

Do or die for Barca

AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona have defensive worries ahead of Tuesday's showdown with Arsenal which midfielder Seydou Keita has described as crucial for their season.

Keita scored the only goal as Barcelona kept up the pressure at the top of La liga with a 1-0 win over Zaragoza at the weekend and now they turn their attention to the Champions League where they must overturn a 2-1 defeat at the Emirates to progress to the quarterfinals.

"Against Arsenal we have to go out with a strong mentality as this is probably the most important game of the season," said Keita.

"The key is not to let them score a goal because I'm sure that (Leo) Messi, (David) Villa and Pedro (Rodriguez) will get on the scoresheet in attack for us."

The bad news though for the Catalan side is that both their first choice centre-halves will be missing with Gerard Pique suspended and Carles Puyol injured.

Puyol had hoped to be ready in time after a knee injury he suffered in mid-January but following a training session on Sunday he was finally ruled out.

His commanding presence at the back will be a big loss as will Pique's ability to bring the ball out of defence and open up

the opposition with his range of passing. Abidal has been in excellent form in recent weeks and he is expected to move from full back into the centre alongside the injury prone Gabi Milito, whose Barca career has been blighted by long spells in the treatment room.

The rest of the team though should be at full strength and it will be an ominous task for the Arsenal defence as they face a forward line which has already scored 78 goals domestically.

They are arguably a stronger proposition than last season when the pair met in the quarterfinals of the competition.

Arsenal drew that time at home but in the return leg they were taken apart 4-1 thanks to a majestic performance from Messi who scored all four goals.

It is true that Arsenal have also improved and will have learnt from their experience last season when they tried to play Barca at their own game and came off a clear second best.

Arsenal's second place in the Premiership is clear indication of their development with Jack Wilshire having emerged, among the exciting talent, in midfield alongside Cesc Fabregas.

While Wilshire has described himself fit after picking up a knock on his ankle in the 0-0 draw with Sunderland on Saturday, Arsenal too have important injuries with Theo Walcott and Robin van Persie out while Cesc and Alex Song are doubts but expected to be fit.



Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema (C) scores one of his two goals against Racing Santander during their Primera Liga encounter at the El Sardinero Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Five-star Inter

AFP, Rome



A blazing second-half performance saw Inter Milan come back from a goal down to crush Genoa 5-2 at the San Siro and stay five points behind leaders AC Milan on a Sunday when fading Napoli dropped more points.

A brace from the brilliant Samuel Eto'o and one goal each from Giampaolo Pazzini, Goran Pandev and Yuto Nagatomo - all in the second half, cancelled out Rodrigo Palacio's 40th-minute opener for Genoa before the visitors scored a last-minute consolation through Mauro Boselli in an end-to-end game.

Third-placed Napoli's own title challenge appears to have run out of steam after the Azzurri were held to a goalless draw by lowly Brescia at the San Paolo where coach Walter Mazzarri was sent from the dugout in the first half for protesting.

In Udine, Antonio Di Natale's second-half penalty, his 22nd goal of the campaign, gave Udinese a 1-0 win over rock-bottom Bari, temporarily taking them fourth ahead of Lazio's evening match against Palermo.

Eto'o was in the thick of things from the start in Milan. Playing to the left of Pazzini, the Cameroonian tested Eduardo on 20 and 35 minutes with right-foot drives.

Genoa though had come to play and after the stretching Alberto Paloschi shot into the side-netting, the visitors took the lead when

fellow forward Palacio fired a rasping cross into the corner after being found by the creative Abdoulaye Konko.

Leonardo's words and Pandev's introduction for Dejan Stankovic at half-time witnessed a very different Inter.

On 50 minutes, Eto'o fed Maicon whose cross was side-footed home by Pazzini. A minute later Eto'o slotted home after Pandev's shot had been fumbled by Eduardo.

Six minutes on and Eto'o robbed the ball, slipped inside another challenge before poking past Eduardo for a brilliant individual effort and his 18th goal of the season.

Pandev, who had gone close following two mazy runs, made it 4-1 after 68 minutes with his second goal of the season after Eto'o and Sneijder had combined to tee him up.

With the hosts flying forward at every opportunity, Nagatomo swivelled on the penalty spot to fire home left-footed for his first Inter goal before Boselli's late header

made it 5-2.

Elsewhere, Adrian Mutu struck a first-half brace to help mid-table Fiorentina to a 3-0 win over Catania at the Artemio Franchi stadium.

A first-half penalty from Marco Di Vaio, his 18th goal of the season, helped Bologna to a 2-2 draw against Cagliari, who stay ninth.

Earlier Sunday, two goals from Emanuele Giaccherini helped Cesena to a 3-2 win at struggling Sampdoria and above the drop zone.

Raul eyes another season

AFP, Berlin

Star Spanish striker Raul said Monday he wanted to stay with Bundesliga side Schalke until his contract ends in June 2012, despite a less-than-stellar performance from the team this season.

"My contract runs until 2012. I want to fulfil this and continue to have fun," the 33-year-old former Real Madrid legend told Kicker magazine.

After finishing narrowly second to champions Bayern Munich last season, Schalke have enjoyed less success this time around, despite the recruitment of Raul, who has scored 11 goals in 25 games.

They are 10th in the league and will likely have to rely on the German cup for the chance of European football next season. They play second division side Duisburg in the cup final in Berlin on May 21.

Raul said Schalke were rebuilding this season for a major attack on the Bundesliga crown in the 2011/2012 term.

"We are a team that is currently in the process of being built, with quite a few players who have just arrived and a lot of young players," he told Kicker.

Tigers trying

FROM PAGE 16 capable of big scores. So they can do it in the next game," hoped Tamim.

That the problem with the middle-order began quite some time ago is no secret, but the team management has often tried to turn attention away from those failings in a bid to keep the mood positive in the camp. Though Bangladesh posted a spirited 283 against India in the opener, they struggled against Ireland (with the bat) before crashing down to earth last Friday. Tamim said that though plans are always in place, it is the implementation that matters, promising a 'different team' come March 11.

"There's always a plan before a game. But we failed in two of our games. We did okay in the India game. Sometimes you fail and sometimes you achieve those things. So I'm sure if we can achieve those in the next game, you'll see a different team," explained the Chittagonian, who brushed aside suggestions of a changed batting line-up though Shahriar Nafees had been given a long stint in the nets.

"It's not the right time to ask this question. Nothing is going our way but I'm sure one good game will change the whole scenario and you will see a new and better Bangladesh team," he added.

Red-hot Benzema

AFP, Madrid



French international Karim Benzema made it four goals in his last two league matches with a brace as Real Madrid moved back to within seven points of league leaders Barcelona with a 3-1 win at Racing Santander on Sunday.

Even without the injured Cristiano Ronaldo, Real were far too strong for Racing and Jose Mourinho's side responded with their eighth league away win of the campaign to close in on Barcelona, who had defeated Real Zaragoza 1-0 on Saturday.

Real had crushed Malaga 7-0 on Thursday and it could have been a similar scoreline in a dominant first half against Racing as they dominated from the get-go.

Xabi Alonso hit the crossbar in the 12th minute with what seemed to be an overhit cross and two minutes later Brazilian Marcelo missed a sitter.

Marcelo's late run into the box was picked out and the left back rounded the goalkeeper, but somehow sliced wide of goal when he had done all the hard work.

Benzema then thumped the crossbar with a fierce drive before Real produced a fantastic team goal on 23 minutes with some slick one-touch passing.

Alonso fed German international Ozil who began an exchange of quick passes with Togo forward Emmanuel Adebayor and Benzema, before putting the ball on a plate for Adebayor to roll home his second league goal of the campaign.

Three minutes later Ozil found

Benzema with a brilliant pass and the Frenchman took the ball in his stride before slotting home.

Racing had a chance to get a foothold in the match when Alonso conceded a penalty six minutes after the interval, but Pablo Pinillos took an awful penalty that goalkeeper Iker Casillas held comfortably.

Real went off the boil in the second half and Racing pulled a goal back in the 69th minute with Swedish midfielder Kennedy Bakircioglu making a clever run to steal a yard on the defence and then finish past Casillas.

Real were in for a nervy final 20 minutes but Benzema ensured that didn't happen by scoring his second three minutes later after a fine pass from Angel di Maria.

With Ronaldo missing, Adebayor was entrusted with taking a late penalty and failed miserably with a poor spot-kick to rival that of Pinillos.

In other matches, Athletic Bilbao ended a run of four league losses with a

vital 2-0 home win over European rivals Sevilla at San Mames on Sunday.

A disastrous own goal from Argentine centre-back Federico Fazio on 66 minutes put Bilbao ahead before Andoni Iraola converted an 88th minute penalty after French defender Julien Escudé committed a needless foul.

Bilbao moved a point above Espanyol, who lost 1-0 at promoted Levante on Sunday, into fifth place.

Earlier Almeria moved off the bottom with two goals in three minutes sealing a comeback 2-1 win at relegation rivals Hercules on Sunday.

Tigers can't

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quarterfinal hopes, has led to former players criticising the team's batting on television talk shows and comments to the media.

"It's a combination of overconfidence and irresponsible batting. West Indies did not bowl any great. They just maintained the basics which our players could not. You cannot expect to win matches with the help of pitch and bowling every day," former captain Aminul Islam Bulbul told Reuters on the day following Bangladesh's debacle.

"They knew crowd would support them anyway. So there was no pressure at all on them," another former captain, Khaled Mahmud said. "I am sure a decent total would do the job for them against West Indies. They just needed to be responsible. But nobody cared for it."

