

Titans clash once again

AFP, Munich



Bayern Munich plan on making home advantage count in Tuesday's Champions League semifinal, second-leg, against Real Madrid having never lost at home to the Spanish giants.

Madrid arrive in the Bavarian capital holding a 1-0 lead thanks to Karim Benzema's 19th-minute goal in last Wednesday's first leg in Madrid and are looking to avenge their defeat at the same stage to Bayern two years ago.

History is on the Germans' side.

Bayern have never lost to Real in Munich, with eight victories and one draw, to lead the overall series with 11 victories to Madrid's eight from 21 encounters.

The second-leg is finely poised.

Real maintained their positive momentum since beating Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final before their first-leg victory over Bayern by romping to a 4-0 win over Osasuna in the Spanish league on Saturday.

Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo proved he is fit for the Munich clash after a hamstring injury by scoring twice to leave him on 47 goals for the season.

Real coach Carlo Ancelotti rested stars Benzema, who picked up a knee knock in the first leg, and Gareth Bale, who was recovering from flu, at Osasuna.

The Italian has insisted both men should be fit to start at the Allianz Arena.

"I am sure that whatever eleven I play will be full of desire and excited to play such a big game," said Ancelotti.

"The objective is to score, not to defend, and that is the manner in which we will continue to work."

Ancelotti has never lost to a German team in six encounters from his time as AC Milan manager.

FACTFILE

Coaches:

Real: Carlo Ancelotti (ITA) - age 54, Bayern: Pep Guardiola (ESP) - age 43

Leading scorers in all competitions:

Real: Cristiano Ronaldo (47 goals), Bayern: Mario Mandzukic (25 goals)

Domestic league performance:

Real Madrid - Second in La Liga, three points behind leaders Atletico Madrid and one ahead of Barcelona with four games left.

Bayern Munich - Bundesliga champions sealed the title with a record seven games to spare back on March 25 and are currently 19 points ahead of second-placed Borussia Dortmund.

Previous meetings:

The two sides have met 21 times in the European Cup and Champions League over the years with Bayern holding the upper hand with 11 wins to Real's eight and two draws after the hosts won last Wednesday's first-leg 1-0 in Madrid.

There have also been five semifinals between the two; Bayern progressing to the final on four of those occasions (1976, 1987, 2001, 2012) with Real's only success coming in 2000.

Alves eats racism banana

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona full-back Dani Alves had a banana thrown at him as he took a corner in his side's match at Villarreal on Sunday -- and decided to eat it.

The Brazilian picked up the banana and took a bite out of it before continuing on with the game.

Alves has been a regular target of racist abuse during his 11 years in Spain with both Sevilla and Barcelona.

"I have been in Spain 11 years and it has been the same for 11 years. You have to laugh at these backward people," he said.

"We are not going to change it, so you have to take it almost as a joke and laugh at them."

"Utterly brilliant reaction from Alves. Treat the racist berk with complete disdain!" tweeted former England international Gary Lineker who once played for Barcelona.

Bayern need angry Ribery: Guardiola

AFP, Munich

Coach Pep Guardiola says holders Bayern Munich need France winger Franck Ribery to be in "angry" mode for Tuesday's Champions League semifinal, second-leg at home to Real Madrid.

Ribery, 31, who missed out on the Ballon d'Or earlier this year, has produced a string of below-par performances since Bayern were confirmed Bundesliga champions at the end of March with a record seven league games to spare.

The Frenchman put in an improved display when he netted in Bayern's 5-2 league win at home to Werder Bremen in Saturday's dress rehearsal for the semifinal, with Real holding a slender 1-0 lead from last Wednesday's first leg in Madrid.

But Guardiola said he needs Ribery, who joined Munich from Marseille in



"We want the ball to create chances and I want us to be just as dominant as we were in Madrid, but more effective and aggressive, we must find the right balance."

Mourinho taunts Liverpool

AFP, Liverpool

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho taunted Liverpool about their ineffective tactics after his side handed Manchester City the initiative in the Premier League title race with victory at Anfield.

Chelsea's 2-0 success on Sunday effectively means that City can claim the title by winning their three remaining games.

Manuel Pellegrini's team trail Liverpool, the leaders, by three

points, but they have a match in hand -- at home to struggling Aston Villa -- and an eight-goal advantage in terms of goal difference.

Liverpool had been on a run of 11 straight wins prior to facing Chelsea, but the visitors' spoiling tactics successfully prevented the hosts from building momentum, quietening the Anfield crowd.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers, who previously worked beneath Mourinho at Chelsea, expressed frustration at his old mentor's tactics, describing them as "defensive" and "not difficult to coach".

The home side laboured in front of goal, however, with Chelsea's stand-in goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer only called upon to make two saves of note, and Mourinho boasted that his side had kept Liverpool at bay with ease.

