

C'Ron eyes record



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo is looking for personal glory on Saturday when the Portuguese star aims to beat the all-time La Liga goals record of 38 on the final day of the season.

Ronaldo equalled the record, set by Athletic Bilbao's Telmo Zarra in 1951 and matched by Real Madrid's Mexican icon Hugo Sanchez in 1990, last weekend and can post a new landmark when Real host already-relegated Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu.

On a personal level Ronaldo has been a huge success but the silverware has not been as forthcoming with the Kings Cup win not enough to satisfy the former Manchester United man in a season where Barcelona wrapped up the title.

"It could be my best season in terms of goals but as a team we wanted to win the Champions League and league titles," said Ronaldo.

Barcelona are still basking in their third successive league title and their final game of the season at Malaga on Saturday will be another chance to blood youngsters with the Champions League final on the horizon.

Coach Pep Guardiola rested his weary superstars last time out and is set to do the same as his team go for the double in the Champions League final against Manchester United at Wembley on May 28.

French full back Eric Abidal is one player stepping up his fitness in a desperate attempt to make the showpiece having overcome surgery on a liver tumour.

"If I don't play in the final then it is not a problem," said Abidal. "I am lucky because the fitness team know me well and will get me in top form for this day."

In-form Malaga have taken 16 points from the last 18 but have nothing to play for.

At the bottom of the table, the relegation battle will go down to a nail-biting final Saturday as six teams aim to beat the drop.

Almeria and Hercules are already relegated but one spot remains.

Real Zaragoza are currently third from bottom but are just one point from safety going into the final match at Levante.

Getafe hover one point above the drop zone and must improve their wretched away record against a Real Sociedad team that are also not yet safe. Getafe have not won on the road in the league in five months.

Sociedad are two points above the relegation places and need a point to stay up.

Deportivo La Coruna are one point above the bottom three and host a Valencia side that have already secured third place.

Osasuna and Real Mallorca, both two points above the relegation zone, are the other two sides involved in the dogfight and will hope to make home advantage count.

Osasuna entertain a Villarreal side that have wrapped up fourth place, while Mallorca host a Atletico Madrid team from which he will draw his squad for the tournament being hosted by Argentina

The race for the Europa League is also set to go down to the wire with three sides jostling for two places.

Sevilla, Athletic Bilbao and Atletico Madrid are all locked on 55 points heading into their final games of the season.

As it stands, Atletico would be the one team to miss out due to their inferior head to head record and the current Europa League holders will hope their rivals slip up and they can win at Mallorca.

It will be manager Quique Sanchez Flores' last game in charge of Atletico after he declared his intention to leave at the end of the season and finishing in Europe is crucial for the club to have any chance of holding on to star Argentine striker Sergio "Kun" Aguero.

Sixth-placed Bilbao are in a similar situation with their Spanish striker Fernando Llorente but know victory at Racing Santander will guarantee them European football.

Sevilla, fourth last season, know a win at Espanyol would secure fifth place as they have a better head to head record over Bilbao and Atletico.

FIXTURES

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

Mano overlooks Kaka

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil playmaker Kaka has been overlooked for the Copa America while striker Fred earned another shot at the tournament when he was named in coach Mano Menezes's squad on Thursday.

Menezes, who also left out Ronaldinho, picked 28 players for friendlies at home to Netherlands and Romania next month from which he will draw his squad for the tournament being hosted by Argentina

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Victor (Gremio), Jefferson (Botafogo),
Julio Cesar (Inter Milan), Fabio (Cruzeiro)

Defenders:

Lucio, Maicon (both Inter Milan),
Thiago Silva (AC Milan), David Luiz
(Chelsea), Luisao (Benfica), Andre
Santos (Fenerbahce), Daniel Alves,
Adriano (both Barcelona)

Midfielders:

Lucas (Sao Paulo), Lucas Leiva (Liver-
pool), Elano (Santos), Elias (Atletico
Madrid), Henrique (Cruzeiro), Jadson
(Shakhtar Donetsk), Ramires (Chelsea),
Sandro (Tottenham Hotspur), Thiago
Neves (Flamengo), Anderson (Man-
chester United)

Forwards:

Alexandre Pato, Robinho (both AC
Milan), Neymar (Santos), Nilmar
(Villarreal), Fred (Flamengo), Leandro
Damião (Internacional)



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil coach Mano Menezes addresses a press conference at a hotel in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday.

in July.

"During the period of the Copa America, Kaka will still need to do some activities related to his recovery so we concluded in a recent chat with him that it was still not the time for a call-up," Menezes told a news conference.

Kaka has made a disappointing comeback from knee surgery for Real Madrid this year and not managed to reclaim a first team place.

Menezes said the only

player not in the squad to defend the title that he would wait for until the last minute was Santos playmaker Paulo Henrique Ganso who has a thigh injury.

"We're following the player's recovery so we can decide at the right moment. He is the only player not among these 28 who can be called for the Copa America," Menezes said.

Former Olympique Lyon striker Fred, in consistently

good form since last season when he led Fluminense to the Brazilian championship title, last played for Brazil in a friendly against Chile in March 2007.

The 27-year-old was in Brazil's squad at the 2007 Copa America in Venezuela but did not play after breaking a foot in training.

Midfielder Thiago Neves, who helped Flamengo win the Carioca (Rio) state championship on May 1, was also recalled for the matches against Netherlands in Goiania on June 4 and Romania in Sao Paulo three days later.

Brazil last met the Dutch in their 2010 World Cup quarterfinal when they were upset 2-1, while the Sao Paulo friendly will double as former World Cup-winning striker Ronaldo's farewell match.

"There is no climate of revenge," said Menezes, who succeeded World Cup coach Dunga. "A victory won't erase the past result and that's not what we want. We're looking to prepare for what we have ahead."

"(In Sao Paulo) Ronaldo will come on midway through the first half and the height of his party will be at the interval. I'm very happy to be able to take part in that moment."



PHOTO: AFP

Bochum's Slawo Freier (L) and Moenchengladbach defender Filip Daems fight for the ball during the first leg of their Bundesliga relegation match at Borussia-Park on Thursday.

Gladbach edge out Bochum

AFP, Berlin

Belgium striker Igor de Camargo gave Borussia Moenchengladbach a 1-0 win at home to second-division VfL Bochum in Thursday's German league, first-leg play-off to put his side a step closer to safety.

Bundesliga side Gladbach will take a slender advantage back to Bochum on Wednesday in the second-leg after de Camargo tapped home with the last kick of the game following a goal-mouth scramble in the 93rd minute.

Although the fourth official had indicated there was two minutes of added time, there was controversy as two minutes 40 seconds of extra time was shown on the clock when Gladbach took the final throw-in that led to the goal.

Referee Guenter Perl blew for the time immediately after the goal as the Gladbach players celebrated wildly, while Bochum were left fuming.

Having finished third from bottom of the Bundesliga last season, Gladbach must beat Bochum, who finished third from top of the second division, to guarantee their place in the top tier next season.

In the play-off, the away-goals rule used in European competition applies.

Fight for survival

AFP, London



Five teams will be fighting for survival on Sunday as the English Premier League reaches its climax with what is poised to be one of the most fraught relegation battles in years.

With Manchester United wrapping up a record 19th title last week, the final day of the 2010/11 season will be dominated by events at the foot of the table, where only one point separates five teams.

West Ham were the first side to be relegated after they slumped to a dramatic defeat at Wigan on Sunday.

The Hammers' exit has left Blackburn, Wolves, Birmingham, Blackpool and Wigan facing a nerve-jangling finale.

For Wolves and Blackburn, who face each other at Molineux, the equation is simple: victory will guarantee their Premier League status for another season.

The two clubs sit just above the relegation zone with 40 points, followed by Birmingham, Blackpool and Wigan, who all have 39 points.

Wolves had looked doomed for much of the year but have climbed out of the drop zone after a draw with Birmingham that was followed by back-to-back wins over West Bromwich Albion and Sunderland.

Wolves manager Mick McCarthy said he had told his players to ignore the possible permutations and stay focused on Blackburn.

"Everyone's been in our ear holes -- the media, mums, dads, kids, friends, saying what if this happens or this happens," McCarthy said.

"But I just told them that if we won our games there was nothing anybody else could

do about it. We've done that and have got to go and do it again against Blackburn."

Blackburn boss Steve Kean's preparations could scarcely have been worse.

The Rovers manager was charged with drunken driving following his team's 1-1 draw with Manchester United last week, and was subsequently summoned to India for an unscheduled meeting with the club's owners.

British press reports meanwhile have suggested that Kean, who took over as manager following the controversial dismissal of Sam Allardyce in December, may be sacked even if Rovers manage to stay up.

The fate of Birmingham, Blackpool and Wigan may hinge on results elsewhere.

Blackpool face the toughest task, travelling to Old Trafford to face Manchester United knowing they will need to get a result to have any chance of staying up.

Although the build-up has been dominated by talk of United fielding a weakened team ahead of next week's Champions League final against Barcelona, Seasiders manager Ian Holloway has

backed his team to defy the odds.

"We've got to go to Manchester United and probably get a win, and that might not even be enough," Holloway said.

"I believe it will be, though, because Wolves are at home to Blackburn. I've had some strange things happen in my life and maybe the main man up there has written a story that would probably beat Cinderella."

"And I believe we can do it, whoever United put out. I want to spoil their party."

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Pirlo going to Juve

AFP, Rome

Italian midfield playmaker Andrea Pirlo, out of contract after 10 years with champions AC Milan, should be playing at Juventus next season, his agent said on Friday.

"He still has some details to sort out, but I think that Andrea Pirlo is heading for Juventus," said Tullio Tinti, saying that a three-year contract was being discussed without giving details of the salary.

"He'll make a decision in the next few days, but Juve is really the leading candidate," added Tinti.

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Riquelme's Copa wish

Football

SOCERNET

Boca Juniors star Juan Roman Riquelme is hoping to end his three-year international exile and receive a call-up to Sergio Batista's Argentina squad for this summer's Copa America.