

Atletico end 18-year wait

AFP, Barcelona



Atletico Madrid claimed their 10th Spanish league crown on Saturday but first in 18 years after coming from behind to draw 1-1 away at title rivals Barcelona.

Alexis Sanchez's stunning strike fired Barca into the lead on 33 minutes, but Diego Godin's header four minutes into the second-half was enough to give Atletico the point they needed to become the first side other than Barca and Real Madrid to win La Liga in 10 years.

A point for both sides means that Barca finish the season ahead of third-placed Real Madrid thanks to a better head-to-head record, three points adrift of Atletico.

The visitors had started brightly but were dealt a huge blow after just 15 minutes when top scorer Diego Costa pulled up with the recurrence of a hamstring injury that will also make him a huge doubt for the Champions League final against Real Madrid next weekend.

Arda Turan was then also forced off with a hip injury as Adrian Lopez and Raul Garcia entered the fray.

Barca grew into the game as the half developed and could have been ahead when Pedro Rodriguez wastefully headed over Dani Alves' precise cross from the right.

When the Catalans did go in front just after the half hour it was in spectacular fashion as Lionel Messi cushioned the ball into Sanchez's path on the right side of the area, but despite the narrow angle he managed to thrash the ball high past Thibaut Courtois at the Belgian's near post.

Atletico forced a series of corners without carving out a clear-cut chance in their search for an equaliser before the break, but the half-time whistle also brought frustration on the part of the Barca players as both Messi and Sergio Busquets were booked for dissent.

David Villa came within inches of an equaliser a minute after the restart when his low effort came back off the post and the former Barca striker had another opening moments later that was smothered by Jose Manuel Pinto in the Barca goal.

However, Diego Simeone's men only had to wait a minute longer to be level as Godin rose highest in the box to power home Gabi's corner.

HONOURS

Spanish La Liga title (10): 1939-40, 1940-41, 1949-50, 1950-51, 1965-66, 1969-70, 1972-73, 1976-77, 1995-96, 2013-14

Copa del Rey (10): 1959-60, 1960-61, 1964-65, 1971-72, 1975-76, 1984-85, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1995-96, 2012-13

Spanish Supercup (1): 1985

UEFA Europa League (2): 2009-10, 2011-12

UEFA Cup Winners' Cup (1): 1961-62

UEFA Supercup (2): 2010, 2012

Intercontinental Cup (1): 1974



Atletico Madrid defender Diego Godin (L) celebrates his all-important equaliser with teammate Filipe Luis during their Primera Liga match against Barcelona at the Nou Camp yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UEFA punishes Man City, PSG

AFP, Nyon



UEFA on Friday fined both Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain 60 million euros (\$82 million, £49 million) and capped their Champions League squad to 21 for falling foul of financial fair play rules.

Newly-crowned English Premier League champions, Manchester City enjoyed a massive spending spree under billionaire owner Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi.

And French Ligue 1 champions PSG have benefited from similar

investment in top-drawer players after their takeover by Qatar Sports Investments in late 2012.

But both clubs have paid for that with massive fines, 40 million euros of which will be repaid should the clubs fulfil the "operational and financial measures agreed with the UEFA CFCB (Club Financial Control Body)".

UEFA said other clubs to have failed the financial fair play rules were Turkish trio Buraspor, Galatasaray and Trabzonspor, Russian sides Zenit St Petersburg, Anzhi Makhachkala and Rubin Kazan, and Levski Sofia from Bulgaria.

Both City and PSG battled UEFA through to the end, the former argu-

ing there had been "a fundamental disagreement" over the interpretation of the FFP regulations on players purchased before 2010 but that it had "decided to enter into a compromise agreement with UEFA".

They agreed, the statement read, to limit their net spending on new players to 60 million euros.

"The club's expenditure on new players for the upcoming summer transfer window, on top of income from players it might sell, will be limited to 60m euros. This will have no material impact on the club's planned transfer activity," City said.

"The MFCF Champions League squad for the 2014-15 competition will be limited to 21 players. In

2013-14 the club registered 23 players for the competition and used 21.

"The wage bill of the whole club (playing and non-playing staff) for 2014-15 will need to remain at the same level as that of 2013-14 season.

PSG said: "After due reflection, Paris Saint-Germain has taken the decision to accept the measures imposed on it in spite of the tremendous handicap they represent in terms of the club's ability to fully compete on an equal footing against Europe's biggest teams."

PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi added: "Our ambition to build one of the best and most competitive European football clubs will not be undermined by these measures."

Arsenal win FA Cup

AFP, London

Aaron Ramsey scored an extra-time winner as Arsenal ended their nine-year trophy drought by coming from two goals down to beat Hull City 3-2 in a gripping FA Cup final on Saturday.

Appearing in their first ever major final, Hull rocked Arsenal by going 2-0 up inside just eight minutes through goals from centre-backs James Chester and Curtis Davies.

But Santi Cazorla's sumptuous free-kick reduced the arrears in the 17th minute and after Laurent Koscielny netted an equaliser with 19 minutes of normal time remaining, Ramsey drilled home the winner in the extra period.

It was the Welsh midfielder's 16th goal of a campaign that has seen him emerge as Arsenal's most influential player and brought Arsene Wenger's side a first trophy since the 2005 FA Cup.

Wenger, who is still to extend his contract, which expires shortly, has now won five FA Cups, while Arsenal have equalled Manchester United's record of 11 successes in the competition.

Hull faded badly after their stunning start, but Steve Bruce's side could console themselves with the knowledge that a Europa League place was already secure.

