

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
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Real, Barca win to boost hype

AFP, Madrid

LEGA CALCIO
Real Madrid defeated Sporting Gijon 3-0 while Barcelona hammered Levante 5-0 on Saturday as Spanish football's two superpowers warmed up for next weekend's El Clasico by preserving their grip on the title race.

Real stretched their winning run to 14 games in all competitions and lead Barcelona by three points with the defending La Liga and European champions having played a game more.

Angel Di Maria, Cristiano Ronaldo and Marcelo were on target against a Sporting Gijon side who finished the game with 10 men when Sebastian Eguren was sent off late on.

"We're winning in different ways, with quality, with team spirit, with counter-attacks," said Real boss Jose Mourinho.

Di Maria struck in the 35th minute. Ronaldo found the Argentine with a long raking pass which Di Maria controlled well before exploiting a mistake by Sporting full-back Damian Suarez to advance into the penalty area.

He then surprised goalkeeper Juan Pablo Colinas with a shot that squeezed inside the near post from a tight angle to conjure an important lead for his side out of nothing.

It was a full 30 minutes later before Madrid could relax and Di Maria was again prominent when his defence-splitting pass found Ronaldo who rounded Colinas before slotting home his 17th league goal of the season.

Brazilian full-back Marcelo increased Madrid's lead in the last minute.

Barcelona eased past Levante to ensure

they remain three points behind ahead of next Saturday's clash at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Cesc Fabregas hit two goals for the champions with youngster Isaac Cuenca scoring his second goal for the club while Lionel Messi and Alexis Sanchez were also on target.

"It was an excellent performance from the boys tonight. I'm very happy for the two goals. Now is time to rest for the two important games next week," said Fabregas, in reference to Tuesday's Champions League clash with BATE and Saturday's trip to Madrid.

"The fans can't wait for next week's game, but we are only thinking about the Champions League on Tuesday."

Barca dominated fourth-placed Levante from the start and it took only four minutes for Fabregas to break the deadlock when a clever Andres Iniesta back-flick found the ex-Arsenal captain in plenty of space to slot home with his right foot.

Fabregas extended the lead on 33 minutes, heading home a Xavi Hernandez free-kick, before a sweeping move involving Iniesta and Messi found Cuenca in space on the left to slot home for Barca's third five minutes later.

Messi finished smoothly on 54 minutes when Dani Alves found him in space on the right to equal Ronaldo on 17 goals as La Liga's top scorer.

Six minutes later Messi became the provider when he defined another flowing Barca move with a pass for Sanchez who exquisitely chipped Gustavo Munua in the Levante goal.



Real Madrid winger Angel di Maria (L) celebrates after scoring the opening goal in their La Liga clash against Sporting Gijon at El Molinon Stadium in Gijon on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP



NEO Cricket
India v West Indies
Third ODI (D/N)
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
English Premiership
Fulham v Liverpool
Live from 2:00am (Tuesday)
TEN Action+
SAFF Championship
Bhutan v India
Live from 6:00pm
La Liga
Lazio v Novara
Live from 1:40am (Tuesday)

DAY'S EVENT
National Cricket League
(Round Seven, Day 1)
Rajshahi v Barisal
Venue: Shamsul Huda Stadium, Jessore
Khulna v Dhaka Metro
Venue: Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium,
Rajshahi
Sylhet v Dhaka
Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium, Sylhet
Chittagong v Rangpur
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra
Time: All matches start at 9:30am

Five-star City

AFP, London



Manchester City remained five points clear at the top of the Premier League after the leaders thrashed Norwich 5-1, while Manchester United kept in touch with their title rivals thanks to a 1-0 win at Aston Villa on Saturday.

Roberto Mancini's side took the lead in the 32nd minute at Eastlands when Argentina forward Sergio Aguero wriggled free of several Norwich defenders before flicking a clever finish into the far corner for his 13th goal of the season.

Samir Nasri got the second when his floated free-kick caught Norwich goalkeeper John Ruddy flat-footed and crept into the net in the 51st minute.

Norwich 5-1, while Manchester United kept in touch with their title rivals thanks to a 1-0 win at Aston Villa on Saturday.

It was not easy in the first half

RESULTS

Aston Villa 0 Manchester United 1 (Jones 20)
Blackburn 4 (Yakubu 20, 45, 57, 82-
pen) Swansea 2 (Lita 35, Moore 66)
Manchester City 5 (Aguero 32, Nasri
51, Yaya Toure 68, Balotelli 88, Johnson 90)
Norwich 1 (Morison 81)
Newcastle 0 Chelsea 3 (Drogba 28,
Kalou 89, Sturridge 90)
QPR 1 (Helguson 20) West Brom 1 (Long
81)
Tottenham 3 (Bale 7, Lennon 50, Defoe
60) Bolton 0
Wigan 0 Arsenal 4 (Arteaga 28,
Vermaelen 29, Gervinho 61, van Persie 78)

because Norwich defended with all their players behind the ball but Aguero scored a fantastic goal," Mancini said.

Sir Alex Ferguson's United kicked off the late game at Villa Park eight points behind City and suffered an early blow when Mexico striker Javier Hernandez was stretchered off with ankle ligament damage that could keep him out for four weeks.

However, the champions

sealed the points in the 20th minute when England international Phil Jones scored the first senior goal of his career, volleying Nani's cross past Shay Given.

"We deserved the victory, we had great possession at times," Ferguson said.

"It was a lovely move for the goal. Nani put in a great cross and it was a lovely finish from Phil. It was a great time to score."

Tottenham are third, seven points off the lead, after an emphatic 3-0 victory over 10-man Bolton at White Hart Lane.

