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Karim Benzema put in a brilliant performance and scored two goals in a 4-2 win for 10-man Real Madrid against Espanyol in the Spanish league on Sunday.

The French striker opened the scoring only four minutes into the match in Barcelona and also provided several smart passes for his teammates that went close to producing more goals.

Benzema's brace took his team-leading tally to 15 goals this season, as he fills in the void left by Cristiano Ronaldo's departure.

Benzema said that he is "possibly" playing his best soccer since he arrived at Madrid 10 years ago.

"I always want to show many things in every match, and help my team win, but it is true that I have lots of confidence right now," said Benzema, who played with a bandaged right hand after fracturing a finger two weeks ago.

A third straight league win kept Santiago Solari's team in third place and 10 points behind leader Barcelona.

"(Benzema) always has well-rounded matches, but today he happened to also score, and score beautiful goals at that," Solari said. "This just confirms what he has been doing all season long and for most of his career."

Madrid finished without both starting centerbacks. Sergio Ramos picked up a knock that led to his substitution at halftime, while Raphael Varane saw a direct red for fouling Pablo Piatti with only the goalkeeper to beat in the 72nd with Madrid 4-1 ahead.

Benzema got Madrid going when he put in the rebound of a save by goalkeeper Diego Lopez, who had parried Luka Modric's strike after Espanyol's defense backpedaled as the midfielder dribbled into the area.

Ramos doubled the visitors' advantage with a header in the 15th. Espanyol's defense was again to blame as he left Ramos unmarked for Modric to find him with a cross.

Leo Baptistao pulled one back for the hosts by firing a loose ball over Thibaut Courtois.

But Benzema restored the cushion in first-half stoppage time when his pass meant for Vinicius Junior was knocked back into his path, where he stroked a low shot around Lopez.

Gareth Bale completed the scoring for Madrid three minutes after going on in the 64th.

Roberto Rosales then expertly controlled a long ball with his chest before beating Thibaut to score Espanyol's second goal.

- AP