

Barca thrash Depor

AFP, Madrid



Ballon d'Or finalists Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta scored a goal apiece as champions Barcelona continued their flawless away record with a 4-0 win at Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday to move five points clear of Real

Madrid.

Messi curled in a terrific left-footed free-kick early in the second half for his 18th league goal of the season while Spanish World Cup winner Iniesta scored a sensational, late individual goal as Barcelona made it a perfect nine wins on the road.

Spanish internationals David Villa and Pedro Rodriguez were also on target as Barcelona recorded a 12th consecutive league victory to put pressure on rivals Real Madrid to defeat Villarreal at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Barcelona have all three finalists for the 2010 Ballon d'Or award, with the winner to be announced on Monday.

The other finalist, Spanish international Xavi Hernandez, was rested along with fellow first-teamers Dani Alves and Sergi Busquets as manager Pep Guardiola rotated his squad for what was their third game in seven intense days.

Although Villa did not make the final cut for the Ballon d'Or, he has been a revelation in his debut Barcelona season and the 40 million euro signing from Valencia opened the scoring on 26 minutes.

Messi fed Villa with a deft pass and the striker shot through the goalkeeper's legs

to give the visitors a much-deserved lead.

Iniesta then produced a sublime pass on 37 minutes and French full back Eric Abidal, who scored his first ever Barcelona goal in the Kings Cup in midweek, thought he had scored his first league goal for the club but was denied by an offside flag.

Six minutes into the second half Messi doubled Barca's lead with a sensational free-kick that goalkeeper Daniel Aranzubia could only watch and admire.

Messi was hauled down just outside the penalty area and he dusted himself down to curl a precise free-kick around the wall and into the top left hand corner.

On 78 minutes it was Iniesta's turn to show why he is being considered for the Ballon d'Or title, cutting inside off the right flank before curling in a fine shot into the far corner.

Two minutes later Pedro made it 4-0 before Barcelona gave Dutch international midfielder Ibrahim Afellay his league debut following his transfer window move from PSV Eindhoven.

Champions League hopefuls Sevilla continued their perfect start to 2011 when in-form Mali striker Frederic Kanoute scored twice in a 3-2 comeback win at Real Sociedad.

Two goals in as many minutes turned the game with Kanoute, after 63 minutes, and Brazilian striker Luis Fabiano, in the 65th, making it a perfect two league wins from two in the new year for Sevilla, who move up to ninth, five points off the top four.

It was a third win in seven days for Manzano's side, who had beaten Osasuna 1-0 in the league on Sunday, before crushing Malaga 3-0 in the Kings Cup on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals of the competition 8-3 on aggregate.

RESULTS

Malaga 1 (Demichelis 80) Athletic Bilbao 1 (Martinez 90)
Real Sociedad 2 (Rivas 23, Lorente 43)
Sevilla 3 (Kanoute 25, 65, Fabiano 63)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 **Barcelona** 4 (Villa 26, Messi 51,



Barcelona star Lionel Messi is about to score the second goal against Deportivo La Coruna during their Primera Liga encounter at the Municipal de Riazor Stadium on Saturday.

Theo says sorry for diving

AFP, London

Arsenal winger Theo Walcott apologised for diving to try to win a penalty during his side's 1-1 draw against Leeds in the FA Cup third round on Saturday.

With Arsene Wenger's team trailing 1-0 in the closing minutes at the Emirates Stadium, England winger Walcott tumbled to the turf after a challenge from Alex Bruce in the penalty area.

Referee Phil Dowd initially awarded the penalty but, after consulting with his assistant, he changed his mind.



Premier Division Cricket League

Mohammedan v Victoria
Venue: KSOAS
Abahani v Orient
Venue: BKSP-2
Biman v Kalabagan
Venue: SBNCIS

Bangladesh League

Arambagh v Multijodha
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur
Ctg Abahani v Sheikh Jamal
Time: 2:30pm

IN brief

Angola appoint Vidigal

AFP, Johannesburg

Lito Vidigal succeeded caretaker Zeca Amaral as coach of Angola Saturday, the national football federation said in Luanda.

