

Real eye Barca revenge

AFP, Madrid



Football fans are in for a treat as bitter rivals Barcelona and Real Madrid gear up to face each other four times in 18 crucial days, beginning with Saturday's league 'El Clasico' at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Barcelona and Real will lock horns in the league, Kings Cup final and then over two legs in the Champions League semifinal in a crucial period that could make or break their respective seasons.

Champions Barcelona hold a commanding eight point lead over Real in the league with seven games left and victory over their foes would virtually seal the league title, while a draw would still leave Madrid with a mountain to climb.

Real coach Jose Mourinho watched Sporting Gijon win 1-0 at the Bernabeu in their last home league outing to end his nine year 150 match unbeaten home league record and the Portuguese hopes to fare better than in his first Clasico when Barcelona thrashed his side 5-0 at Camp Nou.

It was the heaviest defeat of Mourinho's glittering career and both he and his wounded players will be out for revenge for that humiliation.

It is a clash of the league's leading scorers with Barcelona's Lionel Messi on 29 league goals for the season with Real's Cristiano Ronaldo one behind on 28.

While Messi has been a regular scorer in this fixture, Ronaldo is looking to net in his first Clasico and forget the Camp Nou mauling.

Barcelona are unbeaten on the road with 13 wins and two draws and their coach Pep Guardiola has won a perfect five successive Clasicos and the balance of goals during these

fixtures is 16 for Barca and just two for Real.

Real's last win over their rivals was back in May 2008 when they won 4-1 at the Bernabeu as Barcelona performed an agonising guard of honour to salute Madrid as champions.

Real have been boosted by the return of Karim Benzema, Kaka and Gonzalo Higuain from injury to give Mourinho a welcome selection headache.

Barcelona have defensive concerns with captain Carles Puyol injured and Eric Abidal recuperating from surgery on a liver tumour, so Guardiola must decide whether to use midfielder Sergio Busquets or the rusty Gaby Milito at centre-back.

Elsewhere Valencia travel to bottom side Almeria on Saturday looking to cement third place after their morale-boosting 5-0 win over rivals Villarreal last time out.

Valencia are now six points ahead of fourth-placed Villarreal and their coach Unai Emery must put sentiment aside against old club Almeria who are seven points from safety.

Villarreal hope to bounce back from their Valencia mauling with a home victory over relegation-threatened Real Zaragoza on Monday.

In other matches, free falling Espanyol host European rivals Atletico Madrid on Sunday at the Cornella-El Prat Stadium.

Espanyol have won two out of their last 11 league games to fall to eighth, while Atletico are one point ahead in seventh place.

Fifth-placed Sevilla, a point above Atletico, travel to struggling Getafe on Saturday hoping to continue their European push.

Getafe, sixth last season, harboured hopes of a European place a matter of months ago, but have failed to win any of their last nine league matches and languish in 16th four points above the relegation zone.

Journalist Sadi suffering from cancer

SPORTS REPORTER

Eminent sports journalist and current Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi is suffering from cancer.

Sadi is currently in Singapore's National University Hospital, seeking treatment for cancer of the colon and bone.

The cancer which initially manifested itself in his stomach, was treated unsuccessfully with two rounds of chemotherapy.

It has since spread to his bone and he is now undergoing extensive radiotherapy.

He requests all to pray for his well-being.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Amol Roy of Bangladesh plays a forehand return against Sean Lee Wee Yi of Singapore in the Davis Cup Asia Oceania Level 4 group match at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday. Amol won 6-1, 6-2.

Win to take Milan closer

AFP, Rome



AC Milan will take another step towards securing their first Serie A title in seven years if they stick to the form book and take all three points off relegation-threatened Sampdoria on Saturday.

The 'Rossoneri' have a three-point lead over Napoli, who host Udinese in Sunday's late match, with Inter away to Parma Saturday hoping to claw back their five-point deficit to their city rivals.

Having enjoyed the lead for the past 20 matches, Milan seem to be growing in confidence as the countdown to the season finale begins.

"I think we deserve this title," said Milan captain Gennaro Gattuso.

"We've been top of the table for the past 20 match days and we've twice beat Napoli and Inter, who are second and third.

"That said, we still have six matches to play."

After Saturday's game, Milan can look forward to a fairly easy title run in, with matches against Brescia (away), Bolo-

CSA asked to reinstate its president



AFP, Johannesburg

A South African High Court on Friday ordered Cricket South Africa (CSA) to reinstate its president Mtutuzeli Nyoka, who was fired following a public feud with the organisation's chief executive.

Nyoka took CSA to court after the organisation's members' forum, comprising provincial presidents, passed a vote of no confidence in Nyoka at a special meeting in February.

The court found that Nyoka's sacking was unlawful and should be set aside, Sapa news agency reported.

CSA said it would appeal the judgment.

"Cricket South Africa will file notice of appeal in due course," it said in a statement.

A dispute between Nyoka and CSA chief executive Gerald Majola had been simmering since Nyoka challenged the payment of a 1.7 million rand (\$248,000, 172,000-euro) bonus to Majola following the staging of the Indian Premier League in South Africa in 2009.

gna, Roma (away), Cagliari and Udinese.

