



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's Fernando Morientes about to receive the ball under pressure from Recreativo de Huelva's Iker Begoña at Huelva stadium on May 10.

Primera Liga

'Old wine' takes 'em atop

Football

AFP, Madrid

Deportivo La Coruna defender Donato, the oldest man in the Spanish first division, showed the Galicians the way to the top of the Spanish first division with a rare goal in his team's 2-0 win at Malaga on Saturday.

The victory gives Deportivo a one-point lead over Real Madrid after the European champions had earlier left the attic door open with a 0-0 draw at relegation-threatened Recreativo Huelva.

Deportivo now have 66 points from 33 games with five games to go.

Real Madrid have 65 points and could even slip to third by the end of the weekend as Real Sociedad are third on 63 points and have a game in hand, playing at Real Mallorca on Sunday, although the Basques cannot overtake Deportivo.

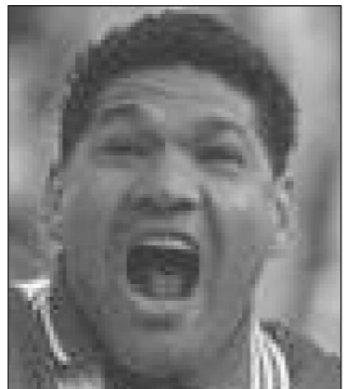
In a game in which silky skills were at a premium, Donato belied his 40 years of age to rise above the Malaga defence and head the 1999/2000 champions ahead after just 12 minutes.

Lionel Scaloni added to Deportivo's tally with a breakaway goal two minutes into injury time with Malaga having already mentally conceded the game.

Before the game, Deportivo coach Javier Irureta said he believed that Madrid's Champions League commitments could work

in their favour and they proved to be prophetic words as the European champions seemed hungover from Tuesday's exertions against Juventus.

Real didn't have a single shot on goal in the second half and without a quartet of their top men - Ronaldo, Raul Gonzalez, Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane were all injured - they lacked their usual



DONATO

sparkle going forward.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque opted to field the unusual attacking combination of Fernando Morientes and Tote Lopez, with both men starting a Spanish league game for the first time this season, but neither debutant could break the deadlock.

The pair rarely threatened Recreativo after a brief flourish in the first 10 minutes, with both men eventually being replaced in the second half, and instead the best chances to score fell to the oldest

club in Spanish football.

Raul Molina and Emilio Viqueira both had several opportunities to get a memorable winner for Recreativo but were thwarted by the bravery and acrobatics of Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

"The truth is, we didn't play to our best in the attack. However, Recreativo were an uncomfortable

TOP SIX

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

Deportivo	33	20	6	7	59	36	66
Real	33	18	11	4	71	38	65
Sociedad	32	18	9	5	59	40	63
Celta	32	15	8	9	36	24	53
Valencia	32	15	8	9	47	26	53
Bilbao	33	12	9	12	52	52	45

rival to play against and they put a lot of pressure on us," admitted Del Bosque.

"It was a long night for us. I don't know whether it was the heat or the state of the pitch," said Del Bosque, becoming the latest critic of Recreativo's facilities.

To add to Real's woes, French international Claude Makelele is doubtful for Wednesday's Champions League semi-final second leg at Juventus with a muscle strain to the front of his left thigh although all of Saturday's absentees except Ronaldo are expected to be fit again.

One small note of consolation for Real will be that they are nowhere near the doldrums being

experienced by their neighbours Atletico.

The other Madrid club's miserable centenary year continued with a 1-0 defeat at home to struggling Alaves earlier on Saturday.

"We are situation that's grey and ugly and, at times like this, everything seems to go wrong," lamented Atletico coach Luis Aragones.

Alaves' Adrian Ilie provided a rare moment of brilliance in an otherwise less-than-memorable match to score the only goal of the game after 55 minutes, to give the Basques their first win in 10 games.

The Romanian international striker controlled a ball lobbed forward in an Alaves counter-attack with his head, before sending a splendid right foot shot past a helpless Atletico goalkeeper Esteban Andres.

Atletico have now lost their last three games and not won in their last eight outings, slipping out of contention for a spot in next season's UEFA Cup.

The bottom of the table is turning into as big a dog fight as the other end as Osasuna hung on to draw 0-0 at Espanyol, which was enough for the Pamplona side to edge out of the relegation zone on goal difference, ahead of Recreativo and Alaves who are 18th and 19th respectively although all three teams have 34 points.

