



Atletico Madrid striker Radamel Falcao is ecstatic after scoring the all-important goal against Real Sociedad during their Primera Liga encounter at the Anoeta Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Atletico stay level

AFP, Madrid



Radamel Falcao scored a stunning last-minute free-kick to give Atletico Madrid a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad on Sunday and keep his team level with Barcelona on 22 points at the top of La Liga.

The right-footed, curling strike was Falcao's ninth league goal of the campaign and the win was Atletico's 10th straight in all competitions, including seven in the league as they stayed eight points clear of city rivals Real Madrid who are fourth.

Sociedad fired a warning after only 15 seconds when former Arsenal player Carlos Vela found Antoine Griezmann whose shot was well blocked by Thibaut Courtois in the Atletico goal.

It took the visitors time to get used to very wet conditions before Koke tested Enaut Zubikarai on 12 minutes with a low shot.

Courtois had to stretch to deny Vela on 20 minutes and Falcao blocked a goalbound shot from Asier Illarramendi

as Real enjoyed the best chances of a goalless first period.

Atletico were brighter after the interval with Falcao going near with a header and then narrowly failing to meet a cross at close range.

The Colombian appeared to be on a mission to open the scoring, shooting just wide from close range and attempting to take on the whole Sociedad defence on one occasion.

RESULTS

Getafe 0 **Levante 1** (Herrero 87)
Espanyol 3 (Verdu 37, 48, Stuani 90+3) Rayo Vallecano 2 (Carrilho Baptista 11, 63)
Granada 1 (El-Arabi 77) **Real Zaragoza 2** (Postiga 3, Rodriguez Romero 27)
Osasuna 0 Real Betis 0

In a bid to help him the Uruguayan Cristian Rodriguez was introduced and he immediately forced a save from distance and Brazilian centre-half Joao Miranda headed over the bar.

The home team's chances were now rare with Vela blazing over the best with 10 minutes remaining.

Just as it looked as if the game was heading for the draw Illarramendi tugged Rodriguez on the edge of the area and up stepped Falcao to hit home for a priceless victory.

Earlier on Sunday, Cristain Stuani powered home an injury-time header to give Espanyol a vital 3-2 win, their first of the season, at home to Rayo Vallecano.

Son or Celtic for Messi

AFP, Madrid



Celtic's hopes of beating Barcelona in the Champions League on Tuesday could be decided at a maternity ward rather than in the intimidating atmosphere of Camp Nou, the home of the Catalan giants.

The Spanish side's Argentine superstar Lionel Messi is due to become a father for the first time this week when his girlfriend, Antonella Rocuzzo, gives birth.

The couple's baby, already known to be a boy who will be named Thiago, was widely expected to arrive at the weekend.

That prompted feverish speculation in the Spanish media that Messi would be rested from the team.

"The game against Deportivo (on Saturday) could go down in Messi's history books. Several sources report

that the Argentine has the date of 20th October marked on his calendar as the day his first child, Thiago, will enter into the world," claimed Marca sports daily.

"Messi himself has confirmed that his family and that of Antonella are on their way to Barcelona for the occasion."

In the end, baby Thiago decided not to make an appearance just yet and Messi played in the 5-4 win over Deportivo La Coruna, scoring his 21st Barcelona hattrick which kept his team on top of La Liga.

With or without Messi, Barcelona are in pole position in their European group after back-to-back victories.

They can take a significant step towards

qualifying for the last 16 if they come out on top against Celtic. The Scottish club managed a surprise win away to Spartak Moscow in their last game to leave them second on four points.

Despite regular centre-halves Carles Puyol and Gerard Pique having spent most of the season in the treatment room, Barca have been a model of efficiency.

Although they haven't reached the peak of recent campaigns in terms of performance, only the El Clasico draw against Real Madrid has stopped them from boasting a perfect winning Liga record.

Messi once again showed his importance to the team with a hat-trick at the weekend and he now already has 15 goals this season. His tally for the calendar year is up to a remarkable 71.

Barca dismissed any fears of tiredness as they stormed into a three-goal lead away to Deportivo, but a harsh penalty awarded

for a foul by Javier Mascherano allowed the Galician side back into the game.

In the end they were left holding on for the final 10 minutes with just a goal advantage and down to 10 men following the dismissal of Mascherano.

Xavi Hernandez and Pedro Rodriguez started the game on the bench, given a break ahead of the visit from Celtic, but coach Tito Vilanova didn't risk dropping Messi who had been on international duty with Argentina.

With Puyol and Pique still not fully fit, it's likely that Mascherano and Alex Song will be the centre-half pairing against Celtic.

Messi closes in on goal mark

AFP, Madrid

Lionel Messi's hattrick in Barcelona's 5-4 tightrope walk of a win over Deportivo La Coruna has brought the forward closer to beating Pele and Gerd Mueller's all-time calendar marks of 75 and 85 goals respectively.

Messi has now scored 71 goals in 2012, meaning that by his standards he is only a couple of games away from surpassing Pele's 1959 tally of 75 for Santos and Brazil, Catalan daily El Mundo Deportivo pointed out Sunday on its website.

"Messi now has 71 goals, 12 of those for Argentina, and has another eight weeks to boost the tally," the paper noted.

"Everything therefore points to him beating 'O Rei' ('king' Pele) and maybe also Mueller, who in 1972 piled up 85 with Bayern and the German national side," the Barcelona daily continued.