Compare that to Napoli's arguably tougher task -- Palermo (away), Genoa, Lecce (away), Inter and Juventus (away) -- and they have every right to be looking forward to a first league crown since 2004.

Milan will be missing Zlatan Ibrahimovic through suspension, after the Swedish striker insulted a referee and copped a three-match ban.

His absence could pave the way for Antonio Cassano, a Sampdoria reject in October, to start and exact some kind of revenge on his former club, who finished an impressive fourth in 2010 but are now just a point above the relegation zone.

Napoli's hunger for the league title has been intact since Argentine legend Diego Maradona helped them win the Scudetto in 1990.

Walter Mazzarri's side welcomes back hot-shot striker Edinson Cavani, who has scored an impressive 25 league goals this season, following his one-match suspension last week.

But as their dream season continues, Mazzarri is urging caution every weekend.

"At the moment our season is stratospheric, but we're taking it one match at a time," he said. "Now we have another tough match and we're thinking about Sunday."

While Cavani returns for Napoli, Udinese will be without injured Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez. Having recently dropped out of the Champions League running to fifth, Udinese will be determined to take something from the match.

Both Napoli and Milan will be keen to see how Inter fare away to Parma on Saturday.

Last year's Serie A, Italian Cup and Champions League winners, Inter exited Europe on Wednesday when a 2-1 defeat to Schalke 04 left them with a humbling 7-3 aggregate score against the Germans.

Despite their five-point deficit, Inter's Dutch striker Wesley Sneijder said there is still plenty to play for.

"We have to put this elimination behind us and focus on the objectives we have left," said Sneijder. "We still want to win the Scudetto and the Italian Cup."

The race for fourth place -- synonymous with the final Champions League place for next season -- is just as tight, with Lazio, Udinese, Roma and Juventus all battling.

Fourth-placed Lazio are away at Catania, who sit just five points above the relegation zone while Roma, in sixth, host Sicilians Palermo.

Juventus, in seventh and six points behind Lazio, travel to Fiorentina.

FIXTURES

Saturday

AS Roma v Palermo, AC Milan v Sampdoria, Parma v Inter Milan

Sunday

Catania v Lazio, Cesena v Bari, Chievo v Bologna, Fiorentina v Juventus, Genoa v Brescia, Lecce v Cagliari, Napoli v Udinese



PHOTO: AFP

Swiss Roger Federer grimaces after losing a point against Jurgen Melzer of Austria in the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series quarterfinals in Monaco yesterday. Melzer won 6-4, 6-4.

DAVIS CUP Bangladesh emerge group champions

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh became group champions in the Davis Cup Asia Oceania Level 4 beating Singapore in 2-1 rubber in the last group match. Earlier Bangladesh had secured 3-0 victories over both Turkmenistan and Iraq.

In the first rubber, Amol Roy beat his opponent 6-1, 6-2 before Shibu Lal was adjudged winner in his rubber as his opponent was penalised for ill-conduct during the match. Bangladesh lost the doubles to their Singapore counterparts, but the two singles victories were enough to see the hosts emerge group champions.

Bangladesh will meet Group A runners up Kyrgyzstan in the last match today in a bid to advance to the Level 3.

Buchanan to guide NZ

AFP, Wellington

Former Australian national coach John Buchanan, who guided the side to three World Cups, was confirmed Friday as New Zealand's new director of cricket.

His brief is to design the blueprint for a consistent coaching philosophy across the country, implement a talent identification programme and oversee the selection panel.

"John's appointment is an exciting one for New Zealand Cricket. He has a great cricketing pedigree and will provide outstanding leadership as NZC look to move forward," New Zealand Cricket chief executive Justin Vaughan said.

More than

FROM PAGE 16

and it will also be the connection the players felt with him.

While the public would remember his term for the 4-0 whitewash, the ground-breaking series win in West Indies or the back-from-the-dead win over England in the World Cup, many of the players will miss his reassuring presence outside those glassed walls.

Watson takes

FROM PAGE 16

Meanwhile, despite India's win in the 2001 World Cup, Australia finished as the top-ranked ODI team, while India remained atop the Test ratings at the end of the cut-off date, April 1. Both teams pocketed US\$175,000 each.

India were the runners-up in the ODI rankings - 120 points against Australia's 128 - by the cut-off date, and picked up US\$75,000, while South Africa received the same for taking the No.2 spot in Tests.

Federer crashes out



AFP, Monte Carlo

Jurgen Melzer handed Roger Federer only his fifth loss of the season as the Austrian came through in a virtual sandstorm with a 6-4, 6-4 quarterfinal victory Friday at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Federer, a three-time finalist in 2006-2008 against Rafael Nadal, was well off his best form after two superlative previous matches this week in the principality as he began his season on clay.

The Swiss was quick to admit he was outplayed on the day as he missed on too many chances.

"I don't think I played terrible, it's still the first week of clay, so I don't expect myself to play my very best.

