

Atletico edge Sevilla

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid squeezed past visiting Sevilla 2-1 on Thursday in an eventful King's Cup semifinal first leg featuring three red cards and three successful penalties.

All the second half spot-kicks were awarded for handball at the Vicente Calderon stadium, the first two resulting in dismissals for Sevilla defender Emir Spahic and Atletico's Diego Godin.

Diego Costa put Atletico in front after Spahic was given a second yellow card for falling on the ball and striking it with his arm in the 48th minute.

Godin was shown a straight red seven minutes later when Alvaro Negredo's goal-bound effort brushed his arm. Negredo then equalised from the spot.

Costa converted his second penalty in the 71st minute after Sevilla full back Fernando Navarro tumbled to the ground and handled.

Navarro was also sent off five minutes from time for bringing down Costa when he was through on goal.

Holders Barcelona and 2011 winners Real Madrid drew their first leg 1-1 at the Bernabeu on Wednesday.

The game between Atletico and Sevilla was a repeat of the 2010 final won 2-0 by the Andalusians.

Barca host Real and Atletico visit Sevilla in the second legs at the end of February with a place in May's final at stake.

Real suffer racist abuse

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid players have suffered more racist abuse than those from other clubs, midfielder Jose Callejon said on Friday after Barcelona's Brazilian fullback Daniel Alves complained of monkey chants in Wednesday's King's Cup semifinal at the Bernabeu.

Alves said on Thursday Spain was a "lost war" when it came to tackling racism and called for stiffer punishments for clubs whose fans abused opposition players.

"The only club that has suffered a lot of insults throughout its history is Real Madrid," Callejon told a news conference previewing Saturday's La Liga match at Granada when asked about the Alves remarks.

Callejon also confirmed that there had been an altercation between assistant Real coach Aitor Karanka and Barca forward Lionel Messi after Wednesday's semifinal first leg, which ended in a 1-1 draw.

Media reports which said Messi called Karanka "Mourinho's puppet" were correct, Callejon added.

A former Real player, Karanka often stands in for coach Jose Mourinho at news conferences.

"I saw what happened with Aitor because I was behind him," Callejon said.



Atletico Madrid striker Diego Costa scores his second goal during their Copa Del Rey semifinal first leg against Sevilla at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Arsenal capture Monreal

AFP, London

Arsenal made a late move on the final day of the January transfer window by announcing on Thursday that they have agreed to sign Spanish left-back Nacho Monreal from Malaga.

In a statement on their website, Arsenal said he had signed a "long-term contract" and although the transfer fee was undisclosed, British media reports said Arsenal had paid around £8.3 million (\$13.2 million, 9.7 million euros). "We are delighted that Nacho Monreal has agreed to join us," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

"We have been monitoring him for some time now and are really pleased that we've been able to agree this move today (Thursday).

"Monreal is a strong left-sided defender with good experience at both club and international level. He is a technically gifted player, a good crosser in the final third and strong in the air."

Monreal, 26, joined Malaga from Osasuna in 2011 and has represented Spain at international level, although he has never appeared at a major tournament.

He arrives at a timely juncture for Arsenal, who will be without English left-back Kieran Gibbs for three weeks after he sustained a thigh injury during Wednesday's 2-2 draw at home to Liverpool.

The deal, subject to the completion of the relevant paperwork, will be Arsenal's first signing of the January transfer window.

Relentless Man Utd

AFP, London



Manchester United will hope to profit from title rivals Manchester City's inactivity by opening up a 10-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a win at Fulham on Saturday.

Alex Ferguson's side were made to toil at home to Southampton on Wednesday before eventually emerging with a 2-1 victory that lifted them seven points above their nearest challengers.

With City not in action until a home game with Liverpool on Sunday, United can strike another psychological blow if they prevail at Craven Cottage.

Despite his side's struggle to beat Southampton, United captain Nemanja Vidic says the only thing that matters is putting points on the board.

"Winning games is important at this stage of the season," he told in-house television channel MUTV.

"But we have to forget what has gone and focus on the next games. Nothing is finished yet. There is a long way to go, but we're in a good position."

United and Fulham met as recently as last weekend, with Vidic and his colleagues winning 4-1 in a one-sided FA Cup fourth-round encounter at Old Trafford.

Fulham secured only their second win in eight games by overcoming West Ham United 3-1 on Wednesday, moving them eight points clear of the relegation zone.

With Chelsea, Tottenham, Arsenal and Liverpool all dropping points in mid-week, Everton capitalised by winning 2-1 at home to West Bromwich Albion to close to within a point of the Champions League places.

As Spurs do not play until Sunday, when they visit West Brom, David Moyes' side will move into the top four if they overcome a floundering Aston Villa team that sank into the relegation zone last weekend.

Leighton Baines scored both Everton's goals against West Brom and manager Moyes says the

Everton in sixth place, after coming back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at home to Liverpool.

"We have to focus on playing football and what we want to do to the opposition," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

"I believe the quality is there and we have to trust it and forget what happened in the past."

Third-place Chelsea also recorded a 2-2 draw on Wednesday, although the context was quite different, as they conceded two late goals in a frustrating stalemate at relegation-threatened Reading.

Ahead of Saturday's trip to Newcastle United, interim manager Rafael Benitez has urged his players to cut out the avoidable errors that have prevented them from keeping pace with the top two.

"We all take responsibility," said the Spaniard.

"We don't blame anyone -- it's for us to analyse why we didn't kill the game off, and to work to stop the mistakes."

With 14 games of the campaign remaining, Reading sit one place above the drop zone thanks to a superior goal difference to Wigan Athletic and Villa.

