

PREVIEW: PRIMERA LIGA

A mighty derby

Football

AFP, Madrid

League leaders Barcelona may have a nine point advantage over bitter rivals Real Madrid in the race for the Spanish title but their derby duel on Sunday will be as fiercely fought as ever.

The man who has had the spotlight shone on him the most over the past week is Barca's Samuel Eto'o.

The African Player of the Year started his career at Real but wants to get his revenge over the club that deemed him surplus to requirements by adding to the 20 goals that has made him the top scorer in the Spanish first division.

Last season, when he was at Mallorca, he scored two goals against Madrid in the Santiago Bernabeu and on both occasions he raced around the pitch pointing at himself in a gesture interpreted as saying "just look at who you let go!"

Eto'o is even more incensed that Madrid, who retained half of his rights when he signed for Mallorca, tried to block his move last summer to Barca.

"Real didn't behave in a good way," said Eto'o at the time.

"I don't have any great feelings of revenge," insisted the striker Eto'o on Thursday.

"If they hadn't discovered me then I would not have signed for

Barcelona. Nor am I obsessed with scoring against Real. I want to win every game and, in that respect, playing Madrid is just like any other game.

"If another Barca player scores and we get the points then I'll be equally happy. But I'm like a kid with new boots at the thought of playing in this derby. I played in the Nou Camp earlier this season and now I'm looking forward to finding out what a derby is like in the Santiago Bernabeu."

Real Madrid coach Wanderley Luxemburgo tried to make light of the threat posed by Eto'o.

"I'm not particularly worried about Eto'o, he's just one more player in their team, and it's Barca as a team I am worried about," said the former Brazil boss.

"He's a great player and he's the top scorer this season but to concentrate on him would be to forget people like Ronaldo and Xavi."

Real superstar Ronaldo, who has also played for both teams, has scored just once for Real Madrid and the Brazilian national team in the last 14 games.

"He'll score goals again, and let's hope he starts on Sunday. He's certainly not lacking in motivation or enthusiasm. Besides, big players shine in big matches," declared Luxemburgo.

Both teams got the good news on Thursday that their key injured or ill players are well on the way to recov-

ery. Against the odds, Barca club captain Carles Puyol is making good progress with the badly twisted ankle sustained during Spain's 0-0 World Cup draw with Serbia-Montenegro last week.

Ronaldinho missed training on Wednesday and Thursday with a dose of stomach flu but Barca medical staff are optimistic that the World Player of the Year will be fit to play.

Real captain Raul Gonzalez and England captain David Beckham both missed last Sunday's 2-1 win at Albacete with leg injuries but both men are likely to get the green light to play against Barca.

But missing will be Barca's Portuguese international Deco, who picked up his fifth yellow card in last Sunday's 3-3 draw with Real Betis, while Real's Walter Samuel and Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez are also suspended.

FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off times in GMT): Numancia v Atletico Madrid (1800), Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad (2000)
Sunday: Real Betis v Levante (1500), Espanyol v Sevilla (1500), Getafe v Albacete (1500), Osasuna v Racing Santander (1500), Valencia v Malaga (1500), Real Mallorca v Real Zaragoza (1500), Real Madrid v Barcelona (1700), Deportivo La Coruna v Villarreal (1900)

ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY GAMES

Jewel, Samedul go in action today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh swimmers Jewel Ahmed and Karar Samedul Islam dive in the swimming pool in Jeddah today with the hope to fly the green and red flag in the First Islamic Solidarity Games, according to a press release.

Jewel will be participating in the 50m butterfly and Samedul will be in the starting block of the 50m breast-stroke.

The Games were officially inaugurated yesterday at the holy city of Mecca.

Jewel's best timing is 26.11s which brought him the bronze medal in the last SAF Games while Samedul clocked 31.60s as his best timing so far.

The heats will take place at 12 noon (Bangladesh time) and the final will be held at 10pm (BST).

The Bangladesh mentally retarded football team will also open their campaign today and look favourites as eight of the 16 entered countries did not send their team.

The only athlete of the squad, hurdler Mahfuzur Rahman, is in Mecca and the weightlifting team is in Medina.

Partex squash

SPORTS REPORTER

Towheed Feroze clinched the B division title in the Partex Open squash tournament defeating his younger brother Shahryar Feroze Misha 3-0 in the final at the Gulshan Club yesterday.

