



Roma star Francesco Totti is about to score the equalising goal from a penalty during their Europa League encounter against FC Basel in Rome's Olympic Stadium on Thursday.

Capello fears Spain, Brazil

AFP, Cape Town

Fabio Capello on Friday identified Spain and Brazil as England's main threats at next year's World Cup, but also said an African team could surprise.

England have been resurgent under Capello and qualified easily, doing enough to be one of eight seeds in Friday's draw for the group stages, meaning there is no danger of a first round meeting with Spain or Brazil.

But they could be drawn against an African team.

"If you want to win then you have to play the great sides but I have confidence in my team," Capello said on the sidelines of England presenting its bid for the 2018 and 2022 World Cup.

"We have played all the top teams. For me, Spain is good and Brazil is very good."

"But I think the teams from Africa could surprise. I saw Ivory Coast and they really surprised me. And Cameroon are one of the best teams from the continent."

England are expected to base themselves in Rustenburg, about two hours drive from Johannesburg, for the tournament from June 11-July 11 next year although Capello is concerned about the quality of the training pitches there.

"The pitches at the grounds are very good and the facilities are fantastic, but the training pitches are not great. But we have time," he said.

"Rustenburg is one of our options."

Real aim to rebound

AFP, Madrid



Still reeling from their painful derby defeat at Barcelona in 'El Clásico',

Real Madrid will hope for some home comfort on Saturday when they entertain Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Real claimed a moral victory from the Barcelona loss with many citing it as their best display of the season, but it was Barca who took the points and the Catalans now lead their rivals by five points after winning 2-0 at Xerez in Wednesday's rescheduled match.

The recovering Lionel Messi, buoyant after winning the Ballon D'or, and Zlatan

Ibrahimovic were second-half substitutes against Xerez but could return to the starting line-up at the Riazor stadium.

Ibrahimovic followed up his winner against Real by coming off the bench again to score a delightful chip against Xerez and is the club's top scorer with nine goals.

Depor are going strong in fifth and Brazilian left-back Filipe Luis faces Barca for the first time since they tried to sign him in the summer, with the move collapsing over what Guardiola felt was an inflated transfer fee.

Sevilla, who were drawn against holders Barcelona in the King's Cup, are seven points off the top of the table with a game in hand and host Valladolid on Saturday.

Valencia are on the up but have a tough trip to Athletic Bilbao on Sunday and must do without Spanish international midfielder David Silva, who is out until the New Year with a knee injury.

Valencia are fourth, three points behind second-placed Real, after going 14 games unbeaten in all competitions.

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid coach Quique Sanchez Flores will hope his side build on their 4-0 win over Espanyol and continue to move away from the relegation zone when they travel to basement boys Xerez.

FIXTURES

Saturday
(1700GMT unless otherwise stated)
Sevilla v Valladolid, Xerez v Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid v Almeria (1900GMT), Deportivo La Coruna v Barcelona (2100GMT)

Sunday
(1600 GMT unless otherwise stated)

Tenerife v Sporting Gijon, Espanyol v Racing Santander, Real Mallorca v Real Zaragoza, Malaga v Osasuna, Villarreal v Getafe (1800GMT), Athletic Bilbao v Valencia (2000GMT)

IN BRIEF

Kalou out for two weeks

AFP, London

Chelsea's Salomon Kalou has been ruled out for "around two weeks", the Premier League leaders said on Thursday, after sustaining a thigh tear in Wednesday's League Cup loss to Blackburn Rovers.

Chelsea's statement said the Ivory Coast star had "sustained a minor tear to his upper left thigh" and that the injury would sideline him for "around two weeks".

The Blues, five points clear at the top of the table from champions Manchester United, are away to Manchester City in the league on Saturday.

Police scare at draw venue

AFP, Cape Town

Police explosives experts using sniffer dogs were called in to the World Cup draw venue here on Friday briefly snagging last-minute preparations for the ceremony.

"We have a situation inside. There is a police action at the moment," one police officer told AFP.

Some 20 minutes later after another police officer said that the situation had been resolved and that further details would be made available later.

A police spokesman told AFP: "It's not confirmed but there is a person who allegedly made a threat."

EUROPA LEAGUE Roma in last 32

Football

AFP, Paris

Roma, Athletic Bilbao, PSV Eindhoven and Sporting Lisbon qualified for the knockout phase of the Europa League on Thursday.

At Rome's Stadio Olimpico, Roma beat Basel 2-1. Midfielder Benjamin Huggel headed the Swiss side into an 18th-minute lead but Roma quickly drew level via a Francesco Totti penalty.

The Serie A heavyweights went ahead when Mirko Vucinic finished a sweeping move with a low, left-footed strike just before the hour but there was a huge scare for Claudio Ranieri's men with three minutes to play when Basel's Swiss international striker Alexander Frei flicked a shot against the bar.

Roma now lead Basel by a point in Group E, with Premier League representatives Fulham a point behind the Swiss side after overcoming CSKA Sofia 1-0 in west London through Zoltan Gera's first-half effort.

Roma visit Sofia, who are now eliminated, in their final group match, with Fulham travelling to Basel, meaning the Italian side will qualify as one of the group's two top sides.

