

## Sports

# Classy Barcelona run riot against Sevilla to give La Liga familiar look

## Barcelona end game with nine men as Dembele and debutant Araujo sent off

**MADRID:** Barcelona are back in form and La Liga's big three are back at the top of the table after the defending champions put on a finishing masterclass to thrash Sevilla 4-0 on Sunday. Lionel Messi scored his first goal of the season by curling in a brilliant free-kick at Camp Nou after three goals in eight minutes from Luis Suarez, Arturo Vidal and Ousmane Dembele had already put Sevilla out of sight.

"It was crucial for us," said coach Ernesto Valverde whose team ended the game with nine men. "It has been a strange start to the season and we have not added all the points we would have wanted."

Suarez launched the flurry, his stunning left-footed bicycle kick arguably even better than the volley he scored in the Champions League win over Inter Milan on Wednesday. Vidal then finished a superb passing move that involved all 11 Barca players and Dembele powered through to make it three before Messi added a fourth in the second half.

The match descended into farce late on as Barcelona's debutant Ronald Araujo was sent off and Dembele followed after collecting a second yellow card for dissent. The referee's report said Dembele was dismissed for calling Mateu Lahoz "very bad". He could now miss the Clasico on October 26.

"Dembele's is a mystery," said Valverde. "It is very difficult to get words out of him in Spanish, so what he said couldn't have been very long." By then, the game was long gone as victory pushed Barcelona up to second in the table, two points behind Real Madrid and one above Atletico, who could have done with some of the Catalans' classy finishing in their goalless draw away at Real Valladolid.

For all the turbulence and scrutiny on Valverde and Zinedine Zidane, Barca and Madrid head into the international break not only as the league's two front-runners but with confidence and momentum too.

Eden Hazard scored his first goal for Madrid in their 4-2 win over Granada on Saturday and Barca's

star man is off the mark as well after his own injury-interrupted start to the season.

This was Barcelona's fourth consecutive victory. Messi's return has increased the pressure on Antoine Griezmann, who was left out of the starting line-up following his quiet display against Inter. Dembele was preferred on the left of the front three.

Sevilla, who drop to sixth, had eight shots to Barcelona's seven in the first half but were three down at the break.

### DE JONG STILL WAITS

Luuk de Jong is yet to score since his move from PSV Eindhoven last summer and the 29-year-old had four excellent chances to break his duck, three of them before Barca had taken the lead.

He fired Lucas Ocampos' pull-back straight at Marc-Andre ter Stegen, sidefooted wide and mistimed a header. In the second half, Arthur lost possession on the edge of his box but still De Jong could not capitalise, lashing his shot against the post.

In between, Barca had already made him pay. Suarez's effort was probably the pick of the trio in terms of difficulty, as he launched himself into the air, turned and threw his weaker left foot over the ball, and banged it into the net.

Five minutes later it was two, this one a team goal, quite literally, as all of Barca's players touched the ball in 85 seconds of build-up. Arthur's cross was the 25th pass, finding the sliding Vidal who was just inside.

The third three minutes later was about pace and power, and a mistake from Sevilla too, as Arthur robbed Fernando Reges. Dembele raced clear, fooled Diego Carlos with a dummy shot, before guiding the ball into the far corner.

After his fourth miss, De Jong was taken off and Messi went close after a barnstorming run. The only surprise was that he had not yet scored and he fixed



**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's Argentine forward Lionel Messi vies with Sevilla's Argentinian midfielder Ever Banega (R) during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Sevilla FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

that in the 78th minute after Sevilla gave him a third attempt at a free-kick. This time he did not miss.

The 20-year-old defender Araujo had come on for his debut in the 73rd minute and was sent off in the 87th for tugging down Javier Hernandez as Barcelona's last man. Dembele then saw red after picking up a second yellow card for dissent.

Atletico's stalemate means they have managed only two wins from their last seven games in all competitions and they could even have lost if Valladolid's Sandro Ramirez had not skied a first-half penalty. Diego Simeone's side managed only one shot on target. Valladolid sit 13th, with two wins from eight games. —AFP

## Battered S Africa need the Guardiola touch, says coach

**VISAKHAPATNAM:** Cricket coach Enoch Nkwe wants to channel the philosophy of title-laden football manager Pep Guardiola to turn the suffering South African side into a winning force. Following India's 203-run mauling of his team in the first Test on Sunday, captain Faf du Plessis and Nkwe pleaded for patience as the squad rebuilds after Dale Steyn's and Hashim Amla's retirement.

Nkwe, 36, said he wants to see South Africa follow Guardiola's innovative style and produce a brave team — but he warned it would take time. "What I want is this team to have the courage, in certain situations, to really back themselves," he said.

