



Real Sociedad's Nihat Kahveci (R) being tripped by Valencia's Amedeo Carboni at the Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian on June 1.

Primera Liga

Nothing's for certain



REUTERS, Madrid

Ten-man Valencia held league leaders Real Sociedad to a 1-1 draw away from home on Sunday to leave the Spanish title race finely poised with two games left to play.

Sociedad, bidding to stretch their lead at the top to three points, went ahead through Xabi Alonso on 35 minutes but an Anthony Revellere strike levelled the score almost immediately and eventually proved enough to give outgoing champions Valencia a point.

The result restored Sociedad's one-point lead over Real Madrid, who were also held to a home draw, 1-1 against Celta Vigo on Saturday.

After 36 games, Sociedad lead the standings on 73 points, followed by Real Madrid on 72.

Deportivo kept their faint title hopes alive with a 3-2 win at home to Atletico Madrid that kept them in

third place on 69 points.

Celta hold on to the fourth Champions League place, a point ahead of defending champions Valencia in fifth.

While the championship battle is likely to go down to the wire, the relegation places were resolved on Sunday, with Rayo Vallecano, Recreativo Huelva and Alaves losing their first division status.

In the race for the final UEFA Cup place on offer, victories for Sevilla and Barcelona put increased pressure on Athletic Bilbao, who are now holding on to sixth place by just two points after a 1-1 draw at Villarreal.

Real Madrid's setback at home to Celta Vigo on Saturday left Sociedad the chance to move three points clear with just six points left to play for.

After the exchange of goals late in the first half, Sociedad took complete control when Roberto Ayala was sent off after 57 minutes for a handball that earned him a second yellow card.

The home side had most of the

possession and all the chances after that but Valencia managed to hold on to leave everything still to play for at the top.

Deportivo do still have a chance of landing the title after winning a thriller against Atletico.

Javier Irureta's side were reduced to 10 men after six minutes but they twice came from behind and snatched a late winner through Juan Carlos Valeron.

At the other end of the table, a 2-0 victory for Osasuna at Valladolid sealed the fate of Rayo, Alaves and Recreativo Huelva.

Both Rayo and Alaves went into the 36th round of matches needing victory, plus a favour from Valladolid, to stand a chance of playing first division football next term.

In the end, neither side of the equation worked out.

While goals from Cesar Palacios and Valdo were taking Osasuna to victory, Rayo were drawing 1-1 away to Real Mallorca and Alaves were going down 1-0 at home to

Real Betis.

Recreativo did have the chance to live to fight another day but they went down 1-0 at Sevilla to fill the third and final relegation slot and make an immediate return to the second division.

One of the sides to move in the opposite direction will be Murcia, who beat Levante 1-0 on Sunday to make sure of finishing in the top three in division two.

TOP SIX									
Spanish football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Sociedad	36	21	10	5	66	42	73		
Real	36	20	12	4	79	41	72		
Deportivo	36	21	6	9	63	43	69		
Celta	36	16	10	10	42	58	68		
Valencia	36	16	9	11	52	32	57		
Bilbao	36	14	10	12	56	52	52		

Tonsils prevent Ze Roberto

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich midfielder Ze Roberto has pulled out of the Confederations Cup which starts in two weeks in France to have his tonsils out.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira had already given in to Real Madrid demands to leave out Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo.

World champions Brazil play Cameroon, the United States and World Cup semi-finalists Turkey in the Confederations Cup group phase.

Bayern giving up on Makaay

AFP, Munich

German champions Bayern Munich said Monday they had little hope of signing Dutch striker Roy Makaay from Spanish side Deportivo La Coruna.

Bayern manager Uli Hoeness told Kicker magazine they had switched interest from Makaay to Carlos Alberto Teves, a 19-year-old who plays for Argentine club Boca Juniors.

Makaay, the leading scorer in Spain with 28 goals, said he preferred to play in the English Premiership.

Hoeness travelled to South America last week to watch Teves.

He also said Bayern had extended Bosnian midfielder Hasan Salihamdzic's contract for another two years. Salihamdzic, out of action since November with ruptured knee ligaments, had signed a new contract to 2006.

France without Zidane



AFP, Paris

France coach Jacques Santini gave in to Real Madrid pressure Monday when he left out star midfielder Zinedine Zidane for the Confederations Cup in France from June 18-29.

Real asked Santini to leave out Zidane and midfielder Claude Makelele because they have two more matches left to play in the Spanish championship and trail Real Sociedad by one point.

The Spanish league finishes on June 22 which would have made Zidane and Makelele available only for the Cup semi-finals.

Real sports director Jorge Valdano said last month he would only release the French duo after their last league game on June 22 when they play Athletic Bilbao.

Santini said he had ruled out naming them for the semi-finals.

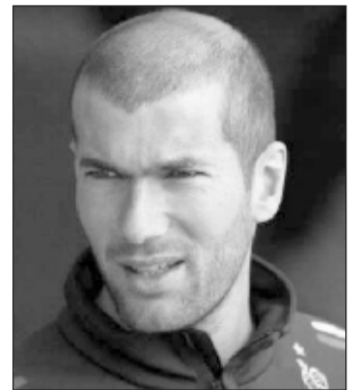
"It was not sensible to call them up," Santini said. "It would have put extra pressure on them as they have two crucial games to play in the coming weeks."

