

Barcelona keep title hopes alive by relegating Espanyol

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A second half strike from **Luis Suarez** pedalled **Barcelona** past **Espanyol** 1-0 on Wednesday night at **the Camp Nou**.

The result brings **Barcelona** to within a point of leaders **Real Madrid** in the table, with Los Blancos scheduled to face **Alaves** on Friday, while **Espanyol** are officially relegated to the second division.

It was far from the dominating performance seen in **Barcelona's** last outing against **Villarreal**, as **Espanyol** made sure it was a tough, contentious derby.

A wild second half sequence in which **Ansu Fati** and **Pol Lozano** were sent off within minutes of each other made for a slightly more open affair, with **Barcelona** taking advantage just enough to secure the three points.

Quique Setien made just one change from the starting XI that pasted **Villarreal** over the weekend, with **Ivan Rakitic** coming in for **Arturo Vidal**.

Otherwise, it was **Lionel Messi**, **Suarez** and **Antoine Griezmann** up top, with **Sergi Roberto** once again pulling the strings in midfield.

While **Barcelona** dominated the early proceedings, **Espanyol** were the ones with the first real scoring chance on a counter attack that ended with an **Adrian Embarba** shot being blocked by the leg of **Barcelona** goalkeeper **Marc-Andre ter Stegen**.

Barcelona started peppering **Espanyol** goalkeeper **Diego Lopez** with shots through **Messi** and **Suarez**, but otherwise it was tough going against their city rivals, who were not as inclined to give up space in midfield like **Villarreal**.

The **Espanyol** counter attack produced another guilt-edged chance minutes before half time, with **Didac Vila** glancing a shot off the post after the ball had pinballed off a couple players deep in the area.

Setien made his first change during the break, replacing **Semedo** with **Fati**, but just minutes after coming on the pitch the youngster was sent off for a studs-up challenge on **Fernando Calero** after referee **Jose Luis Munuera Montero** consulted with VAR, leaving **Barcelona** a man down.

The advantage for **Espanyol** lasted just a few moments, though, as almost immediately a studs-up tackle from **Pol Lozano** on **Gerard Pique**, [who got everyone's attention pre-match by riding his bike to the Camp Nou](#), also resulted in a VAR-aided red card, making for 10 vs 10 football for the final 40 minutes.

Barcelona were happy to exploit the extra space on the pitch and they notched the game's lone goal minutes later when **Griezmann** back-heelled to **Messi**, whose shot was blocked, but **Suarez** was there to clean up and fire into goal for a 1-0 lead.

The second substitution for the hosts saw **Griezmann** make way for **Vidal**, but **Barcelona** were still struggling to find a second goal to make things less nervy.

The **Espanyol** attacking substitutions didn't help and **Victor Campuzano** almost nodded in a header which would have equalised.

Martin Braithwaite was next to be summoned off the bench, replacing **Suarez**, but it was **Espanyol** who had the look of scoring the next goal and there was some question as to whether a shot struck the arm of **Vidal** in the penalty area in stoppage time.

In the end, a spot kick was not awarded to the Pericos, as **Barcelona** emerged with the three points to stay within striking distance of the top spot.

Espanyol, meanwhile, must start preparing for LaLiga SmartBank.

Match Sheet:

1.- Barcelona: Ter Stegen; Semedo (Fati, min. 46), Pique, Lenglet, Jordi Alba; Busquets, Sergi Roberto, Rakitic (Araujo, min. 92); Messi, Suarez (Braithwaite, min. 82), Griezmann (Vidal, min. 71)

0.- Espanyol: Diego Lopez; Victor Garcia, Bernardo, Cabrera, Calero (Darder, min. 66), Didac; David Lopez, Marc Roca (Wu Lei, min. 86), Pol Lozano; Embarba (Campuzano, min. 74), Raul de Tomas

Goals: 1-0, min. 56: Suarez

Referee: Munuera Montero (Andalusian).

Yellow cards: Raul de Tomas (Min. 45+1) for Espanyol, Pol Lozano (Min. 52) for Espanyol

Red cards: Ansu Fati (Min. 49) for Barcelona, Pol Lozano (Min. 53) for Espanyol (David Lopez (Min. 94) for Espanyol

Stadium: Camp Nou