

Diego returns to Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian playmaker Diego Ribas has joined Atletico Madrid on loan from Wolfsburg for the rest of the season.

The 28-year-old has already spent a year on loan at the Spanish side during the 2011-12 season and was a key part in the side that won the Europa League in Diego Simeone's first season in charge.

"I feel very emotional," he told Atletico's website.

"I am returning to a team where I fitted in fantastically well. I am very excited. I am only thinking about working hard to help the team continue winning."

Atletico are still in the running for three trophies this season as they sit joint top of La Liga, will face Real Madrid in the semi-finals of the Copa del Rey and return to Champions League action next month where they will meet AC Milan in the last 16.

Diego will be eligible for the games against Milan as he hasn't played in European competition this season.

Meanwhile, Atletico have farmed two of their own midfielders out on loan for the rest of the season.

French international Josuha Guilavogui will return to Saint Etienne just six months after joining Atletico for a fee in the region of 10 million euros (\$13.6 million, £8.3 million).

And Spanish under-21 international Oliver Torres will join Villarreal.

Jose cranks up mind games

REUTERS, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho cranked up the mind games ahead of Monday's heavyweight clash at Manchester City by suggesting that Lady Luck had been smiling on the Premier League leaders in recent weeks.

"Their players are obviously very good and their manager (Manuel Pellegrini) is also doing a good job," Mourinho told a news conference on Friday.

"On top of that, and this is just pure coincidence, the reality is they have had many crucial decisions in their favour.

"They were lucky against Liverpool, against Newcastle and against Tottenham. But I repeat this is just pure coincidence."

Fortune certainly favoured City on Wednesday when they romped to a 5-1 league win at White Hart Lane after Tottenham defender Danny Rose was sent off for a clean tackle early in the second half that prompted the referee to award a penalty.

Rose has since had his red card rescinded by the Football Association.

City, who have been banging in goals left, right and centre all season, will be without leading scorer Sergio Aguero on Monday.

The Argentine has been ruled out for a month after sustaining a hamstring injury at Spurs.

Mourinho said it would hardly matter because Pellegrini has an embarrassment of striking riches at his disposal.

"City score goals and I don't think for them it is important if somebody is injured," added the Portuguese.

MU crash at Stoke

AFP, London



Manchester United's new-look line-up crashed to a 2-1 defeat at Stoke City on Saturday as they squandered another opportunity to make up ground on the Premier League's top four.

United fielded Wayne Rooney, Robin van Persie and record signing Juan Mata in their starting XI for the first time, but an eighth defeat of the campaign left the champions six points below the Champions League places.

On an afternoon of howling wind at the Britannia Stadium, Stoke took a 38th-minute lead when Charlie Adam's 35-yard free-kick took a huge deflection off Michael Carrick that wrong-footed goalkeeper David de Gea.

United equalised two minutes into the second half, Van Persie finishing adroitly from Mata's deft pass, only for Adam to restore Stoke's lead five minutes later with a glorious shot into the top-right corner.

The visitors piled on the pressure in stoppage time, but to no avail, with Tom Cleverley blazing a shot over the crossbar after Asmir Begovic had palmed a free-kick from Rooney onto the post.

RESULTS

Cardiff 2 (Bellamy 49, Jones 51) Norwich 1 (Snodgrass 5)
Everton 2 (Naismith 74, Mirallas 85) Aston Villa 1 (Bacuna 34)
Fulham 0 Southampton 3 (Lallana 64, Lambert 70, Rodriguez 75)
Hull 1 (Long 12) Tottenham 1 (Paulinho 61)
Newcastle 0 Sunderland 3 (Borini 19-pen, Johnson 23, Colback 80)
Stoke 2 (Adam 38, 52) Manchester United 1 (Van Persie 47)
West Ham 2 (Nolan 26, 45) Swansea 0

It was Stoke's first win over United since December 1984 and saw them climb to 11th place in the table.

With top-four teams Manchester City, Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool not in action, Everton were the only side who fully capitalised on the opportunity to close on the Champions League places.

Thrashed 4-0 by Liverpool in mid-week, Everton fell 1-0 down at home to Aston Villa when Leandro Bacuna finished off a slick counter-attack.

However, Steven Naismith came off the bench to score a 74th-minute equaliser before Kevin Mirallas's late free-kick secured a 2-1 win that left

Roberto Martinez's side a point behind Liverpool in fifth place.

