

Ronaldo eyeing Raul record

Another piece of Real Madrid history awaits Cristiano Ronaldo as he can become the club's all-time leading scorer when they host Granada at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

Ronaldo is officially just two goals shy of Raul Gonzalez Blanco's 323-goal record despite having played over 400 games fewer than the Spanish legend.

However, the club claim he is just one goal behind Raul as they credited Ronaldo with a goal back in 2010 that was awarded to Pepe in the referee's report.

The World Player of the Year has struck eight times in his last two games to categorically silence the critics for his slow start to the campaign as he failed to score in either of Madrid's opening two La Liga fixtures or in two games for Portugal.

Ronaldo hit five goals in the same game for the second time in five months in a 6-0 rout at Espanyol last weekend and Granada will be fearing the worst as they were the previous recipients of a five-goal haul in a 9-1 humiliation at the Bernabeu back in April.

"I am happy, it is a proud moment for me to be in this position," Ronaldo said after netting his 33rd hat-trick for the club against Shakhtar Donetsk in midweek.

"I have to thank the team, they helped me a huge amount.

"Before I was bad and now I am good because I have scored eight goals," he added in a thinly veiled dig at his critics.

"My teammates believe in me, they give me the service with which I scored goals."

Ronaldo will, though, be devoid



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) heads the ball during a training session at Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday.

of some of Madrid's key creators with Gareth Bale having joined James Rodriguez on the sidelines due to injury.

Bale suffered a calf injury in the 4-0 win over Shakhtar and will be sidelined for at least two weeks.

Madrid are also likely to be without Sergio Ramos due to a dislocated shoulder, but Raphael Varane should be fit to partner Pepe in

defence after recovering from the ankle knock he picked up in midweek.

Victory can take Real to the top of the table for 24 hours as league leaders Barcelona aren't in action till Sunday when they host Levante.

The Catalans' already short squad will have to do without midfielder Rafinha for the rest of the season as he suffered cruciate liga-

ment damage in a 1-1 draw with Roma on Wednesday.

Barca boss Luis Enrique will also be without defenders Gerard Pique, Thomas Vermaelen and Daniel Alves, as well as goalkeeper Claudio Bravo.

Atletico Madrid lost their perfect start to the season when Barca won 2-1 at the Vicente Calderon last weekend, but Diego Simeone's men recovered well to get their Champions League campaign off to a winning start at Galatasaray on Tuesday.

Los Rojiblancos visit Eibar on Saturday hoping to end the Basque minnows unbeaten start to the start to the season.

At the other end of the table, Sevilla are looking to add their first league win of the campaign backed by the confidence of a resounding 3-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach in midweek.

Valencia were the only one of Spain's five Champions League participants to get off to a losing start as a Hulk brace handed Zenit St Petersburg a thrilling 3-2 win at Mestalla.

Los Che will be hoping for better fortune at home to Real Betis on Saturday.

Meanwhile, for David Moyes's Real Sociedad just scoring a goal is the aim when they host Espanyol after failing to do so in their first three games of the season.

PHOTO: AFP

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday
Real Madrid v Granada (1400), Valencia v Real Betis (1615), Eibar v Atletico Madrid (1830), Real Sociedad v Espanyol (2200)

Sunday
Sevilla v Celta Vigo (1000), Deportivo la Coruna v Sporting Gijon (1400), Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao (1615), Las Palmas v Rayo Vallecano (1830), Barcelona v Levante (1830)

Valcke suspended

FIFA reeled from fresh scandal on Thursday as Secretary General Jerome Valcke was dramatically suspended over allegations of involvement in a ticketing scam and placed under investigation.

Valcke, the right-hand man of outgoing FIFA President Sepp Blatter, was immediately relieved of his duties as the latest wave of sleaze crashed into world football's governing body.

"Further, FIFA has been made aware of a series of allegations involving the secretary general and has requested a formal investigation by the FIFA Ethics Committee."

