

# Five-star Atletico

AFP, Madrid

David Villa ended his seven-game scoring drought with a double as Atletico Madrid closed to within a point of Barcelona at the top of La Liga with a 5-0 win over Real Betis.

Eighteen-year-old sensation Oliver Torres got the hosts off the perfect start on his full league debut with the fastest goal this season after just 13 seconds.

Villa then made the game safe with a quickfire brace just after half-time.

La Liga's top-scorer Diego Costa took his tally to 13 goals in 13 games in all competitions when he slotted home from Villa's pass 25 minutes from time before Gabi rounded off the scoring in stoppage time.

Torres had been handed a start in place of the injured Arda Turan and the Spanish Under-21 international was in the right place at the right time as he slotted home at the back post from Koke's cut-back.

Diego Godin should have made it two on 16 minutes

## RESULTS

**Sevilla 2** (Rakitic 55, Jairo 75) **Osasuna 1** (Oriol Riera 87)

**Villarreal 4** (Uche 17, Perez 22, Dos Santos 50, 84) **Valencia 1** (Costa 63)

**Real Sociedad 3** (Griezmann 13, 50, Angel 55) **Almeria 0**

**Atletico Madrid 5** (Torres 1, Villa 53, 57, Diego Costa 65, Gabi 90) **Real**

**Betis 0**

when he was left in space inside the box but somehow headed Torres' perfect cross wide.

Costa also ought to have scored twice before half-time as he firstly slotted wide when clean through on goal and was then denied by Betis keeper Guillermo Sara who stood up well to turn his effort behind for a corner.

Sara had to be replaced by Stephan Andersen at half-time due to an injury, but the Dane's first job was to pick the ball out of the net as Villa neatly flicked home Costa's cross at the near post eight minutes after the restart.

And three minutes later Villa smashed home his fifth goal of the season after Koke's pass towards Torres deflected fortunately into his path.

Costa finally got the goal he craved when Villa's lovely through ball allowed him to plant a left-footed finish into the far corner.

He was then withdrawn with one eye on the upcoming league matches against Granada and Athletic Bilbao in mind, but Atletico still had one more goal in them when Gabi fired low into the corner with the last kick of the game.

Villarreal strengthened their hold on fourth spot with a 4-1 thrashing of Valencia at the Madrigal.

Early goals from Ichechukwu Uche and Hernan Perez put the hosts 2-0 up at half-time before a Giovanni Dos Santos double completed the rout after the break.

Real Sociedad continued their recovery with a 3-0 win over the still winless Almeria to move up to ninth.

Sevilla also moved into the top half of the table with a 2-1 win over 10-man Osasuna.



PHOTO: AFP

Atletico Madrid striker David Villa celebrates one of his two goals against Real Betis during their Primera Liga encounter at the Vicente Calderon stadium on Sunday.

## Barca carry momentum

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona can build on their win over Real Madrid in El Clasico on Saturday by moving nine points clear of Los Blancos when they travel to Celta Vigo on Tuesday.

The Catalans' 2-1 win gave them a healthy six point cushion over Madrid with Atletico Madrid just a point behind in second.

However, despite dropping just two points in their first 10 La Liga games, Barca coach Gerardo Martino refused to concede that his side are already well on their way to retaining their title.

"There is still 60 percent of the league to go and Madrid and Atletico are close. They can still cut the gap."

"Right now it counts for our confidence more than mathematically."

Neymar was the star of the show for Martino's men at the weekend as he scored the opening goal and then teed up Alexis Sanchez to seal the points with delightful chip over Diego Lopez 12 minutes from time.

Lionel Messi's impact on the game though was somewhat restricted by his positioning on the right side of the Barca attack.

The World Player of the Year is expected to return to his normal role as a false nine at Balaidos with Cesc Fabregas dropping back into midfield.

Sanchez is also expected to start after his positive impression as a substitute and with the Catalan derby against Espanyol just three days away, Martino is likely to rotate his side heavily with Xavi, Andres Iniesta and Gerard Pique likely to be handed a rest.

Celta enjoyed arguably an even better weekend as they picked up just their second win of the season by hammering Malaga 5-0 away from home on Saturday.

The Galicians are coached by ex-

Barca favourite Luis Enrique, who was linked with the Barcelona job when Martino was hastily appointed following Tito Vilanova's unfortunate resignation due to ongoing cancer treatment in July.

Real Madrid will have the chance to make up some ground on Wednesday when they host Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu.

After a disappointing first-half display at the Camp Nou, Madrid improved mightily after the break and could count themselves unfortunate not to come away with a point as Karim Benzema struck the bar and Cristiano Ronaldo had a strong penalty appeal waved away.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti was encouraged by his side's response after the break and believes it was a sign of their continuing improvement after positive displays against Malaga and Juventus.

"We obviously wanted to win that match, you never like to lose, and it was an important game."

"But we are improving, the

## FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

### Tuesday

Arsenal v Chelsea, Birmingham v Stoke, Burnley v West Ham, Leicester v Fulham, Manchester United v Norwich

### Wednesday

Newcastle v Manchester City, Tottenham v Hull

### Thursday

Villarreal v Getafe (1900), Granada v Atletico Madrid (1900), Real Betis v Levante (2100), Athletic Bilbao v Elche (2100)

### Friday

Barcelona game showed that again."

Gareth Bale made just his second start in a Madrid jersey at the Camp Nou but was largely ineffective before being subbed by Benzema on the hour mark.

The Welshman is though expected to get his first start at the Bernabeu as he tries to build on his match practice after a series of niggling muscle injuries.

## Platini in favour of bigger WC

AFP, Paris

UEFA chief Michel Platini has said he is in favour of increasing the number of teams taking part in the World Cup finals from the current 32 to 40.

