

Pique returns from injury

REUTERS, Madrid

Centre back Gerard Pique has returned to the Barcelona squad after injury and is fit for Wednesday's trip to Celtic in Champions League Group G.

"Happy to train with the team again. It felt really good!" Pique said on his official Twitter account on Monday.

The Spain international has been out of action with a foot injury since Barca's 3-2 win over Spartak Moscow seven weeks ago and his replacements have struggled at times.

He was named in Tito Vilanova's squad for the clash at the Scottish champions but Adriano Correia and Carles Puyol are out injured, while Sergio Busquets is suspended.

Group leaders Barca are five points above second-placed Celtic after three wins out of three and are close to securing last 16 qualifications.

Levante hold Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

A resolute defensive display saw Levante hold out for a 0-0 draw away to Sevilla on Sunday which moves them up to fifth in La Liga as they battle for a European place.

Only Barcelona had taken points off Sevilla at home so far with Real Madrid amongst those defeated but an in-form Levante coped well with the threat from the Andalusian side and remain

RESULTS

Sevilla 0 Levante 0
Osasuna 0 Valladolid 1 (Ebert 83)
Real Sociedad 0 Espanyol 1
(Colotto 77)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Gama 30)
Real Mallorca 0
Grenada 1 (El-Arabi 53) Athletic

two points clear of them.

Sevilla faced Levante without Piotr Trochowski in midfield owing to a long term knee injury and with Diego Perotti also missing, Antonio Luna was given the chance on the left wing.

At the back Alberto Botia was in the treatment room and so Emir Spahic lined up alongside Federico Fazio at centre half.

Levante's game plan was to defend solidly at the back where they had veteran centre-half Sergio Ballesteros available after suspension and they managed to frustrate Sevilla.



Manchester City forwards Mario Balotelli (L) and Carlos Tevez (C) take part in a training session in Manchester yesterday ahead of their Champions League match against Ajax.

PHOTO: AFP

Do or die for City

AFP, Paris



English champions Manchester City and Premier League rivals Arsenal will be looking to rebound in

Tuesday's latest round of Champions League group matches following defeats last time out.

Defeat for City at home to a young and vibrant Ajax side, who beat them in Amsterdam a fortnight ago, would signal a second successive group stage exit of Europe's premier club competition and heap pressure on manager Roberto Mancini.

Mancini, who must deliver something of note on the European front for owner Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan after his huge investment in players, will also be hoping no-one emerges victorious from the other game where Real Madrid host German champions Borussia Dortmund.

Dortmund top the group on seven points with Real a point behind and City are bottom six points adrift of the table toppers after three games.

Arsenal have more room for manoeuvre as they too seek to avenge defeat when they travel to play Schalke 04 as the Gunners lie second three points ahead of Greek outfit Olympiakos.

However, Olympiakos have an enticing home clash with ailing French champions Montpellier and will be expecting at the very least to maintain the pressure on Arsene Wenger's team.

Elsewhere the two teams with 100% records, Porto and the surprise

packages of Malaga are both away with the former playing Dynamo Kiev and the Spanish side away at Italian giants AC Milan.

Mancini realises that victory on Tuesday is imperative.

Whilst the Italian is satisfied with the improvement in his defence of late he is less happy with his much-vaunted strike force, who have been misfiring and scored just once in their last two league games against minnows Swansea and West Ham.

"We have more chances to go through (in the Champions League)," said the 47-year-old.

FIXTURES

Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v FC Porto (POR), Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) v Dinamo Zagreb (CRO), Schalke 04 (GER) v Arsenal (ENG), Olympiakos (GRE) v Montpellier (FRA), Anderlecht (BEL) v Zenit St-Petersburg (RUS), AC Milan (ITA) v Malaga (ESP)
Manchester City (ENG) v Ajax (NED), Real Madrid (ESP) v

"It's important we finish in the group stage well.

"What the Ajax scouts think of us I don't know, it's not important; what the players think is."

While City are unbeaten in 18 home matches in European competition Ajax can travel in some hope as they beat City's neighbours Manchester United 2-1 at Old Trafford in their Europa League last 32 clash there last season.

Real go into their game with Dortmund on the back of having given coach Jose Mourinho his 100th victory of his reign there with a 4-0 win over Real Zaragoza.

Mourinho, who is bidding to become the first coach to win the trophy with three different clubs, said Real just needed maximum points from their remaining two home games to seal their place in the knockout round.

"We are second. Everyone knows that there are groups that are jokes and that this is 'the group'."

"We are in a good position to progress. If we win the two home matches that we have left they are six points that are well within reach and could be enough to get through to the second round."

Schalke may have lost on Saturday but their players were not in the least dismayed as they prepared to welcome an Arsenal side that has made their worst start to a Premier League season since Wenger took charge in 1996.

Milan may look back and see this as the week that turned their season round if they can follow up the Chievo thrashing by inflicting Malaga's first defeat of the Champions League group stage.

They will be looking to their 'little Pharaoh' Stephan El Shaarawy to continue his superb scoring spree which has more than made up for Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic's departure in the summer.

The 20-year-old - son of an Egyptian father and an Italian mother - is well on course for a new target set for him by club captain Massimo Ambrosini with the latter having already promised to pay for his winter holiday for scoring seven goals by December in all competitions.

Roma thrash Palermo

REUTERS, Milan



AS Roma substitute Mattia Destro scored a goal and was sent off in 60 eventful seconds on Sunday in his erratic team's 4-1 win over Palermo in Serie A.

