

What to WATCH

STAR Sports1

Australia v England

Third Test, Day 2

Live from 8:30am

STAR Sports 4

English Premiership

Man City v Arsenal

Live from 6:45pm

Chelsea v Crystal Palace

Live from 9:00pm

Primera Liga

Rayo Vallecano v Granada

Live from 11:00pm

Barcelona v Villarreal

Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

Malaga v Getafe

Live from 3:00am (Sunday)

STAR Sports HD1

Primera Liga

Osasuna v Real Madrid

Live from 9:00pm

English Premiership

Hull City v Stoke City

Live from 11:30pm

Serie A

Catania v Verona

Live from 1:45am (Sunday)

NEO Prime

Bundesliga

Schalke v Freiburg

Live from 9:00pm

Wolfsburg v Stuttgart

Live from 12:30am (Sunday)

V-Day v'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bangladesh Army made a winning start in the Walton LED TV Victory Day Volleyball Tournament when they beat Border Guard Bangladesh by 25-08, 25-12, 25-15 points at the Volleyball Stadium in Paltan yesterday. In the other matches of the day, Titas Gas defeated Bangladesh Police, Power Development Board out-played Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Air Force beat BGB and Bangladesh Navy beat Bangladesh Police.

RVP out for a month

INTERNET

Manchester United manager David Moyes has confirmed that Robin van Persie will be sidelined for a month with a thigh strain.

The Netherlands international missed four matches with a groin problem before making his return to action in the 1-0 loss to Newcastle United, playing the full 90 minutes.

Swansea qualify

AFP, Paris



Swansea City are through to the last 32 of the Europa League despite producing a lacklustre performance in losing 1-0 to St Gallen in Switzerland on Thursday.

The Welsh side knew that a point in would secure their qualification for the knockout stages from Group A but instead a second-half Marco Mathys goal allowed the already-eliminated hosts to bow out on a high.

Nevertheless, the defeat did not prevent the Swans from advancing as Kuban Krasnodar failed to get the victory they required away to Valencia in Spain to stand a chance of grabbing second place.

Paraguayan Lorenzo Melgarejo scored to earn the Russians a 1-1 draw after Paco Alcacer put group winners Valencia ahead at the Mestalla, but Kuban bowed out.

After a quiet first half, St Gallen grew as a threat after the restart, but visiting goalkeeper Gerhard Tremmel made two good saves to deny Roberto Rodriguez before Sebastien Wuethrich hit the woodwork from a free-kick.

St Gallen then had a goal disallowed when Neil Taylor turned a cross into his own net but Wuethrich was penalised for a foul on the Swansea captain.

However, Mathys turned in a low Wuethrich cross following a quick free-kick to put the Swiss Super League side in front with 10 minutes left.

Pablo Hernandez fired wide with Swansea's best chance late on but they limp through and will play European football after

Christmas for the first time in their history.

Tottenham Hotspur, who had already qualified before hosting Anzhi Makhachkala at White Hart Lane, made it six wins from six in Group K by beating the Russians 4-1.

Spanish striker Roberto Soldado, whose form since signing for Spurs in the summer has been the subject of criticism, scored a hat-trick, including one penalty, while Lewis Holtby also netted with a classy finish as Andre Villas-Boas' side ran out comfortable winners.

Last season's FA Cup winners Wigan Athletic were eliminated from Group D, finishing bottom of the section after a 2-1 defeat away to Slovenian champions Maribor.

In new manager Uwe Rosler's first game in charge, Wigan had to win to stand a chance of going through and a Jordi Gomez penalty put them in front.

However, Chris McCann was sent off moments later for a second booking after handling in the box and Dejan Mezga tapped in to equalise after his penalty had been saved.

Zeljko Filipovic then put Maribor in front in the second half, and they held on to win despite having Ales Mertelj sent off late on.

Maribor qualified for the last 32 courtesy of their better head-to-head record against Belgian side Zulte Waregem, who lost 2-0 to section winners Rubin Kazan.

Former European champions PSV Eindhoven needed just a point to go through from Group B but were eliminated after losing 1-0 at home to Chornomorets Odessa, a Franck Dja Djedje goal taking the Ukrainians through instead.

L'pool lose Gerrard

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard will be out for at least four weeks with a hamstring injury, leaving the English Premier League title chasers without the England star for the busy Christmas period.

Gerrard pulled up with a hamstring problem during the 4-1 win over West Ham last weekend and limped out of the game in the 56th minute.

"Steven is, as reported, probably going to be up to about four weeks or so," Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers confirmed to liverpoolfc.com.

"So he'll go through an extensive treatment programme over the next numbers of weeks and hopefully we can get him back that little bit sooner.

"But certainly at this stage, it was a four to six-week injury and we'll see how we look with that."

Gerrard, who has helped steer Liverpool to second spot in the table, will miss the games against Tottenham, Manchester City, Chelsea, Cardiff City and Hull City.

