

Primera Liga

Vintage Valencia

Football

AFP, Madrid

Unbeaten Valencia returned to the top of the Spanish first division after a hiatus of less than 24 hours after they thrashed Espanyol 4-0 on Sunday.

Mista Ferrer got Valencia off to a perfect start after just eight minutes, pouncing on a fluffed clearance by Espanyol keeper Toni Jimenez.

"We gave away the first goal and, after that, we died a little. This team will continue to improve but the gap between us and Valencia was enormous," admitted under-fire Espanyol coach Javier Clemente after the match.

The 2001-02 champions put the hapless Barcelona-based club, who were missing seven first team regulars through injury and also their suspended Cameroon international Pierre Wome, to the sword just before the break.

Spanish international midfielder Ruben Baraja successfully negotiated Espanyol's poorly executed offside trap and then beat Toni one-on-one to score on the stroke of half time.

Mista then grabbed Valencia's

third goal, and his second, two minutes into injury time by finishing off an outstanding individual effort by their Argentine playmaker Pablo Aimar.

Valencia stepped off the gas in the second half but still had enough class to add a fourth goal 12 minutes from time thanks to a long-range thunderbolt from midfielder Vicente Rodriguez.

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez, well aware that his squad has been guilty of complacency in the past, didn't hesitate in dishing out the plaudits.

"Everything about this game looked good. And the way we perform against inferior teams is as important as the way we play against the stronger ones," said Benitez.

The result leaves win-less Espanyol stuck on the bottom of the Spanish first division with only two points, and will increase the calls for the immediate sacking of Clemente.

The former Spanish national coach was given a deadline of four matches in which to turn matters around by the club's directors on Wednesday but the public clamour for his departure may force them to go back on that decision.

Deportivo La Coruna are in second place, one point behind

Valencia after winning 2-0 at Barcelona on Saturday, while reigning Spanish champions Real Madrid beat Celta Vigo 2-0 on Saturday to stay in third place.

Valencia are now the only unbeaten team in the Spanish first division after their near-neighbours Villarreal went down 2-0 at Athletic Bilbao.

Ismael Urzaiz got his 100th goal in an Athletic Bilbao shirt, with a header after 50 minutes, while Joseba Etxeberria added the Basques' second goal nine minutes from time.

Unheralded Osasuna continued their impressive start to the season with a 2-1 victory over struggling Murcia to stay in fourth place.

Ibrahim Bakayoko put the Pamplona side in front after 10 minutes with a low rasping shot but Murcia took only eight minutes to equalise through Luis Garcia after an error by Osasuna keeper Juantxo Elia, making his top flight debut after spending the rest of his career in the Spanish third division.

Murcia threw away their chance of a valuable away point when Luis Carreras got his marching orders after 78 minutes and Daniel Jensen's expulsion shortly after reduced them to nine men.

Bakayoko took full advantage

seven minutes from the whistle, scoring the winner from close range.

Racing Santander meanwhile notched up an emphatic 4-2 victory over Malaga to revive distant memories of the 1930s, the club's heyday when they were regularly among the top Spanish teams rather than the perennial relegation candidates of recent times.

Racing turned on the style in the second half with goals from Fernando Moran, Yossi Benayoun, Joanathon Valle and Rodoifo Bodipo more than making up for Salva Ballesta's 18th-minute opener.

Malaga's Croatian midfielder Ivan Leko scored a last-gasp consolation goal for the visitors.

TOP SIX									
Spanish league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Valencia	7	6	1	0	13	1	19		
Deportivo	7	6	0	1	17	5	18		
Real	7	5	1	1	17	8	16		
Osasuna	7	4	2	1	10	6	14		
Racing	7	3	2	2	11	7	11		



MISTA DOESN'T MISS MUCH! Valencia forward Miguel Angel Mista celebrates his first goal against Espanyol at the Mestalla Stadium in Valencia on October 19. PHOTO: AFP

Premiership Villa open away account

AFP, Birmingham

Aston Villa collected their first away point of the season with a goalless draw in a massive anti-climax of a Midlands derby with Birmingham City on Sunday.

After the tense build-up which led to Villa's Turkish international defender Alpay being omitted from the match, unofficially for his own safety, the match proved to be high on energy but low on finesse.

The point means Steve Bruce's Birmingham move back up to fourth behind the big three of Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea.

