

Real coach Benitez bemoans lack of precision after defeat

Real Madrid coach Rafa Benitez criticised his players for a poor first-half performance and a lack of accuracy in front of goal in the second after they suffered a surprise 1-0 defeat at Villarreal in La Liga on Sunday.

The loss at the Madrigal, after an early goal by former Real forward Roberto Soldado, leaves the visitors third, five points adrift of pacesetters Barcelona and Atletico Madrid after 15 matches and heaps more pressure on the unpopular Benitez.

Already reeling after they were hammered 4-0 at home by Barca in last month's La Liga 'Clasico', Real's defeat by Villarreal comes hard on the heels of their expulsion from the King's Cup for fielding an ineligible player.

Benitez, who took over from Carlo Ancelotti after the Italian was sacked at the end of last season, has been blamed by the fans for Real's woes and was roundly whistled before Tuesday's Champions League game at home to Malmo.

Some players also seem unimpressed with Benitez, dressing room heavyweights Cristiano Ronaldo and Toni Kroos saying in interviews published this week how much they miss Ancelotti.

Benitez had little to offer in the way of explanations after Sunday's defeat.

"These are things that sometimes happen," the former Valencia, Liverpool, Chelsea, Inter Milan and Napoli manager told a news conference.

"We were not good in the first half and in the second we lacked precision," he added.

"To fight for the league title you have to win a lot of matches and one like today's is where we have to be strong."

Benitez has struggled to shed a reputation as a defensive coach since returning to Real, where he cut his coaching teeth in the youth academy, and it was noted at his post-match news conference that the team has scored 23 fewer goals in La Liga after 15 matches than at the same stage last term. "The team is the one that has the most shots," he told reporters. "The explanation has to do with efficiency and that's something we have to work on."

Following their expulsion from the Cup and barring a last-minute reprieve, Real have a week off before they host city rivals Rayo Vallecano in La Liga next Sunday.

Their final match of 2015 is at home to Real Sociedad, also in the domestic league.