



Sevilla's Brazilian striker Luis Fabiano (C) shoots towards Betis goal only to be blocked by keeper Contreras during their King's Cup match at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium in Sevilla on Thursday.

## SPANISH KING'S CUP Sevilla, Betis draw blank

REUTERS, Madrid

Primera Liga strugglers Real Betis produced a battling performance to hold high-flying city rivals Sevilla to a 0-0 draw at the Sanchez Pizjuan in the first leg of their King's Cup quarterfinal on Thursday.

Betis, who knocked out Real Madrid in the last round, held out against the UEFA Cup holders in a derby that was high on effort and tension but low on skill and entertainment.

Sevilla have a slight advantage in the tie as they will go into the return leg on February 28 knowing that a score draw will be enough to put them into the semifinals.

The remaining first leg games were played on Wednesday with Real Zaragoza holding the edge in their tie against league leaders Barcelona after a 1-0 victory at the Nou Camp, the Catalans' first home defeat in almost a year.

Bernd Schuster's Getafe and Deportivo Coruna hold the whip hand in their ties after emphatic first-leg victories.

Getafe were in unstoppable form as they overpowered Osasuna 3-0 at home, while Deportivo came from a goal down to defeat second division leaders Valladolid 4-1 at the Riazor.

## Bring a Bazooka

AFP, Paris

A bazooka would be needed to start transfer talks for Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portuguese star's Manchester United teammate Patrice Evra jokingly told a French radio station on Thursday.

Ronaldo's agent Sergio Alves was quoted by Wednesday's The Sun newspaper as saying offers for next season might be looked into if they came from a big club like Real Madrid or Barcelona.

However, Evra said that if Alves wanted to start discussions, he would do well to bring a bazooka with him.

"Any agent asking for a transfer request for Cristiano Ronaldo would have to come with a bazooka," Evra said.

Sir Alex Ferguson would know exactly how to welcome him. Protective equipment would be needed before going into the manager's office."

## Chelsea deny Lippi link

AFP, London

Chelsea denied Thursday they had been in discussion with former Italy coach Marcello Lippi and insisted no list of candidates had been drawn up to replace current boss Jose Mourinho.

The Portuguese's position at Stamford Bridge has come under intense scrutiny this season amidst reports he has fallen out with the English Premiership champions' Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

Lippi, who led Italy to World Cup glory in Germany last year but is currently without a job, became the latest high-profile candidate to be linked with the Chelsea hotseat last weekend.

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## Barca bid to answer critics

AFP, Madrid



League leaders Barcelona will be looking to bounce back at Osasuna on Sunday following their shock 1-0 home defeat by Real Zaragoza in the Spanish Cup in midweek.

The defeat was Barcelona's first in their Nou Camp stadium in any competition this season and prompted questions over the European champions' ability to win La Liga for the third consecutive year.

"Maybe we are not at the level we were at last year," admitted Barcelona's Mexican international defender Rafa Marquez.

Critics have pointed to the slump in form of 2004 and 2005 World Player of the Year Ronaldinho who was subjected to jeers from Barca fans after Wednesday's loss.

Nevertheless, Barcelona are still in pole position by a point and in the lead of the Champions League once again.

"Barcelona aren't as bad as everyone says," said Osasuna midfielder Raul Garcia.

"It's clear that they are not having some of their best games but they

are always a difficult rival. They are still the league leaders."

However, the Pamplona-based side are quietly optimistic that they can make life difficult for Barca.

Last season, they were one of the few teams to defeat the champions, beating them 2-1 in their intimidating Reyno de Navarra stadium en-route to finishing fourth.

However, this season, Osasuna have been more erratic and currently lie 10th.

One slight problem for Osasuna coach Jose Antonio Ziganda is that defender Jose Antonio Romero and striker Roberto Soldado are both suspended.

Sergio Ramos and Fernando Gago were still training lightly on Thursday, recovering from knocks suffered in the 1-0 loss at Villarreal last Saturday, but club officials said they were optimistic that they would also be fit to play against their visitors from Valencia.

"We are still in contention in the league and still in the Champions League. I don't see why we can't win both titles," said Gago.

Meanwhile, a degree of calm has returned to Real with Spanish judges throwing out a legal challenge to last summer's presidential elections on Thursday, leaving the incumbent Ramon Calderon to continue as president.

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He has not been picked by Brazil since Dunga replaced Carlos Alberto Parreira as coach following the tournament in Germany.

Ronaldo scored 104 goals for Real after joining them in August 2002.

He was the club's leading scorer in each of his four previous seasons in Spain but had limited opportunities to shine following knee surgery after the World Cup last year with coach Fabio Capello preferring Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy up front.

Asked about what went wrong in his last season at Real, Ronaldo said: "I don't know exactly but the coach, as I see it, didn't have confidence in me and didn't want me to play."

"Milan is a fantastic club and the fans are very enthusiastic about my arrival."

Revenge is also on the menu after the 3-0 humiliation Everton inflicted on their neighbours at Goodison Park earlier this season.

"It was a really bad day for us in the last game with Everton and it's an experience I hope I never have to go through again," said the Reds' Dutch striker, Dirk Kuyt, who scored a spectacular long-range strike in the midweek win over West Ham.

"It was really important to win at West Ham after beating Chelsea because we knew we had to maintain our momentum."

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That depends on clearance from the Premier League but Liverpool will definitely be without Momo Sissoko, who needs more time to recover from the shoulder injury that has kept him sidelined since November.

"As long as you move well when you have a player like Wayne Rooney around you're always likely to get chances," Larsson said.

"I enjoy playing with the likes of Wayne and Cristiano Ronaldo immensely. At 35-years-old I didn't expect to get this kind of chance again. So to be here now playing alongside them is fantastic."

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