

Falcao's future unclear

AFP, Madrid
 Atletico Madrid boss Diego Simeone conceded Wednesday that he "didn't know" if the La Liga high-flyers would be able to retain the services of star striker Radamel Falcao for next season.
 "We have to be realists, I don't like to lie to people. We don't know what can happen with Falcao, we have to make the most of him while we have him," Simeone told Radio Marca.
 "Falcao is here, now, and he helps us to win. We hope that he can stay. If that's not the case, I wish him good luck," added the former Argentina international.

The 26-year-old Colombian is the second-leading scorer in Spain's top flight this season with 18 goals, trailing only Lionel Messi's staggering tally of 28, and his irresistible form following his arrival from Porto in August 2011 has caught the eye of Atletico's city rivals Real as well as several English clubs.

Falcao is under contract with Los Rojiblancos until 2016, a deal which notably includes a 60-million-euro release clause.

Sandro has knee op

AFP, London
 Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Sandro has undergone knee surgery after suffering an injury during last weekend's goalless draw away to London rivals QPR, the Premier League club confirmed Wednesday.
 The 23-year-old Brazilian international was substituted after 25 minutes at Loftus Road, having gone down holding his right knee.
 "Sandro has undergone knee surgery following the injury that forced his substitution against QPR at the weekend," said a statement on Tottenham's website.
 Sandro used his Twitter account to inform followers of his health shortly after Spurs released their statement, posting a picture of himself being treated on the pitch along with the message: "Sorry guys, but this one really got me, the beast is hurt..."

Having hinted at future plans to coach in England on Tuesday in London, Guardiola was then announced as Bayern's new coach for the 2013/14 season on Wednesday with current boss Jupp Heynckes, 67, to step down in June.
 Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is reported to have offered him a multi-million pound deal, but Guardiola spent the season so far in his New York apartment, studying at Columbia University and watching the offers pour in.
 Since walking away from



Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney (L) celebrates his all-important goal with teammates during their FA Cup third round replay against West Ham United at Old Trafford on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

Roma ride on Destro

AFP, Milan
 AS Roma striker Mattia Destro scored in the first period of extra time to secure a 1-0 win away to Fiorentina and a place in the Italian Cup semifinals on Wednesday.
 Roma now join Inter Milan, Juventus and Lazio in the last four of the competition won last year by Napoli.
 In the final minute of what had been an entertaining match at Fiorentina's Artemio Franchi stadium both sides spurned chances to secure a late winner before the onset of extra time.
 Fiorentina midfielder Borja Valero first smacked a left-footed shot off the corner of crossbar and post, while at the other end defender Stefan Savic did well with a spectacular diving header which kept Destro's goalbound shot out.
 For the second consecutive night it went to extra time, and Roma had to wait only minutes before the impressive Destro broke the deadlock when he bundled the ball over the line from a foot in front of goal after a goalmouth pass.

Arsenal, MU sneak wins

REUTERS, London
TheFA CUP
 Jack Wilshere's late strike gave Arsenal a 1-0 FA Cup third-round replay win over Swansea City and Wayne Rooney's first goal in over a month earned Manchester United a 1-0 victory over West Ham United on Wednesday.
 Arsenal wasted a hatful of good chances before sealing the win over Swansea thanks to midfielder Wilshere's sublime left-foot strike past Michel Vorm four minutes from time following relentless pressure from the home side.
 Rooney's routine finish after nine minutes proved good enough for 11-times winners United to move into the fourth round but the England striker also missed a late penalty to make the Premier League leaders sweat in the closing stages.
 Arsenal, 10-times Cup winners, will travel to Championship (second division) Brighton and Hove Albion in the fourth round on the weekend of Jan. 26-27 and United host Premier League rivals Fulham.
 The London club's strikers Theo Walcott and Giroud both had shots blocked on the line as the home team mounted relentless attacks in a one-sided second half and Walcott's glancing header hit the post with time running out.
 Swansea, who scored a late equaliser to force a replay, had the game's first good chance when former Arsenal player Kyle Bartley's header from an inswinging Wayne Routledge cross hit the bar in the 25th minute.
 Arsenal defender Thomas Vermaelen forced Vorm into a smart save in the last action of the first half before the home team came out all guns blazing in the second period, to little avail until Wilshere came to the rescue.
 The 21-year-old spared Arsenal's blushes with the second goal of his comeback season following 17 months out through injury.
 Rooney's ninth goal of the season came when he slid along the ground to guide Javier Hernandez's inch-perfect cross into the unguarded net.
 Although Rooney blasted his late spot-kick over the bar, United were rarely troubled but West Ham manager Sam Allardyce was unhappy about two penalty decisions.
 "We should have had a penalty. The difference is that Jordan Spence plays for West Ham and Rafael plays for Manchester United at Old Trafford. The incidents are the same. If you give one you've got to give both, simple as that," Allardyce told ITV.
 United's in-form striker Robin van Persie, who did not come off the bench on Wednesday, scored a majestic equaliser in stoppage time at Upton Park to take the tie to a replay.

