



Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema celebrates his opening goal against Rayo Vallecano in their Primera Liga encounter at the Teresa Rivero Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Real bounce back

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid kept Barcelona in their sights as an early goal from Karim Benzema put them on their way to a 2-0 win over Rayo Vallecano - but they remain eight points behind the Catalan side, who are yet to drop a point this season.

Benzema struck after 13 minutes and Cristiano Ronaldo added a second mid-way through the second half as Jose Mourinho's side came out on top in the match suspended on Sunday due to floodlight failure caused by sabotage.

In injury time Jose Casado was dismissed for the home side after receiving his second yellow card.

The green light was finally given to play the game on Monday evening at Rayo's Estadio de Vallecas ground in what was a tough battle for Madrid against city rivals Rayo with the pressure on after Barcelona beat Granada 2-0 on Saturday, their fifth win in succession, while Madrid had only one.

"We played as a team but we could still have been better. We were committed, which is important and it allowed us to win without problems," said Mourinho afterwards.

"It has been a strange situation with the postponement and it has been complicated to prepare for this but it was the same for both teams. We overcame it and although it wasn't a great win, we did enough. We had a lot of chances to score while they had few."

Sergio Ramos returned to the side after being dropped for Madrid's Champions League victory over Manchester City last week, while Michael Essien was also given the nod over Sami Khedira to partner Xabi Alonso in front of the defence in a more offensive formation than against the Premiership side as Luka Modric returned.

Jemez has shown an admirable commitment to attacking football and they faced the champions with two wingers in Jose Carlos and Lass Bangoura, who had full licence to go forward.

Apart from a dangerous header from Pepe, saved by keeper Ruben Martinez, Rayo took the game to Madrid, who were reduced to committing a series of fouls and Essien was yellow carded for a handball.

However, Madrid conjured up an excellent goal on the counter-attack which spanned the length of the pitch and was finished off by Benzema, who knocked the ball in from close range from an Angel Di Maria cross on the left.

RESULTS

Rayo Vallecano 0 Real Madrid 2
(Benzema 13, Cristiano Ronaldo 70-pen)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Sevilla 2

3-0 walkover awarded to Roma

REUTERS, Rome

AS Roma have been awarded a 3-0 walkover win for Sunday's match at Cagliari after the game was called off for security reasons, Serie A said in a statement on Monday.

Cagliari club president Massimo Cellino was also referred to the Italian football federation's prosecutor for possible further sanctions after calling on supporters to defy an order from local authorities to play the game behind closed doors.

Cagliari have moved to the Is Arenas on the outskirts of the Sardinian capital but authorities ruled last Thursday that the renovated stadium was not ready to host Serie A games despite recent improvements.

The Sardinians had previously been forced to play their opening Serie A home match against Atalanta behind closed doors.

On Saturday, Cagliari issued a statement slamming "the bureaucratic difficulties and the collective disinterest of the authorities". They invited fans to watch the Roma game, saying the stadium was safe.

Cagliari's city government responded by postponing the game.

Cagliari had played at the Stadio Sant'Elia from 1970 until late on last season when they abandoned the dilapidated arena due to disagreements with the local authorities and growing safety worries.

They staged their remaining home games last season in Trieste, around 1,000 miles from their base and closer to Belgrade than the Sardinian capital.

Fletcher set to start

Football

AFP, Manchester

Darren Fletcher is set to continue his return to full fitness with his first competitive start for Manchester United in 10 months when Newcastle visit Old Trafford on Wednesday night for their League Cup third round clash.

The Scotland international midfielder made his first appearance for United as a second-half substitute against Galatasaray last week since his chronic bowel condition left his football career hanging in the balance.

Now he is set to make his first start since November last year after spending the end of last season helping to coach United's reserve side as he battled the illness before working during the summer to make his comeback.

Fletcher, 28, has had to change his diet and adapt his lifestyle to overcome the ulcerative colitis condition and Ferguson is delighted to be able to include him in his starting line-up on Wednesday as he prepares to make a host of changes from their 2-1 win over Liverpool on Sunday.

If the Scot comes through the game unscathed he could be in line for his Premier League return against Tottenham on Saturday.

Ferguson said: "Fletcher will certainly play against Newcastle and that is the perfect game for him to start back. Then we have the game against Tottenham and he could be involved in that."

"It depends on how he does on Wednesday. It will be his first 90 minutes since 10 months out. It's a big one for him. He is handling the condition at the moment, as we saw the other night he is looking fine."

"It is a matter of hoping the condition stays dormant and he is handling his diet well. Hopefully he gets that break."

Ashley Young will miss out as he is out

until October with a knee injury while Wayne Rooney is still not fit following the nasty cut he received on his thigh last month against Fulham.

Ferguson will opt to make a number of changes for the League Cup as he usually does in the early stages and Alexander Buttner, Anderson and Tom Cleverley could all feature having not played a part in the Liverpool game despite being on the bench.

Meanwhile, United defender Rio Ferdinand expressed his relief at getting the game against Liverpool out of the way after United stuttered to victory over 10 men on an emotional afternoon when Hillsborough was remembered.

He said: "With the occasion and the emotions involved, we just wanted to come here, get the job done and get out with the three points. We have done that so we are well pleased."

"You can get really involved and sometimes the emotion of the occasion can affect you, but they dealt with it fantastically."

Newcastle are likely to field a strong side with Fabricio Coloccini and Cheick Tiote set to start to get some more minutes under their belt while Shola Ameobi, Dan Gosling and Sylvain Marveaux could also feature.

