

Barca seek rare win

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona must overturn a terrible run of results away to Real Sociedad in recent years to prevent losing their grip on the Spanish title race when they visit Anoeta on Saturday.

Despite tasting defeat for the first time in 40 games on their last La Liga outing at home to Real Madrid last weekend, Barca still hold a commanding six-point lead over Atletico Madrid with Real a further point adrift and just seven games remaining.

However, the European champions haven't won in their last six trips to San Sebastian, including defeats in the last three seasons in La Liga.

"We have shown in recent years that we can beat Barca and we can do it again on Saturday," Real Sociedad's former Real Madrid midfielder Asier Illarramendi told the club's website.

"Until it is mathematically decided Barca will have to fight and I am sure Atletico and Real Madrid won't give up."

Barca have particularly bad memories of their last visit to Anoeta as a 1-0 defeat plunged the club into crisis and left coach Luis Enrique on the verge of the sack.

Luis Enrique had left Lionel Messi and Neymar on the bench as a punishment for arriving back later than their teammates from their Christmas break.

Barca recovered in style from that setback to land the treble six months later, but their quest to become the first side to retain the

Champions League could play a major role in the coach's selection as they hold a precarious 2-1 lead over Atletico heading into the second leg of their quarter-final tie on Wednesday.

Luis Suarez scored both Barca's goals against Atletico on Tuesday, but the Uruguayan will definitely miss out as he is suspended.

Munir El Haddadi is likely to replace Suarez with Sergi Roberto, Arda Turan and Rafinha -- who made his first appearance after a six-month injury layoff in midweek -- in contention to start in midfield.

Champions League considerations are likely to weigh heavily on the minds of Atletico and Real bosses Diego Simeone and Zinedine Zidane.

Atletico can close to within three points with victory at Espanyol before Barca kick-off on Saturday.

Fernando Torres looks certain to start as he will be suspended for the Champions League return leg after being sent-off having opened the scoring at the Camp Nou on Tuesday.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Saturday
Real Madrid v Eibar (1400), Espanyol v Atletico Madrid (1615), Real Sociedad v Barcelona (1830), Real Betis v Levante (2005)

Sunday
Sporting Gijon v Celta Vigo (1000), Valencia v Sevilla (1400), Villarreal v Getafe (1615), Athletic Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano (1830)

Monday
Deportivo la Coruna v Las Palmas (1830)



Liverpool striker Divock Origi (2nd from L) celebrates his opening goal with teammates during their Europa League quarterfinal first-leg against Borussia Dortmund in Dortmund on Thursday.

Nilphamari, Comilla in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Comilla and Nilphamari moved into today's final of the BBS Cables IGP Cup Youth Kabaddi competition after beating their respective rivals in the semifinals at the Kabaddi Stadium yesterday.

Comilla notched up a 21-13 win over Rajshahi 21-13 while Nilphamari handed an exciting 29-23 defeat to Satkhira in the second semifinal.

Foxes can smell title

AFP, London

Kasper Schmeichel says Leicester's rock solid defence is the secret to the shock leaders' remarkable charge towards a fairytale Premier League title.

Claudio Ranieri's side are within touching distance of becoming the most unexpected champions in English football history as they head to struggling Sunderland on Sunday and Denmark goalkeeper Schmeichel has no doubts he and the four men immediately in front of him will lay the foundation for another priceless victory.

Chelsea captain John Terry this week named seven Leicester players in his vote for the PFA's team of the year and three of those nominations were for Schmeichel and the club's centre-backs Wes Morgan and Robert Huth.

That trio, combined with full-backs Danny Simpson and Christian Fuchs, have proved an impenetrable obstacle to opposing forwards as the pressure of the title race has mounted, with Leicester grinding out five 1-0 wins in their last six matches.

"We defend as a team, we are tough to break down. They are an absolute privilege to play behind, those boys," Schmeichel said.

"They throw their bodies in the way of everything and give us the best opportunity to go and win games."

"Building a good foundation with clean sheets is obviously a great start. For me they are a pleasure to play behind."

