

Atletico stay on course

REUTERS, Madrid



Atletico Madrid remained firmly on course for a surprise La Liga title triumph when Raul Garcia's header secured a 1-0 win for the leaders at home to seventh-placed Villarreal on Saturday.

Lionel Messi scored twice for Barcelona in a laboured 3-1 home victory over bottom side Real Betis as the champions stayed hard on Atletico's heels, a point behind with six matches left including a clash between the sides at the Nou Camp on the final day of the season.

Atletico have 79 points from 32 matches, three more than their tally from last season when they finished third. Barca have 78 and Real Madrid are five points behind in third ahead of their game at sixth-placed Real Sociedad later on Saturday.

Atletico were missing top scorer Diego Costa and playmaker Arda Turan through injury but dispatched Villarreal with an efficient performance in front of their boisterous fans enjoying the club's best campaign since they last won Spain's domestic league in 1996.

Garcia nodded in a Koke corner in the 14th minute at a packed Calderon and the home side comfortably soaked up sustained Villarreal pressure in the second half.

Barca were well short of their best against a Betis side who showed impressive fight despite being eight points adrift at the bottom and having little chance of avoiding relegation.

Messi scored his first from the penalty spot in the 15th minute after Betis defender Jordi Figueras brought down Alexis Sanchez.

Barca were unable to convert long periods of possession into goals and were fortunate to go 2-0 ahead when Figueras deflected the ball into his own net in the 67th.



Manchester City midfielder Samir Nasri (R) pumps his fist after scoring the second goal against Southampton during their Premier League encounter at the Etihad Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BPL resumes on April 15

SPORTS REPORTER

The second phase of Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League will resume from April 15, just two days after the final of the ongoing Independence Cup football tournament.

The home-and-away based second leg of the professional football league will be held at four different venues - Bangabandhu National Stadium, MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, Shaheed Salam Stadium in Feni and Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj as the decision was taken at the league committee meeting yesterday.

The meeting also decided to hold two matches of holders Sheikh Russel KC against M o h a m e d a n and Muktijoddha Sangsad in later part of the second phase as they will be taking part in AFC President's Cup from May 1 to 11 in Sri Lanka.

Leverkusen sack Hyypia

AFP, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday sacked coach Sami Hyypia after their 2-1 defeat at strugglers Hamburg left them with just one win in their last 11 games and facing a battle to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The 40-year-old former Liverpool captain, who took on his first senior coaching role last August, has been replaced by Sascha Lewandowski, the head coach of Leverkusen's junior side.

The defeat at Hamburg on Friday leaves Leverkusen in fourth place -- the last Champions League spot -- but they can be overtaken by Wolfsburg who face second-placed Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

"After careful consideration and in light of the ongoing crisis, we have concluded that only a change in the team management can bring about the much-needed shift," said Bayer's managing director Michael Schade.

"I thank Sami Hyypia expressly for his dedicated work over the past years."

Jessore school in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Jessore Municipal Preparatory School moved into the final of the First Security Islami Bank National School Championship with a 2-0 win over Khanjanpur School of Joypurhat in the first semifinal at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Sweet Hossain and Ekramul Hossain struck one goal each.

Jessore Municipal will play the final against today's winners between Jinjira PM Pilot School and Rajshahi Al Hikma School.

MU announce Real friendly

AFP, London

Manchester United on Friday announced they will face Real Madrid in a prestigious pre-season friendly in Michigan.

United will take on Spanish giants Real at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, on Saturday August 2.

The stadium, nicknamed "The Big House", is the largest sports venue in the United States with an official capacity of 109,901.

The friendly is part of the 2014 International Champions Cup and continues United's push to build the club's brand in the States.

Rooney a doubt for Bayern

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney is a major doubt for Manchester United's Champions League showdown against Bayern Munich after being ruled out of Saturday's clash at Newcastle with a toe injury.

Rooney sustained the bruised toe during the second half of United's 1-1 draw against holders Bayern in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

It was hoped Rooney would recover in time to lead the United attack at St James' Park, but boss David Moyes has revealed the injury is yet to respond to treatment and the England striker is now set to go for a scan to see if there is further damage.

"Wayne's got a badly bruised toe," Moyes told MUTV on Friday. "He picked it up in the game the other night."

"Whether we were going to play him or rest him, it doesn't matter."

"He's got a terrible toe and not only will it be a problem for this game, it could be a problem for the Munich game as well on Wednesday. So we need to monitor it."

