

Neymar backs Barca over Real

INTERNET, undated

Santos star Neymar says he wants Barcelona to beat Real Madrid in Saturday's Clasico clash.

The Brazilian starlet is backing his compatriots Dani Alves and Adriano in this weekend's Clasico and also revealed that he hopes to one day play alongside Xavi and Messi.

Neymar has stated that he wants Barcelona to beat Real Madrid in Saturday's La Liga Clasico between the two sides due to the Blaugrana's Brazilian influences.

The 19-year-old has been perennially linked with both Spanish sides, but says that he would prefer Pep Guardiola's men to emerge victorious because of his compatriots Dani Alves and Adriano representing the Camp Nou outfit.

"I am very fond of Dani Alves and I always support him. I'm going with Daniel and Adriano," the 19-year-old told Mundo Deportivo.

"Barca are the best team in the world. They all play the ball. Xavi, Iniesta and Messi are crucial and I hope to play with them live."

The Brazil international also looked forward to the Club World Cup in Japan, where his Santos side could meet Guardiola's European champions.

Final three revealed

Football

AFP, Paris

Holder Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Xavi were on Monday named on the final three-man shortlist for the 2011 FIFA Ballon d'Or award, which will be presented at a ceremony in Zurich on January 9.

Barcelona superstar Messi won the inaugural award -- a combination of the France Football Ballon d'Or prize and FIFA's World Player of the Year award -- last year, having picked up both awards in 2009.

His great Real Madrid rival Ronaldo had won both awards the previous year.

Messi's Barcelona team-mate Xavi was also shortlisted for the 2010 prize and finished in third place, behind another Barca colleague, Andres Iniesta.

The three-man shortlist was unveiled during a press conference at France Football headquarters in Paris attended by FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke.

Messi, 24, will start as a strong favourite to retain his prize, after a year in which he inspired his club to a La Liga and Champions League double.

He scored twice, including a memorable solo goal at the Bernabeu, as Barca beat arch rivals Real in the Champions League semifinals and was also on target in



XAVI



CRISTIANO RONALDO



LIONEL MESSI

the 3-1 defeat of Manchester United in the final at Wembley.

This season he has scored his 200th goal for Barcelona and is closing in on Cesar Rodriguez' all-time record of 235 goals for the club.

Like Messi, 26-year-old Ronaldo scores at a rate of roughly once a game and last season broke the record for most goals scored in a La Liga season with 40 as his side finished runners-up to Barcelona.

He scored an extra-time winner in the Copa del Rey final

against Barca in April and recently found the net for the 100th time in a Real shirt.

The award is voted for by national team coaches and captains, as well as a panel of football journalists selected by France Football magazine.

In the award for Men's Coach of the Year, Messi's Barcelona mentor Pep Guardiola was shortlisted alongside Real Madrid's Jose Mourinho and Sir Alex Ferguson of Manchester United.

A shortlist for FIFA's Ferenc Puskas Award for the best goal of the year was also revealed, with Wayne Rooney's spectacular overhead bicycle kick for Manchester United against Manchester City leading the nominations.

Messi's inventive chip over the goalkeeper and volley against Arsenal in the Champions League and a slaloming solo goal by Brazilian sensation Neymar in a league game for Santos against Flamengo were also shortlisted.

In the women's equivalent of

the Ballon d'Or, holder Marta of Brazil was nominated alongside USA striker Abby Wambach and Japan's Homare Sawa, who finished top scorer at this year's Women's World Cup in Germany.

Japan coach Norio Sasaki was recognised for leading his country to their first ever World Cup title by being named in the shortlist for the Women's Coach of the Year prize.

France's Bruno Bini and the USA's Swedish coach Pia Sundhage were also shortlisted.

Juve return to top

AFP, Rome



Juventus went back to the top of Serie A after a 2-0 victory over Cesena on Sunday in a match where the visitors had their goalkeeper controversially sent off.

Claudio Marchisio and Arturo Vidal, from the penalty spot, scored the goals that restored the Old Lady of Turin's two-point lead over AC Milan and Udinese.