"I suppose that every coach that comes in has a different philosophy." Nkwe has only an interim contract with South Africa so far, and was appointed for the Indian tour. He caught the attention of the South African public and national federation after making a spectacular start as a coach, winning the four-day and T20 titles with the Highveld Lions in one year.

Nkwe said South Africa must "be able to control sessions a lot longer for period of time with both bat or ball." "But also be a lot smarter and be very innovative in certain situations."

He said he was looking forward to how his team recovers from the past setbacks, and responds to each match. The team put up a spirited fight before Mohammed Shami's 5-35 on the final day dealt a devastating blow to the tourists in Visakhapatnam.

Opening batsman Dean Elgar stood out with his 160 in South Africa's first innings score of 431. Nkwe said Guardiola has a knack of improving systems, and admires his total passion for football — something that resonated with his love for cricket. "I feel I have so much to offer to the game, especially back in our country."

### INDIA CHALLENGE

Nkwe's dream was to make a difference in people's lives, he said, and feels now he can. "I will keep driving forward to ensure that the team keeps growing, keeps believing in themselves that they can achieve greater heights."

Nkwe, who played only 42 first class games in the South African provinces before injury cut short his career, said the challenge of touring India will define the team's character in the coming years.

"My biggest focus is to help this team create a strong foundation. We have lot of work behind the scenes [so] that this team grows in the next four years," he said.

"Ultimately it's about the big picture and we need to be patient with players that might take a bit of time to produce the type of performances we are looking forward to."

"And this is a great place to see that. What sort of character of the team we have and what sort of areas we need to really look at and look to rectify as quickly as possible." With the second Test starting in Pune on Thursday, Nkwe has some quick thinking to do to start lifting his team. —AFP

## Man Utd sinking fast as Solskjaer flounders

**LONDON:** How far will Manchester United sink? Just two points above the relegation places, the one-time powerhouses of English football are without an away win since March and are enduring their worst start to a league season for 30 years.

Old Trafford has witnessed a decline in fortunes since Alex Ferguson stepped down in 2013. Under Ferguson, United finished in the top three every year from 1992 until 2013, winning 13 league titles. In the six seasons since, the Red Devils have finished in the top four just twice.

But while they kept their heads above water in the immediate aftermath of the Scot's departure, winning a handful of cups and finishing second under Jose Mourinho, they are now in the middle of a full-blown crisis under beleaguered boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

Mourinho, speaking a few weeks after his rancorous departure from Old Trafford last year, spoke about how taking the club to second in the table in 2017/18 was one of his best achievements.

Eyebrows were raised as Solskjaer oversaw a dramatic turnaround in fortunes during his caretaker spell in charge, but the wheels started to come off towards the end of last season. United's 1-0 defeat at Newcastle on Sunday left them languishing in 12th spot in the Premier League — an incredible 15 points behind leaders Liverpool after just eight games.

Goalkeeper David de Gea apologised to United supporters, saying it was the toughest time he had experienced since moving to Old Trafford in 2011. "It's difficult to say something. Sorry to the fans, we will keep fighting for sure," he told Sky Sports. "We will come back but at the moment we are in a difficult situation."

United are woefully short of midfield spark and clinical finishers. Just two goals in their past five games is part of a longer-term trend, with Solskjaer's men scoring more than once in a game just three times in their past 23 matches.

The risk in allowing forwards Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Sanchez to depart to Inter Milan without signing a replacement has massively backfired, with a out-of-sorts Marcus Rashford shouldering the attacking burden alone in the absence of the injured Anthony Martial.

Over-reliant on a crop of raw youngsters, Solskjaer pointed to a spate of injuries after the Newcastle defeat but said it was not an excuse for their lame display. United have spent hundreds of millions of pounds

## Aston Villa 'disgusted' by racist chants

**LONDON:** Aston Villa said they were "disgusted and appalled" by social media footage that shows fans chanting a racist song during their Premier League win against Norwich. A video following Saturday's 5-1 victory shows a group of Villa fans singing about the club's Zimbabwean midfielder Marvelous Nakamba and one other player, with references to several racial stereotypes.

Villa said in a statement: "Aston Villa is disgusted and appalled by footage circulating on social media of supporters chanting a racist song which makes reference to two of our first-team players."

"The club wholly condemns the chant and urges other supporters to help us identify those responsible."



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

under four different managers since Ferguson's departure and have the highest wage bill in the Premier League, but are still miles behind rivals Liverpool and Manchester City.

Former United defender Gary Neville said the club's hierarchy should take responsibility for the mess, saying they were getting the pain "they deserve" for poor decisions at board level related to recruitment and managerial policy.

