

## Kaiser salutes Real

AFP, Munich

Former Bayern Munich and Germany great Franz Beckenbauer said Thursday Real Madrid were in a class of their own.

"No team can match Real Madrid," said Beckenbauer who won three European Cups with Bayern and the World Cup as a player and coach with West Germany.

"They're out on their own," he said of Real's performance in Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final with Manchester United.

Brazil World Cup star Ronaldo scored a hat-trick for Real who lost 4-3 but qualified 6-5 on aggregate.

"The match was formidable, dramatic. Real controlled their opponents. They scored, slowed the game down then upped the tempo. I've never seen a team these last few years control the change of rhythm as Real did."

Real are on course for a 10th European Cup. They play Juventus in the semi-finals in May.

Beckenbauer said United manager Alex Ferguson had blundered by starting the match without David Beckham.

"Beckham was the best player and most efficient in the 25 minutes he played," he said.

## Season over for Xavi

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona's Spanish international midfielder Xavi Hernandez will miss the rest of the season due to a chronic dislocated shoulder, club medical officials confirmed on Saturday.

Xavi dislocated his right shoulder late in Tuesday's European Champions League defeat by Juventus after scoring Barca's goal in the 2-1 loss which saw them depart from the competition 3-2 on aggregate.

Club medical staff said that Xavi will be operated on next week.

It is the second time this season that Xavi has dislocated his right shoulder, the first occasion was against Espanyol on February 16. His



XAVI HERNANDEZ

injury will be a blow for both club and country.

Barcelona are currently 12th in the Spanish first division and facing finishing in the second half of the table for the first time since 1942.

However the congested mid-table means that they are also only five points away from sixth place, which would see them into next season's UEFA Cup.

Spanish national coach Inaki Saez had named Xavi, who played for Spain at last summer's World Cup, in his squad to face Ecuador in a friendly on Wednesday but has yet to choose a replacement.

The 23-year-old player, who has been capped 14 times by Spain, is also expected to miss the forthcoming European Championship qualifiers against Greece and Northern Ireland in June.



PHOTO: AFP  
WAS HE LOOKING FOR A SOUVENIR? Bayern Munich's Brazilian star Giovane Elber (R) tries and a security personnel (L) try to hold off a fan who snatched Elber's shorts after Bayern secured their German soccer championship title Wolfsburg on April 26.

## Primera Liga

# Party poopers Osasuna

AFP, Madrid

Osasuna had clearly not read the script of Atletico Madrid's centenary celebrations as the visitors from Pamplona won 1-0 on Saturday for only their second away victory of the season.

Ivan Rosado scored the only goal of a scrappy game - which saw 11 bookings and Osasuna's Cesar Cruchaga sent off 20 minutes from time - which did little justice to the occasion, two minutes before the break.

Rosado latched on to a loose ball after Christian Manfredini's shot from an acute angle could only be parried away by Atletico's reserve goalkeeper Juanma Barrero.

Atletico had only themselves to blame for not being able to enjoy their centenary more.

There was some woeful finishing by Javi Moreno and Jose Mari Romero and instead of the expected cheers, the hosts left the field with jeers ringing in their ears.

After the game, the Vicente Calderon stadium was lit up as hundreds of fireworks shot into the night sky above the Spanish capital.

However there were probably fireworks of equal ferocity in the Atletico dressing room as coach Luis Aragones - who is known for his fiery temperament - investigated why his team have now gone six games without a win.

Despite the defeat Atletico still have a slim chance of qualifying for the UEFA Cup next season, where they could be accompanied by the club that inspired their formation.

Athletic Bilbao - whose Madrid-based supporters created Atletico, hence the similarity in names and club colours - kept alive their own hopes of a place in Europe next season with a 3-1 win over Real Betis on Saturday, all the

goals coming in the first half.

The visitors from Seville went ahead after 26 minutes when Fernando Fernandez headed home from a Joaquin Sanchez corner but the Basques wasted little time getting back on equal terms.

Four minutes later, an Ismael Urzaiz header hit the post but Joseba Etxeberria was on hand to stab in the equaliser.

Urzaiz then put Athletic into the lead with an on-target header five minutes before the break, with Santi Ezquerro adding to the tally on the stroke of half time to extend Athletic's unbeaten streak to four games.

