



Negredo puts Sevilla in charge

REUTERS, Madrid

Alvaro Negredo scored a last-minute penalty to put King's Cup specialists Sevilla in control of their last-32 tie against Espanyol with a 3-1 first-leg win on Thursday.

Sevilla lifted the trophy in 2007 and 2010 and unlike many other La Liga teams in this round of a much-maligned competition, they fielded an almost full-strength side at the Sanchez Pizjuan.

Federico Fazio headed in a corner after three minutes and the visitors levelled in the 70th following a brilliant run and shot from Christian Alfonso.

Defender Cala bundled the ball in for the hosts from another corner in the 83rd minute before Espanyol full back Ernesto Gallan was shown a second yellow card for a foul in the area and Spain striker Negredo netted from the spot.

La Liga sides Getafe and

Valladolid also won but a clutch of top-flight sides lost to lower-league opposition including Osasuna, Real Sociedad and Levante.

Last season's runners-up Athletic Bilbao could only manage a 0-0 draw at neighbours Eibar of the Segunda B (third tier) on a rain-soaked, churned-up pitch.

La Liga basement side Osasuna were beaten 1-0 at second tier Sporting Gijon after Gaston Sangoy netted in the 15th minute.

Sociedad went down 2-0 at second tier Cordoba while Europa League competitors Levante lost 1-0 at third tier Melilla who managed to hold on to their lead despite being reduced to 10 men near the end.

Getafe thrashed second tier Ponferradina 4-0 with a double from Jaime Gavilan while Valladolid triumphed 1-0 at home to Real Betis thanks to a goal by Alberto Bueno just before halftime.

Ribery set to return

AFP, Berlin

Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich are set to have France winger Franck Ribery available for Saturday's away game at Hamburg with Brazil's Rafinha and defender Daniel van Buyten also back in training.

Ribery rejoined squad training on Thursday after a knock to his right thigh in Bayern's Champions League win at Lille ten days ago, while van Buyten also trained with the team after recovering from a rib injury.

Right-back Rafinha has been given the all-clear after injuring his shoulder in Wednesday's 4-0 German Cup win at home to Kaiserslautern.

Bundesliga leaders Bayern are looking to bounce back at Hamburg having suffered their first league defeat of the season at home to Bayer Leverkusen last Sunday.

What to WATCH
ESPN
English Premiership
Man United v Arsenal
Live from 6:45pm
Swansea City v Chelsea
Live from 9:00pm
West Ham v Man City
Live from 11:30pm
Serie A
Juventus v Inter Milan
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

STAR Sports
English Premiership
Tottenham v Wigan
Live from 9:00pm
Primera Liga
Barcelona v Celta de Vigo
Live from 11:00pm
Real Madrid v Real Zaragoza
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)
Valencia v Atletico Madrid
Live from 3:00am (Sunday)

TEN Sports
Paris Masters

DAY'S EVENT
National Cricket League
(Four-day match, Day-2)
Rajshahi v Barisal
Venue: Shaeed Kamaruzzaman Stadium, Rajshahi
Khulna v Rangpur
Venue: Sk Abu Naser Stadium, Khulna
Sylhet v Chittagong
Venue: BKSP
Dhaka v Dhaka Metro
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Real back on song MU look to rebound

AFP, Madrid



After a slow start to the defence of their La Liga crown Real Madrid have clicked into gear and while they face a relentless Barcelona who continue to churn out victories, defender Sergio Ramos says they will keep

chasing their arch-rivals to the end.

With Cristiano Ronaldo once again firing on all cylinders and the rest of the team having rediscovered their form, Madrid have won four of their last five league games with only dropped points coming in a draw at the Camp Nou against Barcelona.

At the same time though that draw was the only game that Barca have failed to win all season.

"The challenge of catching Barcelona gives us motivation. We will keep fighting for this championship until the last game of the season and we will be in the reckoning," said Ramos.

"There are two teams that are at the top at the moment, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid, but our job is to win our games and put the pressure on them. Last weekend we had an important victory against Mallorca, in a difficult stadium and that

has made us more positive."