The 54-year-old French official had already been forced to deny involvement in a \$10 million payment to South Africa in the wake of corruption allegations that forced Blatter's resignation earlier this year.

The latest claims against Valcke related to allegations of involvement in a scam to sell World Cup tickets at vastly inflated prices and take a slice of the profits.

The claims were made by Benny Alon, an American-Israeli consultant at a company which had a deal with FIFA to sell tickets at the 2014 World Cup. The contract was subsequently cancelled.

In a strongly worded statement issued by Valcke's US-based attorney, the official denied the allegations as false.

"Jerome Valcke unequivocally denies the fabricated and outrageous accusations by Benny Alon of alleged wrongdoing in connection with the sale of World Cup tickets," the statement from New York attorney Barry Berke said.

The statement said Valcke "never received or agreed to accept any money or anything else of value from Mr Alon."

All dealings between Valcke and Alon's company had been cleared by FIFA's legal department, the statement added.

"As has been reported, FIFA entered into an agreement with Mr Alon's company, JB Sports Marketing," the statement said.

"That agreement and FIFA's subsequent business dealings with Mr Alon were vetted and approved by FIFA and its legal counsel."

FIFA have been embroiled in a major corruption scandal since the arrest of seven of its officials on May 27 attending a FIFA congress in Zurich to elect a new president.

They are among 14 people charged by US authorities over more than \$150 million in bribes given for television and marketing deals.

Despite the arrests in May the election went ahead with Blatter winning a fifth mandate although the 79-year-old then announced he would be standing down with a new election scheduled for February.

Valcke came under scrutiny in recent months over what he knew about a \$10 million payment from the South African FA

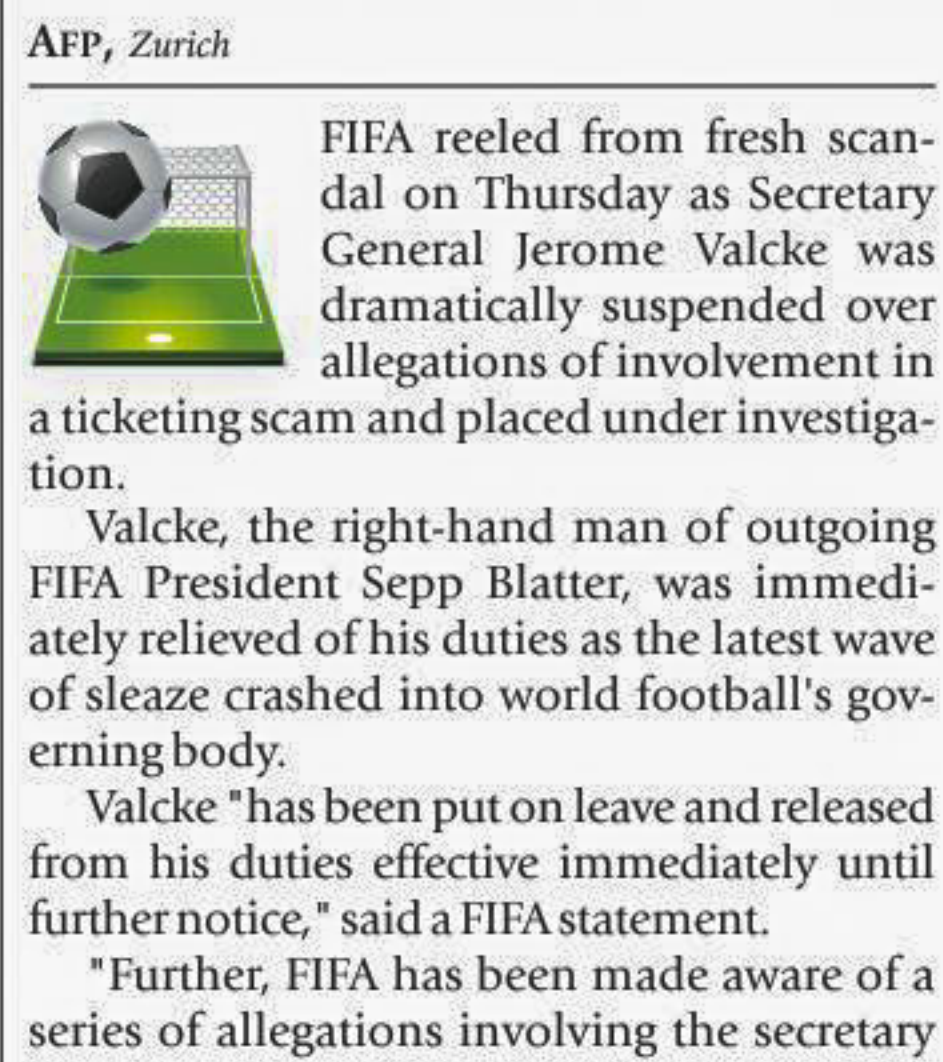
to an account controlled by the then North and Central American (CONCACAF) football chief Jack Warner through FIFA in 2008.