If the Foxes win at the Stadium of Light they will open up a 10-point lead over second placed Tottenham, who will then have to beat Manchester United at White Hart Lane later on Sunday to have any chance of remaining in the hunt.

Ranieri's men, 5,000-1 outsiders for the title at the beginning of the season, have enjoyed such a trouble-free run in that they could even be crowned champions for the first time as soon as April 24 against Swansea if they keep

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

Saturday
Aston Villa v Bournemouth, Crystal Palace v Norwich, Manchester City v West Brom (1630 GMT), Southampton v Newcastle, Swansea v Chelsea, Watford v Everton, West Ham v Arsenal (1145 GMT)

Sunday
Liverpool v Stoke (1500 GMT), Sunderland v Leicester (1230 GMT), Tottenham v Manchester United (1500 GMT)

"Any day of the week you'd rather your team win rather than have personal achievements," Kane said.

"For me it is about the team getting as many points as possible.

"Anything can happen; Leicester will do very well to win every game until the end of the season.

"We have to focus on our next game against Manchester United and look for the win."

Arsenal, in third place, make the short trip across London to face West Ham knowing they must win to maintain their slender hopes of a first title since 2004.

The Gunners are 11 points behind Leicester with a game in hand and, despite successive victories, boss Arsene Wenger is as focused on securing a top four finish -- they are currently five points ahead of fifth placed Manchester United and seven in front of West Ham -- as he is on an unlikely title charge.

"We know that we need nearly the perfect run and we know as well that we don't look only in front of us, we look behind us as well," Wenger said.

"We are chased by a group of teams who can make it very difficult for us, so we have just to focus on our performance and hope we finish in a very strong way."

Manchester City, clinging onto fourth place, will hope the confidence gained from their gritty 2-2 Champions League quarterfinal first leg draw at Paris Saint Germain can provide the impetus to see off West Bromwich Albion at Eastlands.

winning and other results go their way.

Tottenham have no margin for error after last weekend's draw at Liverpool, which featured an exquisite equaliser from Harry Kane but also the frustration of failing to finish off the Reds.

Kane's 22nd league goal of the season set a new club record in the Premier League era, but the England striker would happily swap personal plaudits for a title winners' medal and he is determined to keep hunting the Foxes right until the end.

Reds hold Dortmund

AFP, Dortmund

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool grabbed a precious away goal on his emotional return to Borussia Dortmund as Thursday's Europa League quarterfinal, first leg finished in a 1-1 draw.

A superb finish from Liverpool striker Divock Origi was cancelled out by a bullet header from Dortmund captain Mats Hummels.

The result favours the English side ahead of the return at Anfield in a week's time.

"Now there's a real bit of spice in the tie, but we haven't got the feeling we're through," said Liverpool's manager Klopp.

"Things could have gone worse and all in all it was good a good result from our perspective. Around the time we went 1-0 up, we really showed what we can do."

On his much-hyped return to the Ruhr Valley, Klopp received a warm welcome at Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park, where he enjoyed seven years as Borussia coach, winning two Bundesliga titles and the German Cup in 2012.

His name received a loud cheer from the home fans when it was read out before kick-off and he hugged Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke on the halfway line during the warm-up.

"It was nice to be back and I really valued the applause I had before kick off," added Klopp.

Both sets of supporters gave a rousing rendition of the two clubs' anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone' in front of a sell-out crowd of 65,848, but once kick-off came it was down to business.

RESULTS

Athletic Bilbao (Aduriz 48)	1 - 2	Sevilla (Kolodziejczak 56, Iborra 83)
Borussia Dortmund (Hummels 48)	1 - 1	Liverpool (Origi 36)
Braga (Wilson Eduardo 89)	1 - 2	Shakhtar Donetsk (Rakitskiy 45, Ferreyra 75)
Villarreal (Bakambu 3, 63)	2 - 1	Sparta Prague (Brabec 45+4)

Dortmund made the stronger start with two clear chances in the opening half.

With a quarter of an hour gone, Marco Reus snapped up Adam Lallana's clearance but fired his low drive just wide of Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet's right post.

The game had to be paused on 21 minutes when James Milner's free-kick found Dejan Lovren.