Madrid now take on Zaragoza having beaten Mallorca 5-0 with Ronaldo grabbing two which matched Barca's 5-0 win over Rayo Vallecano where Lionel Messi also hit a brace and he continues the lead the way in the league with 13 goals. Barca now face Celta Vigo.

The Argentine was quick to laugh off rumours that spread following an on-field spat with David Villa against Granada,

that his teammates felt he had become too cocky in the dressing room.

"Like a sort of dictator? I don't care what is said because the players know that I am not like that. It is a privilege to be part of the best Barcelona side ever. Not just for what we have won but because of the way we play," he said.

Radamel Falcao has taken some of the protagonism away from Messi and Ronaldo with his

prowess in front of goal as he scored in his tenth consecutive game for Atletico Madrid who beat Osasuna to keep them level on points with Barca at the top.

They now play Valencia and although it is still early days in the championship race Atletico do have the quality and strength in depth to push the top two this season.

At the bottom of the table Osasuna are up against Valladolid and Espanyol visit Real Sociedad.

FIXTURES

(Kick-off times GMT)

SaturdayMalaga v Rayo Vallecano (1500),
Barcelona v Celta Vigo (1700), Real
Madrid v Zaragoza (1900), Valencia v
Atletico Madrid (2100)**Sunday**Real Sociedad v Espanyol (1100),
Deportivo La Coruna v Mallorca (1500),
Osasuna v Valladolid (1650), Granada v
Athletic Bilbao (1845), Sevilla v
Levante (2030)**Monday**

AFP, London



Manchester United will try to return to winning ways when they face Arsenal in the Premier League at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Victory for Alex Ferguson's men in the day's early kick-off match will see them replace leaders Chelsea, if only for a few hours, at the top of the table and provide their fans with an upbeat end to a week that saw them knocked out of the League Cup.

An unfamiliar looking United side, with several senior players rested, were just seconds away from beating Chelsea at Stamford Bridge and advancing into the quarter-finals when they conceded a last minute penalty to leave the match all square at 3-3.

Extra-time produced more thrills and spills before Chelsea won 5-4 to reach the last eight.

"It's tough to take. When you score four goals away from home more often than not you win the game," United veteran Ryan Giggs told MUTV. "I'm proud of the young players who played, though. There were some great performances."

"They will have learnt a lot and you learn more from losing as well."

Saturday's match will be the first time United striker Robin van Persie

has faced Arsenal since being sold by the Gunners for £24 million (\$39 million) following the end of last season.

The Dutch striker's exit was seen as further proof by some observers of the inability of Arsenal, without a major trophy for seven years, to mount a realistic challenge for the title.

Van Persie has scored seven goals in nine league appearances for United but Arsenal, seven points

FIXTURES

(1500GMT unless stated)

SaturdayManchester United v Arsenal (1245GMT), Fulham v
Everton, Norwich v Stoke, Sunderland v Aston Villa,
Swansea v Chelsea, Tottenham v Wigan, West Ham v
Manchester City (1730GMT)**Sunday**

QPR v Reading (1330GMT), Liverpool v Newcastle

adrift of United in sixth place, will have additional motivation to put in a good performance following their 8-2 thrashing in last season's corresponding fixture.

Arsenal though have kept just one clean sheet in their last 11 games and conceded five, having been 4-0 behind, in an astonishing 7-5 League Cup win over Reading on Tuesday.

"When you are 4-0 down after 36 minutes you can't say all is well on that front," joked Wenger when

asked about his defence.

Chelsea, who suffered their first league defeat of the season in an incident-packed clash against United last weekend, will hope for both three points and a match free of controversy when they travel to Swansea on Saturday.

The fall-out from the United match saw Chelsea lodge a formal complaint with the FA over allegations referee Mark Clattenburg used inappropriate language against midfielder John Obi Mikel.

The incident came just two weeks after Chelsea captain John Terry started a four-match ban for racially abusing QPR defender in October last year.

Meanwhile, Chelsea and the police are also undertaking separate investigations into claims a supporter made a racist gesture towards United's Danny Welbeck during their League Cup clash.

