

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 Raul Gonzalez, 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 midfield.

"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 understrength and we've got a team which is a bit ramshackle."

Both Aldo Duschier 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; Atletico 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), Atletico Madrid v Real Sociedad (1800), Valencia v Real Betis (2000), Athletic Bilbao v Getafe (postponed until March 23)				

Malik allowed to tour India

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan will allow banned former captain Salim Malik, who is barred from travelling abroad, to visit India to watch the upcoming cricket series between the arch rivals, officials said Friday.

The 41-year old Malik, who played 103 Tests and 283 one-day internationals between 1981-1999, now lives a reclusive life after he was banned on charges of match-fixing in 2000.

His name was put on the government's Exit Control List (ECL) which bars people from travelling abroad. He was also barred from holding any cricket related post.

However the Interior Ministry Thursday lifted the ban temporarily for one month.

"Yes, Malik has been given permission to go abroad but his name has not been removed from the ECL," Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao told AFP.

Malik welcomed the decision. "It's a good news for me because I want to see the cricket series and I have also had various commentary offers," said Malik, whose appeal against the life ban is still pending with Pakistan's Supreme Court.

Sharapova in last four

AFP, Doha

Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova of Russia will take on Slovakia's Daniela Hantuchova for a place in the final of the 600,000-dollar WTA Qatar Open after both glamour girls came through their quarter-finals on Thursday.

Sharapova, the second seed, ousted France's Marion Bartoli 6-3, 6-2 after Hantuchova earlier eliminated Spanish veteran Conchita Martinez 6-4, 6-1.

The other semifinal will be played between Australia's Alicia Molik and France's top-seed Amelie Mauresmo.

Federer survives a scare

AFP, Dubai

World number one and defending champion Roger Federer produced his third escape act in a row to reach the quarterfinals of the one-million-dollar Dubai Open here on Thursday.

Federer won his third successive match from a set down, and his second in a final set tie-break, but this time he also saved two match points while overcoming Juan Carlos Ferrero, the former world number one from Spain.

The defending champion had been a set and a break down, before trailing by four points to six in the deciding tie-break, and then capturing four points in a row to survive 4-6, 6-3, 7-6.

S Africa 301-7

FROM PAGE 13 match and play in the second game in Durban Sunday.

Also missing from the South African side was fast bowler Andre Nel because of a hamstring strain.

TEAMS

SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith (captain), Adam Bacher, Jacques Rudolph, Herschelle Gibbs, Ashwell Prince, Justin Kemp, Mark Boucher, Albie Morkel, Nicky Boje, Andrew Hall, Makhaya Ntini

ZIMBABWE: Tendai Taibu (captain), Stuart Matsikenyer, Barney Rogers, Hamilton Masakadza, Alistair Maregewade, Brendan Taylor, Elton Chigumbura, Sean Williams, Tinashe Panyangara, Prosper Utseya, Christopher Mpofu

Pak fans crowd

FROM PAGE 13 which borders India, and the southern port city of Karachi to process applications for thousands of fans who are keen to visit India for the historic tour.

The visa office in Karachi will start working in the first week of March. The special visa offices will remain operative throughout the series.

Pakistan arrive in New Delhi on Monday to play three Tests and six one-day games. The tour ends on April 18.

"In the first phase visas will be issued for Mohali and Chandigarh for a period of nine days from March 6 to 14," the visa official said.

Visitors travelling through the Wagah border, the only land crossing between the nuclear rivals, can enter India on train, bus or by foot, the official added.

"However they must exit India by the same mode," he said.

Pakistani fans were enthusiastic and large groups are expected to cross the border on foot. "Mohali's close proximity to Lahore gives the Lahorites a golden chance to witness cricket," local car dealer and cricket fan Mohammad Abbas said.

The other Test matches are scheduled for Kolkata and Bangalore while one-day games will be played in Cochin, Vishakapatnam, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad, Kanpur and New Delhi.

Visas for other cities will be issued later, said the official.

Magpies, Boro keep English flag flying

UEFA CUP

AFP, Paris

Newcastle United and Middlesbrough stormed to the rescue of England's battered football reputation on Thursday by reaching the last 16 of the UEFA Cup.

After a week which had seen Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United all suffer Champions League defeats, it was left to the two north-

aggregate of 4-2 and will now face Olympiakos of Greece for a place in the quarter-finals while Middlesbrough edged Grazer of Austria 2-1 (4-3 on aggregate) to set up a last 16 clash against Sporting Lisbon.

Elsewhere, the pressure on the shoulders of former Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri increased when his Valencia side, the UEFA Cup holders, crashed out, losing to Steaua Bucharest on a penalty shoot-out.

