

## Sports

# Atletico Madrid eye Champions League as Getafe stumble again in race for top four

## Espanyol beaten 3-1 at home by Levante

**MADRID:** Atletico Madrid boosted their Champions League push yesterday with a 1-0 win over Valladolid which moved them into third place in La Liga.

A goal from substitute Vitolo with nine minutes remaining gave Diego Simeone's side the three points. They now have 52 points and a four-point edge over Getafe in their Champions League pursuit after winning for the first time behind closed doors at their Wanda Metropolitano stadium.

Vitolo had come on as a substitute after 73 minutes for Marcos Llorente and grabbed the winner with a header from a corner after Valladolid keeper Juan Antonio Caro had failed to clear. Getafe's hopes of finishing in La Liga's top four took another knock as their disappointing return from the three-month coronavirus suspension continued with a 1-1 draw at home to Eibar.

Peter Etebo's smart finish put Getafe in front at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez before Eibar's Charles equalised from close range on the stroke of half-time.

Eibar might even have snatched victory, only to have a late goal from Pedro Bigas ruled out for offside. Getafe have now taken just two points from three games since the restart.

"It's clear we needed to win to give us a boost," said Getafe's Jaime Mata. "It would have kickstarted us after the break but we have to keep fighting until we get that win. People say our ambitions are too high but we are going to keep fighting."

Getafe are punching above their weight towards

the top of the table, having enjoyed a remarkable four years under coach Jose Bordalas.

They were only promoted to the top tier in 2017 and missed out on Champions League qualification on the final day last year, edged out by Valencia.

But their challenge may not extend so far this term given this draw followed a stalemate at home to struggling Espanyol and defeat by Granada.

It contributes to a more prolonged dip in form that has included only two wins in nine. Eibar are without a victory themselves in five matches but this was a valuable point that gives them something to build on in their battle to avoid relegation. They sit 16th, three points above the bottom three.

With their coach Jose Luis Mendilibar serving a touchline ban, Eibar fell behind after half an hour when Marc Cucurella's deep cross was volleyed back in by Angel Rodriguez and Etebo steered the

ball first time into the corner.

But Eibar responded and when Getafe's defence failed to push out together after a botched Eibar free-kick, Bigas was left free to nod across to Charles, who had a simple finish.

Neither team really deserved to win it in the second half but Eibar thought they had when Pape Diop's cross grazed the top of Bigas' head and bounced in. But Bigas had strayed just offside and Eibar had to settle for a point.

Earlier, Espanyol were beaten 3-1 at home by Levante, a blow to their morale after they resumed

getting together for informal workouts as lockdown restrictions have eased around the country.

"Please be advised that it is our consensus medical opinion that in light of the increase of COVID-19 cases in certain states that no players should be engaged in practicing together in private workouts," Mayer's statement said. "Our goal is to have all players and your families as healthy as possible in the coming months."

Multiple players from the Houston Texans and Dallas Cowboys have tested positive for the virus. On Friday the NFL Network reported that a San Francisco 49ers player had tested positive, and that he had been working out with teammates in Nashville, Tennessee.

In the most recent reported cases, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers confirmed they had players or staff test positive, but declined to confirm reports that the positive results involved at least two players.

Superstar quarterback Tom Brady, who signed with the Bucs this year after a glittering two decades with the New England Patriots, worked out with some of his new teammates on a high school field in Tampa, Florida, in May. Florida, which announced a one-day record of 4,049 additional confirmed cases on Saturday, has become a worry-spot for sports trying to get their seasons on track.

Major League Baseball is shutting down all spring training facilities in Florida and Arizona — another



**MADRID:** Valladolid's Spanish midfielder Kike Perez (R) and Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Vitolo jump for the ball during the Spanish League football match between Atletico Madrid and Real Valladolid at the Wanda Metropolitan stadium in Madrid on June 20, 2020. — AFP

with an impressive win over Alaves and hard-fought draw against Getafe.

Espanyol stay bottom, three points adrift of safety. Athletic Bilbao climbed to ninth after Inigo

Martinez's flicked finish was enough to beat Real Betis 1-0. Betis' Sergio Canales missed an 85th-minute penalty in the defeat, which leaves coach Rubi on the brink of the sack. — AFP

## Union advises NFL players not to work out together

**WASHINGTON:** With coronavirus cases popping up among multiple US sports leagues, the NFL Players Association has advised members to stop working out together.

That advice from union medical director Thom Mayer came Saturday, after Major League Baseball again shuttered spring training facilities in Florida and Arizona in the wake of a spate of positive COVID-19 cases for players and team staff members.

With the NBA, NHL and Major League Soccer all hoping to resume seasons shut down by the coronavirus pandemic, and MLB trying to hammer out a framework for getting 2020 underway, the cases have sparked concern. Mayer said in a statement to NFL players that "no players should be engaged in practice together in private workouts."

The NFL is still in the midst of a "virtual" off season with no formal team training sessions set to start until July 28.

But with the league still aiming to kick off on schedule on September 10, some players have been

stating where coronavirus cases are on the rise.

USA Today reported that baseball players and staff won't be admitted to the facilities until they are disinfected and deemed safe.

The move comes a day after baseball's Philadelphia Phillies, Toronto Blue Jays and San Francisco Giants shuttered training campuses over virus concerns.

The Phillies said five players and three staff members had tested positive at the team's Clearwater, Florida, training center.

The NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning closed their facility 23 miles (37km) from Clearwater, after multiple players and staff members tested positive.

The NHL said Friday that 11 players had tested positive since training facilities reopened on June 8 in anticipation of a 24-team restart in July at still unspecified "hub" locations.

The rise in COVID-19 cases in Florida could be a serious concern for the NBA and MLS, which are both planning to resume play in so-called "bubble" environments that will isolate multiple teams in the state. The NBA is planning a July 30 restart at the Walt Disney World sports complex near Orlando, Florida. The league plans to have 22 teams — 13 from the Western Conference and nine from the East — to start play with a chance to reach the final.

MLS is also planning a return at Disney World with its 26-team "MLS is Back" tournament, to be held without fans starting next month. —AFP

## Hatton, Ancer, Simpson and Palmer share PGA Heritage lead

**WASHINGTON:** Britain's Tyrrell Hatton closed with a 24-foot birdie putt Saturday to finish among four co-leaders after the third round of the US PGA Tour's RBC Heritage tournament.

Mexico's Abraham Ancer and Americans Webb Simpson and Ryan Palmer shared the lead entering Sunday's final round of the tour's second event after a three-month coronavirus hiatus.

Hatton fired a bogey-free eight-under par 63 to stand on 15-under 198 after 54 holes at Harbour Town Golf Links in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Hatton said he hadn't felt comfortable over the layout but breezed through Saturday.

"I've been lucky with where some of my misses ended up and I've really putted well, which is a big surprise," Hatton said. "Hopefully I feel comfortable tomorrow and hit some good shots."

The 28-year-old Englishman won the Arnold Palmer Invitational in March at Bay Hill in the last completed event before the tour's three-month coronavirus shutdown began.

Hatton birdied four of the first five holes, opening with a 40-foot birdie putt and two-putting from 35 feet for another birdie at the par-5 second. He made a 10-foot birdie putt at the fourth, a 12-footer to birdie the par-5 fifth and closed the front nine with a seven-foot birdie putt. Hatton, a four-time winner on the European Tour, sizzled with the putter on the back nine as well, holing birdie putts from 13 feet at the par-3 14th and 10 feet at the par-4 16th before his dramatic close.

Ancer shot 65, starting with birdies on three of the first five holes, all from four feet or less. He began the back nine with a three-foot birdie putt and followed a 15-foot birdie putt at 13 with his lone bogey at the par-3 14th after missing the green. He answered with birdies at 15 and 16.

"Feel like I'm not making anything," Ancer said. "I made maybe two putts outside four feet. I'm hitting the ball really well. I need a lot of patience, do the same thing, and hopefully they all fall in tomorrow." Palmer, sharing the lead entering the last round for the first time since 2011, shot 66 with five birdies from inside seven feet and a 16-footer at the 10th. His lone bogey came at the third when he found a greenside bunker and missed a six-foot par putt. "I hit it pretty well," Palmer said. "Overall, I'm excited. I still haven't played my best round 1-18. Maybe tomorrow will be the day." Simpson, the 2012 US Open winner, was the 36-hole leader after back-to-back 65s but could only muster 68, making a five-foot putt at the par-5 15th his lone back-nine birdie. "I hit a few good putts that didn't go in," Simpson said. "Hopefully tomorrow I'll be on the correct side of the hole."

One stroke behind the co-leaders were Mexico's Carlos Ortiz and Americans Joel Dahmen and Daniel Berger, who won last week at Colonial in the tour's virus comeback event. He birdied two of the last three holes to shoot 63.

"Winning last week definitely helps," Berger said. "It gives you some extra confidence. I'm putting really well. I'm not exactly hitting the ball well but I'm getting up and down when I've had to."

"If I have another good round tomorrow, I think I'll be right up there." World number one Rory McIlroy, who followed an opening 72 with a 65 and 66, stood in a pack five back on 203.

"The last two days I've hit it better. I've been a little more comfortable over my shots," McIlroy said. "I'm going to have to shoot 62, 63 to have a chance." — AFP

## Former Bangladesh captain tests positive for virus

**DHAKA:** Former Bangladesh cricket captain Mashrafe Mortaza and two other players said they have tested positive for the coronavirus as infections in the South Asian nation rise. Left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam and former opener Nafees Iqbal were the other two who revealed their positive test results.

