

# Another Barca nightmare

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's La Liga title hopes suffered a huge blow as they lost 1-0 at Granada on Saturday to slip to a second consecutive defeat.

Algerian Yacine Brahimi scored the only goal after 16 minutes as Barca failed to find a way past the inspired Orestis Karnezis in the Granada goal.

Defeat rounds off an awful week for Barca as they were also dumped out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

The Catalans are now third in La Liga, a point behind both Real Madrid and Atletico after Real cruised to a 4-0 win over Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu thanks to goals from Angel di Maria, Gareth Bale, Isco and Alvaro Morata.

Atletico, who now just need to win five of their remaining six games to claim a first La Liga title in 18 years, can open up a gap at the top when they face Getafe on Sunday.

"It is a step backwards. It was just one move, for their goal, which we were punished for despite all the effort we put in," Barca midfielder Andres Iniesta told Canal Plus.

"At times it is difficult to explain when you lose. We lacked goals, but the rest we had under control.

"They only had the one chance with their goal. Teams like this, that are playing for their lives, live off just getting one chance. It is undeserved, we ought to have won but we haven't done so.

"We did everything to score. All we lacked was the finish, which is the most difficult part and makes the difference."

Barca boss Gerardo Martino shared Iniesta's analysis of the game and said he couldn't fault his players' performance as they racked up 29 efforts on goal and enjoyed over 80 percent of the possession.

"We no longer have matters in our own hands, but I couldn't ask for anything more from the players," he said.

"They tried in every way possible. They created plenty of chances, but today it wasn't to be. I can't criticise them for anything apart from obviously not finishing off the chances we had."

Martino had made four changes from the side that started Wednesday's 1-0 defeat to Atletico with a makeshift back four made up of reserve full-backs Adriano and Martin Montoya alongside natural holding midfielders Javier Mascherano and Sergio Busquets.

Granada took advantage of that unsettled defence to open the scoring as Brahimi sped past Busquets and forced the ball past Jose Manuel Pinto at his near post.

Neymar then headed over from a fine Montoya cross before the Brazilian forced Karnezis into his first serious save of the day with a curling effort from outside the area that was beaten away by the Greek 'keeper.

It was one-way traffic in the second half as Barca were denied on numerous occasions by Karnezis.

Cesc Fabregas was the first to come close as his low volley was turned behind before Neymar came within inches of an equaliser with a low drive that flew across goal and just past the far post.

It was a far more straight forward evening for Real as even without the injured Cristiano Ronaldo they had far too much for Almeria.

Esteban kept the hosts in the game early on as he made a fine save to deny Bale opening the scoring, but Angel di Maria eventually made the breakthrough with a curling left-footed effort 28 minutes in.

Real then made the game safe with a fast start to the second period as Karim Benzema played in Bale to hammer home his 19th goal of the season before Isco made it 3-0 three minutes later with a precise low finish.

And Morata rounded off the scoring six minutes from time with a lovely dinked finish from Asier Illarramendi's through ball.



Real Madrid's Angel Di Maria (C) celebrates his goal against Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Lerverkusen secure crucial win

AFP, Berlin



Bayer Leverkusen forced their way back into the Champions League places with Sunday's 2-1 win at home to Hertha Berlin in their first Bundesliga match since sacking Sami Hyypia.

The former Liverpool captain, who took charge as head coach in August, was sacked after his side's defeat at Hamburg saw them slip out of the Bundesliga's top four - the Champions League places - and was replaced by his former co-coach Sascha Lewandowski.

Leverkusen took a first-minute lead at home to Hertha when striker Stefan Kiessling headed home and doubled their lead on 24 minutes as 17-year-old Julian Brandt deftly chipped home his second goal in as many matches.

Hertha striker Sandro Wagner headed Berlin back into contention just before the break, but Leverkusen held on for the points which sees them regain fourth place from VfL Wolfsburg, who had romped to a 4-1

win over Nuremberg 24 hours before.

Borussia Moenchengladbach dropped to sixth as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to relegation-threatened VfB Stuttgart.

Daniel Didavi scored early on for Stuttgart but Juan Arango's header with a minute remaining salvaged a point for Moenchengladbach.

Stuttgart are now one point clear of third-from-bottom Hamburg, who lost 2-1 at Hanover 96.

Hamburg coach Mirko Slomka returned to Hanover for the first time since his sacking in December but his new team fell behind when Lars Stindl headed home on nine minutes.

Hamburg levelled through a Hakan Calanoglou free-kick but Didier Ya Konan scrambled home with four minutes left to help Hanover pull five points clear of the relegation zone.

In the other meeting of two relegation candidates, Freiburg defeated bottom club Eintracht Braunschweig 2-0, while Europa League hopefuls Mainz swept aside mid-table Werder Bremen 3-0.

# Sachin, Sourav move to football

AFP, New Delhi

Cricket stars Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly and leading Spanish club Atletico Madrid are among the owners of teams in a new India football league set to start this year, organisers said Sunday.

The Indian Super League, featuring foreign and Indian talent in teams based in eight cities, is due to start nationwide in mid-September and run until the end of November.

Organised by the All India Football Federation, the league is being backed by India's Reliance Industries, which is controlled by the country's richest man Mukesh Ambani, and by sports management giant IMG.

