

A Falcao show

AFP, Paris



A stunning four goal show by Colombian striker Falcao saw Portuguese champions Porto come from a goal down to overwhelm Spanish side Villarreal 5-1 on Thursday in their Europa League semifinal first leg clash in Oporto.

Falcao's goals took him to a record 16 in the competition, beating Jurgen Klinsmann's total of 15 for Bayern Munich in the 1995/95 competition when it was the UEFA Cup.

With Porto set fair for the final in Dublin in May, they will be joined there by another Portuguese club, with Benfica holding a slight edge over Sporting Braga after beating them 2-1 at home also on Thursday.

Villarreal - who were only in this season's competition because Real Mallorca were disqualified from competing because they didn't meet financial regulations set by UEFA - had looked to be in control at the break after Cani had put them ahead.

However, whatever Andre Villas-Boas, the hottest managerial property around, said at half-time it transformed his side and within minutes they were level as 25-year-old Falcao went down in the area and got up to convert the resulting

penalty.

Falcao's fellow Colombian Freddy Guarin then gave them the lead in the 61st minute as he cut in superbly from the left, saw his shot come back off the post but he reacted brilliantly to head home the rebound.

From them on it was all Falcao as he tucked home the third in the 67th minute after great work by strike partner Hulk, who had a quiet night himself in front of goal just going close with one rasping shot from outside the area in the first-half.

Falcao - named after the great Brazilian midfielder of the 1980's who was part of the thrilling 1982 World Cup side - rounded off the scoring with two headers the first a superb diving effort and the final one saw him rise above the stunned Villarreal defence in the dying seconds.

With almost both feet firmly in the May 18 final, 33-year-old Villas-Boas, who learnt a lot from former Porto handler Jose Mourinho though they have since fallen out, is on course for delivering a treble as Porto are also in the domestic cup final.

His overall record with Porto since he took over is 45 victories and just three defeats in 52 matches.

Benfica - who are second

in the league a massive 19 points behind Porto - and Braga's clash only really came alive for 10 minutes in the second-half.

The hosts took the lead in the 50th minute as Jardel reacted quickest when Paraguayan striker Oscar Cardozo's header from Maxi's brilliant cross came back off the bar.

Braga levelled shortly afterwards as Vandinho came up with a towering header that gave the 'keeper no chance.

Benfica restored their one goal advantage just before the hour mark as the giant Cardozo showed he has more finesse to his game than just heading power when he stroked home a brilliant left footed freekick which curled into the top corner.



Porto striker Radamel Falcao is ecstatic after scoring his fourth goal against Villarreal during their Europa League semi-final at the Dragao Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Seedorf to keep going

AFP, Rome

Veteran midfielder Clarence Seedorf brushed off talk of retirement on Thursday as he was presented with a Dutch Knighthood.

The 35-year-old is one of the most decorated players in the history of the game and the only one to have won the Champions League crown with three different clubs, including twice with Milan.

And on the brink of landing his fifth league title, and second in Italy, Seedorf insists he has no intention of hanging up his boots.

"In my job the important things are motivation and your physical condition and as long as I still have those, I'm not setting myself limits," he said from the Rome residence of the Dutch ambassador to Italy.



What to WATCH

SET Max
Indian Premier League
Kochi v Delhi
Live from 4:30pm
Kolkata v Punjab
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN
English Premiership
West Bromwich v Aston Villa
Live from 8:00pm
Chelsea v Tottenham
Live from 10:30pm

STAR Sports
English Premiership
Sunderland v Fulham
Live from 8:00pm
Blackpool v Stoke City
Live from 11:00pm

TEN Action+
La Liga
Real Madrid v Zaragoza
Live from 10:00pm
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Live from 12:00am (Sunday)

TEN Sports
Serie A
Napoli v Genoa
Live from 1:40am (Sunday)



DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Rahmatganj v Arambagh
Time: 5:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
GP-BCB Academy v SA Academy
Second one-day match
Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong

Barca shift focus

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona look to build on their morale-boosting 2-0 Champions League semifinal win over rivals Real Madrid by moving a step closer to their third consecutive league title with victory at promoted Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Two goals from Lionel Messi helped Barcelona put one foot in the Champions League final with the triumph over Madrid on Wednesday and now the focus returns to the league where the champions need just seven points from the remaining five games to retain their crown.

