

Napoli stun Juve

AFP, Milan



Goals by Jose Callejon and Dries Mertens handed Napoli a stunning 2-0 win over champions Juventus and sparked some life into the Serie A title race on Sunday.

Juventus had seen their 14-point lead cut back earlier in the day when Roma, in second with a game in hand, prevailed 2-0 at struggling Sassuolo.

Napoli came flying out the blocks and at the tail end of a dominant first half Callejon broke the deadlock in the 37th minute.

The pace slowed somewhat after the break but moments after replacing Slovakian Marek Hamsik, Mertens made the most of Goran Pandev's delivery to beat Gianluigi Buffon with a crisp drive from the edge of the area and condemn Juventus to just their second league defeat of the season.

Juve now lead Roma by 11 points with Napoli, who have been chasing the second automatic Champions League qualifying spot, still third but six points behind Roma.

Striker Gonzalo Higuain returned to Rafael Benitez's starting Napoli line-up after being rested for the 4-2 win at Catania in midweek, while Pablo Daniel Osvaldo replaced the suspended Carlos Tevez to partner Fernando Llorente in Juve's attack.

The statistics, however, were all in favour of Juventus, who were unbeaten in their last six encounters with Napoli and had restricted the hosts to only one goal in their last four games.

Napoli enjoyed the early pressure with Buffon pulling off a great reflex save in the

seventh minute to stop Callejon from close range and the Spaniard tested the 'keeper again on the half hour when he picked up Lorenzo Insigne's cutback after it missed Higuain.

Juve were seeing little of Pepe Reina's goal but Llorente failed to make contact with Stephan Lichsteiner's probing cross on the half hour.

Minutes later, Napoli took advantage of Kwadwo Asamoah playing in a makeshift defensive role, Callejon ghosting in behind the Ghanaian midfielder to meet Lorenzo Insigne's cross to beat Buffon from close range.

At the other end a spectacular bicycle kick from Osvaldo from Lichsteiner's delivery was well over the bar.

Asamoah made way for Mauricio Isla eight minutes after the restart and the Chilean almost made the difference immediately when he controlled well on the right to cross for Osvaldo, but Reina got down low to block.

Juve coach Antonio Conte shook things up when he replaced Paul Pogba with Claudio Marchisio and minutes later Osvaldo made way for Mirko Vucinic.

Vucinic had to wait only moments before having a shot on goal when he collected Arturo Vidal's short pass on the edge of the area only to curl wide of Reina's upright.

At the other end Hamsik was sent through by Pandev but Buffon had no trouble getting low to block the Slovakian's tame shot from the edge of the area.

Hamsik made way for Mertens in the 78th minute and moments later the Belgian made no mistake when Pandev picked him out with a smart pass to beat Buffon with a crisp angled strike.



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney (C) goes through a training drill along with teammates at Carrington yesterday on the eve of their Champions League quarterfinal against Bayern Munich.

PHOTO: AFP

Nat'l School Hockey C'ship

SPORTS REPORTER

Dharail High School of Natore, Alhikma School of Rajshahi, Keramotia High School of Rangpur and Chittagong University School and College won their respective matches of the First Security Islami Bank National School Hockey Championship at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Dharail High School beat The Aided High School of Sylhet 4-1, Alhikma School thrashed Mymensingh Zilla School 9-0, Keramotia High School beat Jessore Shaheen School 4-0 and Chittagong University School banked Ahmed Bawani Academy School 6-0.

Rafael might miss Bayern clash

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United veteran Rio Ferdinand trained Monday but fellow defender Rafael is a doubt for Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal first leg at home to Bayern Munich after missing the practice session.

Right-back Rafael came off at half-time during United's morale-boosting 4-1 Premier League win against Aston Villa at Old Trafford on Saturday and did not take part in the 15-minute session open to the media at Carrington, the club's training ground, on Monday.

But there was better news for Premier League champions United in the fact that centre-backs Ferdinand (back), Chris Smalling (hamstring) and longstanding absentee Jonny Evans (calf) were all on show at Carrington.

