

TEN CRICKET
South Africa v England
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 2:00pm

STAR SPORTS4
English Premiership
West Ham v Liverpool
Live from 6:45pm
Arsenal v Newcastle
Live from 9:00pm
Watford v Man City

STAR SPORTS1
English Premiership
Man United v Swansea City
Live from 9:00pm

SONY KIX
Primera Liga
Villarreal v Valencia
Live from 9:00pm
Atletico Madrid v Levante
Live from 1:30am (Sunday)
Malaga v Celta Vigo

SONY SIX HD
Primera Liga
Espanyol v Barcelona
Live from 9:00pm

Villarreal edge Valencia

AFP, Madrid



Gary Neville remains without a win in La Liga as Valencia boss as Villarreal moved up to fourth thanks to captain Bruno Soriano's spectacular free-kick in a 1-0 win on Thursday. Bruno found the top corner from the edge of the box midway through the second half to allow Villarreal to edge two points ahead of Celta Vigo in the battle for the final Champions League place.

However, Valencia's ambitions of a top-four finish now look forlorn as they lie 11 points behind their local rivals in 10th.

"We are a significant distance behind, but I am only concentrating on the next match," said Neville.

"Losing today makes everything more complicated, but we have to focus on getting the best out of the players."

Valencia had only managed to draw Neville's opening two league games in charge against Eibar and Getafe before the 10-day winter break.

And the former Manchester United defender took a more defensive approach in a bid to at least preserve his unbeaten record with a five-man defence as Villarreal dominated the first 45 minutes.

Roberto Soldado had the best chance to open the scoring against his old side, but the former Tottenham Hotspur striker failed to connect with Jonathan dos Santos's inviting cross.

Valencia had started the second half much more positively as Alphonse Areola was forced into saves from Andre Gomes and Dani Parejo, whilst Paco Alcacer blasted over a great chance from close range.

However, the visitors were caught with a sucker punch when Soldado was brought down on the edge of the box and Bruno curled the ball perfectly into the top corner for his fourth goal of the season.



Barcelona star Neymar (5th from L) was out with a group of friends to celebrate the end of the year.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Second Samba for Neymar

AGENCIES, Barcelona

Barcelona forward Neymar has won his second consecutive Samba Gold award, handed annually to the best Brazilian player plying his trade in Europe. Neymar grabbed 37.87 percent of the votes, almost three times as many as Costa (13 percent). Melo finished with 9.37 percent, in large part thanks to fans of former club Galatasaray. The fan vote was combined with those of a panel of journalists and former players.

Neymar built on his phenomenal 2014 campaign to establish himself as one of football's top forwards in 2015, enjoying plenty of individual success and winning a ton of trophies.

He combined with Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez to give Barcelona the kind of attack other clubs can only dream of.

Big-hearted Butland

AFP, London

Stoke City goalkeeper Jack Butland has donated £5,000 (\$7,370, 6,785 euros) to Great Britain's women's deaf football team to ensure they can compete in this year's World Cup.

An online appeal aiming to raise £10,000, half the amount the British team need to attend the Deaf World Cup in Italy in June, has now reached its target thanks to Butland's generous donation.

Claire Stancliffe, who won bronze with Britain's deaf team at the 2008 World Cup, praised Butland, 22, for helping the squad's hopes of attending the tournament.

"Physically shaking. Thank you so much Jack Butland for the £5,000 donation. We are in shock,"

Barca aim to duplicate 2015

AGENCIES, Barcelona

Lionel Messi has made it clear that Barcelona want to replicate their successes of the past year in 2016 after Wednesday's 4-0 victory over Real Betis.

The No 10 was as influential as ever against the Andalusians in his 500th appearance for La Blaugrana, winning a penalty to open the scoring, before securing his milestone of his 425th goal for Barca by scoring, and he insists his side "want to keep winning".

"We have a squad who still want to keep winning," he said after the game.

"Repeating 2015 will be difficult, but we'll try."

"[On Neymar's penalty], I fell and didn't notice anything. At no moment did I see anything [when falling to the ground]."

Elneny awaits work permit

AGENCIES, London

Mohamed Elneny has passed a medical before his proposed €10m move to Arsenal, although the Basel midfielder must still be granted a work permit for the transfer to be completed.

The 23-year-old Egyptian international, who moved to Switzerland in 2013, had already agreed personal terms for his move to the Emirates as cover for the injured Francis Coquelin and Santi Cazorla.

