

Messi lifts Barca

AFP, Madrid



A double from Lionel Messi guided Barcelona back to the top of La Liga as they came from behind to beat Sevilla 4-1 in atrocious weather conditions on Sunday.

Alberto Moreno had fired Sevilla into a deserved early lead, but Barca were level in controversial circumstances when Alexis Sanchez bundled home Messi's free-kick from an offside position.

Messi then took over with a wonderful half-volley to give his side the lead at half-time.

The Argentine produced another fine finish 11 minutes after the restart before Cesc Fabregas rounded off the scoring three minutes from time.

The Spanish champions now lead a three-way tie at the top of La Liga on goal difference with Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid also on 57 points.

Barca boss Gerardo Martino had sprung a surprise before kick-off by leaving Dani Alves, Sergio Busquets and Cesc Fabregas on the bench, and the visitors started extremely poorly.

Moreno's low strike was deflected past Victor Valdes by his own defender Marc Bartra, but Barca were lucky not to be further behind in the opening 30 minutes.

Carlos Bacca was unlucky to see his glancing header come back off the base of

RESULTS

Osasuna 2 (Oriol Riera 6, Torres 88) Getafe 0
Valladolid 2 (Osorio 71, 83) Elche 2 (Coro 34, Del Moral 66)
Real Sociedad 0 Levante 0
Sevilla 1 (Moreno 15) **Barcelona 4** (Sanchez 34, Messi

the post before Ivan Rakitic fired wide from close range with only Valdes to beat.

Barcelona were handed a lifeline 10 minutes before half-time when the assistant referee failed to spot that Sanchez was in an offside position as he turned Messi's free-kick into the net via his back.

However, there was no doubt over Barca's second as a flowing counter-attack from the edge of their own box ended with Messi volleying home his first goal from open play in 10 league games.

Sevilla had a series of opportunities to equalise at the beginning of the second-half as Vitolo shot wide when clean through before Kevin Gameiro also fired off target after Valdes had parried Bacca's curling from range.

The hosts were made to pay for their profligacy when Messi produced another precise left-footed finish in off the inside of the post from Andres Iniesta's pass.

Substitute Denis Cheryshev had another guilt-edged chance to give Sevilla hope 17 minutes from time, but he fluffed his lines allowing Valdes to smother.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi is ecstatic after scoring one of his two goals against Sevilla during their Primera Liga match at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Torres ready to return

REUTERS, London

Fernando Torres is ready to return for Chelsea's Premier League visit to West Bromwich Albion on Tuesday, manager Jose Mourinho told a news conference on the eve of the game.

Spain striker Torres has been out for three weeks with a knee injury.

Captain John Terry is again sidelined, however, after he missed Saturday's 3-0 home win over Newcastle United with a slight niggles.

Leaders Chelsea have a one-point advantage over Arsenal at the top of the table.

Hammers to sell Upton Park

REUTERS

West Ham United have agreed to sell their ground at Upton Park to London developer Galliard Group once they have moved to the Olympic Stadium in 2016, the club announced on Monday.

The club have played at the Boleyn Ground in east London for over 100 years, but will move into the focal point of the 2012 Olympic Games in time for the 2016-17 season.

The stadium, built at a cost of 430 million pounds (\$704.96 million), will have a 54,000 capacity once it is converted for use by the club, who have been granted a 99-year lease and will contribute 15 million pounds to conversion work.

"We opted to reach an agreement with Galliard because they are a local London developer and employer with origins in east London," club vice-chairwoman Karen Brady said in a statement on the club website.

"We know they are committed to working closely with the local community and Newham Council on proposals to transform the site into a residential and retail village, which will benefit the local community and east London's regional economy.

"The deal demonstrates that we have been true to our word by securing the regeneration of two areas of east London through our move to the Olympic Stadium in 2016."

Fulham punish MU

AFP, London



Darren Bent scored a dramatic 94th-minute equaliser as the Premier League's bottom club Fulham undermined Manchester United's Champions League hopes in a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Fulham had taken a shock lead through Steve Sidwell in the 19th minute, but quick-fire goals from Robin van Persie and Michael Carrick in the final 12 minutes appeared to have set United on course for victory.

There was one final twist in the tale, however, as deep into stoppage time David de Gea could only push a Kieran Richardson shot into the air and Bent nodded in the rebound to earn Fulham a vital point.

The draw left United nine points adrift of Liverpool, who occupy the fourth and final Champions League place, while Fulham inched to within four points of safety at the foot of the table.

Fulham manager Rene Meulensteen, a former United coach, had seen his side eliminated by third-tier Sheffield United in the FA Cup in mid-week, but after weathering early pressure, his side took a shock lead.

As Fulham attacked down the left, Sidwell drifted into the box undetected and when Lewis Holtby picked him out with a lofted pass, the former Chelsea midfielder slid in to tuck a side-foot volley past De Gea.

United were not slow to react, Van Persie, Ashley Young and Carrick going close, but

RESULTS

Manchester United 2 (Van Persie 78, Carrick 80) Fulham 2 (Sidwell 19, Bent 90+4)
Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Adebayor 65) Everton 0

Richardson should have doubled Fulham's lead in the 37th minute when he shot over with only De Gea to beat.