It's crunch time

AFP, London



Arsenal defender Per Mertesacker has challenged his team to use Saturday's crunch clash at Manchester City to prove they can cope with the pressure of the Premier League title race.

Arsene Wenger's side head to Eastlands still reeling from a 2-0 defeat against Napoli on Wednesday which could prove a fatal blow to their hopes of winning the Champions League.

The Gunners needed just a point to finish top of their group and secure an easier draw in the last 16, but instead they slumped to second place and will now face either Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, Paris Saint Germain or Atletico Madrid.

It was a major setback just days after a frustrating 1-1 draw against Everton stopped Arsenal opening up a seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

In the circumstances, another defeat against City, who have won all seven of their home league matches and scored 29 goals in the process, would be a disaster heading into the busy Christmas programme.

And Germany centre-back Mertesacker knows the critics are once again starting to question whether Arsenal have the mental strength to overcome the psychological scars of the club's eight-year trophy drought.

"Now everybody is questioning our group and asking if we can maintain that level, so we have to stay together and think that 'yes, we are strong enough' ,"

Mertesacker said.

"It is always difficult, especially after 15 games in the league and with the Christmas period coming.

"You think you have a good chance to achieve something this season, but you have to keep your momentum and that is really important."

While Arsenal hope to cement their position at the top, fourth-placed City can't afford to lose their 100 percent home record if they want to stay in touch with the leaders.

Manuel Pellegrini's team are already six points behind Arsenal thanks to some disappointing results on their travels and England midfielder James Milner concedes this weekend's match will have a major influence on City's hopes of regaining the title they won in 2012.

"With the gap Arsenal have at the top, if they win or we win, things are going to look very different, so it is important we get the victory," Milner said.

FIXTURES

Saturday
(1500GMT unless stated)
Cardiff v West Brom, Chelsea v Crystal Palace, Everton v Fulham, Hull v Stoke (1730GMT), Manchester City v Arsenal (1245GMT), Newcastle v Southampton, West Ham v Sunderland

Sunday
Aston Villa v Manchester United (1330GMT), Norwich v Swansea (1330GMT), Tottenham v Liverpool (1600GMT)



Photo: AFP

Tottenham Hotspur striker Roberto Soldado (R) heads in one of his three goals against Anzhi Makhachkala during their Europa League match at White Hart Lane on Thursday.

Bravo to lead WI

AFP, Wellington

All-rounder Dwayne Bravo will lead the West Indies limited overs squad named Friday for a series of five one-day internationals against New Zealand starting later this month.

However big-hitting opener Chris Gayle, who has missed the current Test series against New Zealand following a hamstring injury, remains unavailable, as does all-rounder Kieron Pollard who has a knee injury.

The lineup includes nine members of the squad currently in the middle of a three-Test series against New Zealand.

SQUAD

Dwayne Bravo (capt), Tino Best, Darren Bravo, Johnson Charles, Narsingh Deonarine, Kirk Edwards, Jason Holder, Nikita Miller, Sunil Narine, Kieran Powell, Denesh Ramdin, Ravi Rampaul, Darren Sammy, Marlon Samuels, Lendl Simmons.

Tough tests for contenders

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona, Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid were all convincing winners in the Champions League in midweek, but could face a more difficult time on their return to domestic action this weekend.

League leaders Barca have bounced back from defeat in their last league outing away to Athletic Bilbao by scoring 10 times in their last two matches against Cartagena and Celtic respectively.

However, they welcome a dangerous Villarreal side to the Camp Nou on Saturday aware that their visitors have already taken points from both Real and Atletico this season.

Winger Pedro Rodriguez has more than played his part in the Catalans' return to form with three goals in the last two games and he is looking for a strong end to the year with just three matches to go until the winter break.

"The team is doing fine, we feel good physically and we are looking forward to the matches that remain between now and Christmas," he told Barca TV.

"I am happy with how things are going personally and to be able to help the team. The goals help to make you more confident and I feel better physically and more comfortable on the field."

Neymar was the star of the show as Barca demolished Celtic 6-1 on Wednesday with his first hat-trick for the club.

Coach Gerardo Martino described that performance as his side's best of his first five months in charge and he may well be tempted to retain the Brazilian through the middle in the "false nine" role despite Cesc Fabregas' return from suspension.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday
Osasuna v Real Madrid (1500), Rayo Vallecano v Granada (1700), Barcelona v Villarreal (1900), Malaga v Getafe (2100)

Sunday
Almeria v Espanyol (1100), Real Sociedad v Real Betis (1600), Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao (1800), Atletico Madrid v Valencia (2000)

Monday
Valladolid v Celta Vigo (2000)

Andres Iniesta, Jordi Alba and the fit-again Dani Alves are all likely to return, but Lionel Messi and Victor Valdes remain sidelined by injury.

One of the main threats to Barca will be one of their former players in Giovanni Dos Santos.

The Mexican has been one of the main reasons for Villarreal's fine start to the campaign on their return to the top flight with six goals in 13 games.

"A return to Barcelona for me is always very special, it was the team that opened the door to me in Europe and where I learnt my trade," he said.