But the match was not without incident and controversy, not least the dismissal of Cesena goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli.

Juve dominated possession in the first half but managed only two shots on target, the best effort being from an angle by Mirko Vucinic that Antonioli saved comfortably.

Vucinic had another effort after the break that Antonioli parried, with Simone Pepe knocking the follow-up straight into the goalkeeper's hands.

Pepe then headed a great chance wide after meeting a cross

RESULTS	
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 28)	Siena 0
Catania 0	Cagliari 1 (Ibarbo 64)
Chievo 0	Atalanta 0
Fiorentina 3 (Jovetic 17-pen, Gamberini 44, Silva 86-pen)	Roma 0
Juventus 2 (Marchisio 72, Vidal 83-pen)	Cesena 0
Parma 0	Palermo 0

from the left by Giorgio Chiellini.

Juve lost substitute and club captain Alessandro Del Piero after a clash with Marco Rossi that left him bloodied and carried off on a stretcher.

The hosts got the breakthrough their persistence, if not their effectiveness, deserved 17 minutes from time.

Marchisio played a one-two with Vidal and then turned and shot home smartly from the edge of the box.

Any chance of a Cesena comeback was wiped out with the dismissal of Antonioli in unusual circumstances.

He rushed from his line to punch the ball clear, which hit the incoming Emanuele Giacherini before rebounding out of play.

However, the two players collided in the action and to Cesena's

astonishment, the referee pointed to the spot and sent off Antonioli.

Cesena had already made all their substitutions so defender Guillermo Rodriguez had to go in goal and his first job was to pick Vidal's penalty out of the net.

Roma finished with eight men as they crashed to a 3-0 humiliation at Fiorentina, who began the game by paying tribute to former player Socrates, who died earlier on Sunday.

Juan was harshly sent off inside the first quarter of the match as he gave away a penalty by bringing down Stevan Jovetic, who picked himself up to score from the spot.

Alessandro Gamberini then headed home a corner on the stroke of half-time.

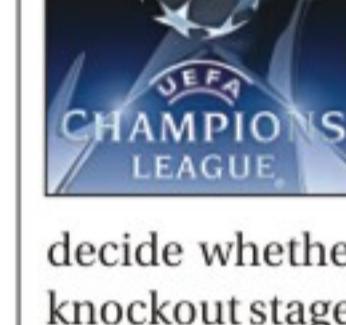
Fernando Gago was sent off for a second booking and then Bojan Krkic was dismissed late on for blocking the ball on the line with his hands.

Santiago Silva completed Roma's misery by scoring Fiorentina's second penalty of the game.

Earlier, Victor Ibarbo scored a stunning individual goal to give Cagliari a 1-0 victory over Catania and their first win in eight matches.

It's crunch time

AFP, Paris



The English Premier League's claims to being the best in Europe will be tested this week with three clubs facing Champions League matches which will decide whether or not they progress to the knockout stages.

Chelsea host Valencia on Tuesday needing to either beat the Spaniards or draw 0-0 to progress -- failure to do so is likely to have dire consequences for young Portuguese manager Andre Villas-Boas.

Last season's finalists Manchester United have to avoid defeat at Swiss side Basel on Wednesday, while city rivals Manchester City face the toughest task as they host Group A winners Bayern Munich needing to beat them and hope second-placed Napoli lose at pointless Villarreal.

They will be looking to join holders Barcelona, Real Madrid, 2010 winners Inter Milan and city rivals AC Milan, as well as the first Cypriot club to qualify, APOEL Nicosia, in the last 16.

Chelsea will go into the clash with Valencia at least comforted by their 3-0 away win over Newcastle on Saturday -- the first time

they have had successive clean sheets in the Premier League since January.

Villas-Boas believes that the victory over the Magpies has given them the necessary boost to get the result they require against the former Champions League finalists.

"We now have a major, major game against Valencia," he said. "We hope to get through it and that will set up the right emotional stimulus to take on the league leaders."

"The results haven't gone our way recently so to find an inner-belief and strength (to win at Newcastle) was a major key."