Roma, who have the best goals total (26) and second worst defensive tally (20) in the league, led 2-0 at halftime through Francesco Totti and Pablo Osvaldo, a scoreline that was bound to test the frayed nerves of their supporters.

Zdenek Zeman's wildly unpredictable team, sixth in the table on 17 points, have twice squandered 2-0 leads and lost 3-2 at home this season but this time went on to add a third of their own through Erik Lamela in the 69th minute.

Destro came on in the 73rd minute. He was quickly booked, added the fourth goal six minutes later and was promptly sent off for taking his shirt off as he celebrated.

Josip Ilicic pulled one back for Palermo who are second from bottom with eight points.

Elsewhere, a blunder by defender Salvatore Aronica allowed Torino to score a stoppage-time equaliser to draw 1-1 at third-placed Napoli after the hosts had led for 85 minutes through Edinson Cavani's early strike.

The Torino goal, converted by Gianluca Sansone, ended Napoli's 100 per cent home record and prevented them taking full advantage of leaders Juventus's 3-1

home defeat by Inter Milan on Saturday.

Forward Antonio Di Natale grabbed his fifth goal in three games to give Udinese a 1-1 draw at Bologna. Catania thrashed Lazio 4-0 helped by two goals from Alejandro Gomez while fourth-placed Fiorentina beat Cagliari 4-1.

Sampdoria slumped to a sixth consecutive defeat, losing 2-1 at home to Atalanta despite a brilliant bicycle kick goal by Enzo Maresca.

Juventus lead the way with 28 points from 11 games followed by Inter on 27, Napoli on 23 and Fiorentina on 21.

Uruguay forward Cavani returned for Napoli after missing two games through injury and made an immediate impact as he turned Marek Hamsik's pass into the net in the sixth minute.

On a wet afternoon at a half-empty San Paolo, sloppy Napoli wasted chances to seal victory especially when Hamsik rounded Jean Gillet and shot into the side-netting five minutes from time.

Aronica's lazy back pass was then intercepted by Sansone who rounded Morgan De Sanctis to equalise for Torino.

Coach Walter Mazzarri missed the shambles leading up to Torino's equaliser as he had been sent off for protesting seconds earlier.

Di Natale, Serie A's top marksman in 2009/10, 2010/11 and joint third leading scorer last season, kept the goals flowing as his opportunist effort for Udinese wiped out Alessandro Diamanti's close-range goal for Bologna.

Suarez rescues point

AFP, London



Luis Suarez rescued a point for Liverpool with a sublime goal that owed nothing to his alleged penchant for diving in a 1-1 draw at

home to 10-man Newcastle at Anfield on Sunday.

This season the Uruguay striker has been on the receiving end of repeated charges from rival managers that he goes to ground all too easily.

However, Suarez delivered a timely reminder of his skill in the 67th minute at Anfield when he drew Liverpool level after Yohan Cabaye had given Newcastle the lead.

Jonas Gutierrez gave possession away to Jose Enrique, who punted a ball into the Newcastle box.

Suarez brought the ball under control, skipped past Fabricio Coloccini and coolly rounded Magpies goalkeeper Tim Krul in a sweeping solo move.

Coloccini's day got worse when he received a straight red card six minutes from time for a wild challenge on Suarez.

Cabaye had put Newcastle in front two minutes before half-time with a superb

strike across the face of goal and into the far corner of Brad Jones's net following a cross from Hatem Ben Arfa.

"We were outstanding," Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers told the BBC.

"Our possession and intensity was relentless. We went to sleep for the goal but I thought we deserved the three points.

"Suarez's goal was brilliant and he has been fantastic. His first touch from that height, and touch was an incredible piece of skill and he is a world-class striker," Rodgers added.

"Most people in football know he is a threat, he plays the false nine role like (Lionel) Messi does at Barcelona. He will be disappointed we did not win."

The draw left Newcastle in 10th place in the Premier League while Liverpool climbed into 12th spot, three points behind the Magpies.

Earlier on Sunday, Queens Park Rangers and Reading were still both left searching for their first league win of the season after sharing the points in a 1-1 draw at Loftus Road.

However, the result did see QPR at least climb off the bottom of the table, leapfrogging Southampton on goal difference.

RESULTS

Liverpool 1 (Suarez 67) Newcastle 1 (Cabaye 43)
QPR 1 (Cisse 66) Reading 1 (Gorkss 16)

Star
SPORT
ONLINE POLL

Do you think umpire Nadir Shah is guilty?
Yes (57%)
No (30%)

No Comments (13%)
Total votes: 140

Do you think the selectors are right to drop Ashraf from Tests?
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TEN Action
UEFA Champions League
Schalke 04 v Arsenal



Liverpool striker Luis Suarez celebrates his equalizing goal during their Premier League encounter against Newcastle at Anfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hulk to miss Anderlecht clash

REUTERS, St Petersburg

Zenit St Petersburg striker Hulk will miss Tuesday's Champions League match at Anderlecht because of a thigh injury.

The Brazil international, who was injured in Friday's league game against Rostov, will be sidelined for up to two weeks, the Russian champions said on their website.

Hulk's injury is a major blow to Luciano Spalletti's team, who are third in Group C with three points, two points above Anderlecht after beating the Belgian champions 1-0 last month in St Petersburg.

The powerful forward has been Zenit's top scorer since joining them for a Russian league record 60 million euros (\$77 million) just before the transfer deadline.

Hulk will also miss Brazil's friendly against Colombia in the United States next Wednesday.