Gareth Bale prodded Spurs into a seventh minute lead and moments later referee Stuart Attwell sent of Gary Cahill, harshly ruling the Bolton defender was the last man

when he fouled Scott Parker.

Aaron Lennon got Tottenham's second goal in the 50th minute and Jermain Defoe sealed their sixth successive league victory 10 minutes later.

"We played some great football although I think the sending off was harsh. I couldn't believe it when the red card came out," said Spurs boss Harry Redknapp.

Resurgent Arsenal moved into fifth place with a 4-0 rout of Wigan that pushed the Latics to the bottom of the table.

Mikel Arteta opened the floodgates at the DW Stadium in the 28th minute when his long range effort squeezed past Wigan goalkeeper Al Al Habsi.

Thomas Vermaelen headed the second a minute later, Gervinho netted the third goal in the 61st minute and Robin van Persie made it four in the 78th minute with his 18th goal of the season.

"It was a great team performance, we controlled the game and could have scored more. There is a difference between the team at the start of the season and now," Gunners boss Arsene Wenger said.

Bayern winners on the day

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich shot back to the top of the German league on Saturday with an impressive 4-1 win over 10-man Werder Bremen and replaced defending champions Dortmund who were held 1-1 at Moenchengladbach.

France star Franck Ribery scored two superb individual goals, while Dutch winger Arjen Robben converted two penalties as Munich opened a one-point lead at the top.

To compound Bremen's misery, midfielder Aaron Hunt was sent off 10 minutes from time after being shown a straight red card following a foul on Germany star Toni Kroos.

"For Bayern, it was of paramount importance that we got back to the top of the table," said coach Jupp Heynckes, whose side were humbled 3-2 at strugglers Mainz last Sunday.

"My team produced a good response after the lacklustre defeat at Mainz. We saw there is harmony again in the team and we have the right balance once more between defence and attack."

"Everyone worked hard to get back when they needed to. In the first half, we didn't play with the same composure we showed in the first third of the season or in the Champions League, but Mainz has cost us a lot of confidence."

Ribery put Bayern ahead in the 22nd minute, but the guests got back on level terms just after the break when Sweden striker Markus Rosenberg turned Bayern defender Holger Badstuber inside out, before firing past goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Robben converted the first of his two penalties on 69 minutes when Bayern's Thomas Mueller was fouled in the penalty area and Ribery then added his second on 77 minutes when he drew Mielitz and then fired into an empty net.

Hunt then saw red before Greek defender Sokratis held back Ribery in the penalty area for Robben to convert his second spot kick to make it 4-1 at the end.

Victory gave the hosts their first win in three league games and allows them to avoid their first hat-trick of Bundesliga defeats in nearly 14 years, while Werder remain fourth.

Dortmund drop to second after they were held to a 1-1 draw at third-placed Gladbach.

"That was an intensive game," said Gladbach coach Lucien Favre.

"Dortmund were the better team in the first half, but we managed to put them under pressure after the break and I am happy with the draw."

The visitors went ahead when Poland striker Robert Lewandowski rose highest to head home a corner on 40 minutes for his 10th league goal of the season.

The hosts drew level on 72 minutes when ex-Germany striker Mike Hanke scored his third goal in two games, but the draw leaves both teams level on 30 points, one behind Bayern.

Mancunian derby in FA Cup

AFP, London

Holders Manchester City have been handed an explosive derby clash with bitter rivals Manchester United in Sunday's draw for the FA Cup third round.

City defeated United 1-0 in the FA Cup semi-finals at Wembley en route to winning the competition last season and they will host Sir Alex Ferguson's side at Eastlands over the weekend of January 7/8.

Roberto Mancini's side, who beat Stoke in the final to claim their first trophy in 35 years, are currently five points clear of reigning champions United in the Premier League as they seek to snatch the English title away from Old Trafford.

Udinese down Inter to go top

REUTERS, Rome

Udinese joined AC Milan at the top of Serie A on Saturday after winning 1-0 at Inter Milan in a game that finished in dramatic style with two missed penalties and two sendings-off in the last four minutes.

Chilean winger Mauricio Isla scored the only goal from a lightning counter-attack in the 73rd minute to give Udinese 27 points from 13 matches, the same as Milan who have a better goal difference.

In a dramatic finale Javier Zanetti (Inter) and Damiano Ferronetti (Udinese) were dismissed while Antonio Di Natale and Giampaolo Pazzini missed penalties for each side.

Inter remained sixth from bottom after suffering their sixth league defeat of the season.

A double from Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani and one each by Ezequiel Lavezzi and Blerim Dzemaili helped Napoli climb to fifth with a 4-2 win over bottom club Lecce.

RESULTS

Kaiserslautern 1 (Hubnik 5-0)
Hertha Berlin 1 (Raffael 14)
Freiburg 1 (Cisse 67) Hanover 1
(Bastians 44-0)
Gladbach 1 (Hanke 72)
Dortmund 1 (Lewandowski 40)
VfL Wolfsburg 2 (Mandzukic 10,
Madlung 41) Mainz 0 2 (Ivanschitz
70, Choupo-Moting 81)
Bayern Munich 4 (Ribery 22,
77, Robben 69-pen, 83-pen) Werder
Bremen 1 (Rosenberg 52)
VfB Stuttgart 2 (Gentner 29, 36)
Cologne 2 (Podolski 15, 88)



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City star Sergio Aguero celebrates after scoring a brilliant goal during their Premier League match against Norwich City at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Saturday.

RESULTS

Inter Milan 0 **Udinese 1** (Isla 73)
Napoli 4 (Lavezzi 26, Cavani 33,
82, Dzemaili 41) Lecce 2 (Muriel 54,
Corvia 90)