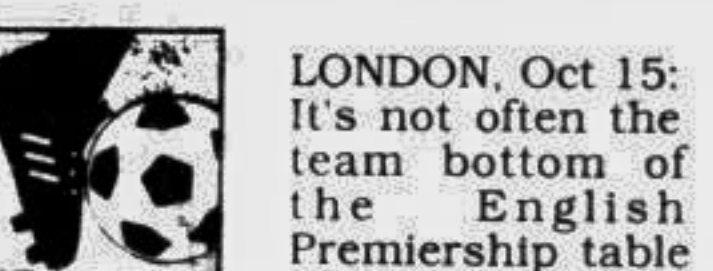
He added: "Players are no different to fans, I'm as excited as anyone about the matches coming up."



(From L-R) Atlanta Olympic Games committee's Billy Payne and Andrew Young, USOC president Bill Hybl and former president Robert Helmick being sworn in before the US House of Representatives on October 14.

Premiership preview

Leeds better be aware of Owls



LONDON, Oct 15: It's not often the team bottom of the English Premiership table travels to face the leaders having scored nine goals in its last two games, reports AFP.

Nor that the side which swept the board last season finds itself having conceded eight goals without reply in its last two matches.

But that is exactly what will happen this weekend when table-proppers - Sheffield Wednesday visit new leaders Leeds United and Treble winners Manchester United play host to Watford.

The Owls snatched five past Wimbledon two weeks ago to record their first league win of the season and added four more as they outclassed first division Nottingham Forest in the League Cup on Wednesday.

United were hammered 5-0 at Chelsea a fortnight ago, a result which allowed Leeds to knock them off their Premiership perch. And on Wednesday, a third-strung United team were beaten 3-0 at Aston Villa in the League Cup, which is now almost meaningless for England's elite clubs.

Wednesday manager Danny Wilson knows his side's recent run will count for nothing in the Yorkshire derby with Leeds.

"We've got a great platform on which to build going into this game with Leeds, but we're not getting carried away," he said.

"But it is a derby game and

you've seen over the years how tight they can normally be. I just hope it's very tight and it comes out in our favour."

"Leeds can afford to give us a few points anyway because they've got too many," he joked.

David O'Leary's young side, who are also progressing nicely in the League Cup and the UEFA Cup, have avoided all too many fixturing to quietly assume top spot.

Saturday's Elland Road clash offers them the chance to equal an all-time club record of nine successive victories set in 1931.

Leeds will be hoping influential midfielder Lee Bowyer can shake off a groin injury in time to play.

Bitter rivals Manchester United, a point behind in second place, have plenty of injuries to contend with as they gear up for a tough Champions League visit to Marseille next week.

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson is likely to field at least a second team against Watford, who have held their own in a tough run of matches over the last month.

He must decide whether to pick error-prone goalkeeper Massimo Taibi or the out-of-favour Mark Bosnich in goal.

Dwight Yorke, Andy Cole and David Beckham will doubtless use the match to sharpen their shooting boots ahead of their French trip. Midfielder Nicky Butt, is suspended.

Fourth-placed Chelsea are many people's favourites for the title - they trail Leeds by just

three points with two games in hand.

But Gianluca Vialli's side were surprisingly beaten 1-0 at home by first division Huddersfield in the League Cup on Wednesday, a defeat which will act as warning against complacency following the demolition of United.

Chelsea also have an appalling record against Saturday's opponents Liverpool at Anfield. They have won just once there in the league since the 1935/36 season.

For once perennial relegation fighters Everton can travel to Highbury without an inferiority complex.

Walter Smith's side are sixth on 17 points, five less than leaders Leeds and just two behind their opponents Arsenal.

Arsenal's French midfielder Patrick Vieira serves the first match of what is likely to be a lengthy suspension following his controversial sending-off at West Ham a fortnight ago.

High-flying Sunderland, third on 20 points but beaten by Wimbledon in the League Cup on Tuesday, play host to Aston Villa on Monday.

Fixtures (kicks-offs 1400 GMT unless stated):
Saturday: Arsenal v Everton, Coventry v Newcastle, Derby v Tottenham, Leeds v Sheffield Wed, Leicester v Southampton, Liverpool v Chelsea, Man Utd v Watford, Wimbledon v Bradford
Sunday (1500 GMT): Middlesbrough v West Ham
Monday (1900 GMT): Sunderland v Aston Villa

Primera Liga preview

Barca, Real expected to sail



MADRID, Oct 15: Spanish title holders Barcelona expected to find a Madrid-based side snapping at their heels as the Catalan club target a third straight championship, reports AFP.

Yet Barca did not expect that side to be promoted Real Valenciano, who lie second on goal difference after seven matches of the new season.

Barca travel to another promoted side Numancia on Saturday hoping to compensate for the loss of two points dropped in Wednesday's home draw with Real while Valenciano have a trip to Alaves, safely esconced in midtable despite a midweek defeat at Atletico Madrid.

Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal will need no reminding of the fact that three seasons ago Numancia, then in the third division, held the Catalan giants 2-2 in a Spanish Cup quarter-final encounter.

Real meanwhile have a home date Saturday with

Oviedo, currently struggling in the bottom three.

Real coach John Toshack drew some comfort from his team's gutsy showing in the draw at the Nou Camp and the much sharper form shown by French international Nicolas Anelka and the time is ripe for the 'meringues' to kickstart their season after just two wins to date and a six-point deficit on the leaders.

Third-placed Deportivo La Coruna, four points behind the leading pair, host promoted Malaga, who have so far more than held their own, on Saturday.

Other action sees Celta Vigo, trying to cement their top five standing, travel to Racing Santander, who walloped Real Sociedad 5-2 on Wednesday.

Bottom side Valencia finally got off the mark with a 4-0 thumping of Numancia in their midweek match and now travel to Athletic Bilbao, 4-3 winners Tuesday at Malaga.

Atletico Madrid must meanwhile hope their mini-revival after an appalling start continues with three points at

Real Betis, who are likewise mired in the bottom five.

Spanish Primera Liga fixtures

Saturday: Numancia v Barcelona, Athletic Bilbao v Valencia, Deportivo La Coruna v Malaga, Real Madrid v Oviedo, Racing Santander v Celta Vigo
Sunday: Real Zaragoza v Real Mallorca, Alaves v Rayo Vallecano, Valladolid v Seville, Espanyol v Real Sociedad, Real Betis v Atletico Madrid