

La Liga Summary

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Defending champion Real Madrid hopes to recover from a 2-0 first leg loss at Atletico Madrid and stay in contention in Spain's Copa del Rey.

Atletico coach Diego Simeone, renowned for his optimism, will aim to motivate his squad to succeed again after a bruising 3-1 defeat at Barcelona on Sunday.

Here are some things to know about the round of 16 return-leg Copa games this week:

EL NINO IS EAGER

Atletico faces a tough visit Thursday to the Santiago Bernabeu where it must contain Madrid to advance to the quarterfinals.

Given the team's need to defend, Fernando Torres, back on loan with Atletico, may be left on the bench against its cross-town rival.

Torres has scored twice against Madrid, once at Liverpool in the English team's 4-0 — 5-0 on aggregate — trouncing of the Spanish powerhouse in the 2009 Champions League and for Atletico in a 1-1 league draw in 2007.

However, the 30-year-old striker is eager to be involved.

"It's a great feeling when you win against a big opponent, when you defeat the best team in the world," said Torres. "Our first leg score gives us many possibilities of moving to the next stage, but we're playing at the Bernabeu.

"You know that 90 minutes is a long time at the Bernabeu."

TEAM BUILDING

Someone maintains the only way a smaller-budget club can beat a big-spending team is with teamwork.

Since taking over from Jose Mourinho as coach at star-studded Madrid, Carlo Ancelotti has relied on the individual quality of Cristiano Ronaldo who, this season, has scored 26 goals in 20 appearances.

Yet in his subtle way, Ancelotti has also made clear that the team comes first.

After fans at the Bernabeu booed winger Gareth Bale for trying to score, instead of passing to the better-positioned Ronaldo, during the team's 3-0 win against Espanyol, Ancelotti laid down the law.

"Bale is just as fundamental for us as Cristiano," he said. "If we see selfish behavior, we will deal with it."

DAMAGE CONTROL

Barcelona has moved into damage control mode after facing a wave of off-field problems.

After its win against Atletico, the normally camera-shy Lionel Messi was presented to appear before the media to dispel rumors.

"I'm grateful to be able to give my version," Messi said. "I've heard all sorts of things said."

The Argentina forward said he had heard of alleged "bad feeling" between himself and former coach Pep Guardiola as well as former players Bojan Krkic and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

"All that was lies and I want people to know it," he said. "Everything that was said is false."

Messi heaped praise on fellow forwards Neymar and Luis Suarez. "Luis is capable of scoring lots of goals and he fights for every ball as if it were his last," he said. "He gives us his all and Neymar has a lot to give, as he is proving."

Barcelona travels to Elche on Thursday to defend a 5-0 first-leg lead.

ANADLUCIAN CLASH

Sevilla defends a 2-1 advantage when it hosts Andalusian rival Granada on Wednesday.

Coach Unai Emery's Sevilla team is currently fourth in the league after beating Almeria 2-0 at the weekend.