United resumed control, with Fulham goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg saving from Carrick and Nemanja Vidic before producing a stunning reflex stop to thwart Wayne Rooney early in the second half.

United manager David Moyes introduced Adnan Januzaj, Antonio Valencia and Javier Hernandez as United laid siege to the visitors' goal and the pressure finally told in the 78th minute when Van Persie tucked in a volleyed cross from Juan Mata.

Less than two minutes later the turnaround was complete as Carrick beat Stekelenburg with a deflected shot from the edge of the box.

Moyes celebrated with scarcely disguised relief, but in the penultimate minute of stoppage time Bent scored to complete another day of despair for the champions.

United now find themselves six points behind fifth-place Tottenham Hotspur, who stole a march on Everton with a 1-0 victory over their Champions League qualification rivals at White Hart Lane.

Emmanuel Adebayor settled the game in the 65th minute, chesting down a quick free-kick from Kyle Walker and resisting the attentions of Seamus Coleman before drilling a low shot past Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard.

Verona peg back Juve

AFP, Milan



Verona forward Juan Gomez came off the bench to level late and secure a 2-2 draw at home to Juventus as the champions spurned the chance to extend their lead on misfiring Roma on Sunday.

Roma were away to Lazio in the city derby only four days after a 3-2 win over Napoli in the first leg of the Italian Cup semifinal.

But despite shading what was a rough and tumble encounter at the Olympic Stadium, Rudi Garcia's men failed to grab the win that would have reduced their deficit on the Bianconeri to seven points with a game in hand.

Draws for both title challengers mean Juventus retained their nine-point lead over the Giallorossi, with Napoli, who outclassed AC Milan on Saturday, are now only four points off second place in third.

Juventus looked to be on their way to an easy win in the north east when Carlos Tevez broke the deadlock after just four minutes.

The Argentinian reacted quickly to tap home a rebound after 'keeper Rafael Dived to push out Kwadwo Asamoah's cross.

Tevez struck his second to give the Old Lady a 2-0 lead before the half

RESULTS

Torino 1 (Immobile 5) **Bologna 2** (Cristaldo 11, 24)
Verona 2 (Toni 52, Gomez 90+4) Juventus 2 (Tevez 4, 21)
Lazio 0 Roma 0
Livorno 0 **Genoa 1** (Antonelli 10)
Parma 0 Catania 0

hour, but if there was just a hint of offside from his first goal -- Fernando Llorente appearing out of position -- there was even more suspicion on his second.

Tevez began his run on to Paul Pogba's through ball on the left of the area just a little too quickly and swept the ball past Rafael on 21 minutes.

If Verona felt aggrieved, they were even more so just after the half hour when claims for a penalty were waved off despite the ball clearly coming off the arms of defender Martin Caceres following a corner.

The hosts earned some rough justice when striker Luca Toni headed home seven minutes after the restart to reduce arrears.

Ironically, Toni and several other Verona players appeared to have breached Juve's defence as Romulo whipped in a free kick that Toni headed past Gianluigi Buffon at the keeper's near post

Former Southampton striker Pablo Dani Osvaldo made his Juve debut when he replaced Llorente on 65 minutes and the Italy international made an immediate impact.

Osvaldo missed scoring on his debut by inches when he swiped Andrea Pirlo's through ball past Rafael only to see his effort come off the outside of the far post.

At the other end Buffon produced a fine one-handed save to keep out Toni's left-footed strike following a free-kick into a crowded area.

Juve then rode their luck when Verona had further claims for a penalty waved away after the ball came off the arm of Stephan Lichtsteiner as the Swiss midfielder marked Toni at Buffon's near post.

Juve continued to threaten, however, and Arturo Vidal tested Rafael with an angled strike from the edge of the area which the keeper did well to push over.

Extra time had been added on because of delays when Vidal was fouled, and a brief lull in Juve's concentration levels was all Verona required to take full advantage.

The hosts won a free kick to the right of Juve's area, it was quickly taken and Romulo whipped in a cross which Gomez headed past Buffon after slipping between Angelo Ogbonna and Pogba.



Fulham striker Darren Bent (C) heads in the equalising goal deep into injury time during their Premier League encounter against Manchester United at Old Trafford on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bender, Reus join casualty list

AFP, Berlin

Champions League side Borussia Dortmund's injury worries have worsened with both Germany pair Marco Reus and Sven Bender out of Tuesday's German Cup quarterfinal at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Left winger Reus suffered a torn right thigh in Saturday's 5-1 Bundesliga hammering of Werder Bremen and will be out for a fortnight, while defensive midfielder Bender has a thigh strain and misses the next week.

Frankfurt host Dortmund in the cup on Tuesday, then travel to Borussia's Westfalenstadion on Saturday for a Bundesliga match and Bender faces a race against time for the league clash.

The double injury blow is more bad news for Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp who lost Germany defender Mats Hummels last week after the centre-back injured his foot in a friendly.