Villa at least achieved their goal of improving on last season when they lost both derbies without scoring a goal.

Frederic Kanoute struck a last-minute winner to hand Tottenham a 2-1 win away to bottom-of-the-table Leicester in another match on Sunday.

The hosts got off to a good start in a first half, which they dominated, when Paul Dickov put the Foxes ahead after poking the ball through Kasey Keller's legs in the 38th minute.

However, Spurs pulled level 12 minutes from time through Mbulelo Mabizela's rocket shot and Kanoute sealed the points, although the Frenchman was stretched off injured moments before the final whistle.

"Frederic's ankle is very sore at the moment and he will have X-rays and scans before we can determine the problem," said Spurs boss David Pleat.

Meanwhile Everton and Southampton battled each other to a 0-0 stalemate at Goodison Park in a drab performance which made a mockery of both sides' hopes of being serious European contenders this season.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Arsenal	9	7	2	0	18	7	23		
Man Utd	9	7	1	1	17	3	22		
Chelsea	9	6	2	1	19	9	20		
Birmingham	9	4	4	1	8	5	16		
Man City	9	4	3	2	20	11	15		
Fulham	8	4	3	1	15	9	15		

Elber bets Kaiser

AFP, Berlin

Brazilian striker Giovane Elber has struck a 10,000-euro (11,580-dollar) bet with Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer that he will come back to haunt his former club with a goal when Lyon host Bayern in Tuesday's Champions League encounter.

In a twist of fate Lyon were paired with Bayern in Europe's premier competition and 31-year-old Elber has his sights set on scoring past Oliver Kahn and forcing Beckenbauer to cough up the cash.

"Franz should bring the 10,000 euros with him," Elber told Bild am Sonntag. "I already have plans to use the money for a foundation in support of kids on the streets. I am definitely going to score against Bayern."

Elber's departure from the Olympic Stadium left the former Brazilian international feeling disappointed but the forward insists that he has no resentment towards the German champions.

"I have no axe to grind with the players and will visit them in the hotel after the match," vowed Elber. "However it will be a strange feeling playing against them."

Serie A

Pirlo Milan's hero

Football

AFP, Rome

A scrambled first-half goal by Andrea Pirlo gave AC Milan a 1-0 win against Lazio at the San Siro and took the European champions' level on points with Juventus at the top of Serie A on Sunday.

The Italy international pounced from close range in the 37th minute to secure a hard-fought win against Roberto Mancini's spirited men.

difficult game, just like the one last season. It was an important result, not only for me but also for the team."

Lazio began aggressively and had the ball in the back of Milan's net in the 17th minute.

Claudio Lopez's diagonal pass found Bernardo Corradi who had pulled off to the right, and he cut the ball back for Stankovic to stab the ball into an empty net.

Lazio's players wheeled away with their arms aloft only for their celebrations to be cut short by the linesman, who had his flag up for offside. Television replays showed that

"Dacourt had a magnificent match and deserves applause for what he has given to the team, not abuse," Capello said.

Bologna's Fausto Rossini went from villain to hero in his side's draw at home to Perugia.

The 25-year-old striker turned into his own net to give Perugia a 1-0 lead but made amends by grabbing Bologna's second goal in a 2-2 draw.

Reggina defeated Siena 2-1 in Calabria for their first win of the season. Junior Mozart and Julio Cesar Leon scored for Reggina, while Tore Andre Flo scored a stoppage-time



Parma's Japanese star Hidetoshi Nakata (R) being tackled by AS Roma's Fench defender Jonathan Zebina at Rome's Olympic stadium on October 19. PHOTO: AFP

The visitors might have fared better had Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic not had a goal controversially ruled out for offside in the first-half.

Milan and Juventus, last season's Champions League finalists, both have 16 points from their six matches played.

Lazio coach Mancini slammed the linesman for ruling out Stankovic's effort.

"The linesman was four or five steps behind the play and there's absolutely no way he could have seen it clearly from where he was," said the former Lazio star.

"Obviously that one moment changed the nature of the game and after Milan took the lead we were up against it."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted his side were let off the hook, but insisted that over the 90 minutes his team deserved the three points.

"The incident of the offside goal certainly worked in our favour, but there was still plenty of time left to play and Milan were definitely good value for the victory," he said.

Midfield playmaker Pirlo was relieved to come out on top and prevent Juve from opening up a gap at the top of the table.