Coloccini has not played since Newcastle's draw with Aston Villa on September 2 while Tiote made just his second appearance of the season in Newcastle's win over Norwich on Sunday.

The Magpies have not won at Old Trafford since 1972. However, manager Alan Pardew is going to give the competition a real go despite knowing it will be a tough test against Ferguson's side even if the hosts field a weakened side.

Pardew said: "Of course you want to enjoy going there. We are going to have make sure we can get game time out of the players that will need it."

'Terry not a racist'

AFP, London

Former Chelsea manager Avram Grant on Tuesday slammed the Football Association (FA) for taking action against John Terry, but admitted he was surprised by the player's decision to end his England career.

Terry returned to FA headquarters at Wembley stadium in northwest London on Tuesday morning for the second day of a disciplinary hearing.

"Nobody thinks that John Terry is a racist, so the FA need to leave it," Grant, who coached Chelsea from 2007-2008, told BBC radio.

"John likes to fight and he's very passionate about the national team so I was surprised. But he's not a child -- he knows what he's doing. One thing I must say about JT is that he's not a racist, that's for sure. He's a good man."

Terry effectively accused the FA of forcing his hand after they pursued charges, despite him being cleared in the criminal case of a racially-aggravated public order offence over the same incident last October.

Although the FA accepted that the case had taken too long to resolve, it denied Terry's claim, insisting that there were two separate proceeds between England matters and those at club level.

Money not an issue: Walcott

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal forward Theo Walcott insisted on Tuesday that his delay in signing a new contract has anything to do with money.

Talks over extending the 23-year-old's contract, which expires at the end of the season, reached crisis point last month when he rejected a new five-year deal worth £75,000 (\$122,000) a week.

And manager Arsene Wenger warned last week the club may be forced to sell Walcott if an agreement could not be reached before the transfer window reopened.

It was reported Walcott was holding out for £100,000 (\$162,300) a week, but he told ESPN: "That speculation on the money side of it has never been me. That's not me."

"I'm not the sort of person who's influenced by money. I always make my decisions based on football and only football."

"Hopefully, something can be sorted out. I'll just wait for the club to get back to us now and go from there."

He added: "It's a slow process."

"My last contract took over six months to happen. Hopefully, it can be sorted out."

"I've never said I wanted to go, I've always wanted to stay." Walcott, who inherited Thierry Henry's number 14 jersey, said he wanted to become as big an Arsenal icon as the Frenchman, who was the team's all-time leading goalscorer.

"I want to be an Arsenal legend," said Walcott. "Thierry joined the club when he was 22 and I want to become an Arsenal legend like him, playing up front as well, which is a big factor for me."

"I've played on the right wing and had the opportunity to play up front a bit more so I think it's about time."

However, the England star refused to rule out leaving Arsenal completely.

"It's one of those things that happens in the game," he said.

"If it comes to it, if the club had to sell me, I'd be disappointed but, like I said, hopefully something can be sorted."

Ref complains over abuse

AFP, London

English Premier League referee Mark Halsey has informed Greater Manchester Police of two abusive tweets following his handling of Sunday's match between Liverpool and Manchester United.

Halsey received the insulting messages, which made mention of his suffering from throat cancer, after overseeing United's 2-1 win at Anfield where he sent off Liverpool's Jonjo Shelvey.

Two tweets were sent out by unhappy Liverpool fans following the game, both of which were met with outrage from other Twitter users.

One post, from an account named @johnwareing1, read: "I hope Mark Halsey gets cancer again and dies" while another from @fcjohn259 read: "Mark Halsey should've died of cancer."

Halsey returned to refereeing in March 2010 and Professional Game Match Officials Limited said in a statement: "PGMO abhors any abuse of match officials whether that is in stadia or outside of it."

"Our main concern is towards Mark and his family, and as with all match officials, there is a backroom team who are there for them."

Terry attends FA hearing

AFP, London



John Terry and Anton Ferdinand met at Wembley as the Chelsea captain's Football Association disciplinary hearing over allegations he racially abused the QPR defender started on Monday.

Ferdinand gave evidence to the independent panel at the hearing, with Terry in attendance to hear the case against him.

Central defender Terry, who dramatically announced his retirement from international football on Sunday, effectively accused the FA of forcing his hand after the governing body pressed on with charges that he racially abused Ferdinand in October.

Terry, who has always denied using a racist slur against his opponent, was found not guilty in a criminal case relating to the incident in a London court in July.

Ferdinand was at Wembley all morning, leaving shortly before midday, while Terry -- who will reportedly return on Tuesday -- left near 3pm local time (1400GMT).

The case could last most of the week.

England manager Roy Hodgson said on Monday that he had "reluctantly" accepted John Terry's decision to call time on his international career, as the centre-back contested a Football Association racism charge.

Despite the controversy, Hodgson picked Terry in his squad for the European Championship in June and wanted to have the 31-year-old involved in England's bid to qualify for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

"I'd like to thank John Terry for his commitment to the England team since I became manager," said Hodgson. "I am of course disappointed to lose a player of John's international experience and exceptional ability."

"I have enjoyed a good relationship with John during my time as England manager and I reluctantly accept his decision. I can also confirm that he had the courtesy to call me prior to the announcement of his retirement from the England team."



A visitor poses with the waxwork figures of Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (L) and Real Madrid ace Cristiano Ronaldo (R) at Madame Tussauds in London on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

Serie A

Chievo v Inter Milan

Live from 1:00am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

Serie A

AC Milan v Cagliari

DAY'S EVENT

KFC Women's Super League

Ansar & VDP v Thakurgaon

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National