On a night when goals were hard to come by, Athletic Bilbao also drew 0-0 with Valladolid to move up to sixth and maintain their hopes of qualifying for the UEFA Cup next season.

Beckham costs \$56 million

INTERNET, London

Manchester United have put a 35-million-pound (56 million dollars) price tag on England captain David Beckham.

United chief executive Peter Kenyon told the BBC Sports website he would seriously consider any offer of that magnitude.

"It would be remiss of us not to," Kenyon said.

"That is the case for David Beckham and anyone else in the squad. David is a critical part of the team but things change.

"Ultimately players retire, so for any key figure in the team there is a life-span.

"Even if David sees out the rest of the career at United there will be a time when we have to replace him."

Beckham has long been the subject of speculation regarding his future at Old Trafford, with United's Champions' League conquerors Real Madrid thought to be heading the list of potential buyers.

However, earlier this week Kenyon had appeared to end such speculation by saying: "You don't spend 12 months negotiating a new contract to give up on it 12 months later.

Wenger to become wiser!

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said Saturday that just a little bit of intelligence on his part would help the Londoners regain their title from this season's champions Manchester United.

Defending champions Arsenal were in superb form before Christmas but eventually saw United overhaul their seemingly commanding lead.

Not that Wenger, who has consistently refused to acknowledge the scale of United's achievement, was in any mood to pay tribute to the efforts of Old Trafford rival Sir Alex Ferguson.

"Many people would swap with us, it is not to be ashamed to finish second when you have 50 percent less budget," Wenger insisted.

"They (United) consider it is a miracle that they beat us and I think that is a lot of credit to the work we do here, the Frenchman added.

"Now, I just have to be a little bit intelligent, work on it and try to get the right players to come back next year stronger.

"I know what I want to do (in the transfer market) and there are young players who I will look to bring in from within the club," explained Wenger.

But, despite all the despondency engulfing Highbury, FA Cup holders Arsenal can still ensure their season finishes on a high by beating Premiership rivals Southampton in next Saturday's Millennium Stadium final.

Portugal's no to revenge match

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal's bid to avenge their shock defeat by the United States in last year's World Cup finals has been called off because the Americans had made outrageous demands according to Portuguese football supremo Gilberto Madail.

The sides were due to meet in a friendly on June 5 in Boston as Portugal continues its build-up to hosting next year's Euro 2004 tournament.

However Madail told sporting daily 'Record' the match had been cancelled because of 'impossible demands' made by the American federation over advertising and broadcasting the match in Portugal.

He did not rule out, however, the match being played at a later date.

It is the third friendly the Portuguese have cancelled recently, they pulled out of trips to South Korea and Japan because of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus that has swept Asia.

According to 'Bola' Portugal may replace the USA match with a friendly against Colombia and take on Paraguay in Lisbon on June 10 as coach Luiz Felipe Scolari is keen to increase the amount of matches his side play before the championships start in June next year.

Ligue 1

Monaco keep the heat on

Football

AFP, Paris

Monaco set up a frantic finale to the French league season on Saturday, coming back from a goal down and from a hatful of early missed chances to beat Montpellier 3-1 and move top on goal difference from Lyon.

But southern neighbours Marseille may miss the boat regarding getting a spot in the lucrative Champions League after a disastrous evening in Sochaux.

Marseille went down 3-0 to stay third - but it wasn't without a whimper as they finished a stormy match with nine men.

A record 19,910 crowd at the Stade Bonal saw Sochaux outclass their visitors once Francileudo Santos had given them the lead in the 28th minute.

Pierre-Alain Frau hit his eighth goal of the season in the 64th minute, having earlier seen Marseille keeper Vedran Runje make a brilliant double save from a 41st-minute penalty and rebound.

Runje's challenge on Frau leading to the spotkick earned the shot-stopper a yellow card. But there was far worse to follow.

Frank Leboeuf continued the apparent victimisation of Frau

with a challenge which earned the former Chelsea man a second booking on 65 minutes and 12 minutes later Belgian defender Daniel Van Buyten was also sent packing for a dreadful foul on Sochaux skipper Benoit Pedretti.

With Marseille having lost their heads completely - and likely with them their fading title hopes - Mickael Isabay rattled in the third for Sochaux in the 86th minute after Runje had beaten out Frau's initial effort.