"They (the club board) have cocked this up over many years," Neville told Sky Sports. "They've cocked it up. They are responsible for this." Last month executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward, himself in the fans' firing line along with American owners the Glazers, pledged his faith in Solskjaer and the Old Trafford hierarchy will be wary of making yet another managerial change. But since the Norwegian was appointed permanently in late March, United have won just 17 points in 16 Premier league matches, the fourth-worst tally among the 17 ever-present teams in that time.

United remain one of the richest and biggest clubs in the world but their lustre is rapidly fading. Liverpool, who dominated English football during the 1970s and 1980s, have taken 30 years to get back to the top.

Ferguson famously quipped his biggest challenge at United was to knock Liverpool "off their perch" in his early years in charge. We are back on our perch, as we famously say," Liverpool chief executive Peter Moore said at a conference last month.

Liverpool are flying high after winning their sixth European Cup last season and opening up an eight-point lead at the top of the Premier League. Next up for the league leaders is a visit to Old Trafford after the international break with few expecting the gloom over United to be lifted anytime soon. — AFP

Villa's statement said security staff would be vigilant at forthcoming games to ensure that anybody attempting repetition of the chant would be dealt with severely.

Former Villa striker Stan Collymore praised the club for acting "swiftly and unambiguously". Aston Villa Supporters' Trust condemned the footage, describing the song's contents as "a cheap and insulting stereotype". A spate of incidents marred Premier League matches last season. Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling was the victim of alleged racist abuse in a match at Chelsea while Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had a banana skin thrown at him by a Tottenham fan.

West Ham announced last month that they would be banning for life a fan shown chanting racist songs on a video, while Chelsea and Liverpool launched a joint investigation after footage showed a Blues fan chanting alleged racist abuse towards Reds forward Mohamed Salah. England boss Gareth Southgate has warned his players could be subjected to racist abuse during next Monday's Euro 2020 qualifier in Bulgaria after Sterling was targeted by a fan at Wembley last month in the first meeting between the two countries. — AFP

## Higuain winner beats Inter to put Juventus top of Serie A

**MILAN:** Gonzalo Higuain scored the winner as Juventus inflicted a first Serie A defeat of the season on Inter Milan with a 2-1 victory which sent the defending champions top on Sunday.

Substitute Higuain slotted home on 80 minutes after fellow Argentine Paulo Dybala had opened the scoring in the fourth minute at the San Siro. Another Argentine forward Lautaro Martinez pulled Inter Milan level from the spot on 18 minutes, but coach Antonio Conte lost in his first meeting against his former club since leaving Juve to take over the Italian national team in 2014.

Juventus moved one point ahead of Inter after seven games as they target a ninth consecutive title, and first under Maurizio Sarri. "Overtaking at the top is insignificant right now," said former Chelsea boss Sarri. "The important things is that we showed a performance of character and personality against a strong team in a high-tension environment. We deserved to win." Sarri started with Dybala and Federico Bernardeschi up front alongside Cristiano Ronaldo. Higuain — who also scored in Juventus's 3-0 Champions League win over Bayer Leverkusen during the week — began on the bench. The champions got off to a blistering start with Miralem Pjanic setting up Dybala who took Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic by surprise.

Ronaldo rattled the crossbar and then had a goal ruled out when Dybala was in an offside position. But Inter got back on level terms when Juventus defender Matthijs de Ligt handled the ball, with Lautaro drilling past Wojciech Szczesny.

The hosts were hit with Stefano Sensi going off injured with Sarri making a double substitution after an hour bringing on in-form Higuain and Rodrigo Bentancur. Ronaldo and Bentancur combined to send Higuain through for the winner, with Szczesny doing well to deny Matias Vecino as Inter desperately pushed forward for an equaliser.

"Juve showed their heavy artillery," said Conte, who coached the Turin giants to the first three of their current run of eight consecutive titles. "Congratulations to them, we'll roll up our sleeves now," added Conte whose side lost their midweek Champions League game to Barcelona 2-1.

Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta celebrated moving back to the newly-named Gewiss Stadium with a 3-1 win over promoted Lecce that keeps the Bergamo side third on 16 points. But Serie A runners-up Napoli are now six points behind Juventus in fourth following a goalless draw at Torino.

"We want to fight for the Scudetto, but our ranking makes us cry a little," said Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti. Roma are fifth, a point behind Napoli, with their match against Cagliari at the Stadio Olimpico finishing 1-1 after Nikola Kalinic's last-gasp goal for the hosts was disallowed.

"Sick and tired of this crap costing us games. Too many times already this year," said Roma owner Jim Pallotta on Twitter. Joao Pedro's early penalty after a Gianluca Mancini handball was cancelled out by Luca Ceppitelli's own goal before half-time.

But what looked like a winner from Kalinic was disallowed without a VAR review for a foul on Fabio Pisacane which saw the Cagliari defender stretched off. Roma were furious with coach Paulo Fonseca and his deputy both banished from the sideline before the final whistle. —AFP