



Barcelona's Argentinean striker Javier Saviola is ecstatic after scoring against Real Sociedad at the Camp Nou stadium at Barcelona on April 27.

Primera Liga

Real have all the luck

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid extended their lead to four points at the top of the Spanish first division after winning 3-1 at Sevilla while their nearest challengers Deportivo La Coruna and Real Sociedad both suffered away losses on Sunday. Deportivo went down 3-0 at Real Mallorca, the Galicians worst defeat of the season, while Real Sociedad lost 2-1 at Barcelona. Madrid now has 64 points from their 31 games. Deportivo and Sociedad are second and third respectively on 60 points. The European champions were comfortable winners in Sevilla and easily found their way through their hosts usually robust defence, only suffering a brief period of difficulty towards the end of the first half. "It's always a worry when we return to domestic competition after Champions League success but we didn't lose our concentration," said a relieved Real coach Vicente Del Bosque. Ivan Helguera headed Real into the lead after connecting with a Zinedine Zidane cross after 24 minutes. It was the turn of Sevilla midfielder Francisco Gallardo to use his head six minutes before the break, noddling the ball past Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

However the visitors moved up a gear in the second half and Zidane converted a Jose Maria Gutierrez cross to put Real back in front before Fernando Morientes had an easy tap in for Real's third goal three minutes from the whistle. Deportivo were behind after just three minutes when Mallorca's Cameroon international striker Samuel Eto'o headed the island side ahead. Albert Riera added another for Mallorca 10 minutes later and Eto'o increased Deportivo's misery just after the hour with his second goal of the game. Real Sociedad suffered a similar fate, going two down in 24 minutes at Barcelona to goals from Javier Saviola and Patrick Kluijvert, before staging a late fight back and getting a consolation strike 10 minutes from time thanks to a trademark swerving free kick from Turkish international Nihat Kahveci. Valencia boosted their confidence in the wake of their midweek Champions League departure by beating struggling Alaves 3-0, who drop to next to bottom. "The league is now our Champions League. Every game is important," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez, in one of his calmer moments this week after a succession of outbursts against his own squad and Champions League victors Inter Milan. The reigning Spanish champions

went ahead after 34 minutes when French defender Anthony Revellere, on-loan from Rennes, got his first goal for the club by stabbing home a loose ball from the edge of the area. Francisco Rufete scored 11 minutes after the break and then Pablo Aimar added Valencia's third on 67 minutes, sending the ball between the legs of Alaves' hapless goalkeeper Richard Dutruel. The victory means that Valencia leapfrog over Celta Vigo, who could only draw 0-0 with Valladolid, into fourth place and back into contention for a Champions League place next season. Recreativo Huelva edged out of the relegation zone with an emphatic 5-0 victory over Villarreal, who ended the game with just nine men. Raul Molina opened the scoring from the penalty spot after Javi Garcia had been hacked down by Rodolfo Arribas, for which the Villarreal defender was shown the red card. Bizarrely, it was the first league goal to be scored at Recreativo's north end this season. Villarreal's Brazilian defender Belletti then got his marching orders four minutes before half time. Recreativo made their two-man advantage tell in the second half with Emilio Viqueira getting goals after 46 and 73 minutes, the latter a thunderbolt from 40 metres.

Mariano Pernia and Quique Romero then got a goal each in the last seven minutes. Racing Santander also improved their chances of first division survival with a 2-2 draw at Malaga. Javi Guerrero put Racing ahead just before the hour when his shot squeezed between Malaga goalie Pedro Contreras and the post. Malaga responded with two goals in 10 minutes from their Panamanian striker Dely Valdes before Racing's Mario Regueiro got a late equaliser when he beat a poorly executed offside trap. Espanyol got their best away win for three years, and extended their unbeaten streak to eight games, when they beat bottom club Rayo Vallecano 3-0. Two goals from Savo Milosevic were a prelude to a spectacular effort from 50 metres by Roger Garcia after 56 minutes.

Table titled 'TOP SIX' showing Spanish football league table on Sunday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points). Rows include Real, Deportivo, Sociedad, Valencia, Celta, and Sevilla.



Roberto Baggio (L) of Brescia putting pressure on Juventus Dutch international Edgar Davids at Turin on April 27.