"We'll get him treatment all over the weekend and see if we can speed it up."

Rooney's absence against Bayern would be a massive blow to United's hopes of progressing to the semifinals as they are already without Dutch striker Robin van Persie, who has been hit by a knee problem.

With five goals in six games last month, Rooney has been in fine form of late, but now the likes of Javier Hernandez and Danny Welbeck may well have to step up to the plate in Munich.

Moyes has suffered bad luck with injuries throughout his first season in charge, but he refused to complain about this latest setback.

Neymar feeling WC nerves

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



With less than ten weeks to the World Cup on home soil, Brazil star Neymar has admitted to butterflies in his stomach.

"I think it is an honour to wear the Brazil shirt in my country and to see my greatest childhood dream come true, but the nerves are starting to appear and I've butterflies in my stomach," Neymar said in an interview published Friday in Lance sports daily.

Brazilian fans are relying on the 22-year-old to help conjure a sixth world title and the Barcelona star insisted that the squad will have the "best possible" preparation as they prepare to face Croatia in their opening match at Sao Paulo on June 12.

"We are going to give our all out there to give Brazil the title," said Neymar, who will be the second-youngest player to wear the mythical number ten shirt for the Seleccion at a World Cup.

Pele famously made the shirt his own as a 17-year-old at the 1958 finals and again in 1962 before another crown in 1970.

Neymar said that "no match will be easy" as Brazil, who lost the final to Uruguay when they last staged the tournament at home back in 1950, take on the Croatians, Mexico and Cameroon in their pool.

"Your opponents always want to win and will give everything against Brazil. We have no preference regarding who we play as we know every match will be difficult. To get to the final will be a dream" regardless of who the team face, Neymar added.

Asked about missing out on a place in the 2010 squad he said: "It was not my turn (then) to play a World Cup."

"I have always worked for this day -- unfortunately it didn't happen for me on that occasion."

Chelsea gain timely boost

AFP, London



Chelsea returned to the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 win at home to Stoke on Saturday in a timely boost ahead of their do-or-die Champions League clash with Paris Saint-Germain.

Jose Mourinho's side bounced back from their 3-1 midweek quarterfinal first leg loss in Paris to move a point ahead of Liverpool, who will regain top spot if they avoid defeat away to West Ham on Sunday.

Manchester City maintained their title challenge with a 4-1 win at home to Southampton that left them two points off the summit and still with two games in hand over both Chelsea and Liverpool at the end of this weekend.

Egypt winger Mohamed Salah marked his first Premier League start by giving Chelsea, who welcome PSG

RESULTS

Aston Villa 1 (Holt 70) Fulham 2 (Richardson 61, Rodallega 86)

Cardiff 0 Crystal Palace 3 (Puncheon 31, 88, Ledley 71)

Chelsea 3 (Salah 32, Lampard 61, Willian 72)

Stoke 0

Hull 1 (Boyd 39) Swansea 0

Manchester City 4 (Toure 3-pen, Nasri 45+1, Dzeko 45+4, Jovetic 81) Southampton 1 (Lambert 37-pen)

Newcastle 0 Manchester United 4 (Mata 39, 50, Hernandez 65, Januzaj 90+3)

Norwich 0 West Brom 1 (Amalfitano 16)

on Tuesday, a 32nd minute lead at Stamford Bridge when he turned in Nemanja Matic's cut-back.

Salah then won a penalty after Andy Wilkinson's poor challenge and although Frank Lampard's 61st minute spot-kick was saved by Asmir Begovic, the veteran England midfielder fol-

lowed up to make it 2-0.

Willian added a third goal with a curling shot in the 72nd minute.

At Eastlands, Manchester City's Yaya Toure and Saints' Rickie Lambert both struck from the penalty spot before Samir Nasri and Edin Dzeko scored in first-half stoppage-time to make it 3-1 to Manuel Pellegrini's men.

However, controversy surrounded Nasri's goal with David Silva, who played in the France midfielder, offside when he received the ball.

City substitute Stevan Jovetic added a fourth goal in the 81st minute.

Juan Mata scored twice as Manchester United moved above Tottenham, who face Sunderland on Monday, and into sixth place with a 4-0 win away to Newcastle.

Following their impressive 1-1 Champions League draw at home to title-holders Bayern Munich, David Moyes's side took the lead at St James' Park courtesy of Mata's curling 39th minute free-kick.

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