

Barca set Clásico

REUTERS, Madrid

A second-string Barcelona set up a King's Cup quarterfinal clash against holders and great rivals Real Madrid when they came back from a goal down to beat Osasuna 2-1 on Thursday for a 6-1 aggregate victory.

Serbian forward Dejan Lekic put the home side ahead just before halftime at a foggy Reyno de Navarra stadium but any hopes of an unlikely comeback were snuffed out by Barca's Chile international Alexis Sanchez when he nodded the equaliser four minutes into the second half.

Teenage B-team midfielder Sergi Roberto grabbed the winner 18 minutes from time when he ran on to a pass from substitute Lionel Messi and crashed a superb angled shot past goalkeeper Asier Riesgo.

Barca, who lost 1-0 to Real in last year's final, travel to the Spanish capital for the first leg on Wednesday, with the return leg at the Nou Camp a week later.

The winners of the tie will meet city rivals Valencia or Levante in the semifinals.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (C) celebrates the second goal with teammate Sergi Roberto during their Spanish Cup match against Osasuna at the Reyno de Navarra Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Spotlight on C'Ron

REUTERS, Madrid



Even more attention than usual will be focused on Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo when the La Liga leaders play at Real Mallorca on Saturday after his petulant reaction to whistling from disgruntled fans last weekend.

The Portuguese refused to celebrate his goal at the Bernabeu, Real's fifth in a 5-1 thrashing of Granada and his 21st of the campaign, after a section of the home support again expressed their frustration with his performance.

There appears to be a perception among some of the Real faithful that the world's most expensive player can be too selfish and that he is more concerned with personal success than collective triumph.

Coach Jose Mourinho and his team mates have rallied behind Ronaldo and he was given a resounding vote of confidence by honorary Real president Alfredo Di Stefano in the 85-year-old's latest newspaper column published on Thursday.

"We should support him because he could not put in any more effort, he gives everything to the team," Di Stefano wrote in sports daily Marca.

"The Portuguese is an example to follow

and his success is the result of a great deal of work," added the former Real player and coach.

Real can stretch their lead over second-placed Barcelona to eight points with a win in Mallorca, with the champions, who drew 1-1 at local rivals Espanyol last weekend, not playing at home against Real Betis until Sunday.

Barca's form at their Nou Camp arena has been almost impeccable, winning eight and drawing one of their nine games and scoring 39 goals without reply, but they have taken only 13 points from a possible 24 away from home.

Coach Pep Guardiola, whose side are chasing a fourth consecutive La Liga title, said on Wednesday the team's patchy performances on their travels could cost them the league.

"Away from home we don't have the numbers to be champions and we must be more ambitious," he told a news conference ahead of Barca's King's Cup last-16, second leg at Osasuna later on Thursday.

"The reliability we have at home is harder to achieve away but we're ready to fight for the remaining 63 points."

Valencia, four points behind Barca in third, host struggling Real Sociedad on Saturday, while fourth-placed Levante, the season's surprise package, play at Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Everton sign Gibson

REUTERS, London

Everton have signed Ireland midfielder Darron Gibson from Manchester United for an undisclosed fee, the Premier League club said on Friday.

The 24-year-old, a product of United's youth system, made 60 appearances for Alex Ferguson's side since making his debut in 2005 but never nailed down a regular place in the side despite scoring a few spectacular goals.

Gibson has signed a four-and-a-half-year contract, Everton said on their website (www.evertonfc.com).

He is Everton's second new recruit since the opening of the January transfer window, following the loan signing of LA Galaxy's Landon Donovan.

Gibson, who has 17 Ireland caps and will be part of the squad for this year's Euro 2012 finals in Poland and Ukraine, could be in line for his debut against Aston Villa on Saturday.

Gerrard extends stay

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard is to stay at Anfield after signing a contract extension with the Premier League club.

Local hero Gerrard, 31, has been a one-club man throughout his career and the England midfielder told liverpoolfc.tv on Thursday: "I'm very happy. It's a very proud day for myself and my family."

The deal, the terms of which have not been made public, was announced less than a day after Gerrard scored the only goal in the Reds' League Cup semifinal first leg win at Manchester City.

"It comes on the back of a fantastic team performance last night when we got the result we were looking for," Gerrard added. "The contract extension coming the day after has been the icing on the cake so it has been a perfect 24 hours."

His latest goal meant Gerrard has now scored in two of his three appearances since the new year as he looks to put a difficult 2011, where he was sidelined with groin and ankle problems, behind him.

"This is the club I love and is the club I have supported since I was a young boy," Gerrard said. "I am living the dream as the captain of one of the biggest clubs in the world."

"I love coming to work every day and the

experiences I have had since I was eight years of age and first signed for the club, I wouldn't change them for the world."

"To extend that and to hopefully have some more good times in a red shirt is what I want."

"There will be more highs and lows, there's no doubt about it as that's part and parcel of being a football player at a top club."

"The important thing is that you react well to the lows and experience more of the highs."

"I'm confident moving forward that the club is going in the right direction."

"We've got a fantastic team, we've got the right owners in place and the right team behind our team, so I'm really confident we'll have more good experiences in the future."

His latest deal means Gerrard is set to finish his playing career at Liverpool, having joined the Merseysiders as a schoolboy.

But the Reds are already planning for the time when he does retire, having offered him an ambassadorial role similar to the one occupied by Kenny Dalglish before he was recalled for his second spell as Liverpool manager.

"It's really flattering for me that the club have offered me the chance to stay when I eventually hang my boots up," said Gerrard.