As expected, star striker Robin van Persie, who earlier this month was ruled out for four to six weeks with a knee problem, did not train Monday and nor did either the suspended Patrice Evra or England midfielder Tom Cleverley.

For United, 17 points behind Premier League leaders Chelsea and 10 adrift of the top four, winning the Champions League effectively represents their last chance of silverware this season and the club's best chance of qualifying for next term's edition of Europe's elite club competition.

Xavi fears Atletico

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez is concerned that Atletico Madrid will know exactly how to stop the Catalans when they meet in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal on Tuesday.

Both sides have already clashed three times this season, twice in the Spanish Supercup and once in La Liga with all three encounters ending in draws.

Barca took the spoils in the Supercup on away goals, but it is Atletico who lead the way in La Liga, a point ahead of second placed Barca, with just seven games remaining.

And Xavi is well aware of how difficult a tie the four-time European champions face if they are to progress to a seventh consecutive Champions League semifinal.

"I don't like playing against Spanish teams in the Champions League, they know us very well. Atletico are a very uncomfortable opponent that defends and breaks on the counter-attack. The tie will be decided by fine details," he told the Barcelona website.

FACTFILE

Coaches

Barcelona - Gerardo Martino (ARG) 51 yrs
Atletico Madrid - Diego Simeone (ARG) 43 yrs
Leading scorers in all competitions
Barcelona - Lionel Messi (36 goals)
Atletico Madrid - Diego Costa (33 goals)

Domestic league performance

Barcelona - Second in La Liga, a point behind leaders Atletico
Atletico Madrid - First in La Liga with seven games to go and three points ahead of third-placed Real Madrid.

Last 16 performances

Barcelona - beat Manchester City 4-1 on aggregate thanks to a 2-0 win in the first leg at the Etihad before finishing the tie off with a 2-1 victory at the Camp Nou.
Atletico Madrid - Overcame AC Milan with ease 5-1 on aggregate. A 1-0 win at the San Siro setting up a famous night at the Vicente Calderon as Atletico emerged victorious 4-1 on the night.

Looking to exploit cracks

AFP, London



Manchester United manager David Moyes says that his side must exploit the smallest weaknesses in Bayern Munich's game if they are to eliminate the Champions League holders in the quarterfinals.

United appeared in three of the four finals between 2008 and 2011, triumphing in the first year, but their fall from grace under Moyes means that they approach Tuesday's first leg at Old Trafford as underdogs.

While Bayern have grown even stronger under their new coach, Pep Guardiola, sweeping to a successful Bundesliga title defence in record time, United have endured a torrid campaign.

Seventeen points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool and 10 points below the top four, their season now hinges entirely on their last-eight encounter with the all-conquering Bavarians.

"When we drew them, I felt we'd drawn probably the best team in Europe at this present time. I think most people would agree with that," Moyes said.

"We have got a really tough game and know exactly what we are going to get, but we'll try to exploit little bits of weaknesses they have got.

"Pep has taken over a really good team and added a bit himself with his own style. They have already won the Bundesliga quite comfortably, so the focus is on the Champions League now."

Moyes's maiden campaign at United has been a succession of false

dawns and crashing lows, and their recent form provides few assurances.

Although they came back from two goals down to beat Olympiakos 3-0 in the last 16, this month has also seen the English champions humbled 3-0 at home by both Liverpool and Manchester City.

Last season's top scorer Robin van Persie is currently sidelined after spraining his knee against Olympiakos, but the form of Wayne Rooney, at least, gives United reason for optimism.

Rooney's brace in Saturday's 4-1 defeat of Aston Villa took his tally to four goals in three games, and his cre-

ativity will be especially important in the absence of the cup-tied Juan Mata.

A group of United fans chartered a plane to fly over Old Trafford towing a 'MOYES OUT' banner during the Villa game, and although the Scot received a warm reception inside the ground, his position will again come under scrutiny if his side are embarrassed by Bayern.

