



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo (L) celebrates one of his two goals with teammate Angel di Maria (R) during their Primera Liga encounter against Getafe at the Alfonso Perez Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Real edge Getafe

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 18th and 19th league goals of the season as Real Madrid started 2011 with a tense 3-2 win at derby rivals Getafe on Monday to close to within two points of champions Barcelona at the league summit.

Portuguese star Ronaldo smashed home an 11th-minute penalty to open the scoring before Angel di Maria set up German international Mesut Ozil for a second on 19 minutes.

Ronaldo grabbed his second on 57 minutes after Getafe had got a foothold in the game with a goal from Madrid old boy Daniel Parejo and Real notched their sixth consecutive win in all competitions, surviving a late scare after Juan Albin pulled another goal back for Getafe six minutes from time.

Barcelona had defeated Levante 2-1 at home on Sunday to record an 11th straight league win with Pedro Rodriguez scoring both goals.

Real had first choice centre-backs Pepe and Ricardo Carvalho suspended so Spanish internationals Raul Albiol and Sergio Ramos were the makeshift partnership in central defence.

With Argentine striker Gonzalo Higuain out injured for the season, French forward Karim Benzema has a lifeline to resurrect his Real career and started

against Getafe.

Real got off to the perfect start in 2011 winning a penalty in the 11th minute with Angel di Maria going down after having his shirt tugged by Jose Mane.

Ronaldo stepped up and smashed an unstoppable spot-kick into the left hand corner for his 18th goal of the campaign.

Di Maria was the provider for the second goal eight minutes later sliding a brilliant pass to Ozil, who rounded the goalkeeper and rolled into an empty net.

Madrid had thumped Levante 8-0 in the Kings Cup in their last match prior to Christmas. However, Getafe showed much more resilience and pulled a goal back on 28 minutes through Madrid old boy Daniel Parejo.

The 21-year-old Parejo, who Real farmed out to English side QPR on loan before selling him to Getafe, sneaked past two Real players before curling in a fine shot.

Getafe were on a run of four straight league wins and came out full of belief in the second half, but a defensive error proved costly as Benzema fed Ronaldo to slot home his second on 57 minutes.

Earlier on Monday Villarreal made it eight league wins from nine at home defeating lowly Almeria 2-0 at El Madrigal to move five points clear of fourth-placed Valencia.

Centre-back Jose Catala finished off a Borja Valero set-piece on 22 minutes and Valero curled in a 58th free-kick to get himself on the scoresheet to seal a win that keeps them nestled in third.

RESULTS

Getafe 2 (Parejo 28, Albin 84) Real Madrid 3 (Ronaldo 11-pen, 57, Ozil 19)
Villarreal 2 (Catala 22, Borja Valero 58) Almeria 0
Real Zaragoza 2 (Sinama-Pongolle 10, Braulio 90+1) Real Sociedad 1 (X. Prieto 33)
Atletico Madrid 0 Racing Santander 0
Real Mallorca 3 (Nsue 38, Victor

IN BRIEF

City suffer twin blow

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City managed Roberto Mancini confirmed Tuesday that David Silva and Mario Balotelli have both been ruled out of Wednesday's crucial Premier League clash at Arsenal.

The pair have both suffered knee injuries, with Silva possibly out for two weeks.

"It is a big problem," admitted Mancini. "Neither of them will be available."

"David has been an important player for us and has been doing well recently," said Mancini.

"Hopefully, he will be back for the Wolves game on January 15. Mario might be back for the FA Cup tie at Leicester on Sunday."

Frank extends Ajax stay

AFP, The Hague

Former Holland international Frank De Boer has signed a deal with Ajax keeping him as the former European champions' coach through to June 2014, the club said on its website on Monday.

De Boer, 40 and in his first management post, had been in temporary charge since Martin Jol stepped down on December 6.

He had previously coached the Ajax youth team before being Bert van Marwijk's assistant to the Dutch national side for the past two seasons.

Boukari joins Rennes

AFP, Rennes

Togolese international striker Razak Boukari has signed a four-and-a-half year deal with Rennes on Monday from French first division rivals Lens.

The 23-year-old arrived in Lens in the 2006-2007 season on a five-year deal from French lower league side Chateauroux.

Brittany outfit Rennes are currently riding high in the French league one point behind leaders Lille.

Government fan of Milan

AFP, Rome

Italy Prime Minister and AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi claimed on Tuesday that his club has the backing of the country's government.

Berlusconi visited the team at a preparation camp in Rome ahead of Thursday's trip to Cagliari in Sardinia.

And after doing so he bizarrely claimed that Milan's success is directly tied to national happiness.

"When Milan win everyone in Parliament celebrates with me and there are happy faces, but when we lose everyone is a little sad," said the extrovert premier.

Reid out for 6 weeks

AFP, London

West Brom midfielder Steven Reid will be sidelined for at least six weeks after suffering a torn cartilage, the English Premier League club confirmed on Tuesday.