The only stumbling block that now remains is for Elneny to be granted a work permit, which is complicated by the fact that Egypt have slipped outside of the top 50 in Fifa's rankings after failing to qualify for the past three editions of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Under new regulations introduced by the Football Association at the end of last season, non-EEA (European Economic Area) players have to meet a minimum percentage of international matches played for their country over the previous 24 month period, as long as they are in the top 50.

Egypt's current position of 57 does not meet those requirements, meaning Arsenal are likely to face an appeal. But with Elneny having featured in every competitive match for the Pharaohs over the past two years, they are expected to be granted special dispensation to sign him.

'I cannot please everyone'

OMNISPORT



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo has insisted criticism does not affect him as he feels it is impossible to please everyone.

Ronaldo was whistled by part of the Santiago Bernabeu crowd after missing a penalty in Madrid's 3-1 win over Real Sociedad on Wednesday.

But the Portugal captain told El Mundo Deportivo: "We cannot live being obsessed with what other people think about us. It's impossible to live like that. Not even God managed to please the entire world."

"There are people out there who hate me and who say I'm arrogant, vain and whatever. That's all part of my success. I have a clear conscience. I sleep well. I feel good helping others, regardless of whether that's with big things or small things. I look at life differently ever since I became a father."

"I can deal with the pressure because of the difficult life I have had. The person I am now is the result of the time I spent without my family and because of the difficult times I went through. I was ironing my own clothes when I was 11 years old. My mental strength goes back to those days."

Ronaldo's agent Jorge Mendes stated earlier this week that the 30-year-old will stay playing for Madrid in a decade, but the former Manchester United man is already looking forward to life after football.

"I want to live like a king when I retire," Ronaldo added. "I will be able to enjoy things more after my career, when I have the time to do what I want."



CRISTIANO RONALDO

Atletico snap up Fernandez

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid have boosted their La Liga title challenge with the signing of Argentine international midfielder Augusto Fernandez from Celta Vigo for an undisclosed fee.

"Fernandez passed a medical on Thursday and has signed his contract with our club on January 1 for the remainder of the season plus three more."

Atletico said in a statement on their website on Friday.

The 29-year-old enjoyed a successful three-and-a-half year spell at Celta, scoring 10 goals in 122 appearances, and helping to guide them to fifth in the table so far this season.

His arrival is expected to cover for the absence of the injured Tiago, who will be out until March with a broken leg.

"He is a player with veritable experience in La Liga, who will offer quality and competition to a great central midfield like ours," said Atletico sporting director Jose Luis Perez Caminero.

"His incorporation will help us with the demands of challenging in three competitions in the coming months."

Atletico are joint top of La Liga with Barcelona and have reached the last 16 of both the Copa del Rey and Champions League.

Fernandez already has title winning experience under Atletico coach Diego Simeone as they won the Argentine Clausura title together when at River Plate in 2008.

Spotlight on Rafa

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Rafael Benitez returns to Valencia, where he won two league titles with Los Che, fighting to hold onto his job on Sunday.

Madrid's awful 2015 began with defeat at the Mestalla which ended a 22-game winning run and led to the eventual sacking of Carlo Ancelotti after he failed to deliver a major trophy.

And his successor could also be set for the chop after just six months in charge should Real suffer a fourth league defeat in eight games.

Yet, despite another unconvincing display in seeing off Real Sociedad 3-1 on Wednesday, thanks in part to two debatable penalty decisions in their favour, Benitez insists his side are improving and can challenge for La Liga and the Champions League in 2016.

"What I want (in 2016) is for the team to keep winning games and the fans to enjoy victories, good football and a title," he said.

"The review of the year will be made at the end of the season. We continue in good form because the team reacted well and is playing better every game."

It is the first time that Benitez will return to the Mestalla as the opposition coach after leading a golden age for the club with titles in 2002 and 2004 before joining Liverpool.

That success seems a distant memory with Valencia in desperate need of the points themselves with Gary Neville yet to taste victory after his first three games in charge in La Liga.

A 1-0 defeat to Villarreal on Thursday left Neville's men 11 points off their target of a top-four finish having failed to win any of their last eight games in La Liga or the Champions League.

However, they have only lost three of their last nine meetings with Madrid and haven't been beaten at home in La Liga since November 2014.

The visitors are expected to be at full

FIXTURES	
(all times GMT)	
Saturday	Espanyol v Barcelona (1500), Atletico Madrid v Levante (1930), Malaga v Celta Vigo (2105)
Sunday	Rayo Vallecano v Real Sociedad (1100), Real Betis v Eibar, Granada v Sevilla (1500), Deportivo la Coruna v Villarreal, Athletic Bilbao v Las Palmas (1715), Valencia v Real Madrid (1930)
Monday	

strength as captain Sergio Ramos trained on Thursday after missing the win over Real Sociedad.

Madrid could find themselves five points adrift of the leaders by the time they kick off at the Mestalla with Barcelona and Atletico Madrid in action on Saturday.

Barca rounded off a five-trophy haul in 2015 with a 4-0 win over Real Betis in midweek to also set a new record tally for Spanish football of 180 goals in a calendar year.

Their quest to repeat that feat in 2016 comes in the first of three Barcelona derbies in 10 days away to Espanyol on Saturday -- the teams will also meet over two legs in the last 16 of the Copa del Rey.

"2015 has been the best year for all of us. To end the year in this way feels great, but we are aware that in three days we begin a new year with a special game," captain Andres Iniesta told Barca TV.

Iniesta, Gerard Pique and Jordi Alba are all expected to return after being rested against Betis as Barca look to extend a seven-game winning run against their local rivals.

Atletico's late show with two goals in the final two minutes at Rayo Vallecano on Wednesday ensured they stayed level with Barca at the top of the table, albeit having played a game more.

Angel Correa scored and Thomas Parthey and Jackson Martinez provided assists off the bench in Vallecas and all three could be rewarded with starts when the league's bottom side Levante visit the Vicente Calderon.

Arsenal look for title proof

AFP, London



As 2016 dawns, Premier League front-runners Arsenal go in search of evidence that they are capable of striking out on their own in pursuit of a first title since 2004.

With Manchester United and Chelsea toiling, Liverpool rebuilding under Jurgen Klopp and Manchester City damagingly porous, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger appears to have reached a decisive juncture in his 19-year tenure.

His team have been top on New Year's Day three times in the last 14 years, only to see their title hopes fade on each occasion, but Wenger feels that the current crop have what it takes to go the distance.

"I believe that we are mature enough and that we have the requested quality to fight and compete," he said ahead of Saturday's home

game with third-bottom Newcastle United. "The most important thing is to feel, at the end of the season, that we have given absolutely everything to be successful."

"It is not the date (New Year's Day) that is decided you win the league. It shows you that we have a good chance as the statistics show you that eight of the past 11 years, the team who was top on New Year's Day won it."

Arsenal continue to nurse frailties of their own, as shown by their 4-0 Boxing Day drubbing at Southampton, but Monday's 2-0 win over Bournemouth was enough to take them top of the table on goal difference after former leaders Leicester City could only draw 0-0 with Manchester City.

Leicester lost 1-0 at Liverpool prior to Tuesday's goalless stalemate with City, but manager Claudio Ranieri says that his players are determined not to let their early-season momentum peter out.

"We've had a fantastic half-season, it's unbelievable what we are doing and we

must continue," said the Italian, whose team welcome Bournemouth to the King Power Stadium on Saturday.

"We will fight right until the end and we want to win. If we give 100 percent, then we accept every result."

Manchester City, three points off the pace in third place, continue to oscillate between the sublime and the ridiculous and have gone 10 league games without recording

back-to-back victories.

Against Watford they will once again be without skipper Vincent Kompany, after he aggravated a calf injury during the 4-1 Boxing Day win over Sunderland, and manager Manuel Pellegrini admits that he is desperate to get to the bottom of the influential centre-back's injury problems.

"We are trying to do all (we can) to know how we can help Vincent to try to be fit and not to continue with the same calf problems," the Chilean told his pre-match press conference on New Year's Eve.

"Everything the club can do, we are going to do it."

City's travails have given hope to Tottenham Hotspur, who are just a point behind them in fourth place prior to their trip to Everton on Sunday, when they will be chasing a fourth successive league win.

Spurs' form is also of concern to both Liverpool and United, who find themselves five points off the Champions League places

FIXTURES	
Saturday	(1500 GMT unless otherwise stated): Arsenal v Newcastle United, Leicester City v Bournemouth, Manchester United v Swansea City, Norwich City v Southampton, Sunderland v Aston Villa, West Bromwich Albion v Stoke City, Watford v Manchester City (1730 GMT), West Ham United v Liverpool (1245 GMT)
Sunday	Crystal Palace v Chelsea (1330 GMT), Everton v Tottenham

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Executive Committee