"Zidane told me he was inter-

ested in playing but we stuck to our idea of going with the players we are sure we can rely on."

Brazil are also without Real stars Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos for the Confederations Cup which includes the United States, Turkey, Japan, Colombia, New Zealand and Cameroon.

Santini is also without injured Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira and



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

midfield partner Emmanuel Petit while Juventus striker David Trezeguet, needing a rest after an injury-plagued season, had already been left out.

Santini called up eight players with English Premiership clubs, including Arsenal trio Robert Pires, Thierry Henry and Sylvain Wiltord.

Midfielder Ousmane Dabo, 26, four goals this season for Italian side Atalanta Bergamo, gets a first call-

up.

"We are looking at young players who need experience at international level," Santini said.

He said the Confederations Cup gave him the opportunity to prepare for next year's European Championships in Portugal with three matches in five days.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Manchester United/ENG), Gregory Coupet (Lyon), Mickael Landreau (Nantes)

Defenders: William Gallas (Chelsea/ENG), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/ENG) Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/GER), Philippe Mexes (Auxerre), Willy Sagnol (Bayern Munich/GER), Mikael Silvestre (Manchester United/ENG), Lilian Thuram (Juventus Turin/ITA), Jean-Alain Boumsong (Auxerre)

Midfielders: Benoit Pedretti (Sochaux), Robert Pires (Arsenal/ENG), Jerome Rothen (Monaco), Olivier Dacourt (AS Rome/ITA), Olivier Kapo (Auxerre), Ludovic Giuly (Monaco), Sylvain Wiltord (Arsenal/ENG), Ousmane Dabo (Atalanta Bergamo/ITA)

Strikers: Djibril Cisse (Auxerre), Sidney Govou (Lyon), Thierry Henry (Arsenal/ENG), Steve Marlet (Fulham/ENG)

Fergie after Alonso



XABI ALONSO

INTERNET, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson wants to sign Real Sociedad midfielder Xabi Alonso.

But he expects to lose out to Real Madrid in the hunt for the highly-rated 21-year-old.

Alonso has been in fine form in Sociedad's surprise challenge for the Spanish title and he has impressed both the Premiership champions and their main rivals in La Liga.

But Ferguson believes Real Madrid's willingness to let Alonso stay with the Basque club for a further season and their £10 million advance payment makes them favourites to sign him.

"His contract runs until 2007 but we have been told there is a £20m buy-out clause," Ferguson told the Manchester Evening News.

"But we understand Madrid have offered a down payment of £10m and that they are prepared to let him stay at Sociedad next season."

Ahn in the army now!



AFP, Seoul

South Korean international striker Ahn Jung-hwan joined the army on Monday with his mane cut short after leading his country to an exciting 1-0 victory over archrivals Japan.

Ahn, the World Cup hero who scored a decider to beat Italy last year, struck home in the 86th minute on a Seol Ki-Hyeon pass to give Korea coach Humberto Coelho of Portugal his first win in three games Saturday in Tokyo.

The 27-year-old forward joined the "White Horse Unit" on the outskirts of Seoul for four-week military basic training during the month J-League play is suspended for the Kirin Cup and the Confederations Cup.

Korean men are required to perform 26 months of compulsory army service, but Ahn and other football players were allowed to avoid it following South Korea's success at the World Cup last year.

South Korea changed the national service law to reward the team's success in moving beyond the first round.

The Koreans went on to beat Italy 2-1 and Spain 5-3 in a penalty shootout to become the first Asian nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals. They lost to Germany 1-0 in the semi-finals and to Turkey 3-2 in a third place playoff.

After basic military training, Ahn was allowed to serve three years in the public sector of his choosing, including football.

According to the Yonhap news agency, Ahn returned home Sunday and paid a visit to the barber, his first in a decade, to cut his hair to army length.



PRAY FOR ME! South Korean superstar Ahn Jung-hwan waves to the press at the entrance of the military training base in Wondang yesterday.

Kezman interests Spurs

AFP, London

English Premiership side Tottenham have joined the chase to sign Serbian striker Mateja Kezman whose 35 goals helped PSV Eindhoven win the Dutch league title.

Spanish giants Barcelona are also in the hunt for the nine million dollar-rated striker crowned Player of the Year in Holland.

Spurs switched their interest to Kezman after their move for West Ham's Frederic Kanoute floundered.

Rangers target Jardel



INTERNET, Glasgow

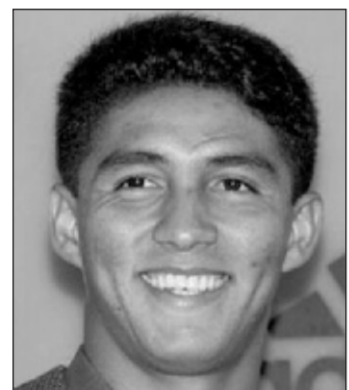
Rangers and Sporting Lisbon are haggling over a price to bring Brazilian striker Mario Jardel to Ibrox.