It will not be lost on United's fans that Guardiola was once seen as an ideal successor to their former manager Alex Ferguson, whose retirement last year paved the way for Moyes's appointment.

Having turned Barcelona into the first truly great team of the 21st century, the Catalan now has his sights set on improving a Bayern side that claimed an unprecedented treble under Jupp Heynckes last season.

Bayern are bidding to become the first side ever to complete a Bundesliga season unbeaten and to win back-to-back European Cups in the Champions League era.

They have already impressed in England twice this season, outclassing City 3-1 in the Champions League group phase in October and then beating Arsenal 2-0 in the last 16.

However, Guardiola was critical of his players after they threw away a 3-1 lead in a 3-3 draw at home to Hoffenheim on Saturday, which was the first time they had dropped points in the league since October 5.

"We need to analyse what happened," he said.

"If we play like we did today in the second half, we are not the favourites on Tuesday against Manchester."

BJMC, BU square off

SPORTS REPORTER

Team BJMC and Brothers Union will be looking to seal a semifinal spot at the Modhumoti Bank Independence Cup football tournament when they square off against each other in the first quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Both BJMC and Brothers are confident to make it to the last eight after the way they played in their last matches.

BJMC came from two goals down to beat Feni Soccer 3-2 while a spirited Brothers Union earned a creditable draw against holders Sheikh Russel. Taking inspiration from their last shows, both teams are looking forward to putting up another good show.

It's going to be season's third meeting between the two sides and Federation Cup semifinalists BJMC are ahead of Brothers Union in terms of statistics after winning once in the Federation Cup encounter and playing a goalless draw in the professional football league tie against Brothers.

"It's a 50-50 match and any side can win the game but it will be tough for the opponents to beat us," said BJMC coach Ali Ashgar Nasir, who however admitted that the running condition of Brothers is better than his charges.

Brothers manager Amer Khan believes both teams have little difference and he wants to bank on his local players.

"We will definitely go for a win but I think the team, which will avail the opportunity most, will win the game," said Amer.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (C) runs with teammates Andres Iniesta (R) and Jordi Alba during a training session at the Joan Gamper Sports Centre yesterday ahead of their tonight's Champions League quarterfinal against Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: AFP

FA clears Fellaini

AFP, London



Manchester United midfielder Marouane Fellaini has "no case to answer" regarding allegations he spat at Manchester City full-back Pablo Zabaleta during last week's derby at Old Trafford, the Football Association said Monday.

"We have reviewed all the available footage and decided he (Fellaini) has no case to answer," an FA spokesman told AFP on Monday.

Footage on the YouTube website emerged which appeared to indicate Fellaini spitting near to Zabaleta's head while the City defender lay on the floor following a clash between the pair.

The FA did have the option of banning Fellaini retrospectively if it had found him guilty of misconduct.

Earlier this month, the FA banned Hull's George Boyd for three matches after he spat at Manchester City goalkeeper Joe Hart.

Match referee Michael Oliver booked Fellaini moments before the alleged spit towards Zabaleta for an elbow on the Argentina full-back.

After title contenders City's 3-0 win over Premier League champions United, Zabaleta said Fellaini was lucky to stay on the pitch.

"I was elbowed by Fellaini. It was a red card," he said.

United manager David Moyes said last week he had discussed the incident with Fellaini and stressed the Belgian international was adamant he'd done nothing wrong.

"I've spoken with Marouane and he says it isn't the case," Moyes said.

"We will work with the FA if that is what we have to do. Marouane is adamant that at no time did he (spit at Zabaleta). I don't think it (the footage) is completely conclusive, from what I've seen," the Scot added.

What to WATCH

MAASRANGA, GTV & STAR SPORTS 1
ICC World Twenty20
Bangladesh v Australia (D/N)
Live from 3:30pm
Pakistan v West Indies (D/N)
Live from 7:30pm
TEN SPORTS
UEFA Champions League
Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)
TEN ACTION
UEFA Champions League
Man Utd v Bayern Munich
Live from 12:45am (Wednesday)