Serie A Juve nearer to championship

Football

AFP, Rome

League leaders Juventus moved a step closer to a 27th Italian title on Sunday after opening up an eight-point gap at the top of Serie A on Sunday with just four matches left to play. Alessandro Del Piero scored both goals as the jaded-looking title-holders dug deep to overcome Brescia 2-1 at the Delle Alpi stadium, while closest rivals Inter Milan were held at home by Lazio. Juventus have 67 points from 30 matches, eight more than second-placed Inter, and 12 more than AC Milan in third. Showing clear signs of fatigue after Tuesday's Champions League win in Barcelona which took them through to the semi-finals along with Inter and Milan, Juventus were clinging on to Del Piero's ninth minute goal, a deflected 20-yard free-kick. Brescia grew in confidence as Juventus tired and deservedly drew level seven minutes from time thanks to Ghanaian midfielder Stephen Appiah's angled shot. After Iglj Tare had gone close to giving the visitors a shock lead, Del Piero went straight down the other end and scored a dramatic 86th minute winner. Running on to Alessio Tacchinardi's high ball over the Brescia defence, the 28-year-old Italy international struck a firm volley wide of Sereni for his 16th league goal of the season and his 100th in Serie A. Tigerish Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids praised Del Piero for inspiring an unusually out-of-sorts Juventus to a crucial win.

fourth-placed Lazio at the San Siro. Hernan Crespo's diving header gave Inter a first-half lead, before Simone Inzaghi converted Massimo's Oddo's cross in similar fashion cross to snatch a point for the beaten UEFA Cup semi-finalists. Lazio coach said he could not see Inter catching Juventus at such a late stage of the campaign. "Eight points in four matches is difficult to make up, especially on a team like Juve," he said. Inter coach Hector Cuper however refused to throw in the towel. "I have to believe," he said. "I must." Crespo said Inter would have to rely on Juventus collapsing in the final four matches. "It was already difficult before today's game and now it's even harder," said the Argentinean international. Argentine defender Hugo Campagnaro was on target twice as Piacenza improved their slim chances of avoiding the drop to Serie B with a 5-1 thrashing of Perugia. Como also look doomed after being held 0-0 at home to Modena although they could have won had Nicola Amoroso not missed a late penalty. The two clubs competing with Lazio for fourth place were both held, with Parma playing out a goalless draw at southern strugglers Reggina and Chievo drawing 1-1 at Bologna. In the day's other match, Empoli drew 0-0 at home to Udinese. On Saturday AC Milan lost 2-1 to Italian cup final opponents AS Roma at the Olympic stadium. Second-half substitute Antonio Cassano's close range effort gave Roma the lead on the hour mark before Damiano Tommasi's powerful header doubled the home side's advantage. Danish striker Jon Dahl Tomasson volleyed a late consolation goal for Milan whose second consecutive league defeat ended their title hopes. In Saturday's other match, Atalanta did little to ease their relegation fears after being held to a 2-2 draw by bottom club Torino.

Table titled 'TOP SIX' showing Italian football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points). Rows include Juventus, Inter, Milan, Lazio, Parma, and Chievo.

Henry players' choice

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry has been named the English Professional Football Association's player of the year, beating last year's winner Ruud van Nistelrooy of Manchester United. Newcastle midfielder Jermaine Jenas beat Everton's England striker Wayne Rooney to the young player of the year award. The 25-year-old Henry has had an



THIERRY HENRY

impressive season for Double-chasing Arsenal, scoring a landmark 100th goal for the Gunners back in January. The other nominees were Newcastle's Alan Shearer, Chelsea's Gianfranco Zola, Southampton's James Beattie and Man Utd's Ruud van Nistelrooy and Paul Scholes. "This means a lot to me because the other players have voted for me," Henry said. "They all know better than anyone else because they play against me and

they must have noticed something, so I'm happy they have noticed something. "It's never easy when you come from another country to get people to like you but, at the end of the day, the most important thing is football, no matter which country you are from. "We are all trying to play the same and to do well on the pitch, so nationality doesn't really matter." Alan Shearer has been named the Premier League's Overall Player of the Decade. Almost three quarter of a million votes from fans in 184 countries cast their votes on the Premier League's official website in a separate vote. "Given the number of top-quality players who have graced our League since its inception, it really fills me with immense pride to have been given this award," Shearer said. Shearer scored twice for Blackburn Rovers in his first Premiership game in August 1992. "Despite the injuries and odd disappointing moment along the way, no one could have written a better script for me," he said.

- PFA TEAM OF THE YEAR Goalkeeper: Brad Friedel (Blackburn) Defenders: Stephen Carr (Spurs), Sol Campbell (Arsenal), William Gallas (Chelsea), Ashley Cole (Arsenal) Midfielder: Patrick Vieira (Arsenal), Paul Scholes (Man Utd), Kieron Dyer (Newcastle), Robert Pires (Arsenal) Forwards: Thierry Henry (Arsenal), Alan Shearer (Newcastle)



Paris-Saint-Germain's Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho (R) on the move during the French Cup semi-final against Bordeaux at the Parc des Princes in Paris on April 27.