Chester had unexpectedly overcome a hamstring problem to take his place in Hull's three-man defence, and nobody could have predicted how quickly he would have an impact on the game at a muggy Wembley Stadium.

Falcao back in training

AFP, Monaco

Colombia striker Radamel Falcao returned to training with his Monaco teammates on Friday for the first time since injuring his knee in January, the Ligue 1 club announced.

Falcao, 28, suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during a last-32 French Cup match against amateur side Chasselay, ruling him out for the rest of the season and putting his participation at the World Cup in serious doubt.

However, he has been included in Jose Pékerman's provisional 30-man squad for the finals in Brazil in the hope that he can recover in time.

Ahead of Monaco's final league match, at home to Bordeaux on Saturday, Falcao was back in the Principality to continue to work his way back to fitness.

Falcao "didn't miss out on the opportunity to join his teammates for the final training session of the season," read a statement on the club's website.

"He was keen to catch up with his teammates and take part in the session," added the club without going into further detail.

In Friday's edition of the Spanish sports daily Marca, Falcao revealed it would be "impossible" for him to be fully fit for the World Cup but didn't rule out the possibility of going to the tournament.

The forward said a decision "will be taken very soon" as to whether he'll be a part of the Colombia squad, which must be finalised by June 2.



Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts during his match against Britain's Andy Murray during the Rome Masters quarterfinal at the Foro Italico in Rome on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Nadal fends off Murray

AP, Rome



Rafael Nadal stormed back from a surprisingly poor opening set to edge Andy Murray 1-6, 6-3, 7-5 Thursday and secure a spot in the Italian Open semifinals.

Murray jumped out to a 5-0 lead and won the first set in just 37 minutes with a dominant display, as the Wimbledon champion unleashed a series of winners from just about everywhere on the court.

But the top-ranked Nadal broke early in the second set and took control with a late break in the third to stay on course for his eighth title in Rome.

"I really didn't feel like I was playing bad in the first set. Probably tactically [it was] not good but inside the energy was really good," Nadal said. "Tonight I didn't have any negative thoughts for the whole match. ... I closed the match at the first opportunity."

There were a series of breaks early in the third set and Murray took a 4-2 lead. But the British player was upset with the way he played the next game.

"That was my chance there and I played a poor game so I'm disappointed with that," Murray said. "I maybe rushed a little bit, because I was being very patient for the majority of the match. ... Physically, he was a little bit stronger at the end."

Driven by heartbreak Schweinsteiger not fully fit

AFP, Tokyo



Japan playmaker Shinji Kagawa is desperate to play a starring role at the World Cup in Brazil after the heartbreak of being left out of his country's squad four years ago.

The 25-year-old said on Saturday he had been devastated by his 2010 omission, and promised to hit the ground running in Japan's opening game against Ivory Coast on June 14, despite a frustrating season at Manchester United.

"Obviously I didn't get to play at the World Cup in South Africa four years ago," Kagawa told reporters after an open training session on the outskirts of Tokyo.

"I felt bitterly disappointed but it made me determined to play a central role for Japan at the next World Cup.

"Being left out wasn't ideal but it gave me the motivation to move to Europe and to play with the top teams in the world," added Kagawa, twice a German Bundesliga champion with Borussia Dortmund. "It drove me."

Kagawa admitted to having mixed feelings watching the Blue Samurai reach the final 16 at the last World Cup, where Takeshi Okada's side were beaten on penalties by Paraguay.

"Of course I was genuinely happy Japan did well," he said. "But it hurt not being out there on the pitch."

"I haven't played as much for my club this year as I would have liked so I don't feel as though my body has hit its peak yet. If I can stay fit and avoid injury I should be at my absolute peak at the World Cup."

Having Kagawa firing on all cylinders will be a huge boost to current Japan coach Alberto Zaccheroni as the Italian bids to advance from Group C, which also includes Greece and Colombia.

AFP, Munc



Midfield general Bastian Schweinsteiger left Bayern Munich's final Bundesliga match of the season with a knee injury giving Germany fans another scare ahead of the World Cup.

Germany desperately need Schweinsteiger to be fit for the Brazil campaign, but it has been a season of many absences. And none is giving a guarantee that he will be fit to start the Brazil campaign.

The 29-year-old will celebrate a decade in the Germany team just before their opening Group C game against Portugal on June 16 having won his 101st cap in the 1-0 friendly

win over Chile in March.

A defensive midfield shoo-in for club and country, Schweinsteiger's appearances for Bayern Munich this season have been restricted by a trio of injuries.

Back-to-back ankle surgeries hampered him in pre-season, then in November and December before he suffered an inflamed knee ligament at a training camp in Qatar in January.

He returned with a vengeance on his first full appearance over 90 minutes in mid-March when he curled home a free-kick for the winner as Bayer Leverkusen lost 2-1 in Munich.

He also scored in the 1-1 draw at home to Arsenal in the last 16 as Bayern reached the Champions League quarter-finals 3-1 on aggregate, then netted in their 2-0 league win at Mainz. Having only played 16 of Bayern's

first 27 league matches, Schweinsteiger gained valuable match fitness in 2014. But Bayern's defeat by Real Madrid in the Champions League was a psychological blow and the knock to the knee last weekend did not help.

"With his class and experience, he has a big influence on our game," said Germany coach Joachim Loew.

"When he is able to play 90 minutes, with his confidence on the ball and tactical awareness, he is very valuable for us."

"Other players respond when they see Bastian is playing well."

"But you can see that he was injured for a long time."

Schweinsteiger claimed his seventh German league title when Bayern were finally confirmed Bundesliga champions with a record seven games to spare after their 3-1 win at Hertha Berlin.