"Hopefully that will be in many years to come because I want to play for as long as I can."

Pato rejects PSG

Football

AFP, Rome

Pato has scuppered Paris St Germain's hopes of landing the Brazil forward by announcing that he is staying with AC Milan.

Earlier in the day sources at the French club claimed PSG had reached agreement to sign the 22-year-old.

Qatari-backed PSG, who have also signed Barcelona's Brazil defender Maxwell, had tabled a 28 million euro bid, with an additional seven million euros in possible bonuses.

However, Milan released a statement detailing the player's intention to stay in Italy.

"Alexandre Pato will stay in the red and black shirt, the striker has decided to continue his young, splendid and winning career with Milan," said the club statement.

Pato, who is dating Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi's daughter Barbara, added: "Milan is my home, I didn't want to interrupt my career in red and black after having won my first two trophies with this shirt."

"I want to help write the story of Milan and contribute to the future success of this club with happiness and in perfect harmony with the whole environment."

"This joy will give me the motivation to approach future games with maximum enthusiasm and the desire to win and score goals."

"Today is a special day for me. I want to thank the president Berlusconi, the club and the fans who have always believed in me."

PSG had offered Pato a three-and-a-half year contract reportedly worth between six and seven million euros a season.

The forward's agent was expected in Paris on Friday to finalise the deal which would have seen him rejoin former Milan boss Carlo Ancelotti, as well as sports director Leonardo, who also used to coach Milan.

While the Pato deal has fallen through Leonardo was able to announce the arrival of Maxwell who is joining PSG on a three-and-a-half-year deal from Barcelona.

"We're thrilled, he's a player I have always liked and who plays in the same position that I used to play in - we have something in common."



Paris Saint Germain's latest signing Brazilian defender Maxwell waves after a news conference at the Parc des Princes on Thursday

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tevez talks abandoned

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan have abandoned talks with Manchester City over the possible transfer of Carlos Tevez following Pato's decision to stay in Italy, Italian news agency Ansa said Thursday.

Milan chief executive Adriano Galliani was holding talks with City and Tevez's agent Kia Joorabchian in London when news filtered through that Pato had turned down a move to Paris Saint Germain.

The decision to walk away from the Tevez negotiations was a direct result of Pato's stance, said Ansa.

Earlier, Italian press reported that Galliani had gone to England to finalise the transfer of the 27-year-old Argentine rebel.

French sources also claimed PSG had agreed a deal over a 28-million-euro move for Pato, potentially rising to 35 million euros with bonuses.

However, the 22-year-old Brazilian's decision to reject the move to PSG, where he could have rejoined former Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti, seems to have put a spanner in the Tevez deal's works.

The news came in stark contrast to rumours throughout the day, in which even Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti threw in the towel, saying he thought Tevez would move to the red half of the city.

Galliani had travelled to London with lawyer Lorenzo Cantamessa and FIFA agent Giuseppe Riso to meet with City and Joorabchian.

He was expected to make a final offer to City, believed to be based around a loan until the end of the season and then a compulsory sale, with certain conditions attached.

Milan last week claimed to have already reached an agreement with Tevez while City continued to insist they were not interested in letting the Argentine leave on loan.

Inter and PSG are also said to be interested in the former Manchester United star, with both allegedly having tabled offers.

Silva poised to return

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester City playmaker David Silva should be fit for Monday's Premier League trip to Wigan Athletic but striker Mario Balotelli is a doubt, assistant coach David Platt said on Friday.

Spaniard Silva, who missed the midweek League Cup defeat by Liverpool with an ankle problem, has been inspirational for the league leaders this term and his return would be welcome news as City try to arrest a recent slip in form.

"David did a bit of running yesterday over in Spain, he'll do a little bit more when he gets back, we are hopeful he will be on the training pitch tomorrow," Platt told a news conference.

A below-par Balotelli was taken off before halftime against Liverpool with an ankle problem and Platt said the Italian was a "maybe" for Monday.

City's three point lead over Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur could have disappeared by the time they face Wigan.

The new year has not been kind to Roberto Mancini's men, who have mustered only one win and three defeats in the four games they have played in all competitions this month.

That includes back-to-back cup defeats, having lost 3-2 to United in the FA Cup third round last weekend before a 1-0 defeat by Liverpool in Wednesday's League Cup semifinal first leg.

Nevertheless, they have still lost only twice in the Premier League all season, scoring 56 goals already, and Platt brushed off any notion of a "crisis".

"We are where we are, it's not a bad position to be in," he said.

They will be without suspended captain Vincent Kompany for Monday's game, while fellow defender Kolo Toure and his midfielder brother Yaya are on African Nations Cup duty with Ivory Coast.

SPORTS POLL

Is the one-match ban justified on Tamim Iqbal?

Yes 63.9%

No 36.1%

TOTAL VOTES: 183

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think the BPL will be successful?

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What to WATCH

STAR Cricket

Australia v India

Third Test, Day 2

Live from 8:30am

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Sri Lanka

Second ODI

Live from 2:00pm

TEN Action+

La Liga

Mallorca v Real Madrid

Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

TEN Sports

Serie A

Catania v AS Roma

Live from 1:40am (Sunday)

ESPN

English Premiership

Man United v Bolton

Live from 9:00pm

STAR Sports

English Premiership

DAY'S EVENT

Premier Div Cricket League

Abahani v Victoria

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Crickit Stadium, Mirpur

Mohammedan v Kalabagan

Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

Gazi Tank v CCS