

## C'Ron back in Real squad

Real Madrid's Portuguese star striker Cristiano Ronaldo rejoined the squad for Spanish league action this weekend after recovering from an ankle strain, his club said on Thursday.

"Cristiano Ronaldo rejoined the squad in this morning's training session in preparation for Saturday's match against Sporting Gijon," Real Madrid said in a statement on their website.

He had skipped training earlier this week after suffering a left ankle sprain during last weekend's 4-1 league win over Atletico Madrid.

Ronaldo is currently the joint top scorer in the Spanish league this season, level with Lionel Messi of Barcelona on 16 goals.

Real Madrid, who lead the Spanish league by three points ahead of European champions Barcelona, travel to third-from-bottom Sporting Gijon on Saturday.



Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque (2nd from L) and Adidas chief Herbert Heine (2nd from R) unveil Tango 12, the official Euro 2012 match ball, during a ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Lucas out for season

Liverpool midfielder Lucas Leiva has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury, the English Premier League club said on Thursday.

The Brazil international had a scan on Thursday that confirmed an injury to the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

A statement on Liverpool's website said Lucas "will undergo surgery and unfortunately be ruled out for the remainder of the current campaign".

The 24-year-old Lucas, injured in a clash with Chelsea's Juan Mata, has been one of Liverpool's best players for the past two seasons.

And he has been in fine form during the past fortnight, starring in Liverpool's Premier League and League Cup wins over Chelsea and Sunday's 1-1 league draw with leaders Manchester City.

In particular, he has formed a successful midfield partnership with Scotland international Charlie Adam, a pre-season signing from Blackpool.

However, Liverpool do have other options in midfield with Jay Spurring able to fill a similar defensive role, Jordan Henderson waiting in the wings, and Jonjo Shelvey recalled from a loan spell with second-tier side Blackpool.

Ideally, Liverpool would like to have captain Steven Gerrard back to full fitness as soon as possible.

Diaby suffers new setback

Arsenal midfielder Abou Diaby has suffered a new injury setback, with a hamstring injury ruling him out of Saturday's match with Wigan, his club confirmed on Friday.

The French international has missed almost the entire season so far after undergoing an ankle operation in the summer and his comeback was then delayed by a muscle injury suffered in training.

He did make a brief appearance as a substitute in last weekend's draw with Fulham before his latest blow.

"He got injured again and it's a minor injury but at the moment I must say he is very low because he has put a lot of effort in to come back," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

# City eye more points Alonso stays focused

Manchester City could end this weekend eight points clear at the top of the English Premier League as Roberto Mancini's men look to edge closer to a first league title since 1968.

Their superiority will be hammered home if they win at home to Norwich and local rivals and reigning champions Manchester United fail to pick up any points on their trip to Aston Villa.

With 11 wins and two draws from their opening 13 league matches, City -- who beat Arsenal in the quarterfinals of the League Cup in midweek -- have hardly put a foot wrong in domestic action all season.

United will try to recover from seeing a second string-side get knocked out of the League Cup by Championship club Crystal

Palace when they travel to Villa Park.

Sir Alex Ferguson came as close as he ever does to criticising his players by insisting their midweek display was "not a Manchester United performance" and someone who will be especially keen to make a mark on Saturday is defender Ashley Young, a £16 million pre-season capture from Villa.

Under-pressure Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas takes the misfiring Blues to fourth-placed Newcastle insisting he won't abandon the brand of football that helped him guide Porto to a trophy treble last season.

Also facing an unwelcome spotlight is Chelsea and England captain John Terry, with prosecutors considering whether to press charges against the defender over allegations he racially abused QPR's Anton Ferdinand in a recent west London derby.

While La Liga gears up for the first Clasic of the season next weekend, Real Madrid midfielder Xabi Alonso refuses to be side-tracked and says a win against Sporting Gijon will be just as valuable.

Madrid are in ominous form at the moment and have a three-point lead plus a game in hand over reigning champions Barcelona.

They are now looking for their 14th successive victory while Barca, who face Levante at Camp Nou, have been stuttering away from home.

Real have been in blistering form in attack, with Cristiano Ronaldo leading the way with 16 goals in the league, while Gonzalo Higuain is not far behind on 12 and Karim Benzema has seven.

It will not be an easy game, however, against Sporting, who beat them at the Bernabeu last season and have been playing well, although they were thumped 4-0 by Levante last weekend.

"This season we have taken a step forward, we are playing

fantastically and we don't want it to stop," said Alonso.

"As a group we are functioning well and so that also helps all the players individually. I am going through one of the best spells of my career but we will have to wait and see how the season finishes.

"I have a lot of respect for Sporting. The three points in Gijon are as important as those against Barcelona.

"We have not yet thought about that match, although I understand that others will already be looking at it. The coach will make a decision on that game when it comes, but first we have Sporting."

Barca have drawn and lost their last two away matches but their home stadium remains a fortress where they have scored 34 goals and are yet to concede.

In mid-week they brushed aside Rayo Vallecano 4-0 in a match brought forward due to their participation in the Club World Cup later this month.

There was controversy, though, with Gerard Pique apparently deliberately earning a yellow card for time wasting that means he will be banned this weekend but will be clear to play against Madrid.

