

Job only half done

AFP, Donetsk



Ukraine's reigning champions Shakhtar Donetsk, already with a mountain to climb, come into their Champions League return with Spanish giants Barcelona on a back of a home league loss whereas their rivals continue to lord it in La Liga.

Barca's weekend success over Almeria ensured that their stylish 5-1 first leg home thumping of Donetsk did not distract them from the additional task of keeping Real Madrid at arm's length.

Should Barca now complete the job they will earn another opportunity in the semifinals to rub Real's noses in the Catalan club's apparent superiority - motivation in itself to take the return leg ultra seriously.

While Barca were motoring eight points clear of Real in the league, Shakhtar found their hitherto serene progress towards another title suffer a blip with a 1-0 home defeat by Obolon Kiev - although the leaders still have a healthy 11-point cushion over Dynamo Kiev.

The surprise reverse, courtesy of a goal from Obolon substitute Sergei Kucherenko, was Shakhtar's first at the Donbass Arena since the 51,000-seater arena was opened in September 2009.

Although Barca coach Pep Guardiola has publicly warned there is work to do in the second leg he nonetheless has taken the opportunity to call in some fringe figures in the shape of B players Thiago Alcantara - on target against Almeria - Andreu Fontas and Jonathan dos Santos.

Even so, their call up is largely out of necessity as the Catalan giants, European champions in 1992, 2006 and 2009, must do without injured trio Eric Abidal, Carles Puyol and Bojan Krkic, while midfield general Andres Iniesta is suspended, hence the need for some fine tuning.

Shakhtar will be without their key defender Razvan Rat, who was booked in the match at the Nou Camp.

Another first-choice full back, Dario Srdic, is also uncertain for the Tuesday's match as he experienced leg muscle problems in the match with Obolon and was substituted after just 10 minutes.



Milan striker Alexandre Pato celebrates his goal against Fiorentina during their Serie A encounter at the Artemio Franchi Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP



Make or break for Chelsea

AFP, Manchester



Carlo Ancelotti must solve the riddle of £50 million misfit Fernando Torres as his Chelsea side bid to overturn their Champions League quarterfinal first leg defeat against Manchester United at Old Trafford here Tuesday.

When the Londoners smashed the British transfer record to land Torres in January, the move was viewed as a clear statement of intent that the club saw the Spaniard as the key to achieving Champions League success.

"This is my job. I have to choose the players, not comparing the players with what money the club paid for them."

Chelsea captain John Terry added that the squad was squarely behind Torres.

"It's just a case of getting that first goal, getting that off your shoulders, and then you can move on," he said. "It must be hard as well, people carrying on talking about it."

"It must be a big weight to carry as well with the fee that he came for. But he knows he's good enough to play,

the victors will most likely be a semi-final against Bundesliga side Schalke 04.

"Maybe he will score the most important goal of our season at Old Trafford, who knows," Ancelotti said. "But I do not know who is in the side yet."

Ancelotti insists however that form will be the principal criteria for deciding his starting line-up.

As well as effectively ending any chance Chelsea have of winning a trophy this season, elimination from the Champions League on Tuesday may well trigger a summer of upheaval at Stamford Bridge.

Ancelotti's position will come under intense pressure while British media reports have suggested that several pillars of Chelsea's success of the past decade may be on the way out.

Drogba, Frank Lampard, Michael Essien, Florent Malouda and John Obi Mikel have all been linked with possible departures as Abramovich prepares to bankroll a rebuilding of the first team squad.

Although Chelsea will be encouraged by the memory of last season's 2-1 win at Old Trafford in the Premier League, the odds, and history, remain stacked against them.

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the players certainly know he's good enough, and he's got our full support."

Only twice before in Champions League history has a team prevailed in a knockout tie after losing a first leg match at home. United have also never lost a European tie after winning the first leg away.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson can also call on a squad that is getting back to full strength, with Rio Ferdinand making a successful return from injury in the first leg to resume his formidable central defensive partnership with Nemanja Vidic.

Rooney, controversially banned for two Premier League matches last week, will also be available and itching to prove a point.

Ferguson's biggest concern following Saturday's routine 2-0 win over Fulham

appeared to be the unusually quiet Old Trafford in the Premier League crowd, who he called on to rediscover their voices in time for Tuesday.



APP, Madrid

Manchester United star Wayne Rooney controls the ball during a training session at Carrington yesterday on the eve of their Champions League quarterfinal against Chelsea.

Milan stay clear

APP, Rome



AC Milan earned a crucial 2-1 win at Fiorentina on Sunday to maintain their three point lead over Napoli, 2-0 winners at Bologna, at the top of Serie A.

Napoli had put the pressure on Milan with their victory earlier in the day but goals from Clarence Seedorf and Pato before half-time ensured Milan always had their destiny in their own hands before Juan Vargas's late reply.

With just six games left, Massimiliano Allegri's team are one step closer to a first title since 2004.

However, the returning Zlatan Ibrahimovic, having served a two-game ban, stupidly got himself sent off late on and will again be suspended.

Milan were always in control and after Artur Boruc had saved an early shot from Seedorf, the Dutchman gave the visitors an eighth minute lead.