At St James's Park, Newcastle took a 2-1 first leg lead into their

Alan Shearer made it 2-0 on the night when he scored from a free-kick. Arnold Bruggink scored a late penalty consolation for the Dutchmen.

"Alan always strikes the ball well - and he did it again tonight," said Newcastle boss Graeme Souness.

"The power and pace of the ball beat the goalkeeper."

Nerves were more frayed at the Riverside where Middlesbrough were level 2-2 with Grazer after the first leg.

The Austrians then grabbed the



PHOTO: AFP

Sporting Lisbon's goalkeeper Ricardo falls to the ground after being hit by fireworks thrown by Feyenoord fans during their UEFA-Cup match in Rotterdam on February 24.

east rivals to restore some balance in the poor relation of the continent's trophy hunts.

Newcastle beat Heerenveen of the Netherlands 2-1 for a third round

clash with Heerenveen and any fears of an upset were extinguished after just 10 minutes when Michel Breuer put through his own goal.

Fifteen minutes later, skipper

advantage after just eight minutes when former England defender Gareth Southgate misjudged a long ball and Mario Bazina stole in to stroke the ball into the net past a

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

RAJSHAHI: 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 wkts: 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
Moniruzzaman c Forhad b Alamgir
Imtiaz c Jahurul b Shuvo
Sadikur lbw b Alamgir

Parvez lbw b Shuvo	16
Babel c Jahurul b Shuvo	0
Ezaz b Shuvo	28
Tapash b Shuvo	16
Rezaul batting	8
Nabil c Nuruzzaman b Shuvo	1
Hasibul batting	5
Extras: (lb-2, nb-1)	3
Total: (For 9 wkts in 68 overs)	202
Fall of wkts: 1-35, 2-41, 3-59, 4-104, 5-104, 6-155, 7-185, 8-190, 9-192.	

Bowlers

Bowlers	O	M	R	W
Alamgir	21	9	49	2
Forhad	4	1	10	0
Sumon	14	4	37	0
Shuvo	25	3	84	6
Anisur	4	0	20	0

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 Mashrafe	0
Niaz b Mashrafe	0
Extras: (b12, lb8, nb8)	28
Total (All out in 84.5 overs)	307
Fall of wkts: 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
Mashrafe	21.5	1	84	2
Dollar	16	3	80	2
Jamaluddin	27	6	72	2

KHULNA: Second innings

Sadat c Sajjad b Sunny	64
Shafiu c Mehrob b Sunny	19
Monirul batting	40
Sazzad batting	23
Extras: (lb-2)	2
Total: (For 2 wkts in 37 overs)	148
Fall of wkts: 1-75, 2-90.	

Bowlers	O	M	R	W
Mahmud	12	0	72	0
Mahbub	2	2	0	0
Niaz	3	0	20	0
Mehrab Jr	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 b Sonnet	15
Nazimuddin lbw b Sonnet	0
Ehsanul batting	106
Azam c Nadiif b Sonnet	0
Sunny batting	75
Extras: (b-5, lb-3, nb-1, w-8)	17
Total: (For 4 wkts in 94 overs)	242



PHOTO: COURTESY

Winners of the FedEx Cup golf tournament pose with their trophies at the Savar Golf Club yesterday.

bemused Mark Schwarzer.

However, 18-year-old James Morrison equalised ten minutes later before Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink put Boro in front 2-1 on the night and 4-3 on aggregate when he finished off a slick move on the hour mark.

Boro boss Steve McClaren admitted that Sporting Lisbon will present an even tougher proposition in the

next round.

"Sporting are technically very good - Portuguese sides always are. But the journey goes on for us, and we will now go to their magnificent stadium," he said.

Andrei Cristea scored second half goals in a chilly Bucharest to give Steaua a 2-2 draw on aggregate with Valencia before the Romanians held their nerve to take the penalty shoot-out 4-3.

Steaua now face another Spanish side Villareal.

Former European champions Ajax of Amsterdam were another of the favourites to go out.

They took a 1-0 first leg advantage to Auxerre in France but lost 3-1 on the night with Bonaventure Kalou, Benoit Cheyrou and Lionel Mathis all finding the net for the French side who face compatriots Lille in the next round.

Feyenoord could face sanctions after the Dutch club's fans brought their clash against Sporting Lisbon to a halt by throwing firecrackers onto the pitch.

Trouble erupted in the 64th minute just after Leidson had put the Portuguese side into the lead in the second leg tie to give his side a 3-1 aggregate lead.

One of the fireworks hit Sporting player Rui Jorge which led to German referee Florian Meyer suspending the match and taking the players off the field.

The match resumed 20 minutes later with Sporting going onto win the tie 2-1 on the night and 4-2 on aggregate.

New BSJA body

BSS, Dhaka

Manjurul Haque of the Independent and Syed Mohammed Mamun of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) were elected unopposed president and general secretary of Bangladesh Sports Journalist Association (BSJA) yesterday.

All the 10 members on the executive committee for 2005-06 were also elected uncontested after the



Manjurul Haque Syed M Mamun

Biennial General Meeting of the association was held at its office.

The newly elected executive committee: president - Manjurul Haque (Independent); vice-presidents - Ajoy Barua (Sangbad) and Arifur Rahman Babu (Samakal); general secretary - Syed Mohammed Mamun (BSS); treasurer - Saidur Rahman Shamim (Jugantar); executive members - Enamul Haque Chowdhury (Observer) Mosharrar Hossain (Purbokan), Al Musabbir Sadi (The Daily Star), Raihan Al Mughni (New Age) and Sayeed Uzzaman (Amar Desh).

Aussies aim

FROM PAGE 13

Paceman Glenn McGrath will be rested with Michael Kasprovicz returning to the side.

Captain Ricky Ponting said Hayden, who still had his arm in a sling Friday, was hoped to be fit for Tuesday's fourth match in Wellington.

Ponting was in no mood to loosen Australia's grip on the series.

"Sure we're in a great position and we've played some pretty good cricket but we still think we can keep improving," Ponting said.

"All we can do is keep trying to win and keep trying to improve, and if that means we get a psychological hold over New Zealand then well and good."

Streak ends

FROM PAGE 13

Bangladesh in February and March last year. The 30-year-old has played 59 Tests and 13 one-day internationals for Zimbabwe.

Once one of the world's top 10 bowlers, Streak, an all-rounder, joins the left-handed batsman Andy Blynnat, another senior member who signed a contract on Monday.

Two other returnees Gavin Ewing and Barney Rodgers have been turning out for the Zimbabwe team that toured Bangladesh last month and which is currently touring South Africa.

Zimbabwe's convener of cricket selectors Macsood Ebrahim said Streak will be eligible to turn out for Zimbabwe's national cricket team subject to form and fitness.

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United will be on a double mission in Saturday's Premiership clash with Portsmouth at Old Trafford.

As well as seeking to turn the screw on Chelsea following the league leaders' FA Cup and Champions League setbacks, Sir Alex Ferguson will have ordered his men to take revenge on the last side to beat them in the league.

That came at the end of October, when a 2-0 win at Fratton Park saw Pompey puncture the optimism generated by United's victory over Arsenal the previous weekend.

Since then however United have clicked into gear and Portsmouth, whose form has been dreadful of late, will be hard pressed to repeat their exploit in the return fixture.

Three points for United on Saturday would cut Chelsea's lead at the top back to six points at a time when Jose Mourinho's squad are, for the first time this season, looking

slightly vulnerable.

A controversial midweek Champions League defeat in Barcelona came hot on the heels of last weekend's FA Cup defeat by Newcastle, forcing Mourinho to endure back-to-back defeats for the first time in his managerial career.

And if Liverpool can make it an unhappy hat-trick in the League Cup final on Sunday, then United will really begin to believe that they can get back within touching distance before the two teams meet at Old Trafford on April 16.

Arsenal meanwhile are battling to prevent their season from completely disintegrating after a woeful midweek performance resulted in a 3-1 defeat by Bayern Munich.

A scrap with relegation-threatened Southampton represents a far from ideal sequel to that traumatic experience.

Arsene Wenger's task in engineering a rebound has not been made any easier by the fact that he will have to do without Dennis Bergkamp and Jose Antonio Reyes, who begin three-match bans imposed after a stormy FA Cup

clash with Sheffield United last weekend, and possibly Brazilian midfielder Edu, who has a hamstring problem.

England defender Sol Campbell, sorely missed in Munich, will also be absent

Newcastle's Sunday lunch-time clash with Bolton sees Magpies manager Graeme Souness pit his wits against Sam Allardyce, who turned down the St James' Park job when Sir Bobby Robson was sacked early in the season.

Bolton were responsible for Souness's first defeat as Newcastle boss and will be looking to boost their bid for a place in Europe by repeating that end-of-October success.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Aston Villa v Everton, Crystal Palace v Birmingham, Man Utd v Portsmouth (1715 GMT), Southampton v Arsenal (1245 GMT), Tottenham v Fulham

Sunday: Middlesbrough v Charlton, Newcastle v Bolton (1300 GMT)