Queens Park Rangers, who host Norwich City on Saturday, remain bottom of the table despite a creditable 0-0 draw at home to Manchester City in mid-week.

However, they are now just four points from safety and manager Harry Redknapp managed to bolster their ranks by signing Christopher Samba, Jermaine Jenas and Andros Townsend on Thursday.

FIXTURES

Saturday

(1500GMT unless otherwise stated):
Arsenal v Stoke City, Everton v Aston Villa,
Fulham v Manchester United (1730GMT),
Newcastle United v Chelsea, Reading v
Sunderland, West Ham United v Swansea City,
Wigan Athletic v Southampton, Queens Park
Rangers v Norwich City (1245GMT)

Sunday

West Bromwich Albion v Tottenham Hotspur
(1330GMT), Manchester City v Liverpool

England left-back will have a key role to play in their push for a top-four finish.

"I think Bainesy has been playing really well and over the last couple of games, I've been thinking he needs another challenge," said Moyes.

"He has to rise to it a little bit more and I think he has done that. He has picked himself up again."

"He has a lot of things going for him and he is turning out to be as good a left-back as there is."

Arsenal go into their home game with Stoke City three points below

Gomez back for Germany

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew had the luxury of including star striker Mario Gomez in his squad, named on Friday, to face France in a prestige friendly in Paris next Wednesday, as the Bayern Munich striker returns to form after a lengthy absence due to injury.

"After a long injury absence, Mario Gomez has returned to good physical condition and I'm confident in his qualities and experience," said Loew of the striker who has not played for his country since the Euro 2012 semi-final defeat against Italy.

Gomez underwent surgery on a left ankle problem in August and has missed Germany's first four World Cup 2014 qualifiers.

Without him, Loew guided the team to top spot in Group C, with three wins and a draw from four matches leaving them three points clear of Sweden, who have a game in hand.

The 27-year-old has scored 25 goals in 57 appearances for Germany.

Polish-born veteran Miroslav Klose, who has racked up 67 goals at international level, is also in the squad and is set to have a chance to equal Gerd Mueller's German record of 68 goals when the old rivals meet at the Stade de France.

There was no place for Bayer Leverkusen's Stefan Kiessling, who is the Bundesliga's top scorer so far this season with 13 goals.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Rene Adler (Hamburg), Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)

Defenders:

Jerome Boateng, Philipp Lahm (both Bayern Munich), Benedikt Hoewedes (Schalke 04), Mats Hummels, Marcel Schmelzer (both Borussia Dortmund), Per Mertesacker (Arsenal/ENG), Heiko Westermann (Hamburg)

Midfielders:

Lars Bender, Andre Schuerle (both Bayer Leverkusen), Julian Draxler (Schalke 04), Mario Goetze, Ilkay Guendogan, Marco Reus (all Borussia Dortmund), Sami Khedira, Mesut Ozil (both Real Madrid/ESP), Toni Kroos, Thomas Mueller, Bastian Schweinsteiger (all Bayern Munich), Lukas Podolski (Arsenal/ENG)

Forwards:



Channel 9

BPL

Barisal Burners v Duronto Rajshahi

Live from 2:30pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Chittagong Kings

Live from 6:30pm

ESPN

English Premiership

QPR v Norwich City

Live from 6:45pm

New Castle v Chelsea

Live from 9:00pm

Fulham v Man United

Live from 11:30pm

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Pakistan

First Test, Day 2

Live from 2:30pm

STAR Sports

Primera Liga

Getafe v Deportivo

Live from 11:00pm



Brazil star Neymar gives two thumbs up during the presentation of new team jersey that will be worn in the upcoming Confederations Cup at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Diego wins tax battle

Football

AFP, Milan

Argentine football legend Diego Maradona has won his right to return to Italy after being cleared of owing nearly 40 million euros in taxes, reports said on Friday.

Maradona, the World Cup winner who helped Napoli to their only two league titles in Serie A in 1987 and 1990, had been banned from setting foot in Italy because of an alleged unpaid tax bill of 37.2 million euros (\$50.5 million, 32 million pounds).

The former player's lawyer, Angelo Pisani, on Friday said his client had been cleared, two years after the authorities relunched the case, which dates back to 2005.

"Maradona has finally been liberated from this fiscal nightmare and the accusations he faced," the lawyer, Angelo Pisani, told the Italian news agency ANSA.

An Italian court in 2005 ordered Maradona to pay 37.2 million euros, 23.5 million of which was interest, after being accused of tax evasion. The case was relunched in 2011 due to a series of procedural errors.

According to ANSA, the court re-investigating the case annulled the proceedings against Napoli football club and its former employees -- notably Maradona but also Brazilians Careca and Amemao.

Pisani said on Friday that the former star, one of the greatest but also most controversial figures in football, would now attempt to win nearly 40 million euros in damages for defamation.

The news will come as welcome relief for a player who has courted controversy throughout his career, not least because of his disputed first goal in Argentina's 2-1 victory over England in the 1986 World Cup that he claimed was the "Hand of God".

The match was already a highly charged encounter given the short war that Britain had fought in its Falkland Islands territory in the South Atlantic Ocean after Argentinian troops invaded and claimed sovereignty in 1982.

In 1987, the diminutive attacking midfielder led Napoli to the Serie A title, repeating the feat in 1990. In 259 appearances with Napoli between 1984 and 1991, Maradona scored 115 goals for the Partenopei.



BPL

Barisal Burners v Duronto Rajshahi

Time: 2:30pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Chittagong Kings

Time: 6:30pm