A spectacular coup

AFP, Berlin
BUNDESLIGA
 Bayern Munich has pulled off a spectacular coup for the German league by recruiting Pep Guardiola as head coach for next season in a glamour move that can only serve to enhance the Bundesliga's rising profile.
 Having hinted at future plans to coach in England on Tuesday in London, Guardiola was then announced as Bayern's new coach for the 2013/14 season on Wednesday with current boss Jupp Heynckes, 67, to step down in June.
 Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is reported to have offered him a multi-million pound deal, but Guardiola spent the season so far in his New York apartment, studying at Columbia University and watching the offers pour in.
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Chelsea suffer blow

AFP, London
BARCLAYS PREMIER LEAGUE
 Chelsea's hopes of winning the Premier League title this season were left hanging by a thread after they squandered a 2-0 lead in a 2-2 draw at home to strugglers Southampton on Wednesday.
 The result, which came on the same day former Barcelona boss Pep Guardiola confirmed he was turning down the European champions' overtures to manage German giants Bayern Munich, left Chelsea still in third place but 13 points behind leaders Manchester United with just 16 league games remaining.
 After successive home defeats to Queens Park Rangers and Swansea, the latter in the League Cup semifinal first leg, Chelsea appeared on course for victory when Demba Ba and Eden Hazard put them ahead before half-time.
 But the visitors rallied after the break through substitute Rickie Lambert's 10th goal of the season and an outstanding equaliser from Jason Puncheon.
 The result saw Southampton continue their improved run of form to move three points clear of the bottom three.
 Chelsea left the field to boos from their own fans and this result will have done nothing for the wafer-thin popularity of interim manager Rafael Benitez with large sections of the London club's supporters.
 While the Spaniard has overseen a steady improvement in Chelsea's away form -- including a 5-1 FA Cup victory at Southampton -- his side have won just two of their last seven home fixtures.
 Chelsea dominated possession early on but with Southampton offering the kind of well-organised resistance that served both QPR and Swansea so well, they struggled to create the kind of chances that might lift the crowd.
 A Ba cross caused confusion in the visitors' penalty area, ricocheting off Luke Shaw and Maya Yoshida before bouncing away to safety but otherwise Saints keeper Artur Boruc was largely untroubled before conceding in the 25th minute.
 Frank Lampard started the move that led to the goal, forcing his way to the by-line with a determined run before laying the ball back to Cesar Azpilicueta.

Malaga hold Barcelona

AFP, Madrid
Football
 Holders Barcelona's hopes of retaining the Spanish Cup hang in the balance after being held 2-2 at home by 10-man Malaga in their Spanish Cup quarterfinal first leg clash on Wednesday.
 Barcelona - who hold an 11-point lead in the league race over Atletico Madrid with 18 wins from 19 matches - looked to be in the driving seat after coming from a goal down to lead 2-1 after half-an-hour thanks to two goals in as many minutes by Lionel Messi and veteran talismanic defender Carles Puyol.
 Malaga's chances of coming away with anything better than a one goal deficit looked to be over when Nacho Monreal was red carded 15 minutes from time for a trip on Pedro.
 However, just as Malaga have shown in their maiden Champions League campaign that they are made of stern stuff so they did in Barcelona as Ignacio Camacho tucked the ball away neatly with a minute remaining after both Puyol and centre-back partner Javier Mascherano failed to get high enough to clear a free-kick.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi poses with his four FIFA Ballon d'Or trophies prior to the Copa del Rey quarterfinal against Malaga at Nou Camp on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

Channel 9 BPL
 Dhaka Gladiators v Khulna Royal Bengals
 Live from 2:00pm
 Barisal Burners v Sylhet Royals
 Live from 6:00pm

STAR Sports Australian Open
 Men's & Women's Third Rd
 Live from 6:00am

STAR Cricket
 Australia v Sri Lanka
 Third OD
 Live from 9:20am

ESPN
 Sportscentre India
 Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
 Soccer Club, Feni v Sk Russel
 Time: 2:45pm
 Venue: Feni Stadium

BPL
 Dhaka Gladiators v Khulna Royal Bengals
 Time: 2:00pm
 Barisal Burners v Sylhet Royals
 Time: 6:00pm
 Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National