



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 goalkeeper 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.

RESULTS

Getafe 0 **Racing Santander 1** (Pinillos 88-pen)

Villarreal 1 (Ruben 35) Malaga 1 (Fernandez 82)

Almeria 1 (Piatti 47) Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Aranzubia 90)

Osasuna 4 (Nekounam 13, 55, Lolo 80, Soriano 88) Espanyol 0

Sevilla 1 (Rakitic 21) Hercules 0

Barcelona 2 (Villa 3, Messi 77)

Barcelona then pressed the self-destruct button to allow the visitors to equalise four minutes after the interval.

French full back Eric Abidal sold team-mate Sergi Busquets short with a misplaced pass and the midfielder lunged in to take down Llorente and concede a penalty, which Iraola converted.

Messi came to life in the 58th minute, racing past three defenders before Fernando Amorabieta stopped him in his tracks in the box and Barcelona were furious as their penalty claims were turned down.

The breakthrough finally came in the 77th minute with Alves crossing for Messi to side-foot home with his weaker right foot.

Earlier, Villarreal missed the chance to close the gap on Champions League rivals Valencia, squandering more points in a 1-1 home draw against basement boys Malaga.

Valencia's 0-0 draw with Sporting Gijon on Saturday meant Villarreal could have gone third with victory, but Uruguayan Sebastian Fernandez scored an 82nd-minute equaliser to cancel out Marco Ruben's first-half opener.

Villarreal stay fourth, two points behind Valencia, after collecting just one point from the last nine.

In other matches, new Osasuna coach Jose Luis Mendilibar enjoyed a dream first match in charge as his side routed Espanyol 4-0 in Pamplona.

It was a fourth successive league loss for Espanyol, who stay sixth but have fallen nine points off the top four.

Sevilla took advantage of Espanyol's slip-up with a 1-0 home win over promoted Hercules to move to within three points of the top six.

Sevilla had failed to win any of their last six matches in all competitions, but Croatian Ivan Rakitic, signed from Schalke in the January transfer window, struck on 21 minutes to end that run and boost the club's European hopes.

Irish players visit PLAN

SPORTS REPORTER

Seven members of the Ireland cricket team, including the coach Phil Simmons, captain William Porterfield and the vice-captain Trent Johnson visited a Drop in Centre (DIC), supported by PLAN Bangladesh, for the street children in Rampura yesterday.

The players were visibly moved and confessed to being touched by the children's smiles. They also expressed their interest to visit other projects of PLAN Bangladesh.

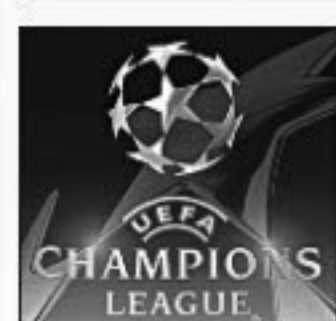
During the visit, the Irish also joked around with the young children. One team member cheekily asked the children which team they would support on Friday when Ireland would take on the Tigers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The children, however, were unfazed and replied "Bangladesh".

PLAN Bangladesh Acting Country Director, Anwar Hossain Shikder thanked the Irish team and the security staff for visiting them despite their busy schedule and preparations.

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 fantastic 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.

O'Brien minds

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away so you never know where we are going to be then as an individual or as a cricket team," said the Northamptonshire batsman.

"But it's important first to get things right here in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, move on and make a statement. If we can play well over the next five or six weeks then hopefully things will take care of themselves."

That intent of making a statement starts with the first match against Bangladesh, which will be held on Friday.

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'Aeroplanino (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.

Bangladesh lose to Singapore

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh tennis team lost 2-1 against Singapore on the opening day of pre-qualifying round in the Junior Davis Cup Asia/Oceania zone in Sri Lanka yesterday.

In the men's singles event, Delwar Hossain lost to Singapore's Haw Yang Nong 0-6, 4-6 while Rustom Ali beat counterpart Rohan Kamdar, who pulled out from the third set following a muscle injury and Ali was declared winner.

In the men's doubles Rustam-Delwar suffered a 3-6, 6-2, 6-8 defeat to Haw Yang-Kai Lee pair.

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, conceded six.

Lyon won 1-0 on home turf when the sides met at the same stage of last season's competition, before Miralem Pjanic's 75th-minute equaliser in the away leg secured a 1-1 draw that sent Real crashing out.