Messi, also looking for a fourth world footballer of the year award, has already set a new Barcelona record in scoring 59 goals already in 2012 this year - one more than his total in 2010.

He has also managed 15 league hattricks for Barca, with Saturday's effort moving him ahead of legendary former star Cesar.

A further two trebles in the Spanish Cup, three more in the Champions League and one in the Spanish Supercup mean he has 21 overall for his club.

Ibra memoirs shortlisted

AFP, Stockholm

The best-selling autobiography of Swedish captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic has been short-listed for a prestigious literary award in his native country, the jury said on Monday.

"Jag är Zlatan Ibrahimovic" (I am Zlatan Ibrahimovic), written by the Paris Saint Germain player with Swedish journalist David Lagercrantz, was named among six titles selected to compete for The August Prize to be awarded on November 26.

The jury described the book as "a precise narration that leaves a lasting impression". "A sensitive and harsh description that takes the reader from the stands to the pitch and into Zlatan's world," it continued.

Inter's 4th on the trot

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan maintained their pursuit of Serie A leaders Juventus with a 2-0 win over Catania as Francesco Totti-inspired

Roma dominated a six-goal thriller against Genoa at the Olympic Stadium Sunday.

Inter's fourth win on the trot came thanks to goals from Antonio Cassano and Argentina international Rodrigo Palacio and leaves Andrea Stramaccioni's side in fourth place only four points behind leaders Juventus.

The Nerazzurri face Juventus away on November 3, and Stramaccioni believes the match -- coming after fixtures against Bologna and Sampdoria -- could be a turning point for their season.

"Maybe after the Juve game we'll have a clearer idea of what lies in store for us this season," said Stramaccioni.

In 30 previous encounters Catania had registered only five wins to 21 for their hosts.

And win number 22 looked on the cards when Cassano headed the ball between the legs of keeper Mariano Andujar to give Inter a 28th minute lead.

With five goals in a total of eight matches Stramaccioni is getting a return on the Milan striker.

But the Inter believes Diego Milito, with-month, will out a goal this soon come good.

"Milito didn't score because he made some sacrifices, but I still think he will be our top scorer in the end," he said.

The 36-year-old was particularly pleased by his improved defence, seven weeks after they leaked three goals in a shock 3-1 defeat at home to Roma.

"After we conceded those goals against Roma we've conceded only three more in six games, I'm happy about that," said Stramaccioni.

Juve took sole lead of the title race Saturday when goals from second-half substitutes Juan Caceres and Paul Pogba secured a 2-0 home win over Napoli and left Walter Mazzarri's side in second three points adrift.

Juve stand-in coach Angelo Alessio said Juve, now on 22 points and the only unbeaten team in the league, had only one priority against Napoli.

"We went out tonight (Saturday) to win. When we scored our opener, it was no surprise. We put six players up for that corner who could potentially score," he said.

Lazio, meanwhile, maintained their early season charge with a 3-2 win over embattled AC Milan that left the Rome-based side in third place four points behind AC Milan's fifth defeat in eight games in unlikely lead to the sacking of coach Massimiliano Allegri, according to Milan mindful of the fact he spine of his team turbulent summer period.

Allegri officials lost the during a transfer



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan forward Antonio Cassano celebrates his goal against Catania during their Serie A clash at San Siro on Sunday.

Brave Bonucci

INTERNET, Undated

If you attempt to rob Leonardo Bonucci at gun-point, he will punch you and chase your moped.

When some men have a gun pointed in their face after leaving a Ferrari dealership with their wife and young child, they give their mugger whatever they want. But Juventus defender Leonardo Bonucci doesn't get played like that. Instead, he punches them and chases their buddy's moped until he gets bored of doing so.

The player was leaving a Ferrari dealership in Turin on Thursday with his wife and baby when he was confronted by a man who pointed a gun in his face and demanded he hand over his watch.

According to the report in La Gazzetta dello Sport, Bonucci stayed perfectly still and the mugger grabbed his wrist, but the player spotted an opening and punched the attacker with his free hand.

The mugger then ran away to his accomplice on a nearby moped with Bonucci chasing on foot for a brief period.

And then Bonucci's wife reminded him that he isn't bullet proof and he was like, "That information would've been more useful before I punched and started to chase the guys with the gun."

Man jailed over Chris attack

AFP, London

A 21-year-old man was jailed for 16 weeks on Monday after admitting to attacking England goalkeeper Chris Kirkland during a televised game in the second-tier English Championship.

Aaron Cawley, from Cheltenham in south-west England, pleaded guilty to assault and invading the pitch during Sheffield Wednesday's 1-1 draw at home to Leeds United on Friday night.

Cawley appeared before magistrates in Sheffield, northern England, having been arrested for running onto the pitch at Hillsborough and shoving Kirkland in the face after Leeds scored a 76th-minute equaliser.

He then ran back into the crowd, but was detained by police on Sunday.

What to WATCH

STAR Cricket Champions League T20 Perth Scorchers v Auckland Aces Live from 5:30pm Titans v Delhi Daredevils Live from 9:30pm
ESPN Sportscentre India Sports News Live at 8:30pm
TEN Sports UEFA Champions League Barcelona v Celtic Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)
TEN Action UEFA Champions League Spartak Moscow v Benfica Live from 10:00pm Man United v Braga

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League (Four-day match, Day-4) Khulna v Barisal
Venue: Sk Abu Naser Stadium, Khulna Sylhet v Rangpur
Venue: Rangpur Cricket Garden Dhaka Metro v Chittagong