



Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo (L) trying to get the better of Barcelona's Dutch veteran Frank de Boer (R) at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium of Madrid on April 19.

Primera Liga

Draw doesn't suit Real

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid hung onto their place at the top of the Spanish first division after a scrappy 1-1 draw with bitter rivals Barcelona on Saturday as the title race was thrown wide open.

After having a six point lead two weeks ago, Real's advantage, which diminished with their 4-2 defeat at Real Sociedad a week ago, could be down to just one point by the end of Sunday night.

Real have 61 points from their 30 games with Deportivo La Coruna and Real Sociedad four points adrift in second and third respectively but the chasing pair both play on Sunday. Deportivo are at home to Sevilla while Real Sociedad play host to bottom club Rayo Vallecano.

Real took the initiative against their Catalan visitors when Ronaldo got their opening goal after 15 minutes.

French midfielder Claude Makelele chipped the ball towards the box and Raul headed on to leave the Brazilian World Cup winner with only Barcelona goalie Roberto Bonano to beat from close range.

Ronaldo rarely fails in such a situation and didn't falter on this occasion, getting his 16th goal of the season.

Barcelona fought back quickly and Luis Enrique scored against his old club after 31 minutes to silence the noisy, partisan 75,000-capacity crowd.

Luis Enrique has turned into a hate figure for the Bernabeu faithful ever since he moved across the country to Barca in 1996 after five years at Real.

The former Spanish international, who retired from international football after last summer's World Cup, was greeted with abuse whenever he touched the ball.

However, in front of goal, he held his nerve and scrambled the ball into the net after Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas had parried away a Patrick Kluijert header.

Five players were shown yellow cards during a fractious first half although, surprisingly, no names were added to the book of referee Cesar Muniz during or after a 21-man melee in which punches were thrown following an incident in which Zinedine Zidane appeared to kick a fallen Carles Puyol in the face.

Another six yellow cards were brandished during a scrappy second half which failed to sparkle until the dying minutes as each side looked for a chink in their opponents' armour.

Real nearly got a winner ten minutes from time when Ronaldo headed against the crossbar but had to endure the final three minutes with just ten men after right back Michel Salgado got his second yellow card.

Barca had little answer for Salgado's speed down the right wing for much of the game but his endeavour was often in vain.

Valladolid ended their five game streak without a win and put their

relegation worries behind them, at least temporarily, with a 1-0 victory over Valencia earlier on Saturday.

The defeat puts Valencia's place in the positions for next season's Champions League in peril and the reigning Spanish champions could drop out of the top four if Celta Vigo win at struggling Osasuna on Sunday.

Antonio Lopez stabbed home the only goal of the game 15 minutes from the end to leave Valencia coach Rafa Benitez to grimly reflect - "they made the most of their only chance of the game."

Villarreal and Real Mallorca fought out a 1-1 draw in a downpour, a result which will have kept both sides in the middle of the table and eased worries that they will become involved in an end-of-season dogfight against relegation.

The home side started the better and Argentine international Martin Palermo put behind him his recent spell of poor form to head home a cross from Belletti after 23 minutes.

Mallorca's Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o equalised against the run of play three minutes before half time.

TOP SIX							
Spanish football league table on Saturday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Real	30	17	10	3	67	32	61
Deportivo	29	17	6	6	49	32	57
Sociedad	29	16	9	4	52	38	57
Valencia	30	14	8	8	43	24	50
Celta	29	14	6	9	34	24	48
Sevilla	29	11	9	9	27	22	42

Serie A  
Juve cross major hurdle

Football

AFP, Rome

Italian champions Juventus took a step closer to retaining their title after defeating AS Roma 2-1 at a rain-soaked Delle Alpi stadium on Saturday.

All the goals came in a blistering 13 minute spell in an otherwise dreary match.

Alessandro Del Piero's penalty on the half hour mark gave the title-holders the lead, before the Italy international doubled his tally by rounding off a flowing move with his 14th goal of the season.

Roma gave themselves hope when in-form striker Vincenzo Montella halved the deficit just before the break, but the home side held on for a crucial win as they attempt to land a 27th Scudetto.

Defences were firmly on top in an evenly-balanced second-half in which neither side produced a clear-cut chance.

The victory saw Juventus restore their six point lead at the top of the table with just five games of the season left.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said victory was even sweeter as it came against a team who he believes have greatly underachieved.

"A win against Roma is very satisfying as they are such a strong, determined team," he said.

"By their standards they have had a bad season and should be higher up the table."

"They were in the match until the very end and made us work very hard for the points."

Roma coach Fabio Capello was his side not far behind Juventus in terms of quality, despite trailing them by 25 points in Serie A.

"We showed real courage and proved that there's no big difference between us and them, despite what the

table says," Capello said.

The game sparked into life in the 30th minute when Juventus were awarded a penalty.

Marco Di Vaio layed a neat pass off to Pavel Nedved, whose run into the penalty box was abruptly halted by Leandro Cuffre's knee.

Referee Emilion Pellegrino had no hesitation in pointing to the spot and Del Piero drilled the ball into the centre of the goal from 12 yards.

Worse was to follow for Roma when Del Piero found the target from open play for the Turin club.

Nedved's teasing right wing cross was missed by everyone except Del Piero, who arrived at the back post to drive home from close-range past Ivan Pelizzoli.

The game appeared to be over for Roma until Montella gave the visitors a lifeline two minutes before half-time.

A mix-up between Lilian Thuram and Nedved handed Francesco Totti possession, and the Roma captain cut the ball back for Montella to rifle past Gianluigi Buffon from 10 yards.

Earlier Saturday Juventus' closest rivals enjoyed mixed fortunes. The dismissals of Cristiano Zanetti and Christian Vieri to sneak a last-gasp 1-0 at Brescia and saw them leapfrog city rivals AC Milan, whose own title hopes appear to be extinguished after they lost by the same score at home to Empoli.

Inter's away victory, secured by Heran Crespo's 93rd minute goal, lifted them up to second on 58 points, six adrift of Juve.

Milan remain third on 55 points, but appear to be out of contention for the championship after slipping up against the tigerish Tuscans.

Inter coach Hector Cuper breathed a sigh of relief as Crespo's close-range strike ended Brescia's 16-match unbeaten run.

"Hope is the last thing to die," said the Argentinian.

"This team has plenty of determination and they never gave in. It was a massive win for us."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti refused to concede the title after his team's first home defeat of the season, but admitted the battle was almost lost.

"It's a massive blow, and now the situation is difficult," he said.

"We will have to win all our remaining games and see what happens."

"We paid for our poor attitude in the first-half. We had chances to get ourselves back in the game, but couldn't put any of them away."

Empoli eased their relegation fears by stunning Milan at the San Siro, where Antonio Di Natale scored the winning goal in the 11th minute.

Lazio held on to fourth place after coming from behind to beat Piacenza, who look set for the drop after losing for the 18th time this season.

Bernardo Corradi scored the winner for Lazio on the hour mark after Simone Inzaghi had cancelled out Giro De Cesare's opener.

Chievo remain fifth after edging Calabrian strugglers Reggina 2-1, while sixth-placed Parma needed an Adrian Mutu penalty to shake off strugglers Torino 1-0.

Giuseppe Sculli scored an 87th minute winner for Modena, 3-2 winners at home to Bologna, while Como edged further towards Serie B after going down by the same score at Udinese.

In the day's other match Perugia defeated Atalanta 1-0.

TOP SIX							
Italian football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Juventus	29	19	7	3	55	21	64
Inter	29	18	4	7	57	33	58
Milan	29	16	7	6	47	22	55
Lazio	29	13	13	3	50	28	52
Parma	29	13	9	7	48	31	48
Chievo	29	14	5	10	40	31	47



Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero (L) is over the moon after scoring against AS Roma at Turin's Stadio delle Alpi on April 19.



Ruud van Nistleroy, the Manchester United ace, watches his attempt enter the past a diving Blackburn goalkeeper Brad Friedel at Old Trafford on April 19.

Premiership  
Title race on knife's edge

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United and Arsenal's Premiership title race edged closer to a photo finish on Saturday as the two rivals followed up their midweek draw with wins over Blackburn and Middlesbrough.

At the bottom, a trademark piece of magic by Jay Jay Okocha was enough to give Bolton a win over West Ham that leaves the Hammers facing the drop and also condemned West Brom to first division football, despite their win at Sunderland.

Paul Scholes took his United goal tally to 100 with a double after Henning Berg had cancelled out Ruud van Nistleroy's 38th goal of the season.

Things might have been very different however if Ricardo, a second half substitute for the injured Fabien Barthez, had not saved a penalty from David Dunn that would have put Blackburn level early in the second period.

Middlesbrough rarely put Arsenal under any kind of pressure but they might have had a major say in the destiny of the title if Malcolm Christie had not sent a free header wide of the upright with what was their first attack of the match midway through the first half.

Having survived that let-off, Arsenal gradually began to take control and their dominance finally yielded a goal three minutes after the break, when Sylvain Wiltord fired home from close range.

Thierry Henry then curled in a free-kick eight minutes from time to ensure there was no nervous finale for the Gunners' fans.

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger said the win had tilted the title race in his side's favour.

"It looks like both teams have to win every game now. I would say that coming out of the game on Wednesday the momentum was with Manchester United a little but I think we levelled it today."

"Now it will be down to the team that

doesn't slip up."

His opposite number Sir Alex Ferguson admitted that he would have liked to see his side score more goals and make up the one goal advantage Arsenal enjoy in terms of goal difference.

"We had some great opportunities, although their goalkeeper made two or three magnificent saves and we also had one shot blocked on the line," Ferguson said.

"I suppose one way we have gained on Arsenal is by scoring the extra goal, which edges us a little bit closer but it looks like it is turning into a really close one and probably won't be settled until the final day."

Okocha's 38th-minute winner for Bolton showed exactly why the Nigerian playmaker has been dubbed 'the Magician' by the club's fans.

Picking up a loose ball 15 yards inside his own half, he was allowed to run to within 25 yards of the West Ham goal before unleashing a superb strike into the top corner to secure three points that leave Bolton six points clear of their opponents with just four games left.

Danny Murphy reignited Liverpool's challenge for a Champions League place with a 25-yard drive that secured a 2-1 victory in the Merseyside derby against Everton, who finished the match with nine men after both David Weir and Gary Naysmith were sent off.

Michael Owen had put Liverpool ahead with a superb solo effort. Cutting in from near the left touchline, the England striker skipped past Joseph Yobo and advanced into the box before driving low and hard past Richard Wright.

David Unsworth equalised for Everton with a 58th-minute penalty after Jamie Carragher had pulled down Naysmith.

But Murphy popped up six minutes later to give Liverpool three points that lifted them

above Everton and to within two points of Chelsea, the side currently occupying the fourth and final qualifying spot for a place among the European elite next season.

With Everton losing, Chelsea could

have opened up a five-point cushion in fourth place but they blew their chance as a Marcus Allback double gave Aston Villa a well-deserved 2-1 win. John Terry scored a late consolation effort for Chelsea.

Like their crosstown rivals Villa, Birmingham also look to have secured their top flight status after a 2-0 win at Charlton courtesy of French World Cup winner Christophe Dugarry's second goal in two matches and a Robbie Savage penalty.

Fulham, who had lost three in a row, stopped the rot with a 2-1 win over Newcastle. Alan Shearer had headed the visitors in front but Fulham took full advantage of Andy Griffin's sending off by claiming victory through two long-range efforts from Sylvain Legwinski and Lee Clark.

Leeds are also still not out of danger after a 3-2 defeat at Southampton.

Brett Ormerod, James Beattie and Anders Svensson put Saints in control before Leeds' misery was compounded by Alan Smith being sent off for a second yellow card offence.

Ironically, Leeds made more of a fight of it with ten men, Harry Kewell and Nick Barmby scoring in the last ten minutes to give the scoreline a more respectable air.

West Brom went down fighting with Scotland midfielder Derek McInnes scoring his first two goals of the season in the space of four minutes shortly before the break to secure a 2-1 win over already-relegated Sunderland.

Marcus Stewart pulled one back for Sunderland 20 minutes from the end but the home side were unable to get the goal they needed to prevent an 11th consecutive defeat.

TOP SIX							
English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Man Utd	35	22	8	5	66	32	74
Arsenal	34	21	8	5	71	36	71
Newcastle	34	19	4	11	58	45	61
Chelsea	34	17	9	8	61	34	60
Liverpool	34	16	10	8	51	36	58
Everton	34	16	8	10	44	40	56

Punching  
Cole!