"He played well when he had to and I missed too many chances. Every time I had this slight opening, things didn't go my way. Either he shanks them and they stay in play, he hits the line.

"I try to do something, I miss by a little bit. All those things accumulate to something quite frustrating. That's what made it hard. But he did well, played aggressive and played the right way he was supposed to."

Melzer added the final major scalp to his record and was pleased with the result, especially after being forced to leave the court

after just one game for physio treatment of a neck problem.

"I felt it when I played a backhand, it kind of blocked my spine," said Melzer of his early incident. "But the physio did a great job unblocking it.

"I was a little worried. But then the pain like go away quickly, it didn't bother me at all."

The Austrian also said he was pleased to have finally defeated Federer. "I beat Rafa last year (Shanghai). I have beaten Nole (Djokovic, French Open quarter-finals). So this was the one missing. I'm very happy I actually did it today."

"It was a tough match for me, he beat me three times last year and I didn't even win a set. But many things went well for me, my shots worked well. When he had break points I was calm and served well.

"I did well on the big points and played my game."

Spain's fourth seed David Ferrer will face Melzer in the semis after defeating Serb Viktor Troicki 6-3, 6-3.

Federer stands 24-5 this season with his losses coming three times to Novak Djokovic and once to Rafael Nadal before Melzer. Melzer was playing his first Monte Carlo quarterfinal.

Federer was plagued by 24 unforced errors while Melzer notched 26. The Swiss was unsuccessful on all seven of his break points in the challenging conditions.

Deccan's 1st win at home

AFP, Hyderabad



Deccan Chargers revived their faltering Indian Premier League campaign with a 33-run thrashing of Royal Challengers Bangalore on Thursday.

Pacemen Dale Steyn and Manpreet Gony grabbed three wickets each while Ishant Sharma took one to restrict Bangalore to 142-9 after Bharat Chipli struck 61 not out to take Deccan to 175-5 at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium.

The win was Deccan's first at home after eight IPL losses, including two in the current edition.

Sharma struck early for Deccan, having the dangerous Tillakaratne Dilshan caught behind in the second over for seven.

The experiment to promote tailender Zaheer Khan as a pinch hitter also flopped, with Steyn uprooting his middle stump with a swinging full toss.

Gony then removed opening batsman Mayank Agarwal and the in-form AB de Villiers to leave Bangalore reeling at 29-4 in the seventh over.

Virat Kohli waged a lone battle, making a

51-ball 71 before falling to Gony. Chipli earlier held the Deccan innings together with his quickfire 35-ball knock, containing five fours and three sixes.

Zaheer had given Bangalore a key breakthrough when he removed opener Shikhar Dhawan in the third over after skipper Daniel Vettori won the toss and elected to field.

Sunny Sohal (38) came to his team's rescue, putting on 50 runs with skipper Kumar Sangakkara who made a fine 36 before being caught by de Villiers off Johan van der Wath (1-30).

Deccan piled on 63 runs from the last five overs but Zaheer applied the brakes by removing JP Duminy (22) and Deccan's big buy Daniel Christian in the space of five balls.

Zaheer finished with figures of 3-32 off his four overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DECCAN CHARGERS: 175-5 in 20 overs (Chipli 61, Sohal 38, Sangakkara 36; Zaheer 3-32)

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE: 142-9 in 20 overs (Kohli 71, Pujara 25; Steyn 3-24, Gony 3-31)

Result: Deccan Chargers won by 33 runs.

WI name squad



AFP, St John's

West Indies have named leg-spinner Anthony Martin as the sole newcomer, recalled Marlon Samuels and Lendl Simmons, and welcomed the return of Dwayne Bravo for the first two One-day Internationals against Pakistan later this month in St. Lucia.

Picking an ODI side for the first time since they were knocked out of the World Cup by the same opponents at the quarterfinal stage, the West Indies selectors have axed Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Ramnaresh Sarwan, and left-arm spinner Sulieman Benn.

All of the other players that played in the World Cup have been retained in the side, except Chris Gayle and Kieron Pollard.

Gayle has been sidelined with a groin injury that required surgery, and Pollard is busy playing in the Indian Premier League.

"We have looked at a mix of players who will take us through the next five to 10 years, and with this squad, we have put together a

youthful, but exciting combination of exceptionally talented cricketers who we believe can win matches," said Chief Selector Clyde Butts in a media release.

"There are some familiar faces, who have not been included on this occasion, but we have already identified the core of players who we will build the team around.

"The time has come for us to introduce a fresh crop of players who we believe has a deep desire to excel and who can be tested at the international level.

"We have already seen players like Kemar Roach, Darren Bravo, Andre Russell, and Devendra Bishoo performing impressively on the international stage, and we believe that players like Kirk Edwards and Anthony Martin can step up similarly."

TEAM

Darren Sammy (captain), Dwayne Bravo (vice captain), Devendra Bishoo, Darren Bravo, Kirk Edwards, Anthony Martin, Ravi Rampaul, Kemar Roach, Andre Russell, Marlon Samuels, Lendl Simmons, Devon Smith, Devon Thomas.