

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 4
English Premiership
Chelsea v Liverpool
Live from 1:00am (Saturday)

SONY ESPN
Serie A
Sampdoria v AC Milan
Live from 12:45am (Saturday)

STAR SPORTS 2
Bundesliga
FC Cologne v Freiburg
Live from 12:30am (Saturday)

Sony SIX
Primera Liga
Real Betis v Granada
Live from 12:45am (Saturday)

Brazil back in top five, Spain slip

AGENCIES, Zurich

Brazil have climbed back into the top five of the FIFA World Ranking, as Argentina and Belgium stayed top of the table. Tite's side jumped five places into joint-fourth, alongside Colombia, thanks largely to wins over them and Ecuador in World Cup qualifying this month. Argentina and Belgium remain first and second respectively, while Germany are now into third and Chile, France and Portugal have all slipped down a place. Uruguay climbed three spots to move into ninth, with Wales edging back into the top 10 at the expense of Spain, who drop three places to 11th despite a 2-0 friendly win over Belgium and 8-0 thrashing of Liechtenstein in World Cup qualifying. England have moved up one place to 12th, with Italy sliding three spots down to 13th, while Scotland, Australia, Greece and Uzbekistan all clambered into the top 50.

TOP 10
1. Argentina; 2. Belgium; 3. Germany; 4. Colombia; 5. Brazil; 6. Chile; 7. Portugal; 8. France; 9. Uruguay; 10. Wales

Simeone cuts contract short

AGENCIES, Madrid

Atletico Madrid have reportedly agreed to reduce manager Diego Simeone's contract at the club by two years, from 2020 to 2018. The agreement comes after discussions between representatives of the Argentine and the club, which has also seen a pay-rise for the manager, according to reports in both AS and Marca. Atletico chief Miguel Angel Gil Marin reluctantly agreed to the terms after Simeone had stated his intentions to leave the Spanish capital after last season's Champions League final defeat to Real Madrid on penalties. Gil Marin, in an attempt to calm the situation, reportedly agreed that the 46-year-old's long-term deal at the Calderon would be reduced and his pay would increase but in return, he would be tied down to the club for at least two more seasons.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) embarks on a muted celebration after scoring the equaliser against his boyhood club Sporting Lisbon during their Champions League encounter at the Bernabeu on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

CR7 inspires comeback

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo warned Real Madrid will be punished if they don't improve on their performance in an edgy 2-1 win over Sporting Lisbon to start their Champions League defence.

Alvaro Morata headed home the winner four minutes into stoppage time at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday after an 89th minute Ronaldo free-kick had cancelled out Bruno Cesar's opener for Sporting.

"It is a warning that in the coming games we can't start so softly because if we do they can make a fool of us," Ronaldo told BeIN Sports.

Ronaldo refused to celebrate his goal against the side where he began his career and he raised his hands almost apologetically towards the thousands of Sporting fans who made the trip to Madrid and gave him a rousing reception before kick-off.

"It was an important goal. The game was almost over, there was a minute to go, but we were playing against a team that didn't surprise me," added Ronaldo.

"They wanted to play well and make life difficult for us. For me it is a privilege to know that the people still have this love for me.

Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane praised his side's effort and belief to fight their way back into the match despite being surprisingly outplayed for the opening hour.

"We are Real Madrid so every game is going to be difficult because teams want to come here and cause us problems," said the Frenchman.

"We never gave up. The effort was tremendous. We are not going to win every game 5-0. Today we had to suffer, but we got the three points."

Zidane had a huge role to play in Real's fightback as he took the brave decision to sacrifice stars Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos when trailing for Lucas Vazquez, Morata and James Rodriguez respectively.

Stunning debut for Foxes

AFP, Paris



The Leicester City fairytale has another chapter after they eased to a 3-0 away win in their Champions League debut on Wednesday, as Monaco beat Tottenham at Wembley in front of a record crowd for an English club.

On a night of goals, Sergio Aguero hit a hat-trick as Manchester City hammered Borussia Moenchengladbach 4-0 at home in a fixture which took place 24 hours late after rain forced the game off on Tuesday, while a rampant Borussia Dortmund smashed Legia Warsaw for six.

But the headlines will all be about Leicester, who stunned the football world last season when they went from relegation candidates to Premier League champions in the space of 12 miraculous months.