After a playing and coaching career spanning more than a decade in Portugal, Vidigal returns home to take over a national team whose fortunes have slumped since a first World Cup appearance five years ago in Germany.

Angola suffered a 3-0 drubbing by Uganda in their opening 2012 African Nations Cup qualifier last September and, after edging Guinea Bissau 1-0, tackle Kenya during March and June hoping to get the campaign back on track.

Robben back in groove

AFP, Munich

Dutch winger Arjen Robben made his long-awaited return after 231 days on the sidelines with hamstring problems as Bayern Munich thrashed local side Al-Wakrah 4-0 in a friendly in Doha on Saturday.

Robben played the first half before withdrawing as he remains some way away from match fitness, having last appeared for the Bavarians in the Champions League final loss to Inter Milan last May.

Robben is hoping to be fit for Bayern's first match after the winter break which pits them against Wolfsburg on January 15.

Ribery eyes two titles

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich will return to winning ways in the second half of the Bundesliga season and can win two titles, the German giants' France international Franck Ribery said on Sunday.

"The best would be all three, of course. But two are definitely possible," Ribery told German daily Bild at Bayern's winter break training camp in Doha.

But the Bavarian giants are still in the German Cup and in the Champions League, where they are due to meet Inter Milan in the last 16 in a re-run of last season's final won by the Italian giants 2-0.

Singapore to axe team

REUTERS, Singapore

Singapore is considering disbanding its underperforming national soccer team in a development that has shocked the players, local media reported on Sunday.

The national team had a poor run last year, the final straw their failure to reach the semifinals of the AFF Cup last month, prompting Football Association of Singapore (FAS) chief Zainudin Nordin to announce a radical overhaul.

"It's scary. I expected to hear calls to drop players after we went out of the (AFF) Suzuki Cup, but I never expected the whole team to be dropped," forward Khairul Amri told the New Paper.

Only four players from the AFF Cup squad are

Stevenage stun Magpies China start with a win

AFP, London



CUP

Lowly Stevenage pulled off the giant-killing shock of the FA Cup third round on Saturday, upsetting Newcastle 3-1 on a day when several Premier League clubs were sent crashing out.

Stevenage -- in the fourth tier of English football and ranked 73 places below the Magpies -- advanced to the next round courtesy of a second half Mike Williamson own goal, a long-range Michael Bostwick effort and an injury time strike from Peter Winn.

Stevenage took a deserved lead on 50 minutes, when Stacy Long cut in from the left and fired a shot goalwards only for his shot to take a huge deflection off Williamson to wrongfoot Magpies keeper Tim Krul.

Five minutes later and Stevenage were in dreamland, Bostwick picking up the ball on the edge of the area and lashing a ferocious shot in off the post from 20 yards to spark delirium at Broadhall Way.

Newcastle's hopes of staging a fightback unravelled in the closing minutes when second half substitute Cheik Tiote was sent off for a two-footed tackle.

Joey Barton threw Newcastle a lifeline with an injury time screamer but Stevenage responded immediately with Winn's strike.

The result was comfortably the biggest

upset on a day when the Wembley dreams of three other Premier League teams -- Sunderland, West Brom and Blackpool -- bit the dust.

In a match that saw former Manchester United team-mates Steve Bruce and Paul Ince come up against each other at the Stadium of Light, Ince's Notts County scored a 2-1 victory thanks to goals from Craig Westcarr and Lee Hughes.

Southampton accounted for an under-strength Blackpool in a 2-0 win at St Mary's with goals from Lee Barnard and Guly Do Prado.

Championship side Reading meanwhile secured their 1-0 victory over the visiting Baggies thanks to a Shane Long goal.

Elsewhere, Bolton needed two goals in the last 10 minutes from Kevin Davies and Johan Elmander to squeeze a 2-0 win over non-league York at the Reebok Stadium.

Wolves meanwhile were held to a 2-2 draw at Championship side Doncaster.

