



Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi (L) scores the winning goal against Athletic Bilbao during their Primera Liga clash at Nou Camp on Sunday.

Messi rescues Barcelona

AFP, Madrid

Argentine Lionel Messi scored a vital 77th-minute winner as Barcelona laboured to a 2-1 home win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday to restore their five-point lead over Real Madrid at the Spanish first division summit.

Barcelona looked set to drop two more points after Andoni Iraola's penalty had cancelled out David Villa's third-minute

opener, however, Messi popped up with his 25th league goal of the season to clinch the points at Camp Nou.

It was Pep Guardiola's 100th league match in charge of Barcelona and the manager was a relieved man as his side bounced back from their 2-1 Champions League defeat to Arsenal in midweek.

Real Madrid had closed to within two points of Barcelona with a 2-0 win over Levante and the Catalan club responded with a hard-fought victory.

With their 2-1 defeat at Arsenal still fresh in their minds, Barcelona were keen to get off to a good start and took the lead after just three minutes through Villa.

A diagonal pass from Xavi picked out the run of right back Dani Alves and the Brazilian laid the ball back for Villa to stroke home his 16th league goal of the season.

Bilbao could have equalised in the 10th minute with Fernando Llorente tricking Gerard Pique with a great drag back before crossing for Markel Susaeta, who headed just wide.

Villa was looking increasingly threatening and almost scored his second on 26 minutes but his brilliant chip came back off the crossbar.

The visitors had their chances though and stand-in goal-keeper Jose Pinto, deputising for the injured Victor Valdes, was forced to produce a fine diving save to stop a Llorente header in the 35th minute.

Irish players visit PLAN

Carlo's last chance

AFP, London

Carlo Ancelotti has backed his Chelsea flops to keep their season alive with a victory over FC Copenhagen in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Ancelotti's beleaguered team head to Denmark for the first leg of their last 16 tie with morale at a low ebb after Saturday's FA Cup exit against Everton.

Chelsea are a club in crisis in the aftermath of that fourth round replay defeat and Ancelotti's job will be in severe danger if Copenhagen eliminate the Blues from Europe.

Ancelotti has already conceded that the Premier League title is out of reach as Chelsea are 12 points behind leaders United and, with even a top four finish far from certain, the Italian knows it is essential his team show signs of life in the Champions League.

"It's not an easy moment, obviously, because we have to play very important games," Ancelotti said.

"Sometimes it's good to play tough games because you are more focused, more competitive, so we don't have to be afraid to play against Copenhagen. It could be a good motivation for us."

"We know Copenhagen very well. They are a good team, with good organisation, a dynamic team, they use a lot of speed."

"It's important to know this to prepare well for the game, and to have courage to play."

Chelsea's woeful run since November is a major stain on Ancelotti's CV but the former AC Milan coach was hired by Blues owner Roman Abramovich because of his pedigree in Europe's elite club competition.

Chelsea had reached five semifinals and one final in the Champions League during the Abramovich era before Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan eliminated the Blues at this stage last season.

Failure to retain the English title would surely be overlooked if Ancelotti could finally deliver the Champions League trophy. Abramovich has craved ever since buying the club.

Copenhagen are regarded as one of the less formidable teams left in the competition, but the Danish champions are unbeaten at home in the Champions League, including a visit from Barcelona this season.

Tigers

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poor bowling and not the decision of bowling first that caused the 87-run defeat in the first game.

"I admit we bowled badly and that is the only thing you can criticise, not the decision to bowl first. You are the same people who termed the decision crazy after we put up a 290-plus score and still lost the game. Which way you want: you can't have it both ways," Siddons reacted sharply on the criticism over his captain's decision to bowl first, pointing out the dew factor as well as the statistics.

It seemed that the whole team rallied behind the decision and there were hints if Shakib wins the toss in the next game he will do the same.

He will be the man to bowl first in the next game.

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Montella replaces Ranieri

AFP, Rome

Roma have named youth coach Vincenzo Montella as their new manager, 24 hours after the resignation of Claudio Ranieri, the Serie A club announced on Monday.

Ranieri resigned on Sunday in the aftermath of the Italian capital side's 4-3 loss at Genoa, despite having led 3-0, for Roma's fourth straight loss.

That reverse left the club lying eighth in the table and nine points off the last Champions League qualification position, which is held by their bitter city rivals Lazio.

Montella, 36, is a former Roma striker. He spent six months on loan at English Premier League side Fulham in 2007.

Known during his playing days as L'Aeroplano (the little airplane for his small stature and trademark goal celebrations) he earned 20 caps for the national team, scoring three goals.

He was a key member of the Roma side along with Francesco Totti and Argentina's Gabriel Batistuta, then coached by current England boss Fabio Capello, which won their third and last league title in 2001.

In his ten years with Roma between 1999 and 2009 he scored a total of 118 goals.

This is his first major managerial position, his only previous experience coming as coach of Roma's under-15 team.

Roma are in the process of being sold to a consortium headed by the wealthy Italian-American industrialist Thomas Di Benedetto.

The FA Cup

Arsenal were held to an embarrassing 1-1 draw by Leyton Orient in the FA Cup fifth round as the League One side snatched a last-gasp equaliser at Brisbane Road on Sunday.

Arsene Wenger's side had enjoyed a famous 2-1 win over Spanish champions Barcelona in the Champions League last 16 first leg on Wednesday, but they were brought back down to earth in east London as Orient substitute Jonathan Tehoue cancelled out Tomas Rosicky's opener.

Wenger made 10 changes from the line-up that beat Barca, with 18-year-old Spanish centre-half Ignasi Miquel making his debut, and Orient were never overawed against the under-21s.

Arsenal midfielder Rosicky broke the deadlock with a header from Nicklas Bendtner's cross in the 53rd minute.

But Orient earned a money-spinning replay at the Emirates Stadium when French striker Tehoue skipped past two defenders and smashed a powerful shot past Manuel Almunia's weak attempted save in the 89th minute.

Whatever happens in the replay the players are due a fortnight in Las Vegas at the invitation of Orient's flamboyant snooker

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

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Lyon relish Real tie

AFP, Lyon



Lyon's

Stade

Gerland

has

become

a familiar

venue for Real Madrid in

recent years but, ahead of

Tuesday's

Champions

League

last 16 first leg, it has

not been a happy hunting

ground.

In six encounters

between the sides since

2005, Real have failed to win

and the nine-time European

champions' record at Lyon

reads: played three, lost

three, scored none, con-

ceded six.

Lyon won 1-0 on home

turf when the sides met at

the same stage of last sea-

son's competition, before

Miralem Pjanic's 75th-

minute equaliser in the away

leg secured a 1-1 draw that

sent Real crashing out.

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cation position, which is held

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