An away trip to Club Brugge of Belgium was not exactly the stuff of Leicester's European dreams, but they showed some of the verve that has been missing so far this season as Riyad Mahrez struck twice, one of them a sumptuous free-kick and the other a penalty.

Much tougher tests surely await for the Foxes, but this was an accomplished, clinical performance in their first European outing since losing to

Red Star Belgrade in the UEFA Cup first round in 2000.

Also in Group G are Porto and FC Copenhagen, who played out a 1-1 draw in Portugal to leave Leicester top of the pile after the opening fixtures.

Current French league leaders Monaco were also notable winners on the night, stunning Tottenham Hotspur 2-1 in an incident-packed encounter at "the home of football" in front of 85,011 fans -- a record home attendance for an English club.

Tottenham are back in the Champions League for the first time in

five years and, with the capacity at their White Hart Lane stadium reduced due to redevelopment, they opted to play their European matches at Wembley this season.

The iconic Wembley arch was lit up in Tottenham's blue and white, but that was the extent of the home comforts for Mauricio Pochettino's side as they paid the price for a sloppy first-half display.

Goals from Bernardo Silva and Thomas Lemar put Monaco in command and although Toby Alderweireld got one back, Tottenham were unable to turn their second-half dominance into an equaliser in a feisty encounter.

In Madrid, Champions League holders Real had a big scare at home to Sporting Lisbon, as Cristiano Ronaldo -- against his former club -- and Alvaro Morata struck in the closing minutes to seal a stunning comeback and win 2-1.

Madrid looked to be heading for their first home defeat in the competition for five years after Bruno Cesar's low effort three minutes into the second-half handed Sporting a thoroughly merited lead.

However, in a frantic finale, Ronaldo's free-kick levelled the game before Morata met James Rodriguez's cross deep into stoppage time to complete a dramatic fightback.

In Turin, Gonzalo Higuain, Paulo Dybala and Sami Khedira fired blanks as Sevilla held dominant but wasteful Juventus to a scoreless draw.

All eyes on the Bridge

AFP, London



The touchline action could be as explosive as what happens on the pitch at Stamford Bridge on Friday when Jurgen Klopp takes his Liverpool side to tackle Antonio Conte's Chelsea.

Both managers are renowned for the remarkable intensity of their touchline antics and the fourth official is likely to have a job on his hands maintaining order in the two technical areas.

Klopp appreciates the similarities, but it is Conte's achievements with Juventus and Italy, rather than his conduct in front of the dug-outs, that have won him the German's admiration.

"I don't know Antonio good enough to know why he is doing it. I know for myself and, as I've said a few times, it just happens to me," Klopp told reporters at Wednesday's pre-game press conference.

"He looks quite emotional, even when they don't score. Obviously he is involved in the game, but that's not the most important thing. The very important thing is he is a great manager, something like the Pep Guardiola of Juventus if you want."

"He created their special type of play and had a very successful time there and with the national team."

"It is quite impressive what he has done until now, but I don't play against Antonio Conte."

After defeat at Burnley and a 1-1 draw at

Tottenham Hotspur, Liverpool returned to winning ways at the weekend with a clinical 4-1 thrashing of champions Leicester City at the newly expanded Anfield.

Chelsea saw their perfect start to the campaign ended by a 2-2 draw at Swansea City in which they went 1-0 up, fell 2-1 down and then rescued a point through Diego Costa's acrobatic 81st-minute equaliser.

The way Chelsea let Swansea back into the match suggested the vulnerability that plagued them last season, when they finished 10th, continues to hover below the surface.

Last season's corresponding fixture, in late October, saw Klopp pull off the first eye-catching result of his nascent Liverpool tenure as the visitors recorded an impressive 3-1 win.

If the teams' last encounter, in a pre-season friendly in the United States, is anything to go by, Friday's game beneath the floodlights could be a spicy affair.

It could also be spectacular. The two teams average more shots on goal per game than any other sides in the division, while Liverpool's players have covered more distance than any other team.

David Luiz is expected to make his second debut for Chelsea, five years and seven months after his first appearance for the club, which coincidentally came in a home game against Liverpool.

Luiz, previously a Chelsea player between 2011 and 2014, is likely to replace captain John Terry, who has been ruled out for 10 days with ankle ligament damage sustained at Swansea.

Pep's plea to City fans

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola warned supporters the club cannot achieve success in the Champions League unless they start fully embracing the competition.

Sergio Aguero scored a hat-trick as City opened their Group C campaign with a classy 4-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Wednesday in a game that had been postponed on Tuesday due to heavy rain.