**FIXTURES**  
(1500GMT unless stated)

**Saturday**  
Aston Villa v Manchester United (1730GMT), Blackburn v Swansea, Manchester City v Norwich, Newcastle v Chelsea (1245GMT), QPR v West Brom, Tottenham v Bolton, Wigan v Arsenal

**Sunday**  
Everton v Stoke, Wolves v Sunderland (1600GMT)

**Monday**



**FIXTURES**

**Saturday**  
(1700GMT unless otherwise stated): Sporting Gijon v Real Madrid, Racing Santander v Villarreal, Barcelona v Levante (1900GMT), Valencia v Espanyol (2100GMT)

**Sunday**  
Atletico Madrid v Rayo Vallecano (1100GMT), Real Sociedad v Malaga (1500GMT), Osasuna v Real Betis (1700GMT), Mallorca v Athletic Bilbao (1900GMT), Granada v Real Zaragoza (2130GMT)

**Monday**

## Jones takes Stoke thru'

A Kenwyne Jones header 10 minutes from time earned Stoke City a 1-1 draw with Dynamo Kiev on Thursday that sealed their place in the Europa League knockout stages, after Fulham lost at Twente Enschede earlier in the day.

Stoke's delivery had been poor for much of the game until an inviting Jermaine Pennant cross was converted by Jones to cancel out Matthew Upson's first half own-goal that had given the Ukrainians the lead at the Britannia Stadium.

Andriy Shevchenko hit the post in the first half for the visitors, while Pen-

**RESULTS**

Vaslui (ROM) 0 Lazio (ITA) 0  
**Lisbon (POR) 2** (van Wolfswinkel 15, Bojinov 58)  
FC Zurich (SUI) 0  
Maccabi Tel Aviv (ISR) 2 (Yeini 59, Logasi 71)  
**Besiktas (TUR) 3** (Quaresma 45, 90 Toraman 47)  
Stoke City (ENG) 1 (Jones 81)  
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 1 (Upson 27-og)  
**Athletic Bilbao (ESP) 2** (De Marcos 15, Laskurain 75)  
Slovan Bratislava (SVK) 1 (Sebo 39)  
**RB Salzburg 2** (Jantscher 20, Svento 90) Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 0  
**Schalke 04 (GER) 2** (Papadopoulos 25, Raul 57)  
Steaua Bucharest (ROM) 1 (Rusescu 33)  
**FC Twente (NED) 1** (Janko 89) Fulham (ENG) 0  
OB Odense 1 (Jensen 51) **Wisla Krakow (POL) 2** (Biton 20, Malecki 28)  
**Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS) 3** (Maicon 62, Sychev 72-pen, Glushakov 89) Sturm Graz (AUT) 1 (Kainz 64)

nant saw a powerful strike cleared off the line by Yevhen Khacheridi as Stoke pressed after the break.

The result means that Stoke are certain of a place in the last 32, and a draw away to Besiktas in a fortnight will ensure top spot in Group E.

Besiktas are almost there too after Ricardo Quaresma's late strike earned the Turks a 3-2 win away to Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Stoke top the group with 11 points, while Besiktas are second with nine, and Dynamo third on six points.

Earlier, a closely-fought encounter in the Netherlands was decided in Twente's favour when substitute Marc Janko turned in Emir Bajrami's cross with a minute to go.

## Inter's Udinese test

Inter Milan host Udinese in the crunch clash of the weekend in Serie A with both teams looking to prove a point in vastly contrasting seasons so far.

Inter have largely disappointed this term having started the campaign as title favourites alongside neighbours and bitter rivals AC Milan.

A torrid start saw them win only two and lose five of their opening nine games and left them struggling to stay above the relegation zone.

But having managed back-to-back successes for the first time this season, thanks to substitute Luc Castaignos's late winner at Siena last weekend, Inter are now hoping to start climbing up the table.

They trail leaders Juventus by 12 points, although with a game in hand, and captain Javier Zanetti says they just have to concentrate on winning matches.

"Juventus are top because that's where they deserve to be. They're doing very well and so far have been the most consistent," said the Argentine veteran.

"We need to look to make up ground and then we'll see at the end where we finish. I hope as soon as possible that we return to being in the hunt as we have been in the last seven years of great success.

"We let the critics talk, we have to try game by game to win as many as possible.

"Everything can happen, we know it will be very complicated and difficult but we have to try.

"As I've already said, Juve deserve to be where they are, Milan have put a good run together, Napoli have maybe paid for being involved in the Champions League while we started with a lot of

**FIXTURES**

**Saturday**  
(1945GMT)  
Inter Milan v Udinese, Napoli v Lecce

**Sunday**  
(1400GMT unless stated)  
Catania v Cagliari (1130GMT), Bologna v Siena, Chievo v Atalanta, Fiorentina v Roma, Juventus v Cesena, Parma v Palermo (1945GMT)

**Monday**

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
Who do you think is the right candidate for future ICC leadership?  
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote  
Follow The Daily Star Sport on twitter  
www.twitter.com/dssport



PHOTO: AFP

Stoke City forward Kenwyne Jones (R) heads in the equalising goal during their Europa League clash against Dynamo Kiev at the Britannia Stadium on Thursday.

**DAY'S EVENT**  
Bangladesh v Pakistan  
Second ODI  
Time: 1:30pm  
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

**What to WATCH**

**BTV**  
Bangladesh v Pakistan  
Second ODI  
Live from 1:30pm

**ESPN**  
English Premiership  
Newcastle v Chelsea  
Live from 7:30pm  
Man City v Norwich City  
Live from 9:00pm  
Aston Villa v Man United  
Live from 11:30pm

**STAR Sports**  
English Premiership  
Wigan v Arsenal  
Live from 9:00pm

**TEN Action+**  
SAFF Championship  
India v Afghanistan  
Live from 3:25pm

**La Liga**  
Sporting Gijon v Real Madrid  
Live from 10:55pm  
Barcelona v Levante  
Live from 12:45am (Sunday)

**STAR Cricket**  
Australia v New Zealand