Mashrafe, who stepped down as the one-day international captain in March but remains available for selection, announced the news on social media late Saturday. "Today my Covid-19 results came as positive. Everyone please pray for my quick recovery," Mashrafe wrote on Facebook.

"The number of infected people has now crossed one lakh (100,000). We all have to become more careful. Let's all stay at home, and not get out unless it is necessary. I am abiding by the protocol at home."

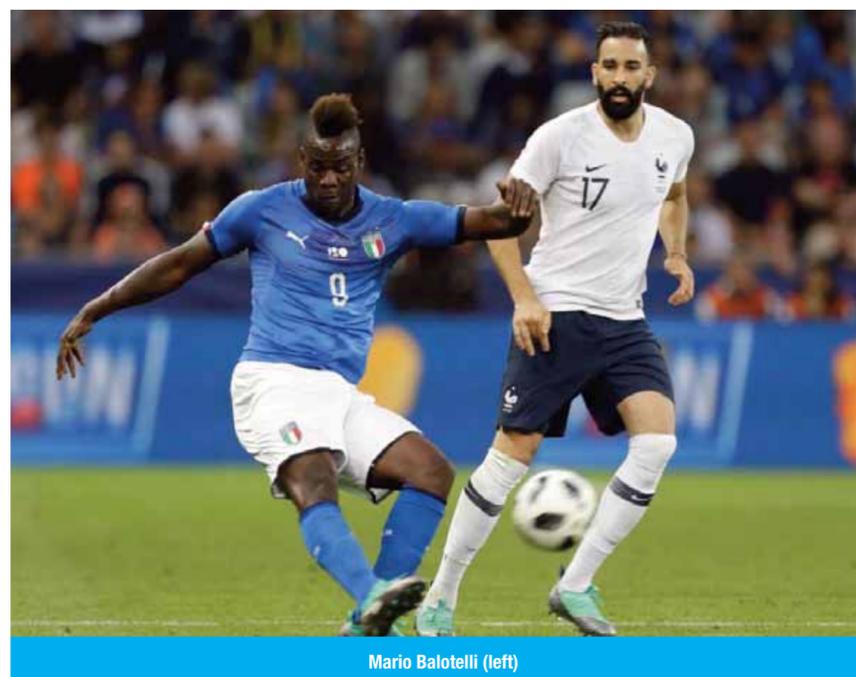
Mashrafe — also a member of parliament — had been active in helping people during the pandemic, particularly in his hometown and constituency Narail west of the capital Dhaka.

His mother-in-law and another relative tested positive last week, a Narail health official said.

Nafees, the elder brother of Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal, played 11 Tests and 16 one-day internationals for his country and is currently a domestic cricket coach. "Ten days ago I was feeling feverish. For two days my body temperature was high. I lost my appetite, felt very weak," Nafees said in an audio message emailed to reporters on Saturday.

"Then I gave sample for the test and the result came that I am COVID-19 positive." Left arm spinner Nazmul, who took part in virus aid work in his hometown of Narayanganj, said he received his results on Saturday. "I don't know how I got it. My parents also tested positive along with me," the 28-year-old, who played one Test, five ODIs and 13 Twenty20 internationals for Bangladesh, told AFP Sunday.

Bangladesh has confirmed over 108,000 infections and more than 1,400 deaths from the coronavirus so far. The impoverished country has restarted economic activities after lifting a months-long virus lockdown at the end of May even as cases continue to rise. —AFP



Mario Balotelli (left)

## Mancini tells Balotelli to 'wake up'

**MILAN:** Italy coach Roberto Mancini on Saturday urged Mario Balotelli to "wake up" before he throws his career away.

Balotelli's ill-fated stint at hometown club Brescia appears to be coming to an end, with reports his contract will be terminated after repeated absences from training. "I've told him a thousand times that he's wasting a huge talent," Mancini told Italian television.

"I have loved Mario very much since he was a

boy and he has done extraordinary things. He has a crazy physique, speed, technique, and at 30 he is in the middle of his career.

"I hope that one day he will wake up and change," Mancini recalled Balotelli to the Italy squad when he took over as coach in May 2018, having successfully worked with the forward at Manchester City and Inter Milan.

Balotelli, who has 36 caps for Azzurri but only one since 2014, joined Brescia last summer in the hope of winning a place in Mancini's Euro 2020 squad, but has scored just five times in 19 matches for the club.

He made his debut with local team Lumezzane in Serie C as a 16-year-old, before moving to Serie A giants Inter in 2007, where he won three league titles and the Champions League. He later had two spells at AC Milan and also played for Liverpool, Nice and Marseille. — AFP