Premier League Stoke were also held by Championship opposition, Tuncay Sanli giving them a 1-1 draw against promotion-chasing Cardiff who had taken the lead at the Britannia Stadium with a Michael Chopra goal on eight minutes.

There were no such problems for Fulham who ran riot at Craven Cottage to swat aside Peterborough 6-2 while Everton also had a comfortable victory at Scunthorpe, cruising past their Championship opponents 5-1.

Dalglish feels honoured

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool legend Kenny Dalglish, the last manager to bring the English league title to Anfield in 1990, admitted on Saturday it was "a great honour" to be back in charge.

Dalglish was named as the man to bring back the glory days to the former European champions after the unhappy six-month reign of Roy Hodgson was brought to an end.

Liverpool's owners New England Sports Ventures (NESV) had suggested after last week's home defeat to Wolves they were looking for alternatives, and Dalglish's first task will be to engineer a win in Sunday's FA Cup third round tie at Manchester United.

"It's a great honour to be asked to come back, it's unfortunate circumstances because a very good man with great dignity and integrity has lost his job," Dalglish told Sky Sports News after cutting short his holiday in Dubai.

Asked how big a task it would be to turn around the season for a Liverpool team struggling at 12th place in the Premier League, the Scot said: "We'll find out, I've only come off the plane, so we'll find out."

Dalglish -- who had sought the job last summer before Hodgson's appointment -- steps in for his second stint in the Anfield hot seat, his first spell between 1985 and 1991 harvested three league titles and two FA Cup titles.

Speaking about the decision to put the Liverpool legend in charge for the rest of the season, Henry added: "We are delighted that Kenny Dalglish has agreed to step in and manage the team for Sunday's FA Cup tie at Old Trafford and for the remainder of the season."

Football

AFP, Doha

China's new generation made a winning start to their Asian Cup campaign with a 2-0 victory against 10-man Kuwait in their Group A opener at the Al Gharafa Stadium here on Saturday.

Kuwait went a man down in the first half when Mesad Nada was sent off for an ugly foul on Yang Xu and China made their numerical advantage count when Zhang Linpeng broke the deadlock shortly before the hour.

Deng Zhouxiang doubled the lead with a free-kick, to put Gao Hongbo's team -- whose average age is just 24 -- level with Uzbekistan at the top of the group. Uzbekistan beat Qatar 2-0 in the first group game on Friday.

Kuwait triumphed at both the West Asian Championship and the Gulf Cup late last year and they came close to taking an early lead here through Yousef Naser and then Waleed Ali.

They looked the more assured side but Nada's needless dismissal prompted a reshuffle; the defender seeing red in the 36th minute for jabbing his foot into Yang Xu's groin following a tussle near the touchline.

A tearful Nada hid his face in his shirt as he left the playing arena, but the cost of his rashness was made immediately clear as

coach Goran Tufegdzcic elected to replace the enterprising Naser with defender Fahad Awad.

Kuwait could have gone into half-time ahead, however, but a stretching Hussain Fadhel toed the ball wide from close range following a free-kick.

Ali almost marked his 100th Kuwait appearance with a goal when his curling free-kick was pushed away by China goalkeeper Yang Zhi early in the second period.

Yang Zhi then survived a major scare when he dropped a Bader Al Mutwa free-kick right on his goal-line, with referee Benjamin Williams turning a deaf ear to Kuwaiti claims the ball had crossed the line.

China were struggling to capitalise on their man advantage, until a stroke of luck saw them take the lead in the 58th minute.

A corner from the left fell to Zhang on the edge of his box and his left-foot volley may well have flashed wide had Fadhel not unwittingly diverted the ball into the bottom-left corner as he attempted to clear.

Scenting a knockout blow, China continued to push forward.

Yang Xu fired over, before Deng stepped up to bend a left-footed shot inside the left-hand post from a 67th-minute free-kick.

It secured a perfect start for the East Asian champions, who would have won by more had Nawaf Al Khaldi not denied the marauding Rong Hao with nine minutes remaining.



China defender Zhang Linpeng (front R) leads the celebration after scoring the opening goal against Kuwait during their Asian Cup clash at the Al-Gharafa Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP