



ONE TO WATCH: Rising Germany and Stuttgart star Mario Gomez (L) celebrates after scoring in their Bundesliga top-of-the-table clash against Werder Bremen at the Gottlieb Daimler on Saturday.

Capello praises Beckham

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Capello has praised David Beckham after the midfielder scored on his return to Real Madrid's starting line-up on Saturday night.

Beckham, 31, had been told he would never play for Capello's side again after agreeing a summer move to MLS side Los Angeles Galaxy four weeks ago.

But the former England captain re-paid the faith shown in him by netting from a trade-mark free-kick in the 2-1 win over struggling Real Sociedad.

"I have always trusted my players, all of them," said Capello. "Beckham has not played for a long time, but he was very good (against Sociedad) and his goal was excellent."

"I have spoken with Beckham twice the last week about his lack of success (on the pitch) in the past."

"I said that he does not score enough goals, but today he scored a very important one."

Capello also hinted that although Beckham's inclusion in the side was largely down to the current midfield injury worries at the side, his performance could see him keep his spot in the future.

He added: "I like to think about the future and not about the past. Beckham is an intelligent person and one who has much merit and talent."

"These last weeks he has trained very well, and today he has done a great performance. That is very good for him and the team."

Rahul blames Sachin, Sourav

PTI, Rajkot

Skipper Rahul Dravid on Sunday blamed the top-order batsmen for India's five-run loss against Sri Lanka in the second one-dayer but promised the hosts would fightback in the remaining two matches of the series.

"One of the top order batsmen needed to go on till the end. They had Sangakkara doing that. Sachin (Tendulkar) and Sourav (Ganguly) were doing well but then we lost too many wickets," Dravid said after India finished at 252-9 chasing Lanka's 257-8.

"It is disappointing to lose after restricting them to 257. The wickets fell at regular interval and that did not help," Dravid added.

"We would bounce back. Now we know what we will have to do in the series. Hopefully everyone is fit and ready to play in the next match," he said.

The win gave a 1-0 lead to Sri Lanka in the four-match series.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene said Kumar Sangakkara's 110 that rescued them from a disastrous 58-4 and brilliant fielding towards the end clinched them the match.

Drug tests on Feb 16

PTI, Karachi

Ignoring warnings of a medical expert, the Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to go ahead with its out-of-competition dope tests for its World Cup-bound squad and set February 16 as the date for the same.

Saleem Altaf, PCB Director of Cricket Operations, said that the tests would be conducted in Lahore despite warnings by an anti-doping and sports medicine expert that they could lead to life bans on fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif.

Akhtar and Asif tested positive for nandrolone in September and were banned for two and one years respectively, but the duo successfully appealed against the verdict.

Schalke at the summit

AGENCIES, Berlin



Schalke 04 beat Hertha Berlin 2-0 on Saturday to move six points clear at the top of the German championship.

Second-half goals from Kevin Kuranyi and former Rangers winger Peter Lovenkrands hit Schalke's second with 15 minutes to go to add to the brace he scored last weekend against Bremen in their top-of-the-table battle.

As for Werder, who led the championship at the halfway stage, they are losing their way with Bremen keeper Tim Wiese being beaten four times at third-placed Stuttgart who, admittedly, have not lost at home since August.

Roberto Hilbert, Marco Streller, Mario Gomez and Ludovic Magnin got on the scoresheet for Stuttgart who were particularly pleased with Gomez who also set up two other goals following his strike in midweek on his Germany debut.

Schalke appeared to be feeling the pressure and were not playing to their potential before the break, though they turned up the heat in the second 45 minutes to finish off

Hertha with two goals in the space of 11 minutes.

Kuranyi, who scored his 15th international goal in Germany's 3-1 friendly victory over Switzerland on Wednesday, bagged his ninth goal of the season in the 64th minute.

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moment status. Days after winning his first German cap, and scoring his first international goal, the Stuttgart striker put the finishing touch to a fine counter-attack.

Hilbert raced down the right wing and squared the ball to Cacau. The Brazilian's exquisite touch into the path of Gomez bisected the last line of the Werder defence and, two touches later, the ball was in the back of Tim Wiese's goal.

Bayern Munich have had Ottmar Hitzfeld, who led them to the 2001 Champions League title, back at the helm since the beginning of the month with the task of getting them back into top form after a goalscoring slump.

The Bavarians, who host Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday, have found the net just 32 times in 20 league matches which statistically is their worst goal-scoring haul since the 1991/92 season.

Young Asad struck 15 boundaries and four sixes in scoring an unbeaten 117 off 148 balls. His batting partner Selim was the more destructive, smashing 85 off only 34 deliveries. Sajjad and Rasel took two wickets each.

Siddeshwari were bowled out for only 103 runs in 20.1 overs. Ariful and Rasel scored 16 and 13 respectively, but it was Asad again who was the bane in Siddeshwari's side as he took five for 19. Rabul Islam took two wickets too.

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But the match at East End ground was different as University Laboratory School (ULS) prevailed to beat Muddapara High School by only 10 runs. Batting first, ULS were bowled out for 233 in 41 overs. Salahuddin struck 64 while Asif scored 21. Koushil and Al-Amin took two wickets each.

Koushil forged a lone battle as he scored an unbeaten 60 but Muddapara were bowled out for 223 in 40.4 overs. Rasel and Mozammel took three wickets each.

At Utari Friends Club ground, Dhamondi Tutorial's Shamsul Arefin took five for 40 as his spell helped skittle Sunny Dale out for 147 in 38.4 overs. Sadman (33) and Redwan (2) were the only contributors. Somson also picked up three wickets.

Sunny Dale pushed Dhamondi Tutorial by taking six wickets but Sakib Chowdhury ensured a victory with an unbeaten 53. He was supported by Irfan (20). Sadman took 3 for 16 while Afan Islam took two for 32.

On a night when the goals were raining down Valenciennes swept aside Nantes 5-2 with Steve Savidon celebrating a four timer.

Le Mans prevailed in a five-goal feast against Sedan and down in the drop zone. Nice did their prospects of staying up no harm at all with a 3-0 win over Troyes to leave them third off the bottom on 23 points, one adrift of Troyes.

PSG's winter recruit from Argentina, Marcelo Gallardo, got the third in the 84th minute with Uruguayan Cristian Rodriguez completing a good night's work.

Monaco's second half goals came from Frederic Piquionne, who then had a penalty saved by Mickael Landreau, with Jan Koller coming up with a face savour late on.

"That will do us some good in terms of the table. We showed lots of heart against Monaco who played well," said former Rangers manager Le Guen.

He added: "We still need time as we're not out of danger yet. We still need more points."

Landreau emphasised the importance of the result.

"This is a turning point for us. A while ago this would have been a match we'd have lost. We have to build on this now, these three points are going to do us a lot of good."

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Gerard Houllier's five-time champions have endured an uncharacteristic barren spell since the winter break, and they went into this game aiming to avoid a fourth defeat of 2007.

But in front of their fans at the Stade Gerland they extended their lead over Lens at the top of the table to 14 points thanks to Fred, the Brazilian who produced the only goal of the game in the seventh minute.

And it was something to savour 24 hours after they became the first French club to be floated on the Stock Exchange.

Lyon's France international keeper Gregory Coupet set Fred up with a long ball and the striker produced an unstoppable drive to beat the advancing Lorient stopper Remy Riout from 30 metres.

Lorient thought they'd got back on level terms four minutes from the break only for Rafik Saïf's close range effort to be deemed offside.

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Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene said Kumar Sangakkara's 110 that rescued them from a disastrous 58-4 and brilliant fielding towards the end clinched them the match.

Amare Diane opened the scoring after five minutes, with the second an own-goal from Monaco keeper Flavio Roma.



PSG players run in a line as they celebrate one of their four strikes in their victory over Monaco in a Ligue 1 encounter at the Parc des Princes on Saturday.

Barca to make audacious C'Ron bid

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona will make Cristiano Ronaldo the world's highest-paid player if he joins them in the summer, thanks to an influx of Arab oil

According to The News of the World, the European champions will launch a 30-million-pound bid for the Manchester United and Portugal winger and offer him wages of 160,000 pounds a week.

The money will come from Sheikh Al-Balawi, the owner of Saudi club Al-Ittihad, who has forged strong links with Barcelona president Joan Laporta through a series of football academies in the middle east.

Al-Balawi told the paper: "I will do whatever it takes to help Barcelona sign a great player, like Cristiano."

It is expected that Ronaldo's agent will demand that Manchester United match Barcelona's offer if they want to keep hold of the 22-year-old player beyond July, despite him being contracted to the club for another four and a half years.

His current employers offered to double his wages to £100,000 a week two months ago to stave off interest from Barcelona and their bitter rivals Real Madrid.

But nothing has yet been agreed, and Ronaldo added his own voice to the debate over whether he will stay or go recently.

Ronaldo said: "I like Spanish football and it interests me, but if anyone wants to speak to me from Spain, they go through my agent, not me."

Asad show sinks S'wari

SPORTS REPORTER

Asadur Rahman propelled Sher-e-Bangla Ideal High School to a massive 239-run victory over Siddeshwari High School in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the Iqbal Road ground yesterday.

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ITALY RESUMES SOCCER

Juve caught in Vicenza

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Play in Italy's second division Serie B resumed peacefully on Saturday, with spectators allowed into just five of the 11 matches.

The rest took place behind closed doors - the result of a tough anti-hooligan plan approved by the government in response to the death of policeman Filippo Raciti during rioting at a Serie A match last week.

The visitors' stand in Vicenza was empty after the ban on the block sale of tickets to away fans, but gone too were lines of police usually required to separate rivals set of supporters.