Goals in either half from Fernando Llorente and Mikel San Jose earned Bilbao a 2-0 win at Austria Vienna, taking them into the last 32 alongside Group Leaders Werder Bremen, who beat Portuguese side Nacional 4-1.

An injury-time own goal from Tomas Repka gave PSV Eindhoven a 1-0 victory over Sparta Prague after a niggly match at the Philips Stadium, enabling the Dutch club to secure top spot in Group K.

FC Copenhagen moved level on seven points with Sparta by beating CFR Cluj 2-0,

thereby eliminating the Romanians from the competition, and the Danish side will go through if they avoid defeat at home to Sparta in their last game.

Group D leaders Sporting Lisbon needed just a point at home to Heerenveen but they had to wait until the first minute of injury time for Leonardo Grimi to cancel out Oussama Assaidi's 47th-minute opener and secure a 1-1 draw.

Grimi's goal enabled Hertha Berlin to climb above Heerenveen into second place after they won 1-0 at Latvian outfit FK Ventspils despite having goalscorer Raffael sent off for two bookable offences late on.

Hertha are six points adrift at the bottom of the German first division but will host Sporting in their final group game knowing a draw would take them through.

Toulouse maintained their hopes of a berth in the next round with a 1-0 home win over Partizan Belgrade in Group J.

The Ligue 1 side won thanks to a 54th-minute strike from Norwegian forward Daniel Braaten and moved a point behind second-placed Club Brugge in Group J.

The Belgian club drew 0-0 at already-qualified defending champions Shakhtar Donetsk and will host Toulouse in a winner-takes-all final group match.

Panathinaikos could have progressed with a draw at already-qualified Galatasaray in Group F but lost 1-0 and now need to draw at home to Dinamo Bucharest, 2-1 winners at home to Sturm Graz, to join the Turkish side in the next stage.

Everton, Benfica, Hamburg, Fenerbahce, Red Bull Salzburg and Villareal all confirmed their places in the knockout phase on Wednesday.

Last chance for City

AFP, London



Any lingering hopes Manchester City entertain of getting involved in a Premier League title race in their first full season of being bankrolled from Abu Dhabi will be extinguished if they fail to beat Chelsea on Saturday.

The league leaders arrive at Eastlands with a 14-point advantage over City, who have slipped to seventh after a run of seven consecutive draws.

It already looks like a virtually unbridgeable gap and Chelsea have acquired a distinct air of champions-elect after following up wins over Liverpool and Manchester United earlier in the season with last weekend's 3-0 victory at Arsenal.

United, who trail Chelsea by five points, travel to West Ham while Arsenal will seek to get their campaign back on track at home to Stoke.

Steven Gerrard makes his 500th appearance for Liverpool at Blackburn while third-placed Tottenham travel to Everton on Sunday.

Despite a blip in midweek, when a second string side was knocked out of the League Cup by Blackburn, the confidence in the Chelsea camp was underlined by Portugal defender Ricardo Carvalho, who described the current squad as stronger than the one which won the club's first title in 50 years in 2004-05.

Carvalho was a key figure in what was Jose Mourinho's first season in charge, during which Chelsea lost only one league match and conceded only 15 goals.

City's spirits were lifted by a 3-0 win over Arsenal in the League Cup in midweek and manager Mark Hughes insists

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday

Arsenal v Stoke City, Aston Villa v Hull, Blackburn v Liverpool, Manchester City v Chelsea (1730 GMT), Portsmouth v Burnley (1245 GMT), West Ham v Manchester Utd, Wigan v Birmingham, Wolves v Bolton.

Sunday

Everton v Tottenham (1600), Fulham v Sunderland

Becks takes centre stage

Football

AFP, Cape Town

David Beckham took centre stage in England's campaign to host the 2018 World Cup on Thursday, using his star quality to bolster a bid that has recently appeared to be floundering.

Visiting a football development project in the Khayelitsha township, Beckham told reporters that England could stage a hugely successful World Cup next week if necessary.

Beckham's statement said the Ivory Coast star had "sustained a minor tear to his upper left thigh" and that the injury would sideline him for "around two weeks".

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the multi-cultural nature of contemporary English society, the global popularity of the Premier League and the important legacy that would be left by the World Cup.

"There are not many countries where you can have Brazil and Portugal and so on coming to our country and for there to be lots of their fans already there," Beckham said. "That's a special thing for us."

"We have one of the biggest leagues in the world but you can't get over-confident that just because we have that we will automatically be given the World Cup. It takes more than that to win a World Cup. The positives are there but there is

still a lot of hard work to be done."

Beckham added: "Football is in our culture, in our DNA, it's in us from the moment we are brought into this world, from when we are born and that's something we will always have."

England's bid team are hoping Beckham can do what Franz Beckenbauer did for Germany when they won the right to host the 2006 tournament and the 34-year-old is aware of how much is resting on his ability to impress and charm key decision-makers.

"My experience of being involved in the Olympic cam-



English midfielder David Beckham arrives at the England stand at the bidding countries media expo in Cape Town on Friday.