

Barcelona's Lionel Messi celebrates

Messi strikes late to down Alaves



Barcelona needed a second-half rally to overcome Alaves 2-1 and maintain their unbeaten run in La Liga

Madrid
Lionel Messi scored a stunning late free kick as Barcelona came from behind to beat Alaves and maintain their unbeaten start to La Liga. The visitors were defending well after John Guidetti's fortuitous opener had put them ahead but they could not hang on as Luis Suarez levelled before Messi curled home

a set piece to secure an unconvincing 2-1 win. As Barcelona's forwards failed to fire, Alaves threatened so often on the counter-attack and it was no surprise that their goal came from such a move in the 23rd minute. Guidetti slipped as he took his shot, which deflected off his standing foot to beat Marc-Andre ter Stegen and stun the Nou Camp. Barcelona's club-record signing Philippe Coutinho made his full debut since joining from Liverpool but he was ineffectual before being replaced. Lucas Digne was handed a rare league start and the full-back had the game's first decent chance, dragging a low shot wide from the edge of the box. The hosts were enjoying plenty of possession although Ibai should have done better with a rare opportunity to put Alaves ahead as they broke on the

counter-attack. The visitors would go one better soon after as another pacey counter ended with Guidetti scoring his first goal for the club since his loan move from Celta Vigo, slipping at the key moment but still managing to convert. Ter Stegen had to be at his best moments later to prevent Barcelona falling even further behind as he dived to tip Ruben Sobrino's header away. The forward was proving a handful for the Barca defence and he raced away on the half-hour mark only to finish with a tame effort straight at ter Stegen. Coutinho was involved in almost every attack and he came close to equalising only for his strike from the edge of the box to deflect behind for a corner. Alaves goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco was alive to push an Ivan Rakitic flick-header behind as the midfielder got on the end of a Messi free-kick. (PA Sport)

Beckham launches Miami MLS team



Miami
Former England captain David Beckham has launched his long-planned Major League Soccer team in Miami. Beckham exercised an option in his contract with former side LA Galaxy to buy an expansion franchise in 2014. The as yet unnamed team is set to play at a 25,000-seat stadium in the city's Overtown neighbourhood. "I'm excited to bring this

great team to this great city - it has been a hell of a journey," said former Manchester United midfielder Beckham, 42. "I promise you the team we will bring into the league will be the best team." The launch follows four years of disputes over the site for a stadium in southern Florida, with residents having opposed multiple locations. Beckham's team of investors purchased the land to build a stadium in

December 2015, following three failed attempts to buy a suitable site. The Miami-Dade government was subsequently sued by wealthy businessman Bruce Matheson, who claimed it had sold the site below fair value and without a competitive bid process. (BBC)

Gerard Pique unrepentant

London
Gerard Pique says he does not regret his comments mocking Barcelona's rivals Espanyol after eliminating them from the King's Cup last week, stoking up the



rivalry ahead of another visit to Cornellà on Sunday in La Liga. Barcelona beat Espanyol 2-0 at the Nou Camp last Thursday and Pique repeatedly referred to the visitors as "Espanyol de Cornellà" when speaking to the media afterwards. The defender was referring to the location of the club's RCDE Stadium, where Espanyol moved in 2009 after playing at the Olympic Stadium in the city of Barcelona. Espanyol made a formal complaint about Pique's comments and the

Spanish football federation's anti-violence committee are investigating the matter. However, speaking to reporters after signing his new Barcelona contract which keeps him at the club until 2022, Pique played down on his comments. "I don't regret it (making his comments) and I don't think today's the day's the day to talk about it. On Sunday we will play there and in the mixed zone I will give you the headlines if you want," said Pique. (Reuters)

Man Utd would help Ibrahimovic leave



Zlatan Ibrahimovic (file pic)

Manchester
Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho says the club will "create conditions" to help Zlatan Ibrahimovic leave if he wants. It has been reported that the 36-year-old former Sweden striker is close to completing a move to MLS side LA Galaxy. "If it's true and he wants a future at another club we are here to help," said Mourinho. "But Zlatan told me he wants to recover and feel ready to help

the team." Ibrahimovic, who re-signed for United on a one-year deal in August, returned to action in November after recovering from a serious knee injury. But he has made only six appearances since, and has not played since the 2-2 Premier League draw against Burnley on 26 December. Mourinho said: "He's working hard to be fit. I wouldn't say he's injured. "He is in a moment of trying

to feel really ready for demands of Premier League football." Ibrahimovic initially joined United on a free transfer in July 2016 but was released the following summer after his season was ended prematurely by a knee injury. Meanwhile, Mourinho described midfielder Marouane Fellaini as "a very important player for me" amid reports linking him with Stoke and Turkish club Galatasaray. (BBC)