Premiership Title MU's for the taking

Football

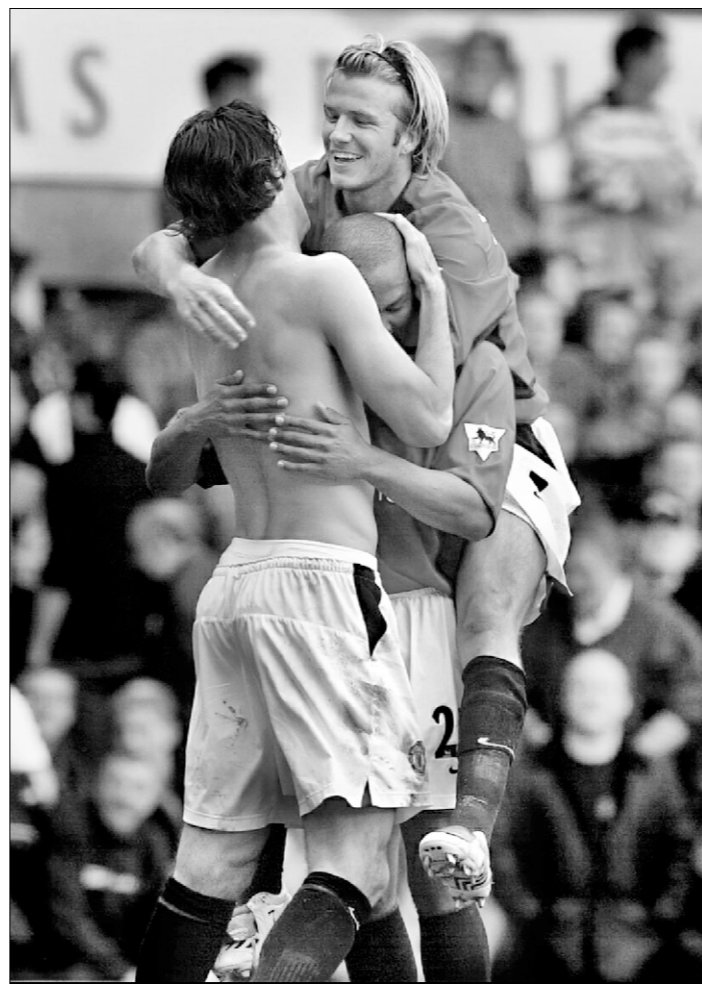
AFP, London

Landmark goals from Paul Scholes and Ruud van Nistelrooy gave Manchester United a 2-0 win over Tottenham and a stranglehold on their neck-and-neck title tussle with Arsenal here on Sunday. After Arsenal's draw with Bolton on Saturday, the win lifted United five points clear and Alex Ferguson's side now know the title is theirs if they beat Charlton at home next weekend and Everton away on the final day of the season. After a frustrating first hour in which United were repeatedly thwarted by the inspired goalkeeping of Kasey Keller, Scholes finally broke the deadlock with a 69th-minute header, his 20th of the season. Van Nistelrooy, who might easily have scored four goals but for the brilliance of Keller, finally got his reward in stoppage time, slotting home his 40th strike of the season after being picked out in the box by Quinton Fortune's cross. United had picked up where they left off in their Champions League thriller against Real Madrid on Wednesday with Van Nistelrooy drawing a fine save from Keller in the first minute after running on to a huge clearance from Roy Carroll, who replaced under-pressure Frenchman Fabien Barthez in the starting line-up. That was the cue for a period of some scintillating passing football from United which culminated in another close call for the Spurs defence. A sweeping move from the edge of the United area ended with Giggs' low cross being prodded just the wrong side of the upright by van Nistelrooy. There was more frustration to follow for the Dutchman, who might easily have finished the first half with a hat-trick but for the efforts of Keller.

cleanly struck Ole Gunnar Solskjaer shortly after the restart. With United going off the boil, Spurs finally began to enjoy some possession outside of their own half. But the home side were nearly caught by a counter-attack which saw van Nistelrooy combine with Solskjaer down the right before breaking into the box and sending a fierce shot across Keller and just wide of the far post. The odds on a draw were rapidly shortening but United's attacking endeavour finally reaped its reward three minutes later. Beckham, restored to the starting line-up after scoring twice as a substitute against Real Madrid, started the move with an angled ball to Scholes on the edge of the area. The midfielder in turn found Giggs with a flicked header before racing into the box to meet the winger's cross with a

header that Keller could do nothing about. The drama did not end there however. Gus Poyet came within inches of heading an equaliser for Spurs and Keller produced another fine stop to keep out a Ryan Giggs volley before van Nistelrooy finally forced his way on to the scoresheet.