AFP, Bolton

West Ham captain Joe Cole was embroiled in a post-match punch-up after the defeat at Bolton which leaves the Hammers facing relegation to the first division.

Cole was seen to throw punches in the direction of French defender Bernard Mendy at the end of the match and was followed off the field by police officers seeking to avert any further trouble.

Players from both sides squared up when the match, which Bolton won 1-0, finished in acrimony with Hammers defender Ian Pearce sent off for a reckless challenge on substitute Pierre-Yves Andre.

West Ham manager Glenn Roeder said he could understand why players like Cole had become so frustrated.

Bundesliga  
Amoroso bites  
Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

Marcio Amoroso's second-half penalty earned German champions Borussia Dortmund a 1-0 victory over Bayern Munich in their home Bundesliga clash on Saturday.

Munich still however have an 11-point lead from second-placed VfB Stuttgart, who travel to VfL Bochum on Sunday, with Dortmund a further point in arrears.

In an uneventful match in front of a sell-out crowd of nearly 69,000 spectators at the Westfalenstadion, Amoroso stamped his mark on the game in the 61st minute.

Dortmund's Czech playmaker Tomas Rosicky fired in a cross from the right and Bayern's Niko Kovac leapt higher than Sebastian Kehl but made contact with the ball with his hand to earn Dortmund a penalty.

Amoroso made no mistake, firing past keeper Oliver Kahn into the top left hand corner.

Fourth-placed Hertha Berlin kept up their hopes of Champions League football next season with a 1-0 away victory against Hansa Rostock thanks to

Ligue 1  
Bordeaux on  
fire

AFP, Paris

Pauleta scored a hat-trick for Bordeaux in a vintage 6-1 French league victory at Corsicans Ajaccio on Saturday to keep them firmly on course for Champions League action next season.

Leaders Lyon could only draw 0-0 at home to Lille meaning second-placed Monaco have a chance to reduce the deficit at home to Strasbourg on Sunday.

Pauleta put Bordeaux 1-0 ahead six minutes before the break in the only goal for the first hour of so before an action-packed closing spell.

Bernard Diomede pulled a goal back for the Mediterranean island team in the 60th minute with a superb solo effort after being fed by a long ball.

Just two minutes later, Bordeaux were back in the driving seat when Pauleta, fed by Savio, found himself one-on-one with Ajaccio keeper Stephane Trevison but made no mistake with a side-footed goal.

In the 73rd minute, Savio went one better to get on the scoresheet himself, Camel Meriem firing in the perfect cross for Savio to head home.

A rousing finale was in store for Elie Baup's men as they fired home a further three goals.

First off was Jean-Claude Darcheville who headed home in the 80th minute after good work from Pascal Feindouno and Pauleta. Three minutes later, a terrible back pass by Yohan Demont allowed Pauleta to intercept and score an easy goal.

With just a minute to go, Meriem completed the route after pouncing when Trevison failed to hold a freekick from Darcheville.

Lyon are three points ahead of Monaco, who will earn top spot on goal difference if they beat Strasbourg on Sunday, and four in front of Bordeaux, who in turn find themselves a point ahead of Marseille who travel north to Lens on Sunday.

Other results on Saturday: Bastia 1 (Maurice 68) Montpellier 2 (Robert 11, Doumeng 78); Nantes 1 (Gillet 49) Paris Saint Germain 1 (Toure 66); Rennes 2 (Delage 24, Arribage 55) Nice 2 (Bigne 16, Mionnet 68); Sedan 4 (H. Camara 55, 65, 72, Asuar 67) Troyes 0; Sochaux 0 Guingamp 0

TOP SIX							
French football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Lyon	34	17	10	7	56	36	61
Monaco	33	16	10	7	53	27	58
Bordeaux	34	16	9	9	52	34	57
Marseille	33	16	8	9	34	29	56
Sochaux	34	14	12	8	37	28	54
Auxerre	34	15	9	10	33	28	54



YOU MIGHT AS WELL TAKE EVERYTHING! Bayern Munich custodian Oliver Kahn (R) exchanging his jersey with Dortmund's hero of the night Marcio Amoroso at Dortmund's Westfalenstadion on April 19.