Barcelona lie eight points ahead of Real at the summit on 88 points and are on course to break the 100 points barrier and better the best ever league tally of 99 points, which they recorded last season.

"We are two wins and a draw away from being crowned league champions. After that we will think about the second semifinal (against Real Madrid) and getting to Wembley (for the final)," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola.

Real have it all to do in the semifinal second leg at Camp Nou next Tuesday, but need to put the European disappointment behind them and focus on collecting three points at home to Real Zaragoza on Saturday.

Real coach Jose Mourinho cut an angry figure after watching Pepe sent off on the hour mark in the painful defeat to foes Barcelona and the rivalry between the two sides cranked up a notch, with the Portuguese coach accusing Barcelona of receiving favouritism from referees and bemoaning

the fact that his sides always ended up with ten men.

It was a long tirade from Mourinho in the post match press conference and he now faces disciplinary action for his controversial comments towards Barcelona and several high profile referees.

"We are playing a man's game and every time you play against Barcelona and you touch them, they go to the ground and cry like babies," said Real striker Emmanuel Adebayor.

In the wake of a third 'El Clasico' in 12 days little has been said about Saturday's match against Zaragoza who are fighting for their lives, one point above the relegation zone, and will hope Madrid have a European hangover.

Mourinho may choose to ring the changes with Gonzalo Higuain, Kaka and Karim Benzema all unused substitutes against Barcelona, while Ricardo Carvalho is back after missing Wednesday's match through suspension.

Barcelona may also rest stars with the return leg of the Champions League in mind with Messi, who has an incredible 52 goals this season with 31 in the league, likely to be given a break after picking up a knock in the Madrid game.

Valencia are a distant third, lying 17 points behind Real Madrid, and hope to put last weekend's 6-3 home drubbing by Real behind them with a win at strugglers Osasuna on Sunday.

Valencia are favourites to seal third, and the automatic Champions League qualification it brings, with Villarreal six points behind in fourth.

Osasuna will be pumped for the Valencia visit, however, as they occupy the final relegation place with games running out.

FIXTURES	
Saturday	Real Madrid v Real Zaragoza (1600 GMT), Real Sociedad v Barcelona (1800 GMT), Deportivo La Coruna v Atletico Madrid (2000 GMT)
Sunday	all 1500 GMT unless stated Levante v Sporting Gijon, Malaga v Hercules, Almeria v Sevilla, Racing Santander v Real Mallorca, Villarreal v Getafe (1700 GMT), Osasuna v Valencia (1900 GMT)
Monday	Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao (1900 GMT)

MU wary of Arsenal

AFP, London



Patrice Evra has warned his Manchester United team-mates to be ready for an Arsenal backlash as the Premier League leaders aim to take a giant step towards a record 19th title.

United can hammer the final nail into the coffin of another trophy-less season for Arsenal when they visit the Emirates on Sunday, where three points will leave them 12 points clear of Arsene Wenger's team with three games left.

Arsenal's hopes of catching United have all but evaporated in a catastrophic sequence of results during the run-in, where they squandered leads against Liverpool and Tottenham before losing at Bolton.

But Evra believes Arsene Wenger's side will be determined to derail United's progress towards the title with a victory that would help salvage some pride at the tail end of a bitterly disappointing campaign.

"You have to fear the wounded animal," the French international said. "It is all or nothing for Arsenal so that is a

danger.

"They will want to show they can still win the title."

Arsenal have not beaten United in any competition since November 2008, and have lost their last two games against Sir Alex Ferguson's side in matches at the Emirates.

However Evra has warned that United's good recent record against

FIXTURES	
(1500 GMT unless stated)	
Saturday	Blackburn v Bolton, Blackpool v Stoke, Chelsea v Tottenham (1730), Sunderland v Fulham, West Brom v Aston Villa, Wigan v Everton.
Sunday	Arsenal v Man Utd (1405), Birmingham v Wolves (1200), Liverpool v Newcastle (1200), Man City v West Ham (1610).