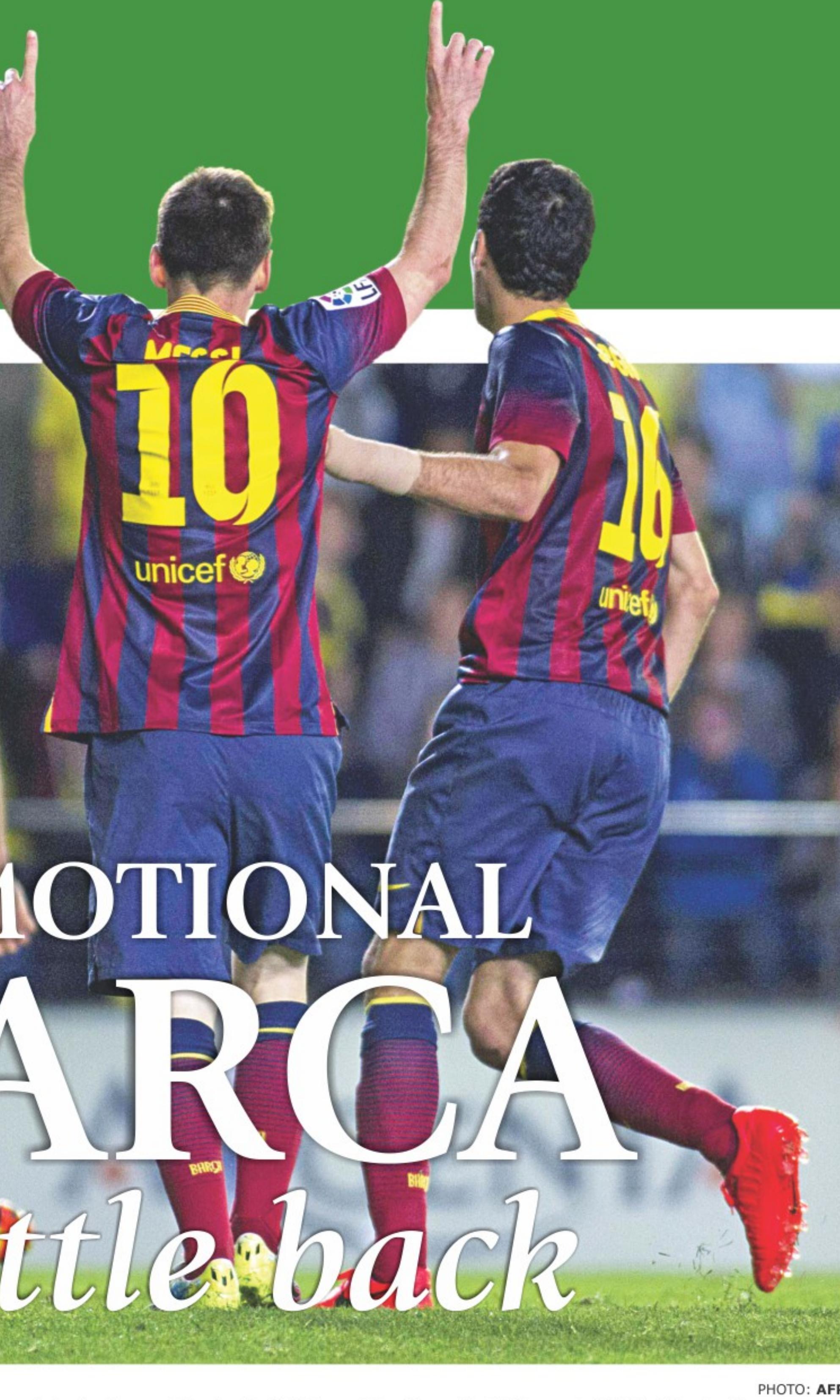
"Defensive display? I am a bit confused what the media thinks about defensive displays," he told reporters.

"When a team defends well, you call it a defensive display. When a team defends badly and concedes two or three goals, you don't consider it a defensive display."

"When Liverpool start putting long balls in the area for Mark and (Gary) Cahill and (Branislav) Ivanovic, they were like in fish in water, (because it was) so easy for them."

"The team played brilliantly. Every player was magnificent. No mistakes. I think it was a fantastic performance by my players."

Although Chelsea are now only two points from the summit with two games to play, Mourinho declared that they have "no chance" of pipping Liverpool and City to the title.



EMOTIONAL BARCA battle-back

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (C) celebrates his match winning goal during their Primera Liga tie against Villarreal at El Madrigal on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona maintained their slight La Liga title hopes as they came from 2-0 down to beat Villarreal 3-2 on an emotionally-charged night at El Madrigal when players and fans remembered Tito Vilanova.

However, Atletico Madrid remain in the driving seat for their first title in 18 years as they ground out a 1-0 win away to Valencia.

The Catalans paid their respects to former coach Vilanova with a minute's silence before the game, but a miserable week looked set to end with a sixth league defeat of the season as Cani and Manu Trigueros gave Villarreal a commanding lead.