Former international stars such as Thierry Henry, Robert Pires, Hernan Crespo, Fredrik Ljungberg, Dwight Yorke and Louis Saha are among those who have reportedly signed up to play in the league.

Tendulkar, who retired last year as the world's leading batsman in both Test and one-day cricket, has joined hands with Hyderabad-based investor Prasad Potluri to co-own the Kochi city franchise.

"I will always remain a sportsman at heart who is keen to positively impact the sporting fabric of the nation," Tendulkar said in a statement.

"The Indian Super League presents a great opportunity to develop a platform for youngsters to learn and enhance their talent to develop into outstanding players."

Ganguly, a former India Test captain, will team up with La Liga leaders Atletico and three Indian businessmen to co-own the team of his home city of Kolkata, an All India Football Federation statement said.

Other team heads include Bollywood stars Salman Khan (Pune franchise), Ranbir Kapoor (Mumbai) and John Abraham (Guwahati), the statement said without elaborating on the financial obligations for each owner.

The remaining three teams will be owned by media house Sun group (Bangalore), TV cable distribution company DEN Networks (Delhi) and three businessmen who will co-own Goa, the statement said.

"The management takes great pride in announcing the winning bids as a good mix of corporates and celebrities," it said.

# It's Juventus vs everyone

REUTERS

Serie A champions and leaders Juventus are used to having the world against them and this season is no exception, coach Antonio Conte said on Sunday.

"Either you are for Juventus or you are against Juventus, it's always been like that and it's like that now," Conte told reporters. "It's us against everyone."

Conte was reacting to comments made by AS Roma coach Rudi Garcia, who said his side felt victimised after forward Mattia Destro was suspended for three games on the basis of video evidence.

# Dortmund thrash Bayern

AFP, Berlin



German champions Bayern Munich suffered their second successive league defeat as they were thrashed 3-0 at home by Borussia Dortmund at the Allianz Arena on Saturday.

Goals from Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Marco Reus and Jonas Hofmann condemned ten-man Bayern to their first Bundesliga loss in Munich since October 2012.

The reigning European champions have failed to win any of the three league matches they have played since wrapping up the German title last month.

The win means second-placed Dortmund move three points clear of rivals Schalke 04, who are third, and means they are now all but certain of returning to the Champions League

next season

The visitors, however, left star striker Robert Lewandowski on the bench. The Polish international, who is set to join Bayern next season, was replaced by Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

The first half was short on chances but Dortmund hit the front after 20 minutes.

Aubameyang flicked Hofmann's throw-in on to Reus inside the box and the German international then found Mkhitaryan.

The Armenian midfielder took a touch before calmly slotting his seventh goal of the season beyond Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

It was the fifth game in a row in which Bayern had fallen behind and the closest they came to equalising was when Mario Mandzukic volleyed straight at Roman Weidenfeller shortly

before the interval.

Neuer was forced off with a calf problem at the break, with Lukas Raeder coming in for the German number one.

The 20-year-old substitute conceded just four minutes later as Mkhitaryan broke swiftly from his own half and then threaded a perfect pass through to Aubameyang.

The Gabonese striker unselfishly left Reus with a simple finish for his 14th goal of the campaign.

Seven minutes later Dortmund made the points safe. Bayern defender Javi Martinez slipped when chasing a long ball over the top, leaving Hofmann with plenty of time to pick his spot.

Mandzukic had a goal chalked off for offside before Rafinha was sent off for hitting out at Mkhitaryan in injury time as Dortmund gained revenge for a 3-0 defeat in November's reverse fixture.

# Roma keep hopes alive

REUTERS, Rome

Second-placed AS Roma did their best to keep the Serie A title race alive by romping to a 3-1 victory over Atalanta on Saturday for their seventh successive league win.

Rodrigo Taddei, Adem Ljajic and Gervinho shared the goals as Roma swept Atalanta aside with an irresistible display to keep the pressure on leaders Juventus.

Roma, who made light of the absence of suspended top scorer Mattia Destro, are five points behind Juve, who visit Udinese on Monday (1845).

Roma, who have five games to play, are hoping they can prevent Juventus clinching the title before the two sides meet at the Stadio Olimpico in the penultimate round of the season.

Taddei fired Roma into a deserved lead with a shot from the edge of the area in the 13th minute after they had dominated the opening exchanges.

A superbly-worked move produced the second goal just before halftime as Gervinho released Francesco Totti who chipped the ball over the defence for Daniele De Rossi to touch it into Ljajic's path for the Serb to sidefoot home.

Stalwart Totti was also involved in the build-up to the third goal in the 63rd with a backheel to Ljajic who put Ivorian Gervinho clear to finish off the move clinically.

# Trouble for Adriano

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Former Inter Milan and Brazil striker Adriano has parted company with Atletico Paranaense after just three games, the southern Brazilian club said on Saturday.

The decision was a mutual one and was taken after the team were knocked out of the Libertadores Cup at the group stage last week.

Adriano, 32, was once one of Brazil's most prolific strikers and helped his country win the Copa America in 2004 and the Confederations Cup in 2005 alongside Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos. He also won four scudettos with Inter Milan.

However, his career has fallen apart in recent years due to an appalling disciplinary record. He has played for five different teams since leaving Inter in 2009, never spending long at any of them, amid accusations of binge eating and drinking.

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