"It's important that we don't let anything affect us and we showed that won't happen," said Chelsea centre-back Gary Cahill. "Whatever is going on off the pitch, players relish playing football."

Reigning champions Manchester City, level on points with United and just a point behind Chelsea, travel to West Ham with fit-again defender Pablo Zabaleta urging his team-mates not to get caught up in any title hype.

Fergie defends Clattenburg

AFP, Manchester



Alex Ferguson said Friday that it was "unthinkable" that referee Mark Clattenburg had racially abused a Chelsea player during Manchester United's controversial victory last weekend.

United's 3-2 Premier League win was overshadowed by allegations from the losers that Clattenburg, who sent off two Chelsea men, used "inappropriate language" against two of their players during the match.

It is a matter that is being investigated by both London's Metropolitan Police force and the Football Association, with the focus now on claims that Clattenburg used a racist slur against Nigeria midfielder John Obi Mikel.

A second accusation, relating to Spaniard Juan Mata, has been dropped by Chelsea while Clattenburg maintains his innocence on all matters.

Now, after words of support from Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger, Clattenburg has received the significant backing of Ferguson, the manager in the visitors' dug-out during the contentious afternoon at Stamford Bridge.

"I don't believe Mark Clattenburg would make any comments like that," Ferguson said Friday. "I refuse



to believe it. I think it's unthinkable.

"In the modern climate, I just don't believe it. Simple as that. There is no way a referee would stoop to that, I'm convinced about that."

Ferguson, United boss for more than a quarter of a century, added: "I think the way we see the game today as compared to the way it was 25 years ago, it has completely changed.

"I played myself and I know the banter that goes on between referees and players 25 years ago is different from today," insisted Ferguson, who made his name in football as a striker with now fallen Scottish giants Rangers.

"We've got options," said Ferguson. "Chicharito (Hernandez) obviously is in fantastic form."

Inter test for Juve

AFP, Milan



Champions Juventus face a test of their title-defending credentials Saturday when a resurgent Inter Milan travel to Turin with a real chance of reducing their four-point deficit to the leaders.

Juventus extended their unbeaten streak to 49 matches after a late Paul Pogba header helped secure a 2-1 win away to Bologna Wednesday as Napoli slipped up at Atalanta and Inter moved up to second with a 3-1 win at home to Sampdoria.

A 50th match without defeat -- Juve's last reverse came against Parma in May 2011 -- will be expected by fans of the Old Lady, but Inter's resurgence has slashed the odds.

Inter's sixth win on the trot came in convincing and timely fashion ahead of a fixture billed as the 'Derby d'Italia'.

Indeed, Inter have peaked so well for this game conspiracy theorists might suggest that canny 36-year-old coach Andrea Stramaccioni, who recently waved off comparisons with Jose 'The Special One' Mourinho, had timed it deliberately.

Argentine midfielder Esteban Cambiasso admits Juve's "good run" deserved applause, but said Inter's good form is a reflection of their high expectations.

"It'll be an important match, and definitely a different one from the others," he told www.inter.it. "This Inter team is now in the situation that it should be in."

While Inter seem to be relishing the challenge, Juve could be suspected of fearing the pinch ahead of a possible 50th match without defeat.

On Thursday it was announced coach Angelo Alessio, the caretaker in the absence of the suspended Antonio Conte, would not be talking to the press prior to the game -- the second such decision this week on the part of the club.

Juve defender Andrea Barzagli was not scared to admit Stramaccioni's Inter, boasting the attacking talents of Diego Milito, Antonio Cassano and Rodrigo Palacio, have made them sit up and take notice.

"Now they have a new, young coach who is determined to stand apart and is doing well with Inter,"

Berzaghi told Sky Sport.

"As a result, they've signed some good players who want to do well for the club and that is why I think Inter really want to do something this year."

While AC Milan's Stephan El Shaarawy became the league's top scorer on Tuesday, Juventus (along with Roma on 22 goals) and Inter (19) have the best scoring records in the league.

Juventus's defence has leaked only five goals, the meanest in the league.