The Croatian clashed heads with Roman Weidenfeller in the goal-mouth scramble and the Dortmund goalkeeper needed medical treatment before he could carry on.

Dortmund then wasted a golden chance when the Liverpool defence left Henrikh Mkhitaryan unmarked, but the midfielder dragged his shot just wide on 34 minutes.

And the hosts were left to regret their missed opportunities when Liverpool struck.

Milner, who was superb all night, flicked a pass to Origi and the Belgian striker slotted past Weidenfeller with a superb low drive, and a slight deflection, with 36 minutes gone.

Klopp produced his trademark pumped-fist celebration on the touchline and Liverpool almost got a second when Milner's shot was blocked by Lukasz Piszczek on 40 minutes.



SUAREZ has 'mental issues'

AGENCIES, Barcelona

Barcelona star Luis Suarez is a liar and has "mental issues," according to his former agent Daniel Fonseca.

Suarez, 29, said in an interview with Montecarlo TV on Tuesday that Fonseca owes him 20 per cent of the fee from his transfer from Nacional to Groningen in 2006.

The 46-year-old agent responded in startling fashion, saying Suarez's accusations are false and questioning the former Ajax man's mental state.

"He is lying, he is a kid with mental issues, everybody knows that. He still sees a psychologist but I don't think it's doing any good. He needs to change psychologist or go to a psychiatrist. He counts on his fingers, the kid doesn't know how to add up."

Fonseca, who played for the likes of Napoli, Roma and Juventus in a storied career, says the rift between Suarez is not entirely over money, but something that happened in the early days of his countryman's playing days. He also continued his scathing attack on Suarez's personality in which he called his courage into question and revealed the 29-year-old's "real motive" for making his claims:

"The whole thing started because I had to tell the kid a very uncomfortable truth when he was playing for the junior national team.

"Three of his teammates gave me a call and said they were having a tough time with Luis. I had to say something very uncomfortable to the kid, but until the day I die I won't say what it was.

"He didn't take it, it didn't go down well at all. The coward should tell the truth and not try to smear me by saying I owe him 200,000 euros.

"If he had any courage he'd say what I had to say to him."

Weightlifters eye wild card

SPORTS REPORTER

Weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta, a SA Games 2016 gold medalist, will take part in the Asian Senior Weightlifting Championships, which is also a qualification competition for the Rio Olympic Games.

SA Games silver-medallists Sathi Akter and Pullapati Chakma will accompany Simanta in the championship, which is scheduled for April 22 to 30 in Tajikistan.

While there is hardly any medal hopes for Bangladeshi women weightlifters in the championships, they will have target to achieve the set mark in a bid to avail the wild-card from the International Olympic Committee to take part in the Olympic Games in Brazil later this year.

"We don't have any hope to win medals because world-class weightlifters will be taking part in the championship to fight for Olympic quotas," Bangladesh Amateur Weightlifting Federation Mohyuddin Ahmed told reporters.

'We're playing for our season'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane warned the Spanish giants' season would be on the line in Tuesday's return leg against Wolfsburg in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"On Tuesday, we're playing for our season," said Zidane on Friday, with the record 10-time European champions trailing 2-0 after crashing to a shock first-leg defeat in Germany.

However, the Frenchman sounded confident of turning things around with the backing of the home support at the Santiago Bernabeu to reach the semi-finals for the sixth year running.

"I think the supporters will be behind us. On Tuesday we're playing for our season but we clearly know that. It's a huge game and the fans like that too."

"I like it when things become difficult and I think the fans do as well," said Zidane, adding he wasn't worried about his future should Real bow out of Europe next week.

"My job is at stake all the time. When I put myself in this situation, I knew the rules. If I'd had a problem with it, I wouldn't have put myself in it."

"I'm at peace with that. What keeps me going is what I do daily, how I can do things to improve, for the team to improve."

"As for the rest, I know that if I lose two matches, one competition, I know that I can be on my way, that they can replace me, that's just part of things."

"But I'm not in that position, I'm right in the middle of the season and very busy with my goals."

Conquering Europe represents Real's only remaining hope of a major trophy this season after they were disqualified from the Copa del Rey for fielding an ineligible player.