Tottenham Hotspur were unable to follow Everton's lead after being held to a 1-1 draw at Hull City that saw them slip to sixth.

Spurs were crushed 5-1 by City on Wednesday and they had to settle for a point at the KC Stadium after Paulinho's smart 61st-minute finish cancelled out Shane Long's first Hull goal in the first half.

Sunderland leapt up the table to 14th place after prevailing 3-0 against derby rivals Newcastle United at St James' Park for the second season running.

Fabio Borini's penalty gave Sunderland the lead in the 19th minute and Adam Johnson tapped in his seventh goal in seven games four minutes later before Jack Colback sealed victory with a late strike.

West Ham United also recorded a potentially important victory, weathering the dismissal of striker Andy Carroll to overcome Swansea City 2-0 at Upton Park, although they remained in the bottom three.

Carroll created both of West Ham's first-half goals, knocking the ball down for Kevin Nolan to break the deadlock in the 26th minute and then teeing up the same player to head in a second in first-half injury time.

Valencia stun Barca

AFP, Madrid



LFP

Valencia inflicted Barcelona's first league defeat at the Camp Nou since April 2012 as they came from behind to win 3-2 on Saturday.

Alexis Sanchez had given the hosts a deserved early lead, but goals just before and after half-time from Dani Parejo and Pablo Piatti turned the game on its head.

Lionel Messi quickly levelled from the penalty spot, only for Paco Alcacer to strike the winner low past Victor Valdes five minutes later.

And Barca's day was summed up 13 minutes from time when Jordi Alba was sent-off for a second bookable offence.

Both Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid now have the chance to end Barca's record run of 59 league games at the top of the table when they face Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao respectively on Sunday.

Valencia came into the game off the back of a busy couple of days in the transfer market as five players left and four arrived in the final 48 hours of the January window.

None of Los Che's new men were signed in time to make the starting line-up, though, and they suffered a terrible start as Sanchez's shot looped up over the stranded Alves after just seven minutes.

Barca should have then built on their lead as Alves made a brilliant save to prevent Sanchez

doubling his tally with a header from point-blank range, whilst Sergio Busquets, Messi and Dani Alves all came close.

However, Barca's intensity dipped after the opening half hour and Valencia missed a great chance to equalise when Ricardo Costa headed wide when presented with an open goal after Victor Valdes completely misjudged a corner from the right.

Valencia did level just before the break as Parejo swept home Sofiane Feghouli's low cross.

And the visitors went in front just three minutes after the restart as Piatti took advantage of more hesitation by Valdes to loop a header into the net.

Barcelona were handed a reprieve six minutes later when referee Pedro Perez Montero wrongly awarded a penalty for handball against Costa when the ball appeared to have struck the Valencia captain's shoulder.

Messi showed no mercy from the spot as he rifled high into the roof of the net to register his first league goal in nine games stretching back to September.

However, it took Valencia just five minutes to retake the lead as Alcacer slotted home another intelligent cut-back from Feghouli.

Barca boss Gerardo Martino then introduced Andres Iniesta in a bid to turn the game around, but it made little difference as his flustered side failed to find any sort of rhythm.



Sunderland striker Fabio Borini scores the opening goal from a penalty during their Premier League encounter against Newcastle United at St James' Park yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Dortmund end winless run

AFP, Berlin



BUNDES LIGA

Borussia Dortmund earned their first Bundesliga win in five games with a 2-1 victory at bottom side Eintracht Braunschweig on Friday with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scoring both their goals.

Dortmund welcomed back Germany centre-back Mats Hummels after two months out with an ankle injury.

The 25-year-old rescued Dortmund with a challenge on replacement Karim Bellarabi in the dying stages as Dortmund stayed third, 14 points behind leaders Bayern Munich.

The night belonged to Aubameyang who, along with Poland striker Robert Lewandowski, finished the match with 11 league goals for the season -- the same tally as the entire Braunschweig team.

"That was a very difficult game for us, so we're very happy about the win," said Aubameyang.

The Gabon right-winger headed home a Lewandowski cross in the first-half, then fired home the winner from Marco Reus' pass 25 minutes from the final whistle.

His pin-point winner saved Dortmund's blushes after hosts Braunschweig had equalised when defender Benjamin Kessel tapped home on 54 minutes, despite a posse of Borussia defenders.

"We're very happy, even if it was a dirty win," admitted Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller.