The Portuguese club are holding out for a transfer fee of £2m, a price Rangers have yet to agree to match.

Despite having just secured a domestic treble, Rangers are under huge financial pressure as debts that were last posted at £52m are believed to have risen even further in the past few months.

"Sporting Lisbon are holding out for more money," said Carlos Ganela, one of Jardel's representatives.

"There is a crisis in the transfer market at the moment. Sporting want £2m for Jardel, but Rangers want to pay £1.5m."



MARIO JARDEL

This is the third time Rangers have tried to sign Jardel, who has one year left on his contract with Sporting.

Jardel was Europe's leading scorer in the 2001/2002 season with 42 goals, but over the last year he has suffered a number of personal problems.

Jardel was sidelined for two months with depression at the start of the season after marriage problems and he has scored just 10 goals.

A striker is a priority for Rangers manager Alex McLeish, with the contracts of Michael Mols and Claudio Caniggia set to expire in a few weeks' time.

"We know we face a Champions League qualifier and for us to get to the next phase we do need to replace the quality that goes," said McLeish.

Wary Eriksson



AFP, London

England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson on Sunday warned the country's fans to behave or risk being thrown out of European football.

European governing body UEFA have threatened that any repetition of the scenes that marred the Euro 2004 qualifier against Turkey in Sunderland in April could see England expelled from next year's finals.

"What we heard from UEFA is clearly very important. The next time something happens we are out of Europe and that would be absolutely catastrophic for us," the Swede said on Sky Sports News.

"It is very important that we behave on the pitch and our supporters behave."

The warning from Eriksson comes ahead of Tuesday's friendly

against Serbia and Montenegro in Leicester, which is being used as preparation for the Euro 2004 qualifier against Slovakia in Middlesbrough on June 11.

Asked if he had spoken to his players about over-elaborate celebrations which it is feared incite the crowd, Eriksson added: "I spoke to the players before South Africa and will speak to them before Tuesday and every time we play."

"It would be incredible if we couldn't go on playing in Europe."

West Ham defender Trevor Sinclair has a muscle problem and is doubtful for Tuesday's match.

Eriksson said: "Trevor Sinclair is not fit but he will stay here and we will see if we can use him on Tuesday. If not Tuesday he will almost for sure be fit for Slovakia."

The coach confirmed that he plans to play a full-strength team against Serbia and Montenegro, the coach said he plans to use both Emile Heskey and Wayne Rooney at some stage on Tuesday.

Gunners list Aussie duo



AFP, London

Newcastle and Middlesbrough because he is not keen on moving to the north-east.

Both Emerton and Kewell are in the last year of their contracts and although Leeds are keen to keep Kewell, the 24-year-old striker has yet to agree terms. Leeds will sell rather than risk losing him on a free transfer next summer.

Emerton can play in central midfield or a wide role - just like ParLOUR. The former England star has two years left on his contract

The London Evening Standard reported Monday that Emerton was the key because if Arsenal sign him from Dutch club Feyenoord for around 4 million pounds that will allow them to offer Leeds Ray Parlour plus about 6 million pounds for Kewell.

The 24-year-old Emerton was watched by Arsenal as his Feyenoord side lost the Dutch Cup Final 4-1 to Utrecht in Rotterdam on Sunday and the Standard said manager Arsene Wenger will make a decision when he returns from holiday later this week.

Emerton, who has scored five times in 27 games for his country, joined the Dutch club three years ago. He wants to come to England but has resisted interest from



BRETT EMERTON

and is due a testimonial which could net him 500,000 pounds, so before he agrees to any move he wants the right financial package.

Leeds manager Peter Reid is a fan of Parlour, who is valued at around 2.5 million pounds, with Kewell at more than twice that fee.

Emerton was named as the Oceania Football Confederation player of the year for 2002 in March, ahead of Kewell.

Wenger must also sort out the futures of Dennis Bergkamp and England goalkeeper David Seaman and finalise contract talks with Patrick Vieira and Robert Pires.

Bergkamp has been made an offer to cover one more season while Manchester City and Birmingham are ready to make a bid for Seaman.

Wenger wants him as goalkeeping coach but Seaman, 40 in October, wants to play on.

Wenger will also be hoping to re-coup cash by selling Sylvain Wiltord and possibly Francis Jeffers.

Beckham's plea



AFP, Leicester

David Beckham on Monday issued an appeal to England's fans to behave during upcoming matches or risk seeing the national side thrown out of Euro 2004.

In a recorded message due to be broadcast by several television channels, Beckham said there must be no repeat of the pitch invasions and pre-match violence which marred England's qualifier against Turkey in April.

"It shouldn't happen. If it does again we will be thrown out of Euro 2004."

England face Serbia-Montenegro in a friendly here on Tuesday and resume their Euro 2004 qualifying campaign against Slovakia in Middlesbrough next week.

UEFA, European football's governing body, warned last week that England could be excluded from next summer's Euro 2004 finals in Portugal if there was any repeat of the disturbances linked to the Turkey match.