Reid limped off during Albion's 2-1 home reversal by Manchester United on Saturday and will be out of action until mid-February after undergoing surgery.

Rovers make Anselotti keeps faith

AFP, Blackburn



English Premier League side Blackburn confirmed Tuesday they have made an ambitious 24.6-million-euro (32.9-million-dollar) move for AC Milan's Brazilian midfielder Ronaldinho.

The club's new Indian owners Venky's revealed that their local office in Brazil is negotiating a three-year deal with Ronaldinho's manager and they are prepared to do whatever it takes to land the former World Player of the Year.

Venky's chairman Anuradha Desai told BBC Radio Lancashire: "He (Ronaldinho) is keen to play in the EPL (English Premier League) and I think that goes in our favour."

"To be precise (it is) 7.6m euros (10.1m dollars) for first year and about 8.5m euros (11.3m dollars) for the second and third years."

Blackburn manager Steve Kean welcomed the move as a statement of intent from the new owners.

"I know there has been contact made by the owners to representatives of Ronaldinho but I don't know how far down the line it is and whether it will actually happen," he said.

"If any Premier League manager was asked if they wanted to sign someone who has been World Player of the Year twice they would be interested."

"That is something that puts us on the map in terms of trying to bring players of that stature to the club."

"Everyone should look at it as a positive because if we can attract players - maybe not that individual if it doesn't happen - but players of that stature I think it has been a long time since we have been able to do that."

Milan complete Cassano deal

AFP, Rome



Controversial Italian forward Antonio Cassano's transfer from Sampdoria to AC Milan was officialised on Monday.

The 28-year-old had already joined his new team-mates at their winter training camp in Dubai on December 27.

His move came following a falling out with Samp president Riccardo Garrone in October after Cassano allegedly gravely insulted the club chief.

He was frozen out of the first team picture as Samp moved to have his contract terminated but an arbitration body ruled against the club in December while deeming that the player's salary should be halved.

Milan were quick to move in and although there was an initial stumbling block relating to a five million euro payment still owed by Samp to Cassano's previous club Real Madrid, the two Italian clubs and the forward soon found a resolution to the problem, each contributing to the financial settlement.

Cassano, one of Italy's two enfants terribles - the other being Manchester City's Mario Balotelli - has been welcomed by his new team-mates.

"We're expecting a lot from him, he's a bonus to the team," said AC Milan defender Massimo Oddo.

The former Roma star has attracted controversy throughout his career for on-pitch tantrums and disputes off it with coaches, presidents and team-mates.

AFP, London



Chelsea head to bottom of the table Wolves on Wednesday with manager Carlo Ancelotti insisting all is not lost for his defending champions in their quest to retain the Premier League title.

The Blues, held to a 3-3 draw by Aston Villa last time out, could kick-off nine points behind Manchester United if the leaders beat Stoke at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

But Italian boss Ancelotti was in defiant mood, saying: "First they (United) have to win (the game in hand)."

"Second I think the gap is not a wide gap. We have to beat them here (on March 1) and then we can say something about the title."

"It's not over because we are improving and I think we can say something again in this season."

Third place second when Arsenal face Manchester City at the Emirates Stadium in a match where victory for the hosts would see the Gunners go above the expensive

FIXTURES

(1945GMT unless stated)

Wednesday

Arsenal v Manchester City, Aston Villa v Sunderland, Blackburn v Liverpool (2000GMT), Bolton v Wigan (2000GMT), Everton v Tottenham (2000GMT), Newcastle v West Ham,

side assembled by Roberto Mancini.

Arsenal recovered from the disappointment of drawing with Wigan to beat Birmingham 3-0 and manager Arsene Wenger said: "You can see we have the belief in our game now. That is what will make the title race really interesting."

Liverpool, fresh from a last-gasp win over Bolton, will look to give under-pressure manager Roy Hodgson more

breathing space away to Blackburn, even though some reports have suggested the Reds' owners are determined to dump the former Fulham boss.

Nevertheless, Joe Cole -- who scored the winner against Bolton -- insisted Hodgson still had the support of the dressing room.

"We are all behind the manager. We all want to put this club in the right direction and keep working hard," said the England midfielder.

Aston Villa manager Gerard Houllier has also had his position called into question in recent weeks but the Frenchman, whose side are at home to Sunderland.



Malaga's new signing Brazilian forward Julio Baptista heads the ball during his presentation at the Rosaleda Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



STAR Cricket

Australia v England

Fifth Test, Day 3

Live from 5:00am

TEN Cricket

South Africa v India

Third Test, Day 4

Live from 2:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

English Premiership

Arsenal v Man City

Live from 1:40am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

Hopman Cup

Great Britain v France

Live from 3:00pm

English Premiership



Premier Division Cricket League

Kalabagan v Orient SC

Venue: SBNC

BKSP v Surjo Torun

Venue: DCS

Gazi Tank v Prime Doleshwar

Venue: BKSP-2

Bangladesh League

Brothers Union v Arambagh

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal