

## EUROPEAN SCENE

### Football

AFP, Paris

A three-goal blitz in four second-half minutes gave Inter Milan a 3-1 win at home to Piacenza on Sunday and saw them draw level on 48 points with Juventus at the top of the Italian league.

Real Sociedad responded to the pressure exerted by championship rivals Real Madrid and beat Osasuna 2-0 to return to the top of the Spanish First Division, also on Sunday.

In other action in France and Germany, weekend wins for leaders Marseille and Bayern Munich left them with a two-point and a 10-point cushion respectively at the top of their tables.

#### Serie A

After being frustrated in a sterile first half, Gabriel Batistuta broke the deadlock with his first goal in an Inter shirt 19 minutes after the interval.

The Argentine striker, on loan from AS Roma until the end of the season, stuck out a foot to divert Frenchman Stephane Dalmat's wayward strike past Piacenza goalkeeper Paolo Orlandoni.

A minute later Christian Vieri drilled a low right-foot shot into the bottom corner to double Inter's lead, before the injury-prone Italian international took his tally for the season to 21 by sliding home Batistuta's cut-back.

Veteran striker Dario Hubner scored a late consolation goal for the visitors who are third from bottom of the table.

Inter coach Hector Cuper was delighted to return to winning ways after consecutive defeats at Chievo last weekend and to Barcelona in midweek. Spain in the Champions League.

"The victory was down to the team's spirit and was an important win for us," Cuper said.

"It was understandable that we were a little nervous after the last two results.

"The match was difficult from a psychological point of view, but we played a patient game and were able to take advantage of a couple of errors."



PHOTO: INTERNET

A delighted Gabriel Batistuta after his first goal for Inter Milan since joining on loan during the match against Piacenza at Milan on February 23.

#### TOP SIX

Italian football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Juventus	22	14	6	2	41	16	48
Inter Milan	22	15	3	4	46	23	48
AC Milan	21	13	4	4	38	16	43
Lazio	22	10	10	2	37	21	40
Chievo	22	11	4	7	31	21	37
Udinese	22	10	6	6	23	21	36

#### Primera Liga

Real Sociedad put their recent spell of poor form behind them - they had only taken one point from their previous three outings - to regain the league leadership after a 24-hour hiatus following Madrid's 3-1 victory over Valladolid on Saturday.

Sociedad have 47 points from 23 games with the European and world club champions two points in arrears.

Valencia stay in third with the same number of points as Madrid although they have an inferior goal difference, but kept pace with the two teams ahead of them thanks to a 4-0 thrashing of relegation-threatened Rayo Vallecano.

Relieved Real Sociedad coach Raynald Denoueix acknowledged that it was a far from perfect performance from his team but was glad that they had rediscovered their winning ways after going undefeated for the first half of the season.

"There was a delay of nearly three quarters of an hour before we arrived at the game," joked Denoueix about his side's lacklustre first half performance.

"I'm glad we are back on the road and played fairly well. There were times when we didn't do ourselves justice but overall I'm happy with the win," added the Frenchman.

Denoueix denied that he had spent the night fretting about his side having lost the leadership, albeit briefly, to Madrid.

"The only thing I was thinking about was the game against Osasuna. If we got three points, everything else would take care of itself."

#### TOP SIX

Spanish league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against):

Sociedad	23	13	8	2	40	27	47
Real	23	12	9	2	49	24	45
Valencia	23	13	6	4	40	17	45
Deportivo	23	12	6	5	37	25	42
Celta	23	11	4	8	29	21	37
Betis	23	10	6	7	35	34	36

#### Bundesliga

VfB Stuttgart moved up a place into third in the German First Division after a runaway 4-0 win over relegation strugglers Borussia Mönchengladbach on Sunday.

Goals from Kevin Kuranyi in the eighth and 88th minute and efforts from Greek striker Ioannis Amanatidis and Romanian loan Viorel Ganea four minutes from time proved Mönchengladbach's undoing.

Stuttgart leapfrog Schalke 04, who drew 2-2 against Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

Also on Saturday Bayern Munich's relentless march to an 18th Bundesliga title continued unchecked with a 2-0 defeat of Nuremberg to extend the Bavarian giants' advantage over Dortmund to 10 points.

Bayern's first goal came from a Bixente Lizarazu header after 17 minutes following good work from Mehmet Scholl.

Brazilian striker Giovane Elber's left-foot shot just before the hour sealed coach Ottmar Hitzfeld's 100th victory at Bayern.

Crisis club Bayer Leverkusen finally won a match, their comeback-behind-2-1 victory at Hannover 96 lifting them out of the

## MU, Milan very close



AFP, Paris

Wins by Manchester United and AC Milan on Tuesday could see them into the Champions League quarter-finals as the world's most prestigious club competition enters the home straight.

United and Milan could become the first two pieces of the jigsaw if they win their fourth straight second phase games though both have away fixtures in return matches from last week.

Juventus, who lost 2-1 at Old Trafford on Wednesday, host United this time and though illness and injury robbed them of many top stars, some of them should be back.

Coach Marcello Lippi may still not have Alessandro del Piero, but he has a long-stranding thigh injury, but he is hopeful of having more of his squad available this week following flu.

"I was proud of the way we played in Manchester, considering we were hit badly by the flu," Lippi said.

"If we can get several of our players back and play with the same kind of spirit we showed in Manchester, we can definitely take something from the match."

Lippi's team beat Como 3-1 in the Italian League on Saturday though they were without flu victims Gianluigi Buffon, Edgar Davids, Gianluca Zambrotta, and France's Lilian Thuram, plus striker David Trzeguet was rested though he featured on the bench. United boss Alex Ferguson has problems in his defensive line-up. Central defender Wes Brown played the whole game in United's 1-1 draw against Bolton at the weekend but is suffering from a pulled hamstring.

Fullback Mikael Silvestre injured his ankle against Juventus in midweek, did not play against Bolton and is a further selection headache for Ferguson. And Paul Scholes has a groin strain.

United lie five points behind Premiership leaders Arsenal and Ferguson admitted they were fortunate to get a draw at Bolton. "We managed to dig something out of an impossible situation," said Ferguson.

"We probably didn't deserve a point but we got it. It's well proven that the players find something extra when they need it."

In the other Group D game, Deportivo La Coruna host Switzerland's Basel in a revenge fixture after losing 1-0 last week, described by Basel coach Christian Gross as the best result in the club's history.

Real Madrid travel to Germany to face Borussia Dortmund in Group C having beaten them 2-1 last Wednesday.

#### bottom three.

This was new coach Thomas Horster's first win since taking over from sacked Klaus Toppmoller.

Sunday's second game between Hertha Berlin and Arminia Bielefeld ended in a goalless draw.

#### TOP SIX

German football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against):

Bayern	22	15	5	2	47	15	50
Dortmund	22	11	7	4	37	19	40
Stuttgart	22	11	6	5	37	26	39
Shalke	22	9	9	4	31	23	36
Bremen	22	10	4	8	37	34	34
Berlin	22	9	6	7	28	25	33

#### Ligue 1

French league leaders Marseille threw down the gauntlet to second-placed Monaco when they beat Lille 2-0 in the Stade Velodrome on Saturday.

Marseille opened up a five-point lead over their Principality rivals though Didier Deschamps' side reduced that back to two points with a 3-1 victory at home to Auxerre on Sunday.

#### TOP SIX

French league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Marseille	28	15	6	7	32	23	51
Monaco	28	13	10	5	43	22	49
Lyon	28	12	9	7	47	33	45
Nice	28	11	11	6	32	22	44
Sochaux	27	12	8	7	29	22	44
Bordeaux	27	12	7	8	38	28	43

## Premiership Liverpool's Birmingham blues

### Football

AFP, Birmingham

Liverpool's hopes of clinching a Champions League place were rocked on Sunday when they were beaten 2-1 by a Birmingham City side fighting for their Premiership lives.

A goal in each half from Stephen Clemence and Clinton Morrison proved enough for Birmingham despite Michael Owen's appearance from the substitute bench to score a 77th minute goal which gave Liverpool some hope.

But Birmingham, reinforced by transfer window signings, proved too much for Gerard Houllier's struggling side who must look to next Sunday's League Cup final and the UEFA Cup to salvage their season.

While Liverpool are stuck in seventh place, two points behind Charlton, Birmingham jump over Bolton and are now six points clear of the relegation places.

Birmingham manager Steve Bruce said: "We deserved it, it gives everyone a belief, if we keep playing like that we'll be OK. We wanted it badly."

The combative Welsh midfielder Robbie Savage, whose performance did so much to unsettle Liverpool, reckoned Birmingham had taken a decisive stride towards Premiership survival.

"It was a massive win for us. We're looking at two to three more wins to be safe," said Savage. "I think 35 points will be enough."

With Owen dropped to the bench - Houllier said it was to rest him before the Cup matches this week - Liverpool began the match at St Andrew's with Milan Baros and Emile Heskey in attack.

Savage's bustling approach

angered Salif Diao and then Jamie Carragher in the opening stages.