On Sunday, Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan expressed his disappointment at the comments in his column for Bangla daily Prothom Alo, highlighting the failures of the past players. "I don't think there are former players in Bangladesh who have not faced such a humiliation. We have faced such a situation once or twice, but there are former cricketers who have been in such situations often. So everyone needs to think before talking."

"I am not saying that every former cricketer is trying to run us down. There have been some who have lent out a supporting hand. That has been our biggest boost," Shakib wrote.

Rubic hopes

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version of Kuwait coach Taher Al Shammari, who also claimed that the margin could have been greater had his players not squandered many easy chances.

However, Rubic said that they would play an open game this time as they had nothing to lose after going down in the away match.

"We must play a bit more attacking game this time though we have some problems in the right side. I need some speedy forwards who can be useful on the special moments. Yes there will be some difference in our strategy this time," said the 46-year-old coach.

Tweeting

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Cheeky it may have been but former Pakistan players Sarfraz Nawaz and Rashid Latif, sensitive to corruption scandals which have engulfed their country, insisted that the International Cricket Council should investigate.

Meanwhile, radio commentator Jonathan Agnew arrived at the official tournament hotel in Chennai and tweeted that it was impossible to watch World Cup games on TV.

Instead, highlights of an old series between Pakistan and New Zealand were being aired, showing the banned Salman Butt at the crease. "Irony grows in 'official' hotel," tweeted Agnew. "On TV is a Pak vs NZ ODI with S. Butt at the crease."

Port city ready

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with the pressure of playing in his own backyard. "I love playing here, playing in front of friends and family. There's no extra pressure, it is nice to be able to play a World Cup game on my home soil," said Tamim Iqbal, adding that it is a special occasion for the city.

"It is very big, for me and for all Chittagonians as well. It will take Chittagong to the next level, I'm sure. I am very happy for the city."

"We'll make history here if we can do so. That will be fantastic and I have said this before the World Cup too. Let's see what we do on the 11th," said the batsman who has two fifties in the six ODIs he has played at the venue so far.

Though Tamim was upbeat, there has been simmering unease as one unsavoury incident after the other pile up on the Tigers after their batting meltdown against the West Indies. The stoning of skipper Shakib Al Hasan has definitely shaken up some of the Tigers, and Tamim urged the fans to not resort to such lengths to be hostile.

"It is disappointing because he's the best player in the country and the No 1 all-rounder in the world. He doesn't deserve to get all this stuff," said Tamim. "My request to the public would be not to do such silly

things because we win one day, we lose one day, these things happen in cricket. So they need to support us in good and bad times.

"To be very honest, it (the pressure) won't play in our minds. We know that if we do something special on the 11th, everything is going to be fine," added the left-handed opener.

It could be

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six points and top position in Group A ahead of co-hosts Sri Lanka and Australia.

Hafeez believes he and Shehzad will fire as a partnership in Tuesday's match against New Zealand having both hit centuries against the Black Caps during team's 3-2 series win on the eve of the World Cup.

"As an opener I know we have not given a good start to the team, but there's no lack of confidence and we just need one good partnership to get the rhythm back," said Hafeez.

The 30-year-old Hafeez also provides a spin option to Pakistan, an added quality which has helped him keep his spot in the team.

Hafeez made nine against Kenya at Hambantota, before being run out for 32, after initially shaping well in the Sri Lanka match.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	DOWN	23 Bush league?
1 Dresses in	1 Canines	24 "I'll take that as..."
5 Navy rank (Abbr.)	2 Oil cartel	25 Advance
8 Early birds?	3 Brussels-based org.	27 Will Smith biopic
12 Colorful fish	4 Unspoken "I don't know"	29 Rx safety grp.
13 Deteriorate	5 Rubout	30 Kreskin's claim
14 Chick's sound	6 Affirmative action?	32 Stanza
15 Prepare	7 Fashion	34 Above all others
17 Sicilian spouter	8 Fancy centerpiece	37 Round Table address
18 Cleans the cookware	9 Move on	39 Tittle
19 Not as small	10 Siskel or Kelly	42 "La Toilette" artist
21 Wilde-beast	11 Mast	44 Hose material
22 Therefore	16 Sea eagle	45 Open something
23 Joke	17 Noah's boat	46 Big rig
26 Historic time	20 Noah's boat	48 Oliver Twist's request
28 Weapon in "Psycho"		49 "Meet Me — Louis"
31 Individual		50 Hollywood clasher
33 North Pole employee		53 Wapiti
35 Concludes		
36 Annie of "Designing Women"		

Solution time: 21 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WE TOLD OUR FARAWAY SON, "YOU'D BETTER COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS THIS SEASON, OR YULE BE SORRY!" Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals T