

PREVIEW: PRIMERA LIGA

Barca can afford to dream

Football

AP, Madrid

FC Barcelona hasn't won a major trophy since 1999, but with the memories of a come-from-behind win over Chelsea in the Champions League and a visit to last-place Numancia in the Spanish league this weekend, things are looking up.

Another boost for the Catalan team will be the calamities facing rival Real Madrid, which is in second place in the league, seven points behind Barcelona.

Madrid could be playing at Deportivo La Coruna, could be without seven players, including David Beckham, Roberto Carlos and Raúl González, who all reportedly have the flu.

Last week, Madrid lost for the first time since Vanderlei Luxemburgo took charge in December. But the team rebounded in the Champions League, edging Juventus 1-0.

Barcelona came back from a goal down to beat English leader Chelsea 2-1 in the first leg of their second round match, but it may have cost the team its goalkeeper.

Victor Valdes suffered a concussion after a collision with Chelsea striker Didier Drogba and was kept in the hospital overnight for observation. It's not yet clear if Valdes - who was released Thursday and will be examined again Friday - will play at Numancia on Saturday, but reserve keeper Albert Jorquera is ready to step in.

Numancia, which won away from

home for the first time last week, is still anchored at the foot of the standings, but coach Maximo Hernandez said his team has a chance if it can choke Barcelona's 19 points behind Barcelona.

"We need to stop Xavi and Deco from supplying the ball to the forwards," Hernandez said.

Barcelona leads the league with 57 points, followed by Madrid with 50. Real Betis is next with 41 points, ahead of Sevilla on goal difference.

Besides the three possible flu victims, Madrid could also be missing Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Ivan Helguera and Michel Salgado when it faces Deportivo on Sunday. Three of the players are injured, and Helguera is suspended.

Deportivo has been in a slump after several years of being a title contender, but coach Javier Irureta said his 10th-place team can still book a place in Europe.

"To do so, we need to start winning as soon as possible," Irureta said. "Beating Real Madrid would fortify us a lot even though we're under strength and we've got a team which is a bit ramshackle."

Both Aldo Duscher and Lionel Scaloni are suspended, but Irureta is expected to recall winger Victor Sanchez, who has been left out for the last eight games. Mauro Silva also looks set to return after recovering from a thigh injury.

Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri could lose his job if his team loses to visiting Betis on Sunday, according

to Spanish media reports.

The defending champions haven't won in their last six matches and have dropped into sixth place, 19 points behind Barcelona.

"In the first year under (former coach Rafa) Benitez it seemed like he was out when we played Espanyol. He ended up winning the league when everyone was demanding his head," Valencia captain David Albelda said.

Third-place Betis is unbeaten in six games and is hoping to secure its first Champions League place.

On Sunday, fourth-place Sevilla takes on No. 17 Racing Santander, which rose from the relegation zone last Sunday by beating Valencia.

In this weekend's other 25th-round matches, it's: Zaragoza vs. Villarreal; Atlético Madrid vs. Real Sociedad; Osasuna vs. Malaga; Espanyol vs. Albacete; and Mallorca vs. Levante.

Athletic Bilbao's match with Getafe has been postponed until March 23 because Bilbao will face Austria Vienna on Sunday in a UEFA Cup makeup match.

FIXTURES

Saturday: (kickoff GMT): Espanyol v Albacete (1700), Real Mallorca v Levante (1700), Numancia v Barcelona (1900), Deportivo La Coruna v Real Madrid (2100).

Sunday: Real Zaragoza v Villarreal (1600), Sevilla v Racing Santander (1600), Osasuna v Malaga (1600), Atlético Madrid v Real Sociedad (1800), Valencia v Real Betis (2000), Athletic Bilbao v Getafe (postponed until March 23)

Rahman ton fails to topple

FROM PAGE 13

six runs by close of play. Opener Nazmus Sadat scored 64 in 60 balls to help Khulna reach 148-2 in the second innings. Monirul Islam was batting on 40 while Sazzadul Hassan was on 23 when stumps were drawn.

Both wickets went to left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny.

CHITTAGONG v BARISAL

Ehsanul Haque made an unbeaten 106 and Ilias Sunny 75 not out as Chittagong staged a brilliant recovery after slipping to 46-4 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

Resuming on 25-0, the home side crawled to 242-4 at stumps to post a four-run lead in the first innings.

Barisal new ball bowler Ishraq Sonnet took all four wickets in the space of nine deliveries to rattle the Chittagong top-order, but the visitors failed to take another wicket in the remaining five-and-a-half hours.

Ehsanul smashed 15 fours in his 240-ball stay at the crease while Sunny hit seven boundaries in 254 deliveries during the unbroken 196-run stand for the fifth wicket.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboards on the second day of the four-day matches of the National Cricket League yesterday:

RAJSHAHI-SYLHET: First innings (overnight 243 for 5)

Naeem c Sadikur b Tapash 76

Jahurul c Babel b Rezaul 0

Nuruzzaman c Babel b Hasibul 7

Anisur lbw b Hasibul 26

Forhad lbw b Hasibul 0

Mashud c Babel b Nabil 98

Rosel c Babel b Rezaul 55

Shamimul c Babel b Tapash 0

Shuvo lbw b Tapash 6

Alamgir c B Hasibul 9

Sumon not out 4

Extras: (b-9, lb-8, w-1) 18

Total: (All out in 112.4 overs) 299

Fall of wkt: 1-2, 2-19, 3-19, 4-91, 5-191, 6-256, 7-256, 8-268, 9-293, 10-299.

Bowlers O M R W

Tapash 24 4 52 3

Rezaul 24 8 67 2

Hasibul 17.4 3 54 4

Nabil 30 11 52 1

Ezaz 1 0 7 0

Imtiaz 2 0 19 0

Sadikur 14 2 31 0

SYLHET: First innings

Golam Rahman run out 115

Moniruzzaman c Forhad b Alamgir 6

Imtiaz c Jahurul b Shuvo 4

Sadikur lbw b Alamgir 0

Fall of wkt: 1-41, 2-45, 3-46, 4-46. **Bowler** O M R W Sonnet 20 3 78 4 Nadif 17 1 63 0 Salahuddin 13 4 23 0 Hannan 11 4 27 0 Mosharraf 26 13 34 0 Humayun 5 1 5 0 Imran 1 0 4 0 Nasiruddin 1 1 0 0

WI: In depths

FROM PAGE 13 when former West Indies great and now broadcaster Michael Holding withdrew as a television commentator from a West Indies series against the South Africans because he was furious that Carl Hooper had been allowed to return from retirement to take over the captaincy.

Every West Indian step forward seems to be followed by two back these days.

The team won the Champions Trophy in England last year yet has had a wretched 24 months in the Test arena. Excluding Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, the team have lost 13 matches and won just two against major Test rivals since the start of 2003.

Last year, they recorded their lowest total in Test history, 47 against England at Sabina Park.

Even victories over Bangladesh in 2004 and Zimbabwe in 2003 have been far from straightforward. In both two-match series the opener was drawn, with Zimbabwe scoring 507 for nine in their opening innings and Bangladesh 416.

Lara even threatened to quit as captain if his team failed to win the second Test against Bangladesh.

Today West Indies are rated eighth in the world Test rankings, with only Zimbabwe and Bangladesh in their wake.

Now they have upset the money men as well. It is something the loss-making West Indies Cricket Board can ill afford.

Digicel has since regretted the leaking of its memo and re-iterated its commitment to Caribbean cricket.

For veteran broadcaster Tony Cozier, however, things are as bad as they have ever been, particularly if Digicel were persuaded to curtail their involvement.

Writing in a syndicated column, Cozier said: "The next step back is into the oblivion and, if never far away, it is now as close as it has ever been."

DHAKA-KHULNA

KHULNA: First innings 153

DHAKA: First innings (overnight 66-4)

Mehrab Jr c Asadullah b Manjurul 8

Anwar c Sazzad b Dollar 9

Mehrab run out 12

Jahangir lbw b Manjurul 1

Sajjad c Dollar b Jamal 76

Halim c Salim b Manjurul 12

Mahmud c Sadat b Dollar 47

Neeyamur b Jamal 61

Sunny not out 53

Mahbub c Jamal b Mashrafee 0

Niaz b Mashrafee 0

Extras: (b12, lb8, nb8) 28

Total (All out in 84.5 overs) 307

Fall of wkt: 1-9, 2-26, 3-32, 4-33, 5-80, 6-180, 7-194, 8-302, 9-307, 10-307.

Bowlers O M R W

Manjurul 18 5 42 3

Mashrafee 21.5 1 84 2

Dollar 16 3 80 2

Jamaluddin 27 6 72 2

KHULNA: Second innings

Sadat c Sajjad b Sunny 64

Shafiq c Mehrab b Sunny 19

Monirul batting 40

Sazzad batting 23

Extras: (b12) 2

Total: (For 2 wkt in 37 overs) 148

Fall of wkt: 1-75, 2-90.

Bowlers O M R W

Mahmud 12 0 72 0

Mahbub 2 2 0 0

Niaz 3 0 20 0

Niaz 8 2 28 0

Sunny 12 3 26 2

CHITTAGONG-BARISAL

BARISAL: First innings 238

CHITTAGONG: First innings (overnight 25-0)

Tamim c Shahin b Sonnet 29

Salahuddin c Sonnet 15

Nazimuddin lbw b Sonnet 0

Ehsanul batting 106

Azam c Nadif b Sonnet 0

Sunny batting 75

Extras: (b5, lb3, nb1, w8) 17

Total: (For 4 wkt in 94 overs) 242

Bowlers O M R W

Tapash 24 4 52 3

Rezaul 24 8 67 2

Hasibul 17.4 3 54 4

Nabil 30 11 52 1

Ezaz 1 0 7 0

Imtiaz 2 0 19 0

Sadikur 14 2 31 0

SYLHET: First innings

Golam Rahman run out 115

Moniruzzaman c Forhad b Alamgir 6

Imtiaz c Jahurul b Shuvo 4

Sadikur lbw b Alamgir 0