"We know that it wasn't a good game, but we can build on the victory."

In a frantic final 10 minutes, Borussia's Lewandowski, Reus, Aubameyang and midfielder Nuri Sahin all had chances to add a third.

This was Dortmund's first win since November 30 after suffering two defeats and two draws.

Hernanes joins Inter

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan completed the signing of midfielder Hernanes from Lazio on the cusp of the transfer deadline Friday, a day after the Brazilian's emotional exit from the Rome-based Serie A club.

The 28-year-old Hernanes has joined the Nerazzurri on a four-and-a-half-year deal, the club announced on its website.

"FC Internazionale would like to welcome Hernanes to the club. The club has filed documents relating to his permanent transfer from Lazio to Serie A officials," said the statement.

"The player has signed a contract until June 30, 2018."

No financial details were immediately revealed although Italian media reports said the fee was in the region of 18m euros.

Hernanes becomes Inter's first major signing under new Inter owner Erick Thohir, the Indonesian businessman who took over the club in November last year.

ARAGONES passes away

REUTERS, Madrid



ARAGONES

Former coach Luis Aragones, the man who ended Spain's 44-year wait for a major international trophy by winning Euro 2008 and sparking a golden era for the team, has died at the age of 75.

He passed away on Saturday morning in the Centro de Madrid clinic in the Spanish capital after a battle with leukaemia, his family said in a statement.

The RFEF, the country's soccer federation, expressed its sorrow at the loss of the "Spain coach that started their glorious run of success in world football".

Spain lifted the European Championship trophy in 1964 but for several decades after they were regarded as under-achievers.

Aragones changed that perception with his victory in 2008, creating the platform for more triumphs under Vicente del Bosque at the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012.

Spain beat Germany 1-0 in the final in Vienna six years ago, Fernando Torres scoring the winner in the 33rd minute.

"Without doubt he paved the way for this latest period that has been so successful. He had a lot of experience as a coach and personally I had a special affection for him," said Del Bosque.



"I knew he had a health problem but I never imagined it would come to this. We will remember this day with a lot of sadness."

Chelsea striker Torres, who was with Liverpool when he appeared in the final in Vienna, also paid tribute to Aragones.

"RIP Luis Aragones. Thanks boss, I will never be able to thank you enough for what you did for me," Torres said on his Twitter feed.

Xabi Alonso, who came on as a substitute in the 2008 final, was also fulsome in his praise of Aragones.

"We have lost a great person, it is a sad day. His personality has marked us for life," Real Madrid midfielder Alonso said on his Twitter account.

Aragones realised the need to get rid of ageing players like Raul and Michel Salgado, creating a new playing style based on the short-passing football that was bringing success at Barcelona.

Juventus seal Osvaldo deal

REUTERS

Italy striker Dani Osvaldo, suspended for two weeks by English Premier League Southampton earlier this month, has joined Juventus on loan.

"Juventus Football Club can today confirm terms have been agreed with Southampton Football Club on a free loan deal for Pablo Daniel Osvaldo," the Serie A club said in a statement on Friday.

"The agreement also includes the option, to be exercised before 31 May 2014, for the purchase of the player's full registration rights at a price of 19 million euros (\$25.62 million) to be paid over the course of three years."

Osvaldo, who scored three league goals after moving to Southampton from AS Roma last year, is keen to play at the World Cup in Brazil in June.

"I've come to Italy's biggest club, and one of the biggest in Europe, in a World Cup year," he said.

"I want to enjoy this experience, do my best to be involved in the World Cup and stay here for many years."

Berba loaned to Monaco

AFP, Monaco

Monaco agreed a loan deal for influential Fulham striker Dimitar Berbatov late on Friday, hours before the January transfer window closed.

The former Manchester United, Tottenham and Bayer Leverkusen forward has joined Claudio Ranieri's Principality side until the end of the Ligue 1 season.

Berbatov, 33, arrives at Monaco as a stand-in for Radamel Falcao, the Colombian star striker who is facing months on the sidelines after suffering a serious knee injury.

Monaco are lying second in the table, six points behind Paris Saint Germain after the capital club's 2-0 win over Bordeaux on Friday.

Monaco can reduce their deficit on PSG with victory at Lorient on Saturday.

Bulgarian forward Berbatov joins the Ligue 1 outfit after scoring five times for struggling west London side Fulham this season.