"I am very grateful for what they gave me so I don't have any feelings of wanting to gain revenge against them."

"But now I am a Villarreal player, I owe it to my team to perform rather than having anything to prove to anyone."

The task is somewhat different for Real Madrid as they face the difficult conditions of an away trip to Osasuna on Saturday.

Osasuna are just one point above the relegation zone, but Real have only won once in their last five league visits to Pamplona and Osasuna also held Barca to a 0-0 draw earlier this season.

Ireland's 3rd this year

AFP, Dubai

John Mooney's second five-wicket haul in the match saw Ireland post a comprehensive victory by 122 runs over Afghanistan to win the ICC Intercontinental Cup final on Friday.

Defending champions Afghanistan, chasing 347 runs for victory, were 136 for five overnight but were dismissed for 224.

Medium pacer Mooney took 5 wickets for 36 in the Afghan second innings, giving him match figures of 10-81.

This was Ireland's fourth title in six editions of the Intercontinental Cup, but this victory marked the first time a team has won three ICC tournaments across three different formats in the same calendar year.

Ireland won the World Cricket League Championship title in the 50-over format in October and the ICC World Twenty20 Qualifier tournament in November.

Kiwis thrash Windies

AFP, Wellington



Trent Boult led New Zealand to their first Test win in more than a year Friday when he produced career best figures in a fiery bowling display that crushed the West Indies inside three days.

The West Indies lost 16 wickets on the third day as they handed New Zealand a comprehensive victory by an innings and 73 runs.

It was the Black Caps first win in 11 Tests under Brendon McCullum who replaced Ross Taylor after their last success in Sri Lanka nearly 13 months ago.

"Everyone's obviously very happy," McCullum said.

"We played near the perfect Test match and that's obviously pleasing."

The West Indies resumed Friday at 158-4 in their first innings in reply to New Zealand's 441.

They were forced to follow on when they collapsed to be all out for 193, and the second innings ended at 175.

Boult was the chief destroyer with six for 40 in the first innings where his last four wickets came in the space of six deliveries.

In the second innings he returned 4-40 and also pulled off a spectacular one-handed, diving catch when Denesh Ramdin (19) slashed at a Neil Wagner delivery.

SCOREBOARD									
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 441 (Taylor 129, Watling 65, Williamson 45; Best 4-110)					Williamson 2 0 12 0				
WEST INDIES: First innings (overnight 158-4)					WEST INDIES: Second innings				
Edwards c Rutherford b Anderson 55					Edwards c Williamson b Southee 35				
Powell lbw Southee 21					Powell b Southee 36				
Bravo c Fulton b Anderson 4					Bravo c Watling b Wagner 0				
Samuels c Watling b Boult 60					Samuels c Anderson b Southee 12				
Chanderpaul c Taylor b Boult 6					Chanderpaul not out 31				
Chanderpaul c Anderson b Boult 6					Deonarine b Boult 12				
Deonarine c Taylor b Boult 22					Ramdin c Boult b Anderson 19				
Ramdin not out 12					Sammy lbw Boult 0				
Sammy b Boult 0					Shillingford c Taylor b Wagner 1				
Shillingford b Boult 0					Best c Fulton b Boult 21				
Best b Boult 0					Gabriel b Boult 0				
Gabriel b Southee 13					Extras: (lb-6, nb-1, w-1) 8				
Extras: (lb-8, w-1, nb-4) 13					Total: (All out in 54.5 overs) 175				
Total: (All out in 49.5 overs) 193					Fall of wickets: 1-74, 2-75, 3-85, 4-94, 5-117, 6-146, 7-147, 8-148, 9-175.				
Fall of wickets: 1-46, 2-67, 3-103, 4-119, 5-175, 6-182, 7-182, 8-188, 9-188.					Bowler O M R W				
Bowler O M R W					Boult 12.5 2 40 4				
Boult 15 5 40 6					Southee 11 2 24 3				
Southee 15.5 2 58 2					Wagner 17 2 67 2				
Wagner 7 1 37 0					Anderson 11 1 29 1				
Anderson 7 1 20 2					Williamson 3 1 9 0				
Sodhi 3 1 18 0					Result: New Zealand won by an innings and 73 runs.				

India's Test preps rain-hit

AFP, Benoni



India's preparation for the first Test against South Africa suffered a setback when rain and a wet outfield prevented any play on the first day of a two-day match against a South African Invitation XI at Willowmoore Park on Friday.

With the outfield wet after heavy rain in the previous week, and more rain expected later, the umpires took an early decision to call off play for the day.

The first of two Test matches starts at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Wednesday. With the tour having been shortened after the Indian board refused to accept the itinerary announced by South Africa, the two-day match was the only fixture scheduled between a three-match one-day series and the Tests.

India's batsmen are desperately short of match practice in South African conditions. India were beaten in the first two one-day games and were bowled out for 217 and 146, with captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni the only man to hit a half-century. A thunderstorm prevented India from batting in the third and final one-day international.