The Frenchman has been behind several innovative ideas since taking over at the helm of European football's governing body in 2007, notably in encouraging the sport's global growth.

"I am in favour of there being more teams from Africa, Asia, Oceania and North America playing in the World Cup," he told AFP.

"So why not move from 32 teams to 40? That would give us eight groups of five. And going by our research, it would only add three days to the World Cup schedule."

Platini's views came just two days after FIFA chief Sepp Blatter said he was in favour of increasing the number of World Cup finalists.

"We need to ensure that the African and Asian federations get what they deserve. The Europeans and South Americans between them have the majority of places at the World Cup although they have fewer member federations than Africa and Asia," Blatter said.

"It is not normal that Africa has just five places."

## Allegri defends Balotelli

AFP, Milan

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri raced to the defence of Mario Balotelli after the striker's early substitution in a 3-2 away defeat to Parma.

Balotelli's return was expected to boost Milan's bid to climb the table following an improvement in form following a 1-0 away win to Udinese and a 1-1 Champions League draw with Barcelona last week.

Instead, Allegri was left defending the striker and claimed he replaced Balotelli over fears he would respond to provocation and see red.

"There's no reason to single him out, he's a player like all the others," said Allegri.

"Mario found it difficult because Parma closed him down and gave him very little space. Then he picked up that caution for simulation."

## Jose fumes over fixture

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho insists he has been left with no choice but to send out an under-strength Chelsea team in Tuesday's League Cup fourth round clash at Arsenal.

Mourinho is fuming that League Cup fixture planners decided to schedule Chelsea's trip to the Emirates Stadium just 48 hours after his side's 2-1 win over Manchester City in the Premier League.

The Blues boss claims Arsenal have been given an unfair advantage because they played at Crystal Palace on Saturday lunchtime, giving them extra time to recover before the London derby.

Mourinho's complaints ignore the fact that Gunners manager Arsene Wenger routinely fields shadow squads made up of fringe players and youngsters in the League Cup, but that didn't stop the Portuguese coach letting rip when asked if he would field a strong team for the last 16 tie.

"We are going to give the game that the people that put the game on Tuesday want. If they want a big game, we cannot give the big game," Mourinho said.

"If they want the players that were playing today (Sunday), we cannot give them that. If they want Arsenal to win a trophy, that's a help."

"If they want a big game between two big teams in London, they should put the game on Wednesday and not on Tuesday, because I am not going to do that."

Mourinho claimed that, out of respect for Chelsea's fans, he would stop short of sending out a starting line-up made up entirely of youth

team players.

But he has no intention of putting his key stars under what he believes is unfair duress.

"It's not the plan because we have to respect also our fans. We discussed that in the club. We have to protect our players," he said.

"We cannot put our players in two matches in the space of three days."



Arsenal played Saturday at 12:30, so two and a half days to rest and to prepare. So I hope they all enjoy."

With both sides set to field weakened teams, the edge has been taken off what could have been an fascinating clash between the top two teams in the current Premier League standings.

Even so, there could still be a few sparks flying on the touchline as Mourinho and Wenger renew hostilities for first time since the Chelsea chief returned to England after spells at Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

Mourinho infuriated Wenger during his first stint at Chelsea by describing his rival as a "voyeur" who was obsessed by the Blues.

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(all 1945GMT)

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And, asked about their relationship on Sunday, Mourinho was unable to resist another mischievous jab at the Frenchman.

"We have no problems, no. Unless you tell me that he had an influence on this (the timing of matches). If you tell me that..."

Wenger was keener to keep the focus on the pitch and he called on his players to show they believe they are capable of finally winning silverware this season after an eight-year trophy drought.

"There are people who do not believe that we have a chance, but the only thing we can do is win our games," Wenger said.

"The only thing which is important is every win makes you a bit stronger and strengthens the belief."

Elsewhere in the fourth round, Manchester United will look to maintain the momentum of their come-from-behind 3-2 win over Stoke on Saturday when they face Norwich at Old Trafford.

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## Inter wary of tricky Atalanta

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan will be taking nothing for granted on their visit to Atalanta in Italy's Serie A on Tuesday, coach Walter Mazzarri said.

The 4-2 win over Verona on Saturday moved Mazzarri's men up to fourth place, four points adrift of Napoli and Juventus and nine behind leaders Roma.

And on paper, Atalanta could offer the chance for Inter to add another three points to their league tally, as the Bergamo-based club sit midtable with only four wins from nine games.

Inter's task, however, will not be straightforward, Atalanta's Atleti Azzurri d'Italia stadium being a notoriously difficult venue for visiting teams.

Mazzarri, who is set to hand Argentinian defender Walter Samuel his first start of the league campaign, warned against complacency.

"It's always been a tricky place to go to. Not only for Inter, but especially on their own patch they're very aggressive and focused," Mazzarri told Inter.it.

"It's a unique stadium, you feel the crowd. It's a tough place to play."

"They're a dangerous side and we need to approach the game correctly. We need to be very focused, something I always stress, and we saw in our last match that when we're all together and focused we can play good football and cause problems for anyone. But we're always at risk once we relax."

Injuries have restricted Samuel to appearances only on the substitutes bench this season but he is set for his first start under former Napoli coach Mazzarri.

"I need to work out where to play him, but Samuel will definitely play, I want to give him a chance, he's training well and is an important player," said Mazzarri.

"Injury kept him out for a long time but he'll be involved tomorrow."

"Samuel, being left-footed could play on the left or in the centre of the back three; I'll speak to the three from the backline to gauge their fitness levels and one will be rested, then we have Udinese four days later."