Arsenal will count for little on Sunday.

"We have a good record at Arsenal but statistics can change so quickly," Evra said.

Wenger, who admits his team's title challenge is all but extinguished, acknowledged Evra's comments that Arsenal were desperate to make a point.

"We are certainly wounded and now

we need to bring out the animal on Sunday. It is important for our pride and our position in the table and for what we did this season," Wenger said.

"It is vital for us. We got a blow on Sunday with the last minute goal at Bolton, so it is vital to show we have some strong mental qualities and finish with a very strong fighting spirit."

"Man United is now in a very strong position, but we have to fight until the last second of the championship."

"It is very unlikely for us now, let's not hide the truth but the pride of our group is to finish in the Champions League. We have to fight even if it is just a minimal chance."

"You never know, if we beat Man United we come back to six points. But it is important to show some fighting spirit, so there is more at stake on Sunday than just mathematics."

The importance of United's game against Arsenal may be magnified depending on the result of Tottenham's London derby with resurgent Chelsea 24 hours earlier.

A win for Chelsea, who travel to Old Trafford to face United next week, will close the gap on the leaders to only three points.

Mourinho in hot water

AFP, Nyon



UEFA on Thursday announced it had launched a disciplinary inquiry into events surrounding Wednesday's fractious Champions League semifinal tie between Real Madrid and Barcelona.

One of the incidents being investigated is Real coach Jose Mourinho's post-match outburst in which the Portuguese suggested referees always showed favouritism to Barcelona, who won 2-0 in Madrid to take a huge step towards the final.

Mourinho also came under fire from Barcelona, who later Thursday announced they were lodging an official complaint with European football's governing body over his tirade.

Real Madrid countered late on Thursday by issuing their own complaint to UEFA over what they termed Barcelona's persistent unsporting behaviour during the match, claiming that Barca players continually over reacted and went to ground at the slightest excuse.

Real also said they fully supported Mourinho.

After Barcelona won the first leg tie 2-0 Mourinho prompted a storm of protest from Barcelona over his post match comments alleging bias towards his side's bitter rivals.

The Real Madrid coach said: "It shouldn't have been a red card for Pepe. Maybe someone can give me an answer. A foul on a Barcelona player and miraculously a red card."

"I don't know if Barcelona are friendly or not. They are a great team so congratulations to them but they have this power. Pepe sent off and me too. I don't know why."

"Why? Why does a fantastic team need

this. Why? Football is equal for everyone. The team that deserves to win, should win."

"If they won by merit we would accept it. Why in a balanced game like tonight did it happen? Why? Why did they leave us with ten men? Why did they turn down four penalties against Chelsea in the semi-final a few years ago? I hope one day I will have an answer. I always try to be honest. I just want to know why."

Barcelona issued a statement giving their reaction to Mourinho's comments.

"In the post match press conference, Jose Mourinho severely criticised the referee Herr (Wolfgang) Stark and insinuated that UEFA treated Barca favourably," the club said.

"The club's legal department is now studying whether to take his remarks to the UEFA disciplinary commission."

Later the Catalan club confirmed it had decided to pursue the matter with UEFA over Mourinho's "inappropriate comments".

"The motivation behind this complaint comes from the wish of the (club) president (Sandro Rosell) to defend the club's history and prestige, its members, its managers, its players and its directors," Barca spokesman Jordi Freixa explained.

As well as the Mourinho affair, UEFA said it was also investigating the throwing of missiles by Real Madrid fans at the Santiago Bernabeu, a pitch invasion and the red card shown to Real defender Pepe on the hour mark for a tackle on Dani Alves.

The dismissal of Mourinho will also be discussed at the hearing on Friday week.

UEFA are also looking into the red card handed out to Jose Pinto, Barcelona's reserve goalkeeper, who received his marching orders following the half-time fracas on the touchline.



(L-R) Real Madrid defender Pepe, forward Cristiano Ronaldo and defender Marcelo take part in a training session in Madrid on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP