

Real Madrid Vs. Barcelona Analysis: 5 Things We Learned From El Clásico

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Real Madrid has a one-point lead at the top of La Liga after defeating arch rivals FC Barcelona 2-0 in *El Clásico* at the Santiago Bernabéu.

It was a much-needed win for *Los Blancos* and means it has a slender lead to take into the final 12 matches of the league season.

Here are five things we learned from the match.

### **Real Madrid Turned Its Poor Form Around**

Madrid went into this match having lost three of its last five in all competitions. That included damaging home defeats to Real Sociedad in the Copa del Rey, and, most recently, Manchester City in the Champions League Round of 16 first leg. In its most recent La Liga match, it lost 1-0 at Levante.

Just as importantly, Madrid was facing the worst Clásico streak in its history. Before this match, it had not won any of its last seven clashes with Barca in La Liga. Barca had won its last four at the Santiago Bernabéu. Now though, that run is over.

### **Zinedine Zidane Got The Big Calls Right**

The French coach put his faith in veteran Marcelo at left back instead of Ferland Mendy and

also resisted the temptation to bench Isco and Vinicius Junior after both started the defeat against City. He was well rewarded. Marcelo was up and down the left wing with the energy he was known for in his prime. Crucially, he also showed his defensive metal. With around 15 minutes to go, with Madrid 1-0 ahead, Marcelo made a last-ditch tackle to deny Lionel Messi as the Argentine was bearing down on goal.

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MADRID, SPAIN - MARCH 01: Zinedine Zidane, manager of Real Madrid during the Liga match between Real ... [+]

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Ahead of Marcelo, Vinicius was willing to keep taking players on and deserved his goal (even if there was some fortune with the deflection off Pique). Isco buzzed around knitting the play together and had Madrid's best chances before its first goal. Even Zidane's subs were spot on. Moments Mariano was introduced, he scored to seal the match for Madrid.

### **Quique Setien Won't Have Enjoyed His First El Clasico**

Ahead of his first Clasico, the Barca coach seemed relaxed and optimistic. In an interview with La Vanguardia, he said he would "enjoy" the match. But he won't have enjoyed the result. In the first half, Barca shaded the play and could have taken the lead when Messi volley straight at Courtois.

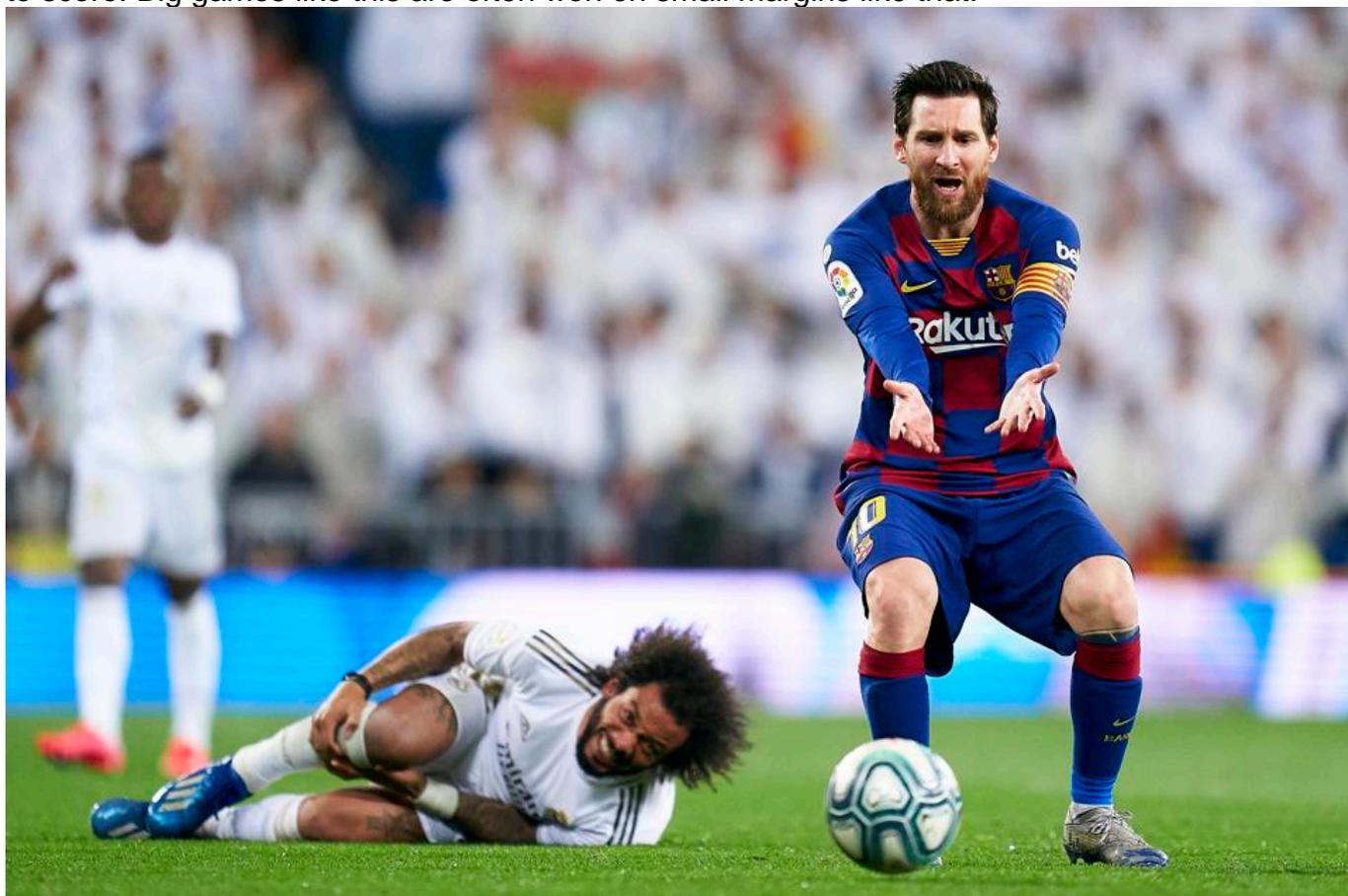
But after half time, Madrid pressed Barca and the visitors didn't have an answer. In the 15 minutes after half time, Madrid had several good chances as Barca failed to play its way through

the swarming white shirts. Setien's commitment to playing an attractive style with short passes to build from the back is admirable, but when it doesn't work there doesn't seem to be a Plan B.

### Barca Needs To Find A Solution To Its Striker Crisis

Setien, of course, has some injuries to contend with. Luis Suarez is a huge miss and Ousmane Dembele is another option currently unavailable to the coach. Antoine Griezmann was again frequently the focal point of Barca's attack against Madrid, but the Frenchman looks a little short of confidence. He battled well but missed a decent-but-difficult chance in the first half and faded from the game.

Barca called on new signing Martin Braithwaite in the second half and the Danish striker almost made the dream impact, but his effort was saved by Courtois. A few moments later, Braithwaite, who was playing on the right wing, failed to track the run of Vinicius as the Brazilian ran through to score. Big games like this are often won on small margins like that.



MADRID, SPAIN - MARCH 01: Marcelo of Real Madrid competes for the ball with Lionel Messi of FC ... [+]

Getty Images

### The La Liga Title Race Is Still Wide Open

This result will give Madrid a huge amount of confidence after a recent sticky spell. The lead though is only a point and, the way this La Liga season is going, there will be many more twists and turns. Both sides have looked unconvincing at times and it would be a surprise if neither dropped points in the final 12 matches.

Barca's psychological advantage could also be a factor. It is chasing a third straight La Liga title, with Madrid having finished third in the previous two seasons. Today though, it's Madrid that has the upper hand after a win which could prove crucial in crowning this season's champions.

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