US investigators believe the money was a bribe in return for backing for South Africa getting the 2010 World Cup.

FIFA has insisted it only acted as an intermediary between South Africa and former FIFA vice-president Warner, who quit world football's governing body and his other functions in 2011 over other corruption allegations.

Valcke said he only knew about the payment because he receives all correspondence sent to FIFA but he did not authorise the transfer.

The French official has found himself under scrutiny during his FIFA career.



FIFA president Sepp Blatter (R) and secretary general Jerome Valcke

Spurs make winning start

Tottenham Hotspur kicked off their Europa League group stage campaign on Thursday by coming from behind to beat Qarabag 3-1, while Liverpool conceded a late equaliser as they drew 1-1 at Bordeaux.

Azerbaijani champions Qarabag grabbed a surprise seventh-minute lead at White Hart Lane when Richard Almeida converted a penalty after being bundled over by Spurs debutant Kieran Trippier.

But two goals in the space of two minutes from South Korean striker Son Heung-min and a late strike from Erik Lamela spared Tottenham's blushes as Mauricio Pochettino's side made a winning start to Group J, as Anderlecht against Monaco finished 1-1 in the other match.

Earlier, Adam Lallana's sublime second-half goal in France looked destined to hand Liverpool all three points in their Group B opener.

But the visitors were pegged back nine minutes from time when substitute Jussie slammed a loose ball beyond Simon Mignolet to salvage a point for Bordeaux.

RESULTS

Fenerbahce (TUR) 1 (Nani 42) **Molde (NOR)** 3 (Holland 36-pen, Elyounoussi 53, Linnes 65)

Ajax (NED) 2 (Fischer 25, Schone 84) Celtic (SCO) 2 (Biton 8, Lustig 42)

Bordeaux (FRA) 1 (Jussie 81) Liverpool (ENG) 1 (Lallana 65)

Sion (SUI) 2 (Moussa Konate 11, 82) Rubin Kazan (RUS) 1 (Kanunnikov 65)

Qabala FK (AZE) 0 PAOK (GRE) 0 **Dortmund (GER)** 2 (Ginter 45+1, Park Joo-ho 90+2) FC Krasnodar (RUS) 1 (Mamaev 12)

Midtjylland (DEN) 1 (Kucharczyk 60-o.g.) Legia Warsaw (POL) 0 **Napoli (ITA)** 5 (Callejon 5, 77, Mertens 19, 25, Hamsik 53) Club Brugge (BEL) 0

Rapid Vienna (AUT) 2 (Schwab 50, Hofmann 53-pen) Villarreal (ESP) 1 (Carrillo Baptista 45)

Viktoria Plzen (CZE) 2 (Horava 36, Petrzela 75) Dinamo Minsk (BLR) 0 Slovan Liberec (CZE) 0 **Sporting Braga (POR)** 1 (Rafa 60)

FC Groningen (NED) 0 **Marseille (FRA)** 3 (Nkoudou 25, Ocampos 39, Alessandrini 61) Dnipro (UKR) 1 (Seleznyov 90+4)