"We never thought about the title," insisted Marseille defender Johnny Ecker. "We've lost it."

Monaco meanwhile were caught out on 49 minutes when Mansour Assoumani headed in from close range.

But with Monaco all over their visitors pressure and class finally told when league top scorer Shabani Nonda netted four minutes later to level after a surging run from Ludovic Giuly.

Croatian Dado Prso snapped up a rebound after Montpellier keeper Rudy Riou saved another Giuly effort and Nonda scored the third for his 22nd of the campaign after an interchange between Argentine Marcelo Gallardo and Jerome Rothen.

Monaco have 64 points from 36 games but Lyon will expect to go top once more in Sunday's home encounter with Paris Saint

Germain.

Sochaux's domination of Marseille still left them fifth but they closed the gap on Marseille to two points.

Bordeaux are ahead of Sochaux on goal difference with 60 points after a 2-0 win over Le Havre achieved with goals from Portuguese forward Pedro Pauleta after eight minutes and Jean-Claude Darcheville seconds before the break.

Auxerre are sixth but may go no higher after dropping home points in a goalless home draw with Lille and Nice are set to miss a UEFA Cup spot after losing 2-0 at Ajaccio, who could just survive as a result.

Guingamp made it six wins in seven matches after thrashing Breton neighbours Nantes 4-0 away. Troyes are meanwhile relegated having lost 1-0 at Lens.

TOP SIX

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

Monaco	36	18	10	8	59	30	64
Lyon	35	18	10	7	60	36	64
Marseille	6	18	8	10	37	33	62
Bordeaux	6	17	9	10	54	35	60
Sochaux	36	16	12	8	42	28	60
Auxerre	36	16	10	10	34	28	58



PHOTO: AFP

Sabani Nonda (R), Monaco's Congolese forward, beats Montpellier's captain Bruno Carotti to a header the Louis 2 stadium in Montpellier on May 10.

Missing Agnelli

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus' 27th Serie A title success was a fitting tribute to the man who was arguably the club's biggest fan - the late Giovanni Agnelli.

Juventus won the Scudetto on Saturday despite being held to a 2-2 draw by Perugia at the Delle Alpi stadium.

Agnelli's brother Umberto, who was at the match in Turin, said it was a great shame his brother could not be there to witness the celebrations.

"He would have been a very happy man. He loved this club," Umberto said.

One of post-war Italy's most influential figures in industry and politics and honorary president of the family-owned Juventus, Agnelli died in January, aged 81, after months of illness.

Known throughout Italy as l'Avvocato (The Lawyer), Agnelli loved his football and in particular Juve, who held a special place in his heart.

A regular at the Delle Alpi stadium and a frequent visitor to the team's training sessions at the Comunale stadium, Juve's old ground, Agnelli was never far away from the 'Old Lady'.

After his death, a black and white striped shirt was draped over his usual seat in the directors box as a mark of respect.

Although he spent just seven years as acting club president, between 1947 to 1954, Agnelli was always closely involved behind the scenes of the Turin club.

No fool when it came to recognising talent either, he famously concluded the deal to sign Michel Platini from St Etienne in 1982.

The French international striker

played a pivotal role in helping the club to three domestic championships and the European Cup in 1985, and was voted European Footballer of the Year three times in a row while in Italy.

When Platini played his last game for Juventus, Agnelli was sadder than anyone.

"Another piece of our lives has come and gone," he said. "Platini will forever be regarded as a Juventus legend."

Agnelli always made a point of being close to his players and regarded many of them as friends.

He was particularly fond of current striker Alessandro Del Piero and gave him the nickname 'Il Pinturichio' after the renaissance artist. But when the Italy international was recovering from injury Agnelli changed his moniker to 'Godot', for whom everyone is waiting in Samuel Beckett's play.

He was however sometimes cruel in his assessment of his squad, and once described Zinedine Zidane as 'exciting more than useful'.

Agnelli's other love was motor racing and he took great pride in the success of the Agnelli-owned Ferrari Formula One team.

But even when attending a Grand Prix, the suave, silver-haired industrialist was always itching to find out how his beloved Juventus got on. Asked how much Ferrari meant to him, he replied: "It's difficult at times as there is always something I want to find out, and that is how Juventus got on."

When Agnelli passed away, Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said: "L'Avvocato will soon be looking down from heaven on a 30th title."

Having clinched their 27th Scudetto, it shouldn't be too long before the team makes good on that promise.