However, he is determined that his players do not go to London just looking for a score draw.

"Our mentality will be to go there to win. We'll have a chance in London to see what we are capable of."

Elsewhere all three French clubs are still theoretically in the mix though Lyon need a miracle to survive -- having to beat Dinamo Zagreb by seven goals and for Real Madrid to hammer Ajax.

Lille appear the best placed as a home win over Turkish side Trabzonspor will suffice for the French champions while 1992 European Cup winners Marseille must beat bottom-placed Borussia Dortmund to ensure they progress.

Doctor paid last respects

Football

AFP, Rome

Serie A club Fiorentina have paid their respects to former Brazilian player Socrates who died on Sunday aged 57 from an intestinal infection.

Players wore black armbands and a minute's silence was observed before their kick-off against Roma.

Socrates spent one year at the club in the 1984-85 season, just two years after he had captained Brazil in the 1982 World Cup.

La Viola paid tribute to him on their website.

"To the unforgettable 'Doctor' who played with the purple shirt in 1984/85, playing 25 matches and scoring six goals and who will always be remembered for his footballing intelligence, he will be affectionately remembered by the club, the team and the Fiorentina fans," said a club statement.

Tributes also poured in from former team-mates and opponents.

"I'm really sorry for Socrates, he's also a little bit one of ours," said Paolo Rossi, Italy's hero in their World Cup victory in 1982, in which they knocked out Socrates's Brazil.

"It's a piece of our history that's broken off and gone away."

Italy beat Brazil 3-2 in the second group stage to reach the semifinals with Rossi scoring a hat-trick while Socrates notched the Selecão's opening strike.

"I remember the goal he scored against (Dino) Zoff, he was one-on-one and it didn't seem like he could get to the ball, he looked slow but in reality he wasn't," added Rossi.

Giancarlo Antognoni, a team-mate of Socrates's at Fiorentina and an opponent at the 1982 World Cup, spoke of his pain.

"I'm really hurt, everyone was hoping that he was getting better and that he could recover," he said.

"I was injured that year (1984-85) and didn't play much but I have great memories of Socrates."

"He was a true personality, above the rules with his own methodology, his way of life and his ideas."

"He struggled to adapt to our football but he was an authentic champion, full of refined class, great charisma and character."

The Brazilian's former coach at Fiorentina, Giancarlo De Sista also spoke of his admiration for the player.

"Socrates was a very intelligent man, he had great class," he said.

"I remember that he was an objector, he wanted to know everything, why he couldn't smoke on the team bus, why we had to be in retreat on the Saturday nights before games."

"He was an intelligent person who was interested in politics although he smoked and drank a bit too much."

Fiorentina fans hung up a banner in remembrance of their former player during the match against Roma that read: "Doctor fly in the sky and do a backheel worthy of God."

Bastian eyes early return

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich hope that midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger will make his comeback from injury before the December 18 date that marks the winter Bundesliga break.

The 27-year-old had a plate inserted in his right shoulder after breaking his collarbone following a heavy fall in the 3-2 Champions League win over Napoli on November 2.

"We really hope that Bastian can play again before Christmas," sporting director Christian Nerlinger told German daily Bild.

Bayern, who moved atop the Bundesliga on the weekend after their 4-1 victory over Werder Bremen, wrap up their group phase of the Champions League with an away tie against Manchester City on Wednesday.

League action sees the Bavarian club travel to Stuttgart on Sunday before hosting Cologne on December 18. Their last match of the calendar year comes two days later in a German Cup quarterfinal against Bochum.

SPORTS POLL

Who is the right candidate for ICC leadership?

Saber Chowdhury 83.5%

Mustafa Kamal 16.5%

TOTAL VOTES: 231

WEEKLY QUESTION

Who is Bangladesh's sports personality of 2011?

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What to WATCH

TUESDAY

BTV

Bangladesh v Pakistan

Third ODI (D/N)

Live from 1:30pm

TEN Action+

SAFF Championship

Pakistan v Nepal