Despite another difficult week off the field, Barca had started positively as Sergio Asenjo made a low save from Messi before Gabriel blocked Xavi's goalbound effort.

However, Villarreal were always dangerous on the counter-attack and after Marc Bartra had cleared Javier Aquino's effort off the line, Barca were caught out again moments later when Jonathan Pereira crossed for Cani to slot home.

Trigueros doubled Villarreal's advantage 10 minutes into the second-half when he was well-

picked out by Aquino and cushioned a header low past Jose Manuel Pinto from the edge of the area.

Barca got back into the game with a fortunate break 25 minutes from time when Dani Alves' cross was deflected into his own net by Gabriel.

Alves was then the subject of a shocking incident as a banana was thrown at the Brazilian as he prepared to take a corner, provoking the full-back to take a bite of the banana before continuing on with the game.

And Alves was the source of Barca's equaliser when Mateo Musacchio this time misjudged a header from his cross to send the ball past the helpless Asenjo.

Messi then sealed the comeback as a fine move involving Sergio Busquets and Cesc Fabregas ended with the Argentine drilling home his 40th goal of the season.

Dhawan takes Punjab home

SPORTS REPORTER

Virat Kohli's Bangalore continued their bad run in the Indian Premier League as they slumped to a five-wicket defeat to Punjab at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Batting first, Bangalore posted a below-par 124. In reply, Punjab, despite a hiccup in the middle reached their target with seven balls remaining.

Bangalore's star-filled batting line-up failed to mesmerise yet again as they struggled to get a move on. Chris Gayle smacked a 7-ball 20 and gave his side a good start. However, it was all down hill after he got bowled by Sandeep Sharma in the second over. From 21 for 1, Bangalore slumped to 26 for 4 in four overs. A 32-ball 35 from Virender Singh at number six helped Bangalore put up a hopeful total.

A flurry of wickets in the middle order reduced Punjab to 88 for 5 in the 13th over and for a brief period they seemed to be in trouble. However, a 39-run partnership for the sixth wicket between Rishi Dhawan and captain George Bailey ensured that

Punjab reach home without any further hiccups. Virender Sehwag put up an uncharacteristic 26-ball 32 at the top and set the foundation for his side. David Miller too played his part with a 20-ball 26.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGALORE: 124 for 8 (Yuvraj 35, Gayle 20; Sandeep 3-15, Dhawan 2-14)

PUNJAB: 127 for 5 in 18.5 overs (Sehwag 32, Miller 26, Dhawan 23; Chahal 2-23)

Result: Punjab won by five wickets.

Suarez wins PFA award

AFP, London



Liverpool striker Luis Suarez won England's Professional Footballers' Association's Player of the Year award on Sunday.

This time last year the Uruguayan international was starting a 10-match ban for biting

Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic.

But now Suarez has been chosen by his fellow top-flight professionals in England as the outstanding player in the Premier League after spearheading Liverpool's title bid.

Suarez received the award during a ceremony at London's Grosvenor House hotel after flying down from Liverpool following a 2-0 defeat by Chelsea at Anfield that dented the Merseysiders' challenge for a first English title in the Premier League era.

The 27-year-old Suarez has scored 30 league goals in 31 appearances, despite his ban for biting Ivanovic carrying over into the start of this season.

"The Premier League is full of really great players and so it is a great honour when these players recognise your work on the pitch," said Suarez, who threatened to leave Liverpool at one stage after claiming Reds manager Brendan Rodgers had gone back on a deal to let him move to a Champions League club.

However, Suarez added Sunday: "I always try my best for the team and it is nice to get awards but really this is for my team-mates and the staff at Liverpool because without their help I wouldn't have this prize."

Chelsea's Eden Hazard, who didn't play at Anfield due to injury, was named the PFA Young Player of the Year.

Suarez and Liverpool strike partner Daniel Sturridge were both included in the PFA Premier League team of the year, also chosen by their fellow top-flight professionals in England.

The duo were joined by Liverpool and England captain Steven Gerrard in the XI.

Chelsea also had three players in the PFA side in goal-keeper Petr Cech, defender Gary Cahill and Hazard.

Title-chasers Manchester City were represented by Vincent Kompany and Yaya Toure while the Southampton duo of Luke Shaw and Adam Lallana were also included, with Everton right-back Seamus Coleman in the XI.

However, no players from soon to be dethroned champions Manchester United or Arsenal were in the select side.

PFA Premier League team of the year: Petr Cech (Chelsea); Luke Shaw (Southampton); Vincent Kompany (Manchester City); Gary Cahill (Chelsea); Seamus Coleman (Everton); Eden Hazard (Chelsea); Yaya Toure (Manchester City); Steven Gerrard (Liverpool); Adam Lallana (Southampton); Luis Suarez (Liverpool); Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool).

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