



MADRID: Real Madrid's forward Alvaro Morata (C) kicks the ball during a training session at Valdebebas training grounds in Madrid yesterday on the eve of their Liga football match against Sporting Gijon. —AFP

FIVE THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN LA LIGA

MADRID: Ahead of another Champions League salvage mission there is no room for error for Barcelona as they try to chase down Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Here are five things to look out for in La Liga this weekend.

BARCA BEGIN LIFE WITHOUT NEYMAR

Barca's season unravelled quickly in the past week as they lost at Malaga to fall three points behind Madrid, who also have a game in hand, at the top of the table and were then thrashed 3-0 by Juventus in the Champions League. In between Neymar was also slapped with a three-game ban following his first Barca red card last weekend and misses Real Sociedad's visit today, as well as a potential decisive clash with Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu next weekend. Barca have to win to have any chance of keeping the title alive ahead next weekend's Clasico but have been let down by their lack of strength in depth this season. Boss Luis Enrique therefore has a delicate balance to find between resting some of his star names ahead of another Champions League rescue mission in midweek and still having enough to see off a Sociedad side battling for a place in the Europa League.

ASENSIO'S TIME TO SHINE

In stark contrast to Barca's troubles, Real Madrid have been propped up throughout the campaign by the depth of their resources. No more so than by Marco Asensio. The 21-year-old made a huge impact by setting up Cristiano Ronaldo's winner against Bayern Munich on Wednesday after replacing Gareth Bale for the final half hour. With Bale set to sit out the trip to Gijon, Asensio will get his chance to make a case to start against Bayern on Tuesday.

ADAMS'S 'ARSE-KICKING' COMMENCES

Tony Adams made a surprise return to coaching this week as Granada boss due to his close ties with the club's Chinese ownership. The eccentric former Arsenal captain didn't disappoint in his first press conference where he promised to "kick some players' arse" in an uphill battle to save Granada from relegation in the final seven games of the season. Adams takes charge for the first time against Celta Vigo on Sunday with Granada seven points adrift of safety.

BASQUE BATTLE ROYALE FOR EUROPE

The fight to be top dogs in the Basque Country will almost certainly be rewarded with a place in Europe with Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao and Eibar separated by just two points between sixth and eighth. With Sociedad at the Camp Nou, Athletic can move a step ahead when they host Las Palmas on Friday night before Eibar continue their remarkable charge at struggling Betis on Sunday. The population of Eibar would fit twice into Betis' Benito Villamarin stadium, yet they are 19 points ahead of the Seville giants thanks to an already record points tally of 50 in the top flight.

VALENCIA ON THE RISE

There is a rare sense of positivity around Valencia's fortunes at the minute after three consecutive wins for the first time in a year. Chairwoman Layhoon Chan's resignation earlier in the week also pleased a large section of the fanbase unhappy with her role in a disastrous past couple of seasons on and off the pitch. Sunday's visitors to the Mestalla should take note of what bad organization from the top can do to even a historically big club. Sevilla are in a state of flux after sporting director Monchi's departure and look set to lose coach Jorge Sampaoli to Argentina's advances at the end of the season too. —AFP

ATTACK WAS LONGEST 15 MINS OF MY LIFE: BARTRA

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund defender Marc Bartra, who was wounded when three bombs rocked his Bundesliga team's bus, described yesterday his ordeal as "the longest and hardest 15 minutes of my life". "The pain, the panic, the uncertainty of not knowing what was happening, or how long it would last... they were the longest and hardest 15 minutes of my life," the Spanish defender wrote in a message posted on Instagram.

The bombs containing metal pieces detonated minutes after the team bus set off to a Champions League game against Monaco on Tuesday night. Bartra was hurt by flying

glass and had to undergo a wrist operation, taking him out of action for four weeks. The 26-year-old said "the shock of the past few days is diminishing all the time" and that when he looks at his swollen wrist, what he feels is "pride".

"I look at it proud thinking of all the damage they wanted to do to us on Tuesday and it resulted in just that," he said, thanking those who are treating him as well as fans, his team-mates and others who have showered him with support. "I needed to write and get this off my chest and settle it so I can just think about getting back to 100 percent as soon as possible," he added.

Three days after the attack that injured Bartra and a policeman who suffered trauma from the noise of the blasts, investigators are still scrambling to find possible culprits. The probe suffered a setback on Thursday when the sole suspect in custody was cleared of involvement in the crime. Investigators had zeroed in on two suspects believed to belong to a large jihadist scene in western Germany's Ruhr region, after three identical letters were found at the site of the attack. The letter demanded that Berlin stop its Tornado reconnaissance missions in the international anti-IS coalition and close the US air base at Ramstein, western Germany. —AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Tottenham v Bournemouth	14:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
Stoke City v Hull City	17:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Crystal Palace v Leicester City	17:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Watford v Swansea City	17:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Everton v Burnley	17:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Sunderland v West Ham United	17:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Southampton v Manchester City	19:30
beIN SPORTS HD	

SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA

Deportivo La Coruna v Malaga	14:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Sporting Gijon v Real Madrid	17:15
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
Atletico de Madrid v Osasuna	19:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
FC Barcelona v Real Sociedad	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
beIN SPORTS HD 2	

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Internazionale v AC Milan	13:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
ACF Fiorentina v Empoli	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
AS Roma v Atalanta	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Torino FC v Crotone	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Genoa CFC v SS Lazio	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Citta di Palermo v Bologna	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Cagliari v AC Chievo Verona	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Pescara v Juventus FC	16:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Sassuolo Calcio v Sampdoria	19:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
Napoli v Udinese Calcio	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD	

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Dortmund v Eintracht Frankfurt	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
VfL Wolfsburg v Ingolstadt 04	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
FSV Mainz 05 v Hertha Berlin	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
FC Augsburg v FC Koln	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
Hoffenheim v Monchengladbach	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
RB Leipzig v SC Freiburg	16:30
beIN SPORTS HD	
Bayer 04 v Bayern Munich	19:30
beIN SPORTS HD	

FRENCH LEAGUE

OGC Nice v Nancy Lorraine	18:00
beIN SPORTS HD 6	
FC Metz v Caen	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 7	
Montpellier HSC v Lorient	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 9	
Stade Rennes v Lille OSC	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 10	
Guingamp v Toulouse FC	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD	
AS Monaco FC v Dijon	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 6	