But as in previous group-stage games, the Etihad Stadium was far from full, with only 30,270 spectators present in an arena that can hold 53,000 on European nights.

"Our fans, they have to know that we play for them," Guardiola said.

"It's our job, we are here, but to play without our fans, there is no reason why we are here. Our fans have to know that we need them in the Champions League."

"In the Premier League, everybody comes here, but in the Champions League the people don't come."

"We need them to compete against the best teams in the world. We can't make something good in the Champions League in the upcoming years without them."

"With our supporters and our songs, we are stronger. I think, honestly, what these

players have done from the beginning, our players deserve the stadium completely full. "Hopefully against Barcelona and Celtic (their other group opponents), it will happen."

City reached the Champions League semi-finals last season under Guardiola's predecessor, Manuel Pellegrini. Guardiola, a two-time Champions League winner with Barcelona, also called on City's supporters to end their practice of booing the competition's anthem.

City fans have jeered the music since CSKA Moscow supporters managed to watch a game against them in 2014 despite it being played behind closed doors as a punishment for racism by the Russian club's fans.

"I was not here (to see) what happened, but they can forget it. They must forget what happened in the past," said Guardiola.

"Today the stadium is not completely full, so the only thing we can do is play good so the people watching at home say: 'Wow, next time I'm going to be there.'"

"We have to be so proud to play in this competition. Not all the teams can play this competition."

"In three or four weeks coming here is the best football player ever (Lionel Messi), with Luis Suarez, with Neymar and the amazing Barcelona team, and we have to come here to enjoy it."

"The people are listening to me, so I am sure they are going to do that."

Neymar turned down jet, €40m

AGENCIES, Barcelona

One of Neymar's agents has claimed that the Brazilian held two meetings with Paris Saint-Germain in the summer before eventually agreeing to extend his contract with Barcelona.

Neymar, 24, penned a new five-year deal at the beginning of July with Barca, but Wagner Ribeiro says his client could have earned much more money if he had left for the French capital.

According to Ribeiro, PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi met with the player and his father in Ibiza at the beginning of June and again in Brazil later that same month.

"It was me that brought Nasser to Sao Paulo," he said in an interview with ESPN Brasil.

"[PSG] were willing to pay [the €190 million release clause] and then he would have earned €40m a year after tax."

On top of the huge salary, Ribeiro also claims that Al-Khelaifi offered Neymar a private jet to travel to Brazil games.

He died with his wish fulfilled

AGENCIES, Manchester

A lifelong Manchester United fan got his dying wish to meet his heroes - just 45 minutes before he passed away.

Patrick Lawler, 73, told his family he would love to be visited at his home in Wythenshawe by his favourite Reds as he was in the final stages of his battle with cancer.

So granddaughter Kayleigh, 27, posted an emotional plea on Facebook asking if anyone could help make Patrick's dream come true.

And just days later Wythenshawe's Marcus Rashford and fellow players Jesse Lingard, Ashley Young and Timothy Fosu-Mensah turned up at his home.

The stars posed for photographs with Patrick, who was dressed in a United shirt, as well as signing autographs.

Less than an hour after the visit Patrick passed away.

Kayleigh said that her granddad known as Paddy and himself previously a professional footballer, was told there was nothing doctors could do for him after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer four years ago, which spread to other parts of his body.

And she says she decided to try and grant the lifelong United fan his dying wish after his condition

deteriorated in recent weeks.

She said: "He had been talking about watching the derby and I later asked him if there was anything he wanted."

"He said nothing at first but when I mentioned meeting the players his eyes just lit up and he became dead excited as if to say 'is that possible?'"

"So I posted on Facebook and I couldn't believe the response."

"Within hours people said they knew people at the club and I got a number for someone who knows Jesse (Lingard)."

"Then they said they would come round after training on Tuesday and his eyes lit up again when we told him."

"They were great with him. They were so down to earth and had chatted to him, had pictures and signed some shirts."

Kayleigh paid tribute to the 'incredibly selfless' gesture, writing on Facebook: "Top lads, all four of them. Thanks so much to everyone who helped. Sure my grandad's

over the moon."

In her original post Kayleigh wrote: "Please can everyone share I'm trying to get a few of Manchester United players to come and visit my grandad we asked him the other day if he would like to do anything before his time comes and he said to meet the team I've emailed the Mufc foundation but no reply yet!"

