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Santa fires Betis

AFP, Madrid



M a nchester City reject

Roque Santa Cru z scored twice as 10man Real Betis maintained their 100 per cent La Liga record with a 4-3 victory over Real Zaragoza on

Thursday to open a two-point lead at the top. Santa Cruz, on loan from English giants City, scored the first of a double after seven minutes and Salva Sevilla

extended the lead from the penalty spot before Efrain Juarez pulled a goal backfor Zaragoza. Betis, promoted from the second division last season, never looked secure at the back but another penalty

Santa Cruz's second on 49 minutes gave them a comfortable cushion. However, midway through the second half, Betis keeper Casto Espinosa rashly darted off his line and was redcarded for upending Luis Garcia

this time from Benat Etxebarria and

despite having defenders behind him. A double from Juan Carlos led to some anxious last minutes for Betis but they held on.

Betis coach Pepe Mel is refusing to get carried away by the impressive run.

"We are 10 points from the drop zone, the team are leading and we are playing well," said Mel.

"These are the only things that I am looking at. We have won the four games we have played so far but all we can do is look to the next one against Getafe."

Super-sub Walter Pandiani scored an injury time winner as Espanyol beat Getafe 1-0 and condemned their rivals to their third successive defeat.

Getafe had not won away since



PORT

Real Betis striker Roque Santa Cruz celebrates his goal against Real Zaragoza during their Primera Liga encounter at the Benito Villamarin stadium in Sevilla on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

RESULTS

Espanyol 1 (Pandiani 90+1) Getafe 0 Real Betis 4 (Santa Cruz 7, 49, Sevilla 12-pen, Etxebarria Urkiaga 48-pen) Real Zaragoza 3

January and their confidence was not high after a poor start to the season but they were up against an Espanyol team who had also suffered two defeats from three games.

There was plenty of toil but little flowing football in the first half.

However, after the break Espanyol took the game to the visitors.

Javi Marquez saw a deflected shot go just wide and Alberto Lopo blocked a Vladimir Weiss strike on the goal line but it was really keeper Miguel Moya who was keeping Espanyol at bay.

In particular he did well to stop a Thievy Bifouma shot from close range.

Getafe missed a glaring chance themselves when Juan Valera blazed wide late on but Espanyol got a deserved win a minute into injury time, when Pandiani coolly slotted home in the box.

"This victory gives us a good feeling because as well as the three points it is good to get your reward after searching for the goal for so long," said Espanyol coach Mauricio Pochettino.

"We struggled to get in the game during the first half but after that we dominated completely."

Vitiello denies Roma

AFP, Rome



Roberto Vitiello struck two minutes from time to deny Roma coach Luis Enrique a first victory in five outings as Siena snatched a 1-1

Roma had led through Daniel Osvaldo's first-half strike but having failed to turn possession into pressure, they were hit

with a late blow. The result means neither side have yet won a match this season but took them both above champions AC Milan, who now sit just two places above the relegation zone, where Inter Milan find themselves.

The final whistle was met with a cacophony of jeers from disgruntled home fans.

Enrique admitted he was concerned about his team's results.

"The assessment cannot be positive because of the result but the team did everything we expected in terms of our gameplan," he said.

"But we didn't take enough risks to finish off our chances. Siena played very well in the second half while we struggled to move the ball around and create chances.

"There isn't a specific problem that worries me, everything worries me.

"In the second half we didn't do what we should have done, there was a bit of fear, which is normal because we haven't won

"We're a long way from what we want but I remain confident because there's

another game in three days." Siena coach Giuseppe Sannino was

delighted with his team. "I'm happy with the performance, we played against a big team and put them in difficulty," he said.

Roma started by seeing a lot of the ball without creating anything, while Siena repeatedly looked dangerous on the coun-

Inside the first quarter of an hour Emanuele Calaio had a shot deflected behind off Simon Kjaer while Franco Brienza's header from Angelo's cross was brilliant tipped away by Bogdan Lobont. And yet the hosts went in front on 25

minutes as Jose Angel crossed from the left and Marco Borriello took the ball to the byline before firing it across goal where Osvaldo was waiting at the back stick for a simple tap in. However, it was still Siena who looked

the more likely to score as Calaio dragged a shot just beyond the far post. In the second period a stinging shot

from Osvaldo brought Zeljko Brkic into action to punch the ball clear. Midway through the period Francesco

Totti got his weight behind a free-kick but Brkic got down to save comfortably. Kjaer then came to Roma'S rescue as he

spread his body on the line to block a Pablo Gonzalez header from close range after Calaio headed the ball back into the danger zone.

Miralem Pjanic set his sights from distance for the hosts but fired just beyond the angle of post and crossbar.

But then came Siena's sucker punch two minutes from time as Brienza's speculative effort crashed back off the post and Vitiello was on hand to side-foot home the rebound for a deserved equaliser, the

club's first goal this season. Osvaldo had a late chance to snatch a winner but headed wide.

Afellay faces knee op

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's Dutch winger Ibrahim Afellay will need surgery after tearing a ligament in his left knee during training, the club has announced.

"Bad news for Josep Guardiola and FC Barcelona," the club said in a statement late Thursday on its website.

"Ibrahim Afellay has torn a cruciate ligament in his left knee while training this evening. He will require surgery and further details will be revealed tomorrow (Friday) regarding how and when."

It is another injury blow for the Dutchman who had recently returned to fitness after picking up a hamstring injury in the preseason. The 25-year-old has played just a substitutes roles this season, appearing in games against AC Milan and Osasuna.

Afellay was signed from PSV Eindhoven in Decem-

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