Ibrahimovic tried to play him in but a covering defender half cleared only for Pato to head the ball back into the danger zone where Seedorf had been left free to volley home majestically.

Pato spurned a one-on-one with Boruc moments later while up the other end Christian Abbiati had to be alert to save an Adem Ljajic shot at his near post.

But four minutes from the break, Milan hit La Viola with a ripper counter-attack as Ibrahimovic released Kevin-Prince Boateng down the right and he crossed for Pato to have the simplest of finishes.

Already it appeared to be game over but it could have been worse for Fiorentina as Ibrahimovic slotted wide when bearing down on Boruc.

However, 11 minutes from time Vargas's shot from 25 yards deflected off substitute Gennaro Gattuso and beat Abbiati.

Earlier in the day Napoli had made light of the absence of top scorer Edinson Cavani as Giuseppe Mascara and a Marek Hamsik penalty secured three points.

In a largely low-key first half, Napoli virtually sealed the three points with the only two clear chances they created.

The first came on the half hour mark but was helped in no small part by Bologna keeper Emiliano Viviano.

Cristian Maggio crossed from the right and Ezequiel Lavezzi tried a clever flicked finish between his legs that was rolling wide of the far post with two defenders covering when Viviano dived out and pushed the ball straight into the path of Mascara who shot home.

The second chance came on the stroke of half-time as Hamsik and Lavezzi both beat the offside trap, but, faced with a two-on-one against Viviano, they almost fluffed their lines.

Hamsik tried to draw the goalkeeper and set-up his strike-partner but he failed to make Viviano commit and his pass was too soft, giving the Bologna stopper a chance to close down the Argentine.

Lavezzi tried to take the ball around him and Viviano brought him down, with a relieved Hamsik smashing home the spot-kick.

Lazio moved back into the top four and the crucial final Champions League qualifying position with a comfortable 2-0 win at home to Parma.

Stylish Valencia

APP, Madrid



Valencia staked their claim for third place in La Liga with a stylish 5-0 win in Sunday's head-to-head clash with local rivals Villarreal.

Neither side tried to play down the importance of the match with both teams comfortably clear of the chasing pack, with the victory pushing Valencia six points ahead of Villarreal.

Valencia had more time to prepare as Villarreal were in European action on Thursday night and it showed as they were far livelier and put plenty of pressure on the Villarreal players.

If the visitors were in good spirits after their 5-1 win over Twente then they were brought back down to earth quickly as Roberto Soldado gave Valencia an early lead.

Although they had further chances it was not until the second half that the floodgates opened against a tired looking Villarreal.

Ever Banega scored in between two goals from Juan Mata and Soldado also got his second of the night.

Earlier, Atletico Madrid moved onto the verges of the European places with a comprehensive victory over Real Sociedad who have now lost five games on the trot.

After an inconsistent campaign Atletico are still in the fight for a place in the Europa League and have hit form at the right time.

RESULTS

Sporting Gijon 1 (Barral 66) **Osasuna 0**
Hercules 0 Espanyol 0
Malaga 0 Deportivo La Coruna 0
Racing Santander 1 (Nano 32-0)
Levante 1 (Jorda 89)

Atletico Madrid 3 (Filipe 12, Suarez 45, Aguero 78) **Real Sociedad 0**

Valencia 5 (Soldado 14, 75, Mata 56)

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Back-to-back wins mean that Atletico are level with sixth-placed Athletic Bilbao who lost to Real Madrid 3-0 and a point behind Sevilla who drew 2-2 with Mallorca.

Atletico were in charge against Sociedad from the start with a deft back-heal from Diego Costa setting up Felipe Luis to put them ahead and then shortly before half time Mario Suarez added another after good work from Jose Antonio Reyes.

Sociedad, now just five points above the relegation zone, are going through their worst run of the season and conceded a further goal from Sergio Aguero.

Espanyol's poor form continued with a disappointing 0-0 draw away to Hercules. They have struggled badly since Christmas and had lost eight of the last ten games going into the match.

Hercules' Royston Drenthe carried the greatest threat and went closest to scoring with a header which came back off the crossbar.

Second-from-bottom Malaga remain behind Hercules on goal difference as they also drew 0-0 against Deportivo La Coruna.

Sporting Gijon followed up their win over Real Madrid last weekend with a 1-0 victory against Osasuna thanks to a David Barral strike while Racing Santander drew 1-1 with Levante.

The visitors were heading for defeat following a Nano Rivas own goal but were rescued by Rafa Jorda in the dying minutes.



ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

SET Max

Indian Premier League

Rajasthan Royals v Delhi Daredevils

Live from 4:30pm

Royal Challengers v Mumbai Indians

Live from 8:30pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

Shakhtar v Barcelona

Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)

TEN Action+

UEFA Champions League

Man United v Chelsea



National Cricket League

SECOND PHASE

(Four-Day Match, Day-3)

Dhaka v Sylhet at Chittagong

Rajshahi v Barisal at Fatullah

Independence Cup Football

Rahmatganj v Farashganj

Time: 4:30pm

Brothers Union v Ctg Mohammedan

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu