

Tough test for Real

AFP, Madrid



Title hopefuls Real Madrid face their toughest home league match of the season so far when they host third-place Villarreal at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Real have a flawless eight wins at home and hope to make Villarreal their latest victims to stay in touch with league leaders Barcelona who are currently two points ahead.

Mourinho has been short of strikers with Argentine attacker Gonzalo Higuain out injured.

However, Brazilian international playmaker Kaka is back from injury to boost his attacking options.

Champions Barcelona are on a run of 11 consecutive league wins and aim to keep the ball rolling with victory at Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday.

In other matches, Valencia take on Levante in the city derby on Sunday looking to get over their painful cup exit to Villarreal on Thursday.

Valencia sit fourth, three points above fifth-placed Espanyol, and repeating last season's third-place finish is the target.

Espanyol host third from bottom Real Zaragoza on

Sunday aiming to get over a recent blip of three successive league losses and a last 16 Kings Cup exit.

Espanyol were defeated 2-1 on aggregate by Atletico Madrid after drawing the second leg 1-1 on Thursday so now all that is left is the league.

Elsewhere Sevilla ended a run of five consecutive defeats with a 1-0 win over Osasuna on Sunday and go into Saturday's match at Real Sociedad with wind in their sails after progressing in the Kings Cup.

Holdes Sevilla crushed Malaga 3-0 to reach the last eight and now bid to improve on their 10th position in the league.

FIXTURES

Saturday

Malaga v Athletic Bilbao (1700 GMT), Real Sociedad v Sevilla (1900 GMT), Deportivo La Coruna v Barcelona (2100 GMT)

Sunday

(1600 GMT unless stated)
Real Mallorca v Almeria, Osasuna v Getafe, Espanyol v Real Zaragoza, Racing Santander v Sporting Gijon, Real Madrid v Villarreal (1800 GMT), Levante v Valencia (2000 GMT)

Monday

Hercules v Atletico Madrid



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan midfielder Thiago Motta (R) heads in one of his two goals against Napoli during their Serie A encounter at San Siro on Thursday.

Inter bounce back 'Qatar WC in winter'

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan gave new coach Leonardo a flying start to his San Siro career with a 3-1 win at home to Napoli on Thursday as

neighbours AC Milan moved five points clear at the top with a 1-0 win at Cagliari.

Former Milan boss Leonardo, who replaced Rafael Benitez, saw Thiago Motta grab a brace while Esteban Cambiasso added the other to sink Napoli, who replied through Michele Pazienza.

Inter are still 13 points behind Milan in seventh but they do have two games in hand.

Napoli dropped to third, six points off the leaders and just one behind Lazio who drew 0-0 at Genoa.

Inter enjoyed the best possible start at the San Siro as brilliant one touch football between Goran Pandev and Dejan Stankovic sent Motta through to hit a first time volley beyond Morgan De Sanctis on three minutes.

However Napoli were level on 25 minutes as Pazienza headed home an

Ezequiel Lavezzi corner.

Cavani then teed up Christian Maggio who should have done better than drag his shot wide of the far post.

On 35 minutes Diego Milito should have given Inter the lead but somehow spooned over from six yards.

Yet two minutes later they were in front as Cambiasso arrived late and at pace in the box to head home Maicon's cross.

Napoli's Marek Hamsik stabbed wide from an early second half chance before it was three as Motta sent a brilliant header into the top corner on 55 minutes.

Inter captain Javier Zanetti had the best chance thereafter but pulled his effort across goal.

Sierra Leone international Rodney Strasser pounced five minutes from time to score the only goal of the game in Sardinia as AC Milan beat Cagliari 1-0.

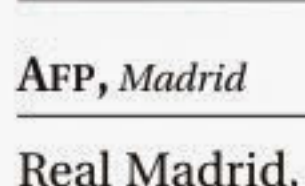
Controversial signing Antonio Cassano, on his debut as a substitute, slipped in the 20-year-old to beat Michael Agazzi in the Cagliari goal.

RESULTS

Juventus 1 (Legrottaglie 60)
Parma 4 (Giovenco 41, 48, Crespo 62-pen, Palladino 90)
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 5)
Fiorentina 1 (Santana 67)
Brescia 1 (Eder 49) **Cesena 2** (Jimenez 33, Ceccarelli 40)
Cagliari 0 **AC Milan 1** (Strasser 85)
Genoa 0 Lazio 0
Lecce 0 **Bari 1** (Okaka 77)
Palermo 3 (Miccoli 37, Migliaccio 50, Maccarone 79) Sampdoria 0
Roma 4 (Borriello 4, 47, Vucinic 85, 90) Catania 2 (Silvestre 28, Maxi Lopez 38)
Udinese 2 (Sanchez 14, Di Natale 25) Chievo 0
Inter Milan 3 (Motta 3, 55, Cambiasso 37) Napoli 1

Real lose, still make last 8

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid, cushioned by an 8-0 first leg lead, secured their place in the Spanish Cup quarterfinals on Thursday despite a 2-0 defeat in the return match at Levante.

Levante's two second-half goals by Xisco Nadal and Sergio Gonzalez were not enough to overturn Real's huge advantage secured over the Valencia-based side last month and the Spanish giants pushed through 8-2 on aggregate.

Last season's runners-up Atletico Madrid, who took a 1-0 lead to Espanyol, made it through to the last eight after clinching a 1-1 draw to wrap up a 2-1 aggregate win.

Betis ended the hopes of top-flight Getafe with a 3-1 win that overturned the Madrid's club's 2-1 advantage from last month's first leg. The Seville-based side are now the only lower-tier club left in the competition.

Centre forward Jorge Molina sprinted through and struck the ball past Getafe keeper Oscar Ustari in the 56th minute to open the scoring for Betis.

Betis striker Ruben Castrol netted twice more and Getafe substitute Francisco Casquero scored his side's only goal, allowing the Seville-based team to advance 4-3 on aggregate.

"As a first division side we have had the tendency to relax. We only reacted when we went 2-0 down. They were much better than us. We have been humbled," said Getafe coach Michel Gonzalez.

Almeria scored four first-half goals in a 4-3 win at Mallorca to advance 8-6 on aggregate while Villarreal made it to the quarterfinals after defeating Valencia 4-2 following their goalless draw last month.



PHOTO: AFP

Villarreal striker Giuseppe Rossi celebrates his goal against Valencia during their Copa del Rey clash at the El Madrigal Stadium on Thursday.

Quagliarella out for season

AFP, Rome

Juventus and Italy striker Fabio Quagliarella's season is over after tests on Friday revealed he has torn a cruciate knee ligament.

The 27-year-old was stretched off early during Thursday's humbling 4-1 home defeat to Parma that left Juve eight points off the top of the Serie A table in fifth.

And they suffered a further blow with the news that Quagliarella's cruciate ligament has been torn meaning he faces four to six months on the sidelines.

Juve have moved to replace Quagliarella with veteran former Italy forward Luca Toni, according to Italian press reports.

Toni is due to undergo a medical on Friday afternoon before the official announcement of his signing.

However, if his signing is a boost, there was worse news as Brazil midfielder Felipe Melo was banned for three games for his dismissal against Parma for kicking Massimo Paci in the face.



NEO Cricket
New Zealand v Pakistan
First Test, Day 2
Live from 4:00am
TEN Action+
La Liga
Sociedad v Sevilla
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)
Deportivo v Barcelona



Premier Division Cricket League
BKSP v Orient SC
Venue: KSOAS
Old DOHS v Prime Doleshwar
Venue: BKSP-2
Gazi Tank v Surjo Torun
Venue: SBNC
Bangladesh League
Mohammedan v Ctg Mohammedan
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal

IN brief

Podolski named skipper

AFP, Cologne

Germany international striker Lukas Podolski was named the new captain of struggling Bundesliga side Cologne on Thursday, succeeding defender Youssef Mohamad.

"It's a great honour for me to become captain and it's an enormous challenge," said the 25-year-old, after being handed the armband at his childhood club by coach Frank Schaefer.

Cologne are third from bottom in the Bundesliga and firmly in the relegation zone having sacked previous coach Zvonimir Soldo in October and general manager Michael Meier in November.

Hoffenheim, Ba fall out

AFP, Berlin

Hoffenheim striker Demba Ba looks to have played his last game for the Bundesliga side after refusing to join his teammates at a winter training camp.

Ba, 25, who is under contract with Hoffenheim until 2013, is keen to play in the English Premier League where he has been linked with the likes of Stoke City, West Ham and Fulham.

"I can't imagine him ever playing for us again after the way he's behaved," declared Hoffenheim sporting director Ernst Tanner on Thursday.

Macheda trains with Samp

AFP, Rome

Teenage Manchester United striker Federico Macheda was training with Sampdoria on Friday while waiting for his proposed loan move to be finalised, Italian press reported.

Macheda is hoping to be available for Sunday's home clash against Roma, one of the teams from the city where he was born, although the 19-year-old came through Lazio's youth programme before joining United in 2007.

However, should the paperwork not be completed in time, Macheda could then make his debut a week later against his former club at Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

Algeria scraps matches

AFP, Algiers

All top-level soccer matches scheduled in Algeria on Friday and Saturday have been scrapped, the national football league announced, after days of riots in the capital and a dozen other areas.

The league decided to "postpone all meetings scheduled on the weekend of 7 and 8 January 2011 in the first division professional football championship," it said in a statement on its website.

All second division and national amateur divi-