Liverpool strongly appealed for a penalty when Clemence's tackle prevented Danny Murphy from shooting in the Blues penalty area after he had been set up by Heskey, but the referee waved play on.

Houllier believed a penalty should have been awarded.

"Danny was about to shoot and the lad just flung his leg in the way," he said.

"But what lost us the game was their second goal... We had other chances but we did not take them and that sums up our season at the moment."

Asked about Owen, the Frenchman said starting him on the bench was "because we have a

#### TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	28	18	6	4	62	30	60
Man Utd	28	16	7	5	45	26	55
Newcastle	27	16	4	7	45	32	52
Chelsea	28	13	9	6	49	29	48
Everton	28	14	6	8	37	33	48
Charlton	28	13	6	9	39	34	45

UEFA Cup game on Thursday (against Auxerre) and the League Cup final on Sunday."

Birmingham took the lead with a rare goal from Liverpool-born Clemence, only the fourth of his career.

Diao's foul on Australian international Stan Lazaridis produced a free kick which Savage floated in to the Liverpool penalty area where Clemence outjumped the far taller Carragher to glance the ball past Jerzy Dudek.

Directly from the restart, Murphy shot narrowly wide. Birmingham's decisive second goal was the result of a break led by

Vicente Del Bosque's galaxy of stars are still without Fernando Hierro in defence though Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo, rested and suspended respectively for the 3-1 win over Valladolid in the Spanish league on Saturday, are set to come back.

Meanwhile reports say the 2002 European footballer of the year and FIFA world player of the year Ronaldo is causing tension among the Madrid squad for what is perceived as unprofessionalism.

Overweight and often work-shy during games, he might then pop up and score a fabulous goal but his moments of brilliance have allegedly not been able to cancel out behind-the-scenes bitterness that he is not really passionate about playing for Madrid. Ronaldo was taken off in the second half against Dortmund last Wednesday having scored what proved to be their winning goal but his reception on leaving the pitch had more jeers than cheers.

Ronaldo may only be 26, but having won world titles with club and country last year, has often been described in the Spanish press as a man who has done it all and has little motivation to work hard for Real.

Russian champions Lokomotiv Moscow enter their Group C clash with AC Milan still without competitive match practice as the Russian league does not start till March 15.

Milan look set to be without key defender Alessandro Nesta who is suffering from a fever, a fate which has also befallen second-choice goalkeeper Christian Abbiati.

Muscular ailments have also dealt problems for Andrei Shevchenko of the Ukraine, Massimo Ambrosini, Denmark's Thomas Helveg, Argentinian Juan Antonio Chamot and Roque Junior of Brazil.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti will have to put his thinking cap on for his team line-up depending on who has recovered in time to make the Moscow trip.

#### FIXTURES

Champions League second phase:

#### TUESDAY

**Group C**  
At Dortmund  
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) v Real Madrid (Spa)  
At Moscow  
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) v AC Milan (Ita)

**Group D**  
At La Coruna  
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) v Basel (Swi)  
At Turin  
Juventus (Ita) v Manchester United (Eng)

## Religious rally

FROM PAGE 16  
Zimbabwe," he told the Johannesburg Star.

"In Zimbabwe, we are suffering. They (the Australians) are not suffering, so perhaps this doesn't affect them."

"Politics is about life, just as cricket is."

England forfeited their February 13 match to Zimbabwe in Harare due to moral and security concerns.

## Imran's money

FROM PAGE 16  
"I'm sure with Sachin on a high, the rest of the Indian batsmen will follow suit soon and join him in the free run-scoring," Imran wrote.

Both India and England have three wins from four games in Pool A that includes defending champions Australia, Pakistan and Zimbabwe, besides minnows Namibia and the Netherlands.

## Windies bemoan

FROM PAGE 16  
The West Indies still have fast bowlers but the Rolls Royce of former years appears to have been traded in for an old banger.

## Hooper unhappy

FROM PAGE 16  
bat.

"A lot of credit must be given to him for the way he played today."

West Indies, who have climbed to second place behind Sri Lanka in the Pool B standings, take on Kenya and Sri Lanka in their final pool matches and Hooper is looking for further improvement.

"We definitely have some work to do in a few areas of our game," he said. "May be it was a good workout for us today but we have to learn to adapt better in certain situations."

"Our part-timer bowlers brought us back into the game pretty well but, in general, we have to be a lot more accurate with the ball - we have to pitch five or six balls in the right areas (each over)."

## Bad boys asked

FROM PAGE 16  
"The incident was disappointing and pretty disruptive at this stage of the campaign," said Crowe as the squad headed for Kimberley where the face Bangladesh on Wednesday.

It will be their first match in ten days after they decided to boycott their game in Kenya because of security fears.

Skipper Stephen Fleming, one of the players in the club at the time of the trouble, refused to discuss the incident but said the team needed to work hard and with the shadow of the Durban scuffle hanging over them, he said it wasn't ideal for their momentum.

"It's disappointing we couldn't have played the game with South Africa a few days later, because now is like starting the season again," Fleming said.

"While we're doing lot of nets and a lot of physical work, the intensity we created was building into something really good. We have to recreate that."

## Rested NZ raring

FROM PAGE 16  
The high spots have included victory in the ICC Trophy against India in 2000 and knocking Australia out of a triangular series last year.

But as a batsman, the statistics do not immediately inspire.

An average of 31.19 may not worry the Sachin Tendulkars or Brian Laras of world cricket, nor would he admit he has his repertoire of shots.

But as the Kiwi opener he bears the brunt of the world's best bowling attacks, and four centuries and 33 half-centuries prove he is no slouch.

## James sings Shane song



AFP, Melbourne

Australian Cricket Board (ACB) chief executive James Sutherland has come to Shane Warne's defence, saying the champion leg-spinner is not a drugs cheat.

As Warne and his advisers kept the cricket world guessing on Monday as to whether he would appeal his 12-month drugs ban, he won an ally in Sutherland.

Sutherland said evidence at Warne's hearing into testing positive to two banned diuretics proved he was not a drugs cheat.

"It is one thing to have banned substances in a sample. It is another thing to be a drug cheat," Sutherland told Australian Associated Press from South Africa on Monday.

"The evidence that came through in the hearing confirmed my thoughts that Shane Warne is not a drug cheat."

"A lot of mud will stick for this in that if you are found guilty of a doping offence a lot of people will say you are a drug cheat."

"But I think that's unfortunate if that happens. I think we all know and understand some people may regard it as that but they won't understand the facts - the facts coming into the hearing and the evidence at the hearing confirmed my theory."

The ACB is set to release the findings of Warne's drugs hearing in full this week regardless of whether he appeals.

## Not even behind the microphone

AFP, Sydney

Banned Shane Warne won't be making a return to the cricket World Cup in southern Africa via a television commentary team, Australia's Nine Network said on Monday.

A Nine spokesman said no decision had been made about Warne's future at the network in the wake of his ban.

"Certainly he wouldn't be commenting on the World Cup," he said.

"We are only taking the host broadcaster's coverage and we have four commentators working as part of the pool team for the whole event, so he would not be involved in that."

"As to whether in the current domestic season or the next twelve months, there's really been no decision made and it hasn't been discussed."

Australian Cricket Board (ACB) chief executive James Sutherland said on Monday he was not sure whether Warne, an ACB employee, would be allowed to commentate while suspended.

"That is part of the challenge for us. If Australian cricket wants Shane Warne to be part of its future in some ways we need to help him prepare for the future," Sutherland told Australian Associated Press on Monday.

"At the same time he has breached policy. We will have a bit of think about it and we have time to do that."

"We will work through it separately from Shane and then with Shane later on."

"If it's something the commentary team wanted to talk to us about we would discuss it."

The Nine Network's cricket commentary team is stacked with ex-cricketers - Richie Benaud, Ian Chappell, Bill Lawry, Tony Greig, Mark Taylor and Ian Healy.

ACB spokesman Peter Young said the board was reconsidering its decision to hold back publication of the anti-doping committee's full judgement after talking with the body which would hear any possible appeal.

The ACB had been waiting until Warne had appealed or decided against appealing to the National Sports Disputes Centre, saying it wanted to ensure Warne's rights to a fair hearing weren't compromised.

"We're progressively coming to the view after having spoken to the National Sports Disputes Centre that it is possible to publish it without jeopardising the appeal process," Young said.

"There are some mechanical issues to work through, but we do plan to publish it as soon as we can."

"When we do publish it, we will do so with full transparency."

Warne, who was replaced on Monday in Australia's World Cup squad by Queensland spinner Nathan Hauritz, has until Saturday to lodge an appeal.

But the chances of Warne fighting the ban lessened on Monday, with Warne saying he had to think seriously about the consequences of an appeal.

"Do I want to go through all this again and put my mum, wife, kids and the rest of my family through another couple of weeks of heart-ache, anticipation and anxiety?" he wrote in Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper.

"This is something I am giving a lot of thought to because I have seven days to decide."

## Warne report soon

AFP, Melbourne

The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) said on Monday it was to publish this week the findings of Shane Warne's drugs hearing regardless