Lazio (ITA) 1 (Milinkovic-Savic 34) Saint-Etienne (FRA) 2 (Beric 4, Roux 87-pen) Rosenborg (NOR) 2 (Mikkelsen 16, Svensson 79)

Sporting Lisbon (POR) 1 (Montero 50) **Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS)** 3 (Samedov 12, 56, Niasse 65)

Skenderbeu (ALB) 0 v **Besiktas (TUR)** 1 (Sosa 28)

Fiorentina (ITA) 1 (Kalinic 4) **Basel (SUI)** 2 (B. Bjarnason 71, El Nenezy 79) Lech Poznan (POL) 0 Belenenses (POR) 0

Anderlecht (BEL) 1 (Gillet 11) Monaco (FRA) 1 (Traore 85)

Tottenham Hotspur (ENG) 3 (Son Heung-min 28, 30, Lamela 86) Qarabag (AZE) 1 (Richard Almeida 7-pen)

APOEL (CYP) 0 **Schalke (GER)** 3 (Matip 28, Huntelaar 35, 71) Asteras (GRE) 1 (Mazza 2) Sparta Prague (CZE) 1 (Lafata 56)

Partizan Belgrade (SRB) 3 (Oumarou 11, 39, Zivkovic 89) AZ Alkmaar (NED) 2 (Jop van der Linden 34, Henriksen 90+3)

Athletic Bilbao (ESP) 3 (Aduriz 55, 66, Susaeta 90) Augsburg (GER) 1 (Hal. Altintop 15)

Ibra books Square for homecoming

Paris Saint-Germain's Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic revealed Friday that he has booked Malmö's Main Square for his homecoming match in the Champions League on November 25.

"I have previously said that the game will be heard all over Malmö. Now I've also made sure that all of Malmö will be able to watch the game," the Swede said on Facebook.

"I've booked the Main Square where the game on November 25 will be broadcast live. All are welcome!"

PSG will travel to Malmö for the fifth game of their Champions League group games.

It will be the first time in 14 years that Ibrahimovic has played at his home club where he started his professional career.

London rivals face off

Jose Mourinho has warned Arsene Wenger that Chelsea are back in the groove as the Premier League champions look to extend their revival in Saturday's showdown with London rivals Arsenal.

Mourinho's side are languishing just above the relegation zone following a miserable run of one win from their first five matches, but the Blues boss is confident his players are beginning to rediscover their swagger after a 4-0 demolition of Maccabi Tel Aviv in midweek.

That vibrant opening to their Champions League campaign was a stark contrast to the doom and gloom that surrounded the club after their worst start to a season since 1988.

Already trailing leaders Manchester City by 11 points and fourth placed Arsenal by six, a third successive league defeat this weekend could leave Chelsea's title defence in tatters.

Yet Mourinho expects the challenge of taking on a title rival will draw a powerful performance from his team against an Arsenal side reeling from their surprise Champions League defeat at Dinamo Zagreb.

"We come with a different feeling. We can

wake up with a different state of mind," Mourinho told Chelsea TV.

"Saturday is a big match, it's a great rival. This result can put us in a better situation.

"We had too many bad results. We couldn't have this one on top of it."

Mourinho has been quick to dismiss claims of a rift with captain John Terry, one of several players dropped for the Maccabi clash.

But Mourinho looks an agitated figure at present and locking horns with old rival Wenger is likely to keep him in a waspish mood, especially since he is still smarting from losing to the Arsenal chief for the first time in 14 meetings in the Community Shield last month.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

Saturday
Aston Villa v West Brom, Bournemouth v Sunderland, Chelsea v Arsenal (1145 GMT), Manchester City v West Ham (1630 GMT), Newcastle v Watford, Stoke v Leicester, Swansea v Everton

Sunday
Liverpool v Norwich (1500 GMT), Southampton v Manchester United (1500 GMT), Tottenham v Crystal Palace (1230 GMT)

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