

## Sports Editors Highlight

BERLIN: Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Sidney Sam will be out for several weeks after tearing a muscle 12 minutes into his comeback on Saturday and will also miss the Champions League round of 16 clash against Barcelona, the club said on Sunday.

"The medical check revealed a tear of a muscle bundle that means Sam, who had just recovered, will be out for several weeks," Leverkusen said in a statement.

Sam had returned in the 2-2 draw against VfB Stuttgart as a 72nd-minute substitute after being injured during the winter training camp and missing the first two league games of the year for last season's runners-up Leverkusen. The 2002 Champions League finalists take on holders Barcelona on Feb. 14 before travelling to Spain for the second leg on March 7. -Reuters

## FOOTBALL

# Barca see off Sociedad to keep pace with Real



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (left) scores a goal past Real Sociedad's goalkeeper Claudio Bravo during the Spanish league football match, Feb. 4, 2012. (AFP)

**MADRID:** Barcelona stayed hard on the heels of La Liga leaders Real Madrid when Lionel Messi's brilliance lifted a side containing several youngsters from the club's B team to a 2-1 win at home to Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Real had earlier deployed close to their strongest team in a 1-0 victory at city rivals Getafe, defender Sergio Ramos nodding in the only goal on a bitterly cold and blustery night at the Coliseum stadium that lifted them to 55 points from 21 matches.

In the late kickoff at an equally chilly Nou Camp, more than 50,000 fans turned out to witness Barca's 10th victory in 11 home league games this season that kept them within seven points of their arch rivals.

With Wednesday's King's Cup semi-final second leg against Valencia looming, coach Pep Guardiola had opted to start with regulars including World Cup-winners Xavi, Sergio Busquets and Gerard Pique on the bench.

World Player of the Year Messi, who had earlier been denied by several excellent saves from the Sociedad keeper, made it 2-0 in the 72nd minute when he hooked in a Daniel Alves cross before Carlos Vela pulled one back for the visitors two minutes later.

The Spanish and European champions' night was

spoiled by a nasty-looking injury to Busquets.

The Spain midfielder had come off the bench only a few minutes earlier before he sustained a deep gash below his right knee in a challenge with Sociedad defender Carlos Martinez.

In the earlier kickoff in Madrid, Ramos rose above the home defense to head a Mesut Ozil corner high into the net in the 18th minute as Real brushed aside the team who inflicted Barca's only defeat of the season in November.

They comfortably held a toothless Getafe at bay and it was a sixth straight league win for Jose Mourinho's side since they lost 3-1 at home to Barca in December.

Fourth-placed Levante, Valencia's second club, missed the chance to close within two points of their more illustrious city rivals when they surrendered the lead and were held to a 1-1 draw at home by struggling Racing Santander.

A diving header from striker Arouna Kone put Levante ahead in the 23rd minute before midfielder Manuel Arana leveled for Santander just past the hour.

Barcelona-based Espanyol are fifth on 32 points behind Levante on goal difference, with Bilbao two points back on 30 and Atletico on 29 in seventh. -Reuters

# Wenger hails Henry's 'parting shot' in Rover rout

**ENGLAND:** Arsene Wenger believes Thierry Henry's stoppage-time goal in the win over Blackburn will be remembered as a "special" moment if it turns out to be his last strike at the Emirates Stadium.

Henry, who returned to Arsenal on loan, is scheduled to head back to New York after away matches against Sunderland and AC Milan, so wrapping up the scoring against Rovers could have come in the last minute of his final home game.

Robin van Persie had scored a hat-trick, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain netted twice and Mikel Arteta also found the back of the net before Henry struck to complete a 7-1 win, their biggest Premier League win at the Emirates.

"With Thierry going back to the States he played, normally, his last game at the Emirates and in the last minute he scored his goal. That is really something special," Wenger said.

Wenger insisted he has not looked at extending Henry's loan yet for him to be involved in the clash against Tottenham.

His return to the club has coincided with emergence of Oxlade-Chamberlain and has also seen Theo Walcott return to his best form.

Wenger suggested both may be included in the England squad to face Holland at the end of the month, although he has not spoken to Fabio Capello.

Walcott set up Van Persie's first two goals, which came either side of Morten



Arsenal's Thierry Henry celebrates his goal against Blackburn Rovers during an English Premier League soccer match at the Emirates Stadium, Feb. 4, 2012. (Reuters)

Gamst Pedersen's equalizer.

Oxlade-Chamberlain netted either side of half-time, while Arteta's volley came just after the interval. Henry's goal came off Scott Dann in the final moments. Rovers were not helped by Gael Givet

getting a straight red card for a reckless challenge on Van Persie.

You never know how bad it is and it's something we cannot afford at the moment, to lose a player like Robin," Wenger said. -AFP

## Pienaar back in the groove: Moyes

**ENGLAND:** Everton manager David Moyes believes that Steven Pienaar has already settled in as he begins his second spell at Goodison Park.

The South African winger returned to Everton on loan for the rest of the season last week, just 12 months after leaving for Tottenham.

The former Ajax player enjoyed a successful three-year stint on Merseyside after his career stalled at Borussia Dortmund.

He was outstanding in the 1-1 draw at Wigan and looked likely to create plenty of chances alongside Landon Donovan, who is on loan from LA Galaxy, in midfield.

Everton have struggled for goals this season but Moyes is sure that Pienaar, 29, will have a major impact in the second half of the season.

"Steven Pienaar was the best Everton player. He came back and looked as if he hadn't been away," Moyes said.

"He was involved in a lot of bits where we looked as if we were on the verge of making things happen but things just broke down around the edge of the box but Steven Pienaar played really well."

The Everton manager only gave Nikica Jelavic, who also joined on transfer deadline day in a £5.5 million move from Rangers, a 30-minute run-out. But he is also satisfied with the early days of the Croatian striker's Everton career.

"He did fine. He's only just come into it so it's difficult to judge," he said. "He only really joined us on Friday and we'll give him a chance to settle in and be part of it."

Wigan, who are bottom of the Premier League, are now five points from safety but Martinez is still certain that they will manage to avoid relegation.

"The situation that we've been in the table affected us in the last two games but that wasn't the case against Everton," he said.

"It was a free group that really enjoyed getting on the ball and working hard for each other and that gives me great confidence to look forward to the end of the season. We've been in this situation before and we know that it's going to be extremely difficult but we are a strong unit and that's the challenge that we've got ahead." -AFP

## Dalglish expects instant impact from Suarez



FILE - Liverpool's Luis Suarez (2nd left) celebrates after scoring during their English Premier League soccer match against QPR, Dec. 10, 2011. (Reuters)

**ENGLAND:** Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish expects controversial striker Luis Suarez to hit the ground running when he returns from suspension against Tottenham on Monday.

The Uruguayan, 25, has missed the last eight matches through suspension after being found guilty of racially abusing Manchester United's French defender Patrice Evra in the 1-1 draw at Anfield in October. Suarez had been Liverpool's main attacking threat since arriving in a £22.8 million deal from Ajax in January last year.

In his absence, the Reds have won through to the League Cup final at Wembley, where they will face Cardiff later

this month, and the FA Cup fifth round. But their problems in the Premier League have continued, with just one win in the four matches that Suarez has missed.

His return is sure to be a major boost for the Reds and Dalglish claims the striker has been looking sharp in training.

"Luis is smashing. He's good, he's in and around the place and he's quite happy," Dalglish said. "We'll have a look and see how he is in training before we pick a team for Monday."

Dalglish could also recall captain Steven Gerrard, who was rested for the 3-0 victory at Wolves in midweek.

He may well need Gerrard as Tottenham continue to push Manchester City

and Manchester United hard at the top of the Premier League table. And Dalglish claims he would not be surprised if Spurs lasted the distance.

He added: "Spurs were a wee bit unfortunate at the beginning of the season but since then they've kicked on and have been as good as anyone in the league. It's a really difficult game for us, but it'll be a fantastic evening and a great occasion for everybody."

Spurs manager Harry Redknapp has talked of his desire to get back in the Champions League, but Spurs were five points behind City going into this weekend's fixture and Bond believes the title is well within reach. -AFP

## Bayern boss stays calm as Dortmund go top

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich boss Jupp Heynckes refused to point the finger of blame at his defence as the Bavarians had to come from behind to draw 1-1 at Hamburg and lost their place at the top of the German league.

Defending champions Borussia Dortmund finish the weekend back on top of the league, but only with a precarious two-point margin, with both Bayern and third-placed Schalke hard on their heels with 41 points each.

After Hamburg's Italian 20-year-old midfielder Jacopo Sala headed Hamburg into the lead on 23 minutes on Saturday, Bayern's blushes were spared when Croatia striker Ivica Olic equalised just minutes after coming off the bench.

Having seen his defense leave Sala unmarked for the opening goal, Bayern's Heynckes refused to point the finger of blame at his team who have taken just four points from a possible nine in their last three league games.

"I don't want to throw accusations at the troops," said Heynckes, whose team play FC Basel in the first-leg of their Round of 16 Champions League clash on February 22.

"Despite everything, we played well in the first half. Because the demands of Bayern Munich are somewhat greater, we can't be happy, that is clear. We needed to win here and we should have had the urgency to make that happen."

Dortmund deserved to go top after grinding out an impressive 2-0 win at Nuremberg as temperatures reached minus 11 Celsius on Friday night with captain Sebastian Kehl and striker Lucas Barrios providing the goals.

The win looks to have come at a cost as midfielder Sven Bender, who has only recently returned from breaking his jaw at Arsenal last November, damaged his ankle ligaments, while Kehl has a foot injury. -AFP

## Mancini hopeful for change in fortune



Mousa Dembele of Fulham competes with Samir Nasri of Manchester City during a Barclays Premier League match, Feb. 4, 2012. (AFP)

**ENGLAND:** Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini is hopeful that the start of February will provide his club with a change in fortune after a disappointing start to 2012 threatened to derail their quest for honors. City's expensively-assembled side lost four of their eight matches in the first month of the year, exiting the FA and League Cups and seeing Manchester United draw level with them on points at the top of the Premier League. However, the opening fixture of February saw City beat Fulham convincingly, a 3-0 victory maintaining their perfect start to this season of 12 wins from 12 home league games and restoring a three-point lead at the top over United.

City's recent indifferent form has not been helped by the absence, at the African Cup of Nations, of influential midfielder player Yaya Toure of the Ivory Coast.

City have lost three of the six games for which he has been unavailable although Mancini was pleased with the individual displays of his goal scorers in

Toure's continued absence.

"I was pleased with Adam," he said. "It was a good performance. I always thought he was a fantastic player, it is just that he can always improve. And I was pleased with Edin and Sergio, not just because of their goals, but because they played for the team."

Mancini confirmed that Samir Nasri was forced off during the game due to a hip injury although the midfielder has an extra day's recovery this week with City not in action until the visit to Aston Villa in Sunday's televised game. Meanwhile, the Fulham manager Martin Jol confirmed his team hope to have the Russian forward Pavel Pogrebnyak available for next weekend's home game with Stoke after a delay to his work permit.

"He is in the country," said Jol of the player signed from Stuttgart before the deadline. "Hopefully we will have the work permit late in the week, not too late to be involved next weekend. We hope Thursday, it could be Friday." -AFP