Towheed, a journalist working for The New Age, earlier eliminated Babu in the semifinal.

Meanwhile, Swapan Parvez will take on Bishu Nath in the Premier Division final tomorrow. Swapan topped the table with a 3-0 win over Masud Rana and Bishu beat Ram Jagadish by the same margin to finish second.

Pepsi h'ball on

SPORTS REPORTER

The final round of the Pepsi 17th National Men's Handball Championship began yesterday with Chittagong and three services teams winning their respective opening day matches at the outer stadium handball court.

Chittagong beat Jessore 26-19, Bangladesh Rifles defeated Dhaka 35-18, Bangladesh Ansar beat Rajshahi 35-19, and Bangladesh Police outplayed Bagerhat 37-8.

Jute and Textile Minister Shahjahan Siraj inaugurated the meet.



Did U Know?

Mahendra Dhoni is now the second Indian wicketkeeper to have posted a hundred. Rahul Dravid has recorded four centuries as a wicketkeeper - two against West Indies and one each against Sri Lanka and UAE.

PREVIEW: SERIE A

Easy outings on card

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus and AC Milan resume their duel for the Italian championship this weekend after a three-week break.

Due to international fixtures and the cancellation of last week's Serie A matches out of respect for the late Pope John Paul II, the two title rivals have not played a league match since March 20.

Level on 66 points with just nine matches left to play, the Scudetto contenders face lowly opposition battling for survival.

Title-holders Milan, looking for their ninth straight league win and buoyant after Wednesday's 2-0 Champions League quarter-final, first leg win over city rivals Inter, host second from bottom Brescia at the San Siro, while Juventus play away to fierce rivals Fiorentina.

Juve were beaten 2-1 away to Liverpool in their Champions League tie on Tuesday, but the crucial away goal has left the Turin club in a strong position to reach the last four.

The rivalry between the two sides began in 1990 when Juve prised Roberto Baggio away from Fiorentina for a then record fee of 17 million dollars.

Incensed by Juve's snoop for their idol, thousands of heartbroken Fiorentina supporters went on the rampage in the Tuscan city for two days.

Juventus have won five of their last six league matches, while

Fed Cup draw Abahani, MSC in same group

SPORTS REPORTER

Traditional football powerhouses Abahani and Mohammedan were drawn in the same group in the Federation Cup finals while the two strongest teams of the season, holders Muktiyodha Sangsad and Brothers Union, were pitted against each other.

The eight-team final round kicks off April 21 with Group B matches as Muktiyodha, who are Group A top seeds, are scheduled to host Nebitchi FC of Turkmenistan in their AFC Cup match on April 20 in Dhaka.

Last year's semifinalists Sheikh Russel Kriya Chakra and Premier League newcomers Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool are the other teams in Group A while qualifiers Arambagh Kriya Sangha and Wanderers Club complete Group B.

Praying

FROM PAGE 12

South Africa in 2003, to accommodate an extra batsman or bowler.

Before Dhoni slammed a maiden century in only his fifth match, Dravid was the only Indian wicketkeeper to reach three figures in one-dayers.

The remaining matches are scheduled to be played in Ahmedabad (April 12), Kanpur (April 15) and New Delhi (April 17).

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf is due to attend the New Delhi match on an invitation from Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Fiorentina have amassed just five points from their last 15 and are lying sixth from bottom.

On current form, Milan should have no trouble securing three points from Brescia, who surprisingly held them to a goalless draw back in November.

FIXTURES

(all 1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)
Saturday: AC Milan v Brescia (1700), Bologna v Inter Milan (1700), Fiorentina v Juventus (1930)
Sunday: Atalanta v Chievo, Cagliari v Sampdoria, Lazio v Livorno, Lecce v Siena, Palermo v Messina, Reggina v Parma, Udinese v Roma

BFF honours 10 booters, 5 organisers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will honour ten footballers and five organisers tomorrow for their extraordinary services to the nation on the occasion of the inauguration of the BFF Bhaban.

Mohammed Bin Hammam, president of Asian Football Confederation, will open the BFF Bhaban - built with finance of FIFA under its Goal Project.

A panel of BFF officials made their final selection from lists of 12 organisers and 35 footballers.