## Premiership

# A Red-letter Day

AFP, London

Arsenal missed the chance to regain top spot in the English Premiership after a 2-2 draw away to relegation-threatened Bolton at the Reebok Stadium on Saturday.

Reigning champions Arsenal let slip a two-goal lead and ended the day two points behind leaders Manchester United, who play Tottenham on Sunday.

Meanwhile Liverpool strengthened their bid for a Champions League place with four goals from Michael Owen including his 100th in the Premiership in the backbone of a 6-0 win over already-relegated West Brom.

For Bolton, who had on-loan midfielder Florent Laville sent-off in the 90th minute for a second bookable offence, the result took them five points clear of West Ham, who occupy the last vacant relegation spot.

All the goals came in the second half with France duo Sylvain Wiltord and Robert Pires firing the Gunners into a 2-0 lead in the 56th minute.

But Bolton responded through Youri

Djorkaeff's chip over David Seaman and six minutes from time the France midfielder's free-kick saw Martin Keown head into his own net.

In the race for Champions League places Chelsea, who started the day in third, lost ground to both Newcastle and Liverpool, following a 1-1 draw with west London rivals Fulham.

The result saw Chelsea slip to fourth following Newcastle's 1-0 win over relegated north-east rivals Sunderland - the Black Cats suffering a club record 13th straight defeat.

An Alain Goma own-goal gave Chelsea the lead before Fulham levelled through Luis Boa Morte in the 66th minute to take the Cottagers closer towards safety on 42 points.

**Liverpool's thrashing over demoted West Brom - a match where England striker Michael Owen score four goals including his 100th in the Premiership, put them level on points with Chelsea but behind on goal difference.**

Owen started the scoring with a low, right-foot, 15th minute shot before Liverpool piled on the goals in the second half.

Milan Baros made it 2-0 in the 47th minute following a Steven Gerrard cross and two minutes later it was 3-0 thanks to Owen sniping from the edge of the

six-yard box to bring up his Premier League century.

The fight went out of relegation-bound West Brom with Owen adding two more in the 61st and 67th minutes before Baros got his second six minutes from time.

At the Stadium of Light Newcastle, now third, were indebted to a 43rd-minute Nolberto Solano penalty after Kevin Kilbane brought down Craig Bellamy.

In the day's other matches, Premiership new boys Birmingham leapfrogged Middlesbrough into 12th place with a 3-0 win at St Andrews thanks to France star Christophe Dugarry, Stephen Clemence and Stan Lazaridis.

Leeds missed the chance to put themselves well clear of the relegation zone after losing 3-2 at home to Blackburn after Mark Viduka had given them the lead.

But Blackburn hit back through a David Dunn penalty, Andy Cole and Andy Todd before Alan Smith grabbed a last-minute consolation for Leeds.

And Everton, following last week's defeat by Chelsea, rebounded with a 2-1 win over Aston Villa with 17-year-old England striker Wayne Rooney netting

the winner in the 90th minute.

Marcus Allback opened the scoring for Villa in the 49th minute before Kevin Campbell equalised 10 minutes later.

Charlton, who had not won in their last seven games, stopped the rot in a 2-1 home victory over FA Cup finalists Southampton.

Scott Parker and Kevin Lisbie scored for the Addicks before in-form striker James Beattie pulled one back at the death for the Saints.

On Sunday, West Ham - with Upton Park legend Trevor Brooking in charge for the first time following Glenn Roeder's stroke - travel to Manchester City - a match that pits Brooking against friend and former England colleague turned Maine Road manager Kevin Keegan.

### TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Man United 35 22 8 5 66 32 74
Arsenal 35 21 9 5 73 38 72
Newcastle 36 20 5 11 60 46 65
Chelsea 36 18 10 8 66 36 64
Liverpool 36 18 10 8 59 37 64
Everton 36 17 8 11 47 45 59

## Bundesliga

# Bayern rule Germany

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich were crowned German league champions for the 18th time with four games to go on Saturday following their 2-0 victory at VfL Wolfsburg.

Second-placed VfB Stuttgart could only draw 1-1 with Hansa Rostock and last season's winners Borussia Dortmund drew 0-0 with 1860 Munich meaning neither club could catch the Bavarian side.

Munich meet Kaiserslautern in the German Cup final on May 31 in Berlin for the chance to win the double for the fourth time after 1969, 1986, and 2000.

Bayern's goals came from their South American contingent with Giovane Elber of Brazil netting in the 59th minute and Peruvian Claudio Pizarro making victory sure with seven minutes to go.

Ottmar Hitzfeld's men are now 13 points ahead of Stuttgart and 14 ahead of Dortmund meaning the 2002/03 trophy, affectionately known as "the most ugly salad bowl in the world," is

already set to be displayed by the legendary club.

Hitzfeld said afterwards: "We hadn't really reckoned on winning the title today. We thought we might win but hadn't thought Stuttgart would fail to beat Rostock."

"We are delighted and to have won the title so early is a sensational effort by the team."

And on star midfielder Michael Ballack, who was returning from injury, Hitzfeld added: "It was superb that Ballack was on the pitch and his class spoke for itself."

Ballack himself, who last season with Bayer Leverkusen got three runners-up spots in the German League, German Cup and Champions League, said: "It's great to have won something after a season where I got nothing. We really had a great time today."

"Although we have not done well in the Champions League, we have proven we are a good team with good individual players by being so dominant in the league."

Munich captain Oliver Kahn will receive the trophy on May 17 in front of their home fans in their last match of

the season at the Olympic stadium against Stuttgart.

The success continues for Bayern, made world famous by three consecutive European Cup wins in the 70's with players such as Franz Beckenbauer, Gerd Muller and Sepp Maier.

At the other end of the table, Bayer Leverkusen lost precious points at Borussia Monchengladbach after a late equalizer for 2-2 to remain in the first relegation place at third from bottom.

Monchengladbach, fourth-from-bottom, retained their three-point gap from Leverkusen and also have a better goal difference.

### TOP SIX

German football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):
Bayern 30 20 6 4 61 20 66
Stuttgart 30 15 8 7 48 35 53
Dortmund 30 14 10 6 44 23 52
Berlin 30 15 6 9 45 31 51
Hamburg 30 13 9 8 39 34 48
Schalke 30 11 13 6 43 33 46

## Serie A

# Decisive blow for Milan

AFP, Milan

AC Milan's Serie A title hopes were all but extinguished on Saturday as AS Roma edged their Italian Cup final opponents 2-1 here at the Olympic stadium.

Antonio Cassano gave Roma the lead on the hour mark before Damiano Tommasi's header doubled the home side's advantage.

Danish striker Jon Dahl Tomasson, scorer of Milan's winner in Wednesday's 3-2 Champions League win over Ajax, grabbed a late consolation goal for the visitors, who crashed to their second consecutive defeat after losing to Empoli last week.

Milan, who clinched a place in the last four of the Champions League in mid-week, remain third in the table on 55 points, nine adrift of leaders Juventus, who play their game in hand at home to Brescia on Sunday.

Should Milan qualify for the next season's Champions League via their league position, AS Roma will go into the UEFA Cup, even if they lose the cup to the 'Rossoneri.'

The first-half was instantly forgettable with both defences on top and neither side creating a clear-cut chance.

But the game sprang to life three minutes after the break when Nesta's last-ditch goalline clearance denied

Roma the opening goal.

Tommasi chased Francesco Totti's long ball and muscled his way past Milan defenders Maldini and Kakha Kaladze, before rounding Dida and striking towards the net.

Nesta refused to give up the chase and stretched out a leg which reached the ball just in time to ensure the scores remained level. Roma kept up the pressure and took a deserved lead in the 60th minute.

Cassano, a second-half substitute for Totti, started the move with a superb flick for Emerson to run on to, and the Brazilian midfielder took it past two defenders before running into Dida.

Milan's Brazil international failed to clear the danger and the ball squirmed into the path of Cassano, who slotted home from four yards out.

Tommasi put Roma in the driving seat 14 minutes later by scoring a rare goal, the Italy international heading in Francesco Lima's looping cross.

Roma appeared to be in total control until Tomasson handed Milan a lifeline with a well-placed volley nine minutes from the end, but Roma dug deep to hold on for their eighth home win of the campaign.

Roma's win saw them close the gap on seventh-placed Udinese to just one point.

Earlier Saturday Atalanta moved out of the bottom four but did little to ease their relegation fears after being held to a 2-2 draw by Serie A's bottom club

### 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 30 16 7 7 48 24 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



PHOTO: AFP  
HERO NUMBER OWEN! Liverpool superstar Michael Owen celebrates his 4th goal of the game against West Bromwich Albion on April 26.