Table titled 'TOP SIX' showing English Premiership table after weekend matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points). Rows include Man United, Arsenal, Newcastle, Liverpool, Everton, and Chelsea.



WE'RE ON THE WAY! Manchester United players David Beckham (top R), Wes Brown (C) celebrate their team's second goal against Tottenham Hotspurs with scorer Ruud Van Nistelrooy (L) at White Hart Lane on April 27.

French Cup Ronaldinho PSG's hero

Football

AFP, Paris

A Ronaldinho double put Paris Saint Germain into the French Cup final following a 2-0 victory over Bordeaux at the Parc des Princes on Sunday. PSG will meet Auxerre in the May 31 final at the Stade de France following their 2-1 victory over Rennes on Saturday. It will be a relief for coach Luis Fernandez to be within one match of

silverware as the pressure on the PSG coach to win titles is traditionally unrelenting. Ronaldinho was first on the mark in the 21st minute when he made the most of a mistake by Marc Planus to get the ball before honing down on goal and firing past Frederic Roux into the net. PSG got a helping hand in the 55th minute when Bordeaux's Marco Caneira was sent off and, as expected, they went on to win the tie. A superb lob by the Brazilian World Cup over Roux with 10 minutes left earned PSG a place in the final for the seventh time in their history. French international striker Djibril

Cisse scored a dramatic last-minute winner against Rennes to put Auxerre into the final on Saturday. Auxerre took the lead after 41 minutes when Cisse latched on to a pass from Philippe Mexes to score but Rennes, struggling towards the foot of the first division, levelled 18 minutes into the second half courtesy of Olivier Sorlin. However Rennes' hopes of winning the tie were dashed in the 76th minute when Toifilou Maoulida was sent off and Cisse added to their misery when he sneaked in unmarked to head in the last minute winner.

Bayern eyeing Makaay

AFP, Berlin

Newly crowned German champions Bayern Munich are interested in buying the Spanish league's top striker - Deportivo La Coruna's Dutch international Roy Makaay. Bayern boss Ottmar Hitzfeld told Monday's Kicker magazine: "Makaay is for sure an interesting player. "If something was possible, we would certainly be interested." Kicker estimate Makaay's value at between seven and ten million euros (dollars). Bayern's interest may not be in vain as the 28-year-old has recently suggested he would be interested in leaving his Spanish first division club before his contract expires in 2005. Bayern are only too aware of Makaay's ability to place the ball in the back of the net as he was responsible for four of Deportivo's five goals against the German superpower in the Champions League this season. Yet before any approach is made Hitzfeld may have to convince his superior, Franz Beckenbauer, of the need to bring in another frontman to team up with Brazilian Giovane Elber - joint top scorer in the Bundesliga with 16 goals this term. "I don't think Bayern needs an extra striker next season" Beckenbauer told German daily Bild. For the record Bayern not surprisingly have the best attack record with their goal haul on 61 - 14 more than the next best club.

Bosnich's mystery woman theory!

AFP, London

Disgraced Australian goalkeeper Mark Bosnich has discovered a mystery woman he claims spiked his drink with cocaine which led to Chelsea sacking him. Bosnich, 31, was due to appear before a Football Association hearing Monday at which he will present the extraordinary new evidence he hopes will save his career. The panel has the power to ban him from the game worldwide should he fail to prove his innocence. Bosnich was sacked from his 42,000-pounds-a-week job after he tested positive for cocaine last November and he has already lost a case for unfair dismissal against Chelsea. The player has made no public comment but his girlfriend, model Sophie Anderton, spoke out in his defence in the Evening Standard which reported Monday that a woman had given sworn statements admitting she accidentally spiked the Australian's drink at the Wellington Club in Knightsbridge. According to the Standard the woman is a known cocaine user who had intended to drink the cocaine cocktail herself. The paper says it follows a three-month investigation by private investigators acting for Bosnich. Bosnich is appealing against the Premier League's verdict that the termination of his contract did not represent unfair dismissal.



THE HOTTEST AUTOGRAPH! International Stadium Yokohama staff Yukiko Takenouchi introduces an autograph (upper L) of Brazilian superstar Ronaldo on a wall of a locker room at the stadium yesterday. All the players of the Brazilian national team who took part in the FIFA World Cup 2002 Korea/Japan put their autographs on the wall during an official training session on June 29 on the eve of the final against Germany.