The organisers chosen are ex-president of Mohammedan Sporting Club late Mainul Islam, BFF's founder general secretary late Abul Hashem, footballer, National Awardee and Chittagong Divisional Sports Association's ex-general secretary late Abu Taher Putu, Abahani director and ground specialist Kazi Shahed Ahmed and Khulna Divisional Sports Association's former secretary Prof Abdur Rahman.

The footballers to be honoured are Zakaria Pintoo, Kazi Salahuddin, Golam Sarwar Tipu, Badal Roy, Sheikh Mohammed Aslam, Ashish Bhadra, Wasim Iqbal, late Monem Munna, Kaiser Hamid and Rumman Wali Bin Sabbir.

The list of legends, like any other selection, is not without controversy as two of the country's best footballers were ignored. Enayetur Rahman, a great striker and playmaker of the 70s and 80s and Ashrafuddin Chunnun, who is not only the best winger the country has ever produced but also is the top scorer for Bangladesh in international level, missed out.

Pintoo was captain of the Swadhin Bangla Football Dal and also the first national captain while Salahuddin remains arguably the best footballer of the country and the only one to play in a semi-professional league abroad. The other name from the 70s is Tipu, a right-out who is a national coach now.

The four players from the 80s, Badal, Aslam, Ashish and Wasim all graced the country's football while defensive stalwarts Munna and Kaiser both dominated the show together in the 90s.

Sabbir, another attacking player of the 90s, also showed great potential in a career shortened by injury.



PHOTO: AFP

FRIENDS AGAIN! Newcastle's Lee Bowyer (L) and Keiron Dyer show no hard feelings as they replace one another during the match against Sporting Lisbon at St James' Park, Newcastle on April 7.

Did Rijkaard speak to Frisk?

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

The row over whether Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard spoke to referee Anders Frisk took a new twist Thursday after a report said the Dutch great had made several efforts to speak to the official.

Rijkaard has maintained he merely shook Frisk's hand during half-time at the Nou Camp during February's Champions League match against Chelsea and European football's governing body UEFA initially insisted there was nothing to investigate.

But a report from venue director, Pascal Fratellia, quoted in the London Evening Standard here Thursday, painted a different picture.

According to Fratellia's report, Rijkaard made several attempts to speak to Frisk during the break. Rijkaard has always maintained he was simply welcoming him to the club.

And while the report says that indeed was the first contact between the duo at the break, it added that Rijkaard had pursued Frisk up the stairs and confronted him again in a reception area outside the referee's dressing room.

Fratellia's report, compiled after a post-match interview, with Frisk said: "Frisk told us that he said to Rijkaard, 'It is not the moment to speak about match situations' and told him when he was in front of his (the referee's) dressing room to go back to his (Barcelona's) dressing room."

At the time Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho was furious at what he thought was an improper attempt to influence the Swedish official and revealed his frustration both during

and after the game. Chelsea's assistant manager Steve Clarke witnessed the entire exchange apart from the period when Rijkaard passed out of view beyond the glass doors.

When he returned, Clarke incorrectly assumed the Barcelona coach had been in the referee's dressing room, passing on the information to Mourinho and leading to a public war of words between Chelsea and UEFA with the club effectively accused of telling lies.

Chelsea were found guilty of bringing the game into disrepute after a UEFA spokesman said they had made "false comments" and Mourinho was handed a two-match touchline ban.

In the second half of the match in Spain, Frisk sent-off Chelsea's French striker Didier Drogba and Barcelona hit back from being 1-0 down at the break to win 2-1.

Frisk denied he'd been improperly influenced and subsequently announced his retirement after saying he'd received death threats.

WI 71-2

SPORTS REPORTER

West Indies were 71-2 at lunch in the second Test against South Africa in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad yesterday.

Former captain Brian Lara was closing in on his 47th half-century. He was batting on 41 while first Test double-centurion Wavell Hinds moved cautiously to 15 not out.

The home side, who drew the opening Test at Georgetown, lost two wickets cheaply for 13 runs after electing to bat. But Lara and Hinds repaid the loss of Chris Gayle and one-down Ramnaresh Sarwan.

Dhaka on title

FROM PAGE 12

lifted them to 182-6 when the match was called off seven overs before schedule.

Asadullah hit 14 boundaries in 111 balls and put on 101 runs for the fifth wicket with Jamaluddin Babu (32) before being run out.

Rajshahi batsman Forhad Reza was adjudged man-of-the-match for his 177 in the first innings.

SYLHET-CHITTAGONG

Chittagong began the final day 128 runs behind Sylhet's 448 in the first innings with just three wickets remaining at the Sylhet Stadium. Overnight pair Nazimuddin (73 off 251 balls) and Ahsanullah Hassan (78 off 148 balls) took the score to 426, adding 113 runs for the eighth wicket to dash Sylhet's hopes of posting a lead.

Ahsanullah batted till the end to ensure Chittagong's lead. He was adjudged man-of-the-match.

Sylhet reached 164-4 at close of play with opener Golam Rahman making 51 and Intiaz Hossain remaining 55 not out.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BARISAL-DHAKA
DHAKA: First innings 574
BARISAL: First innings 213 and second innings: 308 all out in 99.1 overs (Imran 49, Bikash 43, Sonnet 13, Nasiruddin 50, Shahnaj 53, Towhid 57, Rajan 20, extras 26; Mehrab Jr 6-80, Muntasir 3-56).
Result: Dhaka won by an innings and 53 runs.

RAJSHAHI-KHULNA
RAJSHAHI: First innings 425 and second innings 245 all out in 68.2 overs (Jahurul 51, Rakibul 48, Reza 20, Rosel 75, Anisur 13, Mushfiq 14, extras 13; Zia 4-43, Sakib 3-92).
KHULNA: First innings 344 and second innings 182-6 in 60 overs (Sahagir 8, Sakib 16, Asadullah 74, Jamal 32, Sajjad 25 n.o., extras 16; Alamgir 2-57, Mushfiq 1-28, Sumon 1-31, Reza 1-15).
Result: Match drawn.

SYLHET-CHITTAGONG
SYLHET: First innings 448
CHITTAGONG: First innings 459 all out in 178 overs (Salahuddin 119, Masum 72, Rabbi 20, Nazim 38 batting, Faisal 8, Sabbir 8, Dhiman 21, extras 31; Nabil 4-74).
Result: Match drawn.

Shearer brings smiles

UEFA CUP

AFP, Paris

Former England skipper Alan Shearer scored the only goal as English crisis club Newcastle beat Portugal's Sporting Lisbon 1-0 in the first leg of their UEFA Cup quarter-final clash on Thursday.

The narrow victory helped the Magpies temporarily forget the nightmare of last Saturday when teammates Lee Bowyer and Kieron Dyer were sent-off for fighting each other in a Premiership match.

Shearer's 37th minute header, his 19th goal of the season and his 192nd career strike for his hometown team, kept up his record of scoring in every European tie he has

been a part of this season. Laurent Robert played the crucial pass to his captain who was left unmarked to head easily past Ricardo in the Sporting goal.

Newcastle had to replace goalkeeper Shay Given with Steve Harper at half-time because of a hip injury but the biggest cheer for a substitution came in the 63rd minute when Bowyer came on to replace, ironically, Dyer.

The two exchanged 'high-fives' when they crossed on the touchline while Bowyer, fined six weeks wages for his attack on the England midfielder, was given a standing ovation.

His only contribution of any note came just seven minutes later when he was booked for a nasty tackle from behind on Sa Pinto.

If Newcastle manage to wrap up

the quarter-final tie in Portugal in the second leg next week they will face either Spanish Champions League hopefuls Villarreal or Dutch side Alkmaar.

Alkmaar will be favourites to go through after a 2-1 win in Spain. Villarreal were without top scorer Diego Forlan, whose 18 goals have taken the club to third place in the Spanish first division, as he was cup-tied and they certainly missed the Uruguayan's potency in front of goal.

CSKA Moscow took a huge step to becoming the first Russian team to win the UEFA Cup when they crushed French side Auxerre 4-0 in the first leg of their quarter-final in the Russian capital.

The winners of that tie will face either Austria Vienna or Parma of Italy, who drew 1-1.

A terrifying prospect

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Milan

The Italian word 'vendetta' needs no translating into English and nor is there any need to explain to English football supporters why it is being used in the context of Wednesday's Champions League game between Juventus and Liverpool.

Twenty years ago 39 fans, mostly Juventus supporters, died at the Heysel stadium in Brussels when a wall collapsed after Liverpool supporters charged towards the Italian fans at the European Cup final.