The French side went on to reach the semifinals for the first time in their history and president Jean-Michel Aulas is relishing the prospect of Jose Mourinho bringing his expensive squad to town.

"Even though the draw wasn't kind, I hope to beat Real Madrid over two games for the fourth time in a row," Aulas told French sport daily L'Equipe.

"Mourinho's head and his credibility are on the line, and it's the same for the president, (Florentino) Perez, but we'll do everything to beat them."

Lyon won 4-0 at home to Nancy on Friday to keep their Ligue 1 title challenge on course, although coach Claude Puel knows Real -- currently second in the Spanish top flight -- are a very different prospect.

Real won 2-0 at home to Levante on Saturday with Mesut Ozil, Xabi Alonso, and Emmanuel Adebayor on the bench and Mourinho confirmed that his big-name



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo controls the ball during a training session at their Sport City yesterday on the eve of their Champions League encounter against Lyon.

"We're preparing for this European encounter with lots more calmness but Real will be a completely different calibre of opponent," he said.

"We'll have to be capable of raising the level of our play again. We know it. It'll be a

players would be restored to the starting XI in France.

"We gave a rest to Ozil and Xabi," said the Portuguese.

"Everyone knows they will play against Lyon, who have had 24 hours more rest than us."

Orient hold Arsenal

AFP, London



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 lineup that beat Barca, with 18-year-old Spanish centre-half Ignasi Miquel making his debut, and Orient were never overawed against the underdogs.

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

promoter Barry Hearn as he had promised them the trip should they either win or get a draw.

The winners of the replay will face Premier League leaders Manchester United at Old Trafford in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Patrick Vieira fired Manchester City into the fifth round as the French midfielder's double inspired a 5-0 rout of Notts County in a fourth round replay.

Vieira, a four-time FA Cup winner with Arsenal, was on target in each half at Eastlands and Carlos Tevez, Edin Dzeko and Micah Richards also scored late on as Roberto Mancini's side booked a home clash with Aston Villa in the last 16.

Mancini's men took the lead in the 37th minute as Vieira's header from David Silva's corner deflected in off Krystian Pearce.

Vieira struck again in the 58th minute with another header, this time from Alexandar Kolarov's corner.

Tevez came on to score in the 84th minute, while Dzeko netted in the 89th minute and Richards completed the rout in the final moments.

Bolton beat Fulham 1-0 at Craven Cottage in the fifth round to secure a quarterfinal clash at Birmingham.

Fulham were unbeaten in their last six games, but they fell behind in the 19th minute when Croatian striker Ivan Klasnic pounced on a poor clearance to drill a fine volley past Mark Schwarzer.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Request

4 Movie

8 Interoffice

12 Writer

13 In due

14 Ahma-

15 Coffee

16 Runner

18 Source

20 Spotted

21 Spheres

24 Parade

28 Confirm

32 Harvard

33 — carte

34 Baghdad

36 Sailor

37 Hard

39 Flood

41 Rio

43 Casino

44 Poolroom

46 Robbery

50 Convert

55 —

56 Burden

57 Grand

58 Puginists'

59 Summer-

60 Bottle

61 Cleo-

DOWN

1 Astrin-

2 Antitoxins

3 "King —"

4 Rival of

5 Santa —

6 —

7 Con-

8 Carnival

9 Historic

10 Wrestling

11 Insepa-

17 — the

19 Miss

22 Adriatic

23 Leave

25 Sitar

26 Coagu-

27 "... oh,

28 Seduc-

29 Burn

30 Secular

31 Iso-

35 Re-

38 Grass-

40 Cee

42 —

45 Paradise

47 Corn Belt

48 Second-

49 Snare

50 Journal

51 Hostel

52 Sine-non

53 Mimic

54 Twitch

Solution time: 21 mins.

CRAB DEAIR TWA
MONO OGRE WIG
TWINPEAKS ONE
BAIRD TUSKS
DEPOT FAME
IRAN STARWARS
PSI LEAST TAI
SERGEANT CENT
ELAN FORTE
ADDON BAUM
LEO DOUBLED
OAF EDGE LILY
ELF REST YOKE

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CRYPTOQUIP

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OZCOGZ HIC GCSZ QC SNYNQ
T K Z J Q T N X N X W N T X
DZQJCOCGNY: "IZGGC, WZGIN!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: POPULAR SHOW IN WHICH SINGLE PEOPLE IN A CERTAIN OHIO CITY ARE MATCHED UP: "THE DAYTON GAME."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals O