



Barcelona's Croatian midfielder Ivan Rakitic celebrates after scoring the decisive goal against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Saturday. The win took the defending champions 10 points clear at the top.

PHOTO: AFP

## Barca outclass Real again

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona won their second Clasico in four days on Saturday and Real Madrid might have to win the Champions League if Santiago Solari is to be in charge for the next one.

After knocking them out of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday, Barca returned to the Santiago Bernabeu for a 1-0 victory that surely eliminates their greatest rivals from the title race too.

Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos locked heads after Ramos flung an arm into Messi's face but, despite the scoreline and a few half-chances, that was about the most trouble Madrid caused.

Messi would have been proud of Ivan Rakitic's delightful chip, a rare moment of precision that in the end settled another Clasico high on vigour but lacking in either real quality or rhythm.

The onus was on Madrid, not only to make amends for their defeat in midweek but to reduce the nine-point gap between them and La Liga's leaders.

Instead, Barcelona extended it to 12 and the way their players jumped up and down in front of the away fans after the final whistle suggested they felt this was a major hur-

### Real were too soft: Jose

AFP, Madrid

Jose Mourinho accused Real Madrid of lacking fight and looking unhappy against Barcelona on Saturday, just as the pressure cranked up on coach Santiago Solari after a second successive Clasico defeat.

Mourinho has been among those mentioned as a possible replacement for Solari, as Madrid have been knocked out of both the Copa del Rey and, realistically, La Liga's title race within four days.

"I think it was not a happy performance," Mourinho said as a pundit for beIN Sports. "It was not the performance of a happy team, of a team with great belief and self-esteem."

"Clearly they are now in a zone after a few bad results, especially after the cup

match, where they are in a low. They couldn't bring to the game what I used to call the temperature of the big matches. They were passive."

"I cannot speak about a bad performance, it is just a soft performance. Sometimes you play like this against medium teams and in the end, you get a positive result, but against the top teams you have to do a lot more than this if you want to win."

Former Real Madrid president Roman Calderon has claimed Mourinho will take over in the summer.

"I'm pretty sure he has general information about the club of his passion," Mourinho said. "But he knows more than me because I know absolutely nothing about it at all."

free-kick over the bar but Madrid started with purpose, like a team determined to right the wrongs of before.

Their early impetus faded though as Barca, driven on by Messi, took control.

Messi skipped through three players in

midfield and was furious with Ousmane Dembele when he missed his late run into the box.

He then weaved in behind with the help of a Luis Suarez touch but, to everyone's surprise, the trademark lifted finish floated wide.

Rakitic showed him how to do it. He played the ball wide to Sergi Roberto, continued his run behind Ramos and received it back, before feathering a delightful chip over Thibaut Courtois.

Barca were comfortable but the game erupted on the stroke of half-time. Ramos won the ball from Messi but, with his arm outstretched, left it long enough to catch his opponent in the face. Messi pointed to his lip and then butted heads with Ramos but referee Alberto Mallenco saw nothing worthy of punishment.

Madrid pushed for an equaliser but their desperation showed. Benzema failed to connect while Vinicius Juniors' rushed shot was blocked.

Bale was hauled off just after the hour, replaced by Marco Asensio, and even Isco came on in the 76th minute, for his longest appearance since the end of January.

Raphael Varane might have snatched a late equaliser but his header was weak. Barcelona were left celebrating again.

idle overcome.

Barcelona also now own 96 victories in this fixture to Real Madrid's 95, the first time they have been in front in 87 years.

It took Busquets 89 seconds to be booked and only a few more for Bale to send the

ball home on 47 minutes. Gnabry added Bayern's fourth before Lewandowski netted a late penalty for his 19th Bundesliga goal -- making him the league's joint top-scoring foreign player alongside Werder Bremen's 40-year-old Peru striker Claudio Pizarro.

—AFP

#### Watford mar Rodgers's return

Brendan Rodgers's first match as Leicester boss ended in a dramatic defeat as Andre Gray scored in stoppage time to give Watford a 2-1 win at Vicarage Road.

The former Liverpool boss was given a tough welcome back to the Premier League when substitute Gray pounced on Troy Deeney's fine through ball.

The Hornets had taken an early lead when Deeney flicked home Gerard Deulofeu's free-kick and looked set for all three points as Leicester laboured despite dominating possession.

One incisive Youri Tielemans pass, though, undid the Watford defence and Jamie Vardy prodded home his 10th goal of the season 15 minutes from time.

But Leicester were hit by a sucker punch when Gray brilliantly controlled Deeney's lofted pass and kept his cool to fire low past Kasper Schmeichel to spark contrasting reactions in the dugouts.

—AFP

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Gladbach briefly rallied when their captain Lars Stindl pulled a goal back eight minutes from the break, but Lewandowski made sure of the win after he converted Thiago Alcantara's pass to smash the

ball home on 47 minutes. Gnabry added Bayern's fourth before Lewandowski netted a late penalty for his 19th Bundesliga goal -- making him the league's joint top-scoring foreign player alongside Werder Bremen's 40-year-old Peru striker Claudio Pizarro.

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**Former England captain and Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder David Beckham and his wife Victoria Beckham pose beside his newly unveiled statue at the Legends Plaza in Carson, California on Saturday. The English legend and fashion icon played for the Los Angeles Galaxy from 2007 until 2012.**

PHOTO: AFP



## Girls proud despite China defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

 Although Bangladesh ended their AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers-2 campaign with a 0-3 defeat against China in their final Group B encounter at Mandalar Thiri Stadium, the girls in red and green can be proud of their overall performance and qualifying for the final round of the competition for the second successive time.

China qualified for the 2019 finals as Group B champions with an all win record while Bangladesh, with two wins in three outings, joined as runners-up. Two more teams from Group A will join the four automatic qualifiers -- North Korea, South Korea, Japan and hosts Thailand -- in the eight-team final round to be held in September.

Both teams came into the match having confirmed their place in the finals but Bangladesh needed an outright win to topple China as group champions.

At first, Golam Rabbani Choton's charges played defensively before eventually going on strike but China proved too adept for Bangladesh, who did however beat different provincial teams of China during their preparations for the 2017 edition's final round.

Bangladesh's backline cleared away all

the initial attempts from China's forwards rather than build-up play from behind, which resulted in China claiming superior ball possession throughout the match.

In the first half, China used the wings well as Shao Zioin ran down the right flank to cut one back for Dia Xinyao, who tapped it home in front of an open net in the 29th minute with centre-back Akhi Khatun looking too slow to stop Dia inside the box.

China could have doubled the lead a few minutes later but goalkeeper Rupna Chakma denied Wang Kinling brilliantly.

In the second half China changed their strategy, launching attacks directly to find the back of Bangladesh's net twice within eight minutes after resumption, dashing any hopes for a comeback.

Goalkeeper Rupna seemed to hesitate over whether to grip or punch the tough-pass inside the box, leading to Shao's second goal in the 46th minute before Wang Kinling coolly sealed victory by scoring from a one-on-one situation in the 53rd minute.

Bangladesh then tried some build-up play but were still outclassed by their superior opponents.

"The girls tried to play according to the game plan and tried their best but we conceded the second goal due to a mistake of goalkeeper Rupna," said coach Choton after the match.

## Last chance to impress

SPORTS REPORTER

 Bangladesh national team coach Jamie Day will keep an eye on the 10th round of the Bangladesh Premier League, beginning today, as he looks to finalise his 23-member squad for a FIFA friendly against Cambodia.

The national team will leave for Cambodia on Wednesday ahead of next Saturday's [March 9] match and for this reason, the 10th round of the BPL will see three matches each on Monday and Tuesday, paving the way for players to join the national squad.

Today, defending champions Abahani will play hosts Saif SC in Mymensingh, Chittagong Abahani will square off against Sheikh Jamal in Dhaka while NoFeL SC will host Mohammedan in Noakhali.

On Tuesday, leaders Bashundhara Kings take on Sheikh Russel in Nilphamari, Mukti Joddha Sangsab play Brothers Union in Gopalganj and Rahmatganj face Arambagh in Dhaka.

Out of 13 participating teams, Day only called up players from six teams -- Abahani, Saif SC, Sheikh Jamal, Bashundhara Kings, Sheikh Russel and Arambagh -- so their matches are expected to be important for the English coach, who will have only two days to prepare his charges before playing Cambodia.

Day is planning to drop four players from his 27-member preliminary squad before declaring the final squad on Tuesday.



Lazio forward Ciro Immobile (L) celebrates after scoring against city rivals AS Roma at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday. Lazio won the derby 3-0.

PHOTO: AFP

## Lazio take derby honours

AFP, Milan

 Felipe Caicedo and Ciro Immobile scored as Lazio beat Roma 3-0 in the capital-city derby on Saturday to revive their hopes of Champions League qualification from Serie A.

Simone Inzaghi's men ended their bitter rivals' eight-match unbeaten run in the league to move only three points behind Eusebio Di Francesco's fifth-placed team in the race for a top-four spot, both with a game in hand.

Victory at the Stadio Olimpico for Lazio also pulled them within six points of fourth-placed Inter.

Inzaghi's decision to leave Immobile on the bench took less than 12 minutes to pay dividends as Joaquin Correa played in Caicedo, and the former Manchester City

striker rounded visiting goalkeeper Robin Olsen before tapping in his fourth league goal of the season.

Roma were much improved after the interval, with Stephan El Shaarawy and Nicolo Zaniolo both bringing saves from Thomas Strakosha.

Lazio made their rivals pay 18 minutes from time, as Immobile scored his 16th goal of the campaign only eight minutes after coming on as a substitute.

The 29-year-old striker sent Correa running through on goal, with Federico Fazio outpaced and resorting to bringing down the forward, and Immobile squeezed the resulting penalty underneath Olsen.

There was further pain for Roma late on, as a wonderful team move from Lazio ended with midfielder Danilo Cataldi curling home an 89th-minute third goal.

## SA Games in December

SPORTS REPORTER

The 13th edition of the