From the moment when the draw for the quarter-finals of the Champions League was made the media has been full of personal memories of that terrible night and on Tuesday at Anfield Liverpool fans tried to close a shameful chapter in their history with a moving attempt to apologise and appeal for friendship with Juventus fans.

It hasn't been enough though to create an atmosphere of calm before the return game in Turin.

The fact that the mayor of the city had to appeal on Friday for "good sense" and the isolation of extremist groups calling for a vendetta should be a clear signal of what is the "worst case scenario" at the DelleAlpi stadium.

The image of some Juventus fans at Anfield turning their backs on a mosaic declaring 'Amicizia', or friendship, and raising their middle fingers in rejection of the peace offering was a sharp reminder that, for some, 20 years has not been enough to heal the wounds.

In all the many words of recollection and reconciliation that were reported in the days running up to the first meeting of the sides since the tragedy, perhaps the wisest came from Zbigniew Boniek, the Polish midfielder in Juve's side at Heysel.

"The important thing is that this game doesn't get put on the wrong

track and that we talk only about football. Two clubs that are friends are meeting again. As far as the fans are concerned, everyone will follow their own path.

"It is pointless trying to force gestures of reconciliation from those who have suffered and are still suffering -- it won't change anything," he said.

The press, officials and supporters, are not talking only about football, and that hope was probably naive given the circumstances, but Boniek's realistic view of the feelings of Juventus supporters was much closer to the mark than all the wishful thinking about "closing the page" on the affair. Liverpool deserve praise for their well-intentioned gestures but the Italian press were perhaps too strong in their heavy criticism of those Juventus fans who literally turned their backs on their efforts.

Accepting an apology for the deaths of 39 fans is one thing but friendship, or the kind of "twinning" implied by joint scarves in the colours of both clubs with a hand-shaking motif, is another matter and was a step too far for some Juventus supporters.

Perhaps, were Juve's travelling support made up only of those ordinary fans who sit in the main stands at the Delle Alpi or the mainstream 'Juve clubs' from across Italy, the reaction might have been different.

But this is the problem that faces the two clubs, the Turin police and the travelling Liverpool supporters on Wednesday -- the ultras, the hardcore and sometimes violent supporters associated with every Italian club, were never going to be interested in reconciliation -- the word they more frequently use is 'honour'.

England may have banished violence from stadiums with the radical changes that took place to venues and the different fan culture that emerged in the 1990's but that process has not happened in Italy.

In England, hooligan gangs now mostly exist in isolated outposts and

the storylines of voyeuristic books and films that enjoy a strange dark popularity but the ultras are present in every stadium across Italy.

Visiting fans at the Delle Alpi, by no means the most violent stadium in Italy, frequently face flares and smoke bombs launched down on to their sector by home fans with little or no response from the police.

Clashes outside and sometimes inside stadiums remain a common occurrence at Serie A games, particularly derby matches or games with a history of rivalry, and police action is, usually, belated and then excessively violent.

Tribal soccer

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Rangamati

The Mymensingh regional team recorded a 3-2 victory over Sylhet in the inaugural match of the first-ever Adibashi (tribal) Football Tournament at the local stadium here yesterday.

Soilash Chandra Burmon struck twice while Robin Chandra Burmon added the other for the winners. Horonath Shilla and Rigal Khonpodang scored for Sylhet.

Rangamati Hill District Council chairman Dr Maniklal Dewan inaugurated the tournament in the afternoon.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts regional unit of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum (BAF), a platform for indigenous people, has organised the tournament.

"We organised the tournament to foster closer ties between different indigenous people in the country," said Mriganok Khisha, BAF member secretary of CHT regional unit.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) team will face the Northern regional team today.

Four teams from Mymensingh, Northern, Sylhet region while another from CHT are taking part in the meet.

PREVIEW: PREMIERSHIP

All eyes on the bottom

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea may have virtually wrapped up the English Premiership title with a massive 13 point lead but down at the bottom there is a desperate battle for survival taking place.

Basement club Norwich are six points adrift of the rest of the field - a situation unlikely to improve when Manchester United arrive at Carrow Road on Saturday - and seemingly on their way down.

But which two clubs will join them on the relegation route remains uncertain with seven league games to go.

Second bottom Crystal Palace are just a point behind West Brom, who themselves are level on 27 with fellow strugglers Southampton.

And all are in sight of Saints' arch-coast rivals Portsmouth who have 31 points.