

sports

# Benzema leads Real past Levante

● Karim Benzema brace earns Bernabeu win as Eden Hazard makes La Liga debut

● Benzema scored twice as Real Madrid beat Levante 3-2

AFP | Madrid

Karim Benzema scored twice yesterday in an outstanding performance for Real Madrid against Levante, although his side were left hanging on for a 3-2 win on the day Eden Hazard made his La Liga debut.

The French striker's goals came just six minutes apart in the first half on a wet afternoon at the Santiago Bernabeu, before Casemiro put Real 3-0 up.

However Levante, who had won their previous two outings, made a fight of it in the second half as they pulled goals back through Borja Mayoral and Gonzalo Melero.



Karim Benzema of Real Madrid scores his sides first goal

While the manner of their victory was not as convincing as coach Zinedine Zidane might have wished, it was a welcome return to winning ways for Real after they had drawn their previous two games.

Hazard also came off the bench for the final half-hour to make his first appearance in La Liga after a thigh injury had interrupted the start of his Real

career following his 100 million-euro (\$110 million) move from Chelsea.

The Belgian could now start for Real when they go to Paris Saint-Germain for their open-



Real would have won by a greater margin here had it not been for some inspired goalkeeping from Aitor Fernandez, who produced a stunning one-handed stop to keep out a Benzema shot from the edge of the area midway through the first half

ing Champions League game on Wednesday.

Gareth Bale will also be available for that match after suspension kept him out here, but Sergio Ramos will be unable to play against PSG because of a European ban.

Zidane was also without the injured Luka Modric here. However, as well as Hazard, fellow

summer signing Eder Militao came off the bench in the second half and the former Porto defender could start in Paris in place of Ramos.

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However, the hosts went ahead shortly after that when Dani Carvajal held up a cross from the right for Benzema to bullet home a header from the edge of the six-yard area.

The Frenchman struck again in the 31st minute, with James Rodriguez pouncing when Sergio Postigo headed the ball down into his path, and teeing up Benzema to score his fourth of the campaign.

Benzema was also involved in the build-up to the third goal five minutes before the interval, which concluded with Vinicius Junior squaring for Casemiro to apply the finish.

## Vinales on pole for San Marino MotoGP

AFP | Misano Adriatico, Italy

Yamaha's Maverick Vinales snatched pole position for the San Marino MotoGP ahead of fellow Spaniard Pol Espargaro after a thrilling qualifying duel yesterday.

Vinales, 24, sealed pole with a blistering final lap of 1min 32.265sec to overtake KTM's Pol Espargaro, who had been poised to take top spot but was pipped by just 0.295sec.

The pair will be joined on the front row in Sunday's race on Italy's Adriatic coast by French rider Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha-SRT, who had dominated free practice earlier in the day, but was third fastest at 0.306.

Vinales is targeting his second win this season after the Dutch MotoGP and is currently fifth in the world championship standings which Spaniard Marc Marquez is dominating.

World championship leader Marquez clocked the fifth-fastest time at 0.477 behind Vinales, and will be joined on the sec-



Yamaha Spanish rider Maverick Vinales rides during San Marino MotoGP qualifying

ond row by Italian pair Franco Morbidelli (Yamaha-SRT) and Andrea Dovizioso (Ducati).

Marquez spectacularly tumbled in the fourth and final free practice session earlier yesterday but still managed to lead the way into qualifying at the Misano circuit, near Rimini.

The daredevil Marquez showed great pluck by picking himself up and rushing to get back on his bike, apparently unhurt.

Former seven-time world MotoGP champion Valentino Rossi qualified seventh fastest for the race he has won three times, most recently in 2014.

Both Marquez and Italian Rossi had both also been in the running for pole but ended each others chances.

## Sterling not on same level as Messi, Ronaldo, says Guardiola

AFP | Manchester

Pep Guardiola would love Raheem Sterling to reach the same level as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, but the Manchester City manager is not sure if any player will be able to equal the feats of that legendary pair.

Others have recently been comparing Sterling to the two dominant players of the last decade. England manager Gareth Southgate suggested Sterling could eventually be mentioned in the same breath as Messi and Ronaldo when asked how far the City winger could go if

he maintains his superb form.

Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher has also said that he sees Sterling as a potential future winner of the Ballon d'Or -- an award Barcelona star Messi and Juventus forward Ronaldo have each won five times.

City manager Guardiola is thrilled at Sterling's progress during their three years working together, but having also coached Messi at Barca, he knows the exceptional standards required at that exalted level.



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