"It was important to win to stay in touch with Juve. We expected a

consolation goal for the Tuscans.

In the day's other matches Modena and Udinese both chalked up 2-0 wins over Lecce and Empoli respectively, while Chievo were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Sampdoria.

On Saturday reigning champions Juventus won 3-2 at bottom club Ancona.

In Saturday's early match Inter Milan fought back from a two-goal deficit to earn a 2-2 draw at Brescia.

Christian Vieri netted an 87th minute penalty to earn a share of the spoils, but a point was not enough to save coach Hector Cuper, who was fired early Sunday and replaced by Alberto Zaccheroni.

Cuper paid the price for Inter's poor start to the season in which they have just nine points from a possible 18. Zaccheroni guided AC Milan to the Italian league title in 1999

TOP SIX									
Italian league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Juventus	6	5	1	0	16	7	16		
Milan	6	5	1	0	12	3	16		
Roma	6	4	2	0	14	3	14		
Parma	6	3	2	1	10	7	11		
Modena	6	3	1	2	8	4	10		
Lazio	6	3	1	2	11	8	10		

A South Korean embarrassment

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's 1-0 defeat to Vietnam in their Asia Cup football qualifier stunned South Koreans, who associate the national side with their giant-killing World Cup exploits of last year.

"Our status as Asia's best is on shaky ground," said Yonhap, South Korea's national news agency, describing the defeat as a "humiliation."

An official at the Korean Football Association (KFA) said the result was a disappointment but suggested that too much should not be read into a one-off result that went against a young, under-strength South Korean team.

"Perhaps it was complacency, or perhaps the coaching staff underestimated the Vietnamese side," said the official, who declined to be named.

"It is a disappointment for the people, and it's very disappointing for us as well."

South Korea has been struggling to recapture the form that saw them reach the semi-finals of the World Cup in June last year under Dutch coach Guus Hiddink.

Key players have moved abroad on lucrative contracts and others have retired from international football.

Hiddink's replacement, Portugal's Humberto Coelho, has produced a mixed bag of performances since he took in March.

The lowest point, however, was Sunday night's defeat in Oman to a Vietnamese side who were beaten 5-0 by South Korea in September in the first round of the Group-E qualifiers.

The defeat is unlikely to prevent South Korea from qualifying for next year's Asian Cup finals in China from Group-E which includes Oman and Nepal as well as South Korea and Vietnam.

In the first round of group matches played in Incheon, South Korea, in September the South Koreans beat Vietnam 5-0, Oman 1-0 and Nepal 16-0.

Dundee after Davids?

AFP, Glasgow

Dundee director Giovanni di Stefano said Sunday the club was again negotiating with Dutchman Edgar Davids in the hope the Serie A star will come on loan for five months to boost their UEFA Cup campaign bid.

Feisty midfielder Davids is set to leave Juventus for Roma at the end of the season but Dundee are hoping their audacious bid will tempt the Dutch star north of the border in January - if the club still need him.

Di Stefano told the Sunday Mail: "We are negotiating with Mr Davids to come in January for five months. By January, we'll know roughly where we are - if for example we are in third place with a nine-point cushion, we don't need him."

"If we're in fifth place, hell, I need him. Because if we're in third, we qualify for the new UEFA Cup where there is a mini-league with eight games. That's a cheque for six million pounds (10 million dollars)."

"It would simply be a loan deal because he's going to AS Roma without a doubt," added Di Stefano who is set to spend 1.7 million pounds (2.8 million dollars) on the Dutchman and is also hoping to lure Lazio defender Francesco Colonnese.

"People say why spend 1.7 million pounds for five months but look what we might get back."

He added: "Our real weakness, in my view as a supporter, is in defence - which is why we're talking with Mr Colonnese and my friends at Lazio about whether they'll release him for a period."

Zacc has high hopes

Football

AFP, Paris

New Inter Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni is confident he can halt the club's slide and put the fallen giants back among Serie A's title contenders.

Zaccheroni, who led Inter's neighbours AC Milan to the league championship in 1999, was appointed on Sunday after Hector Cuper was sacked.

"My ambitions perfectly match those of the club president Massimo Moratti and I thoroughly believe in the competitiveness of the squad I have been left with," said Zaccheroni, a lifelong Inter fan.

"I can assure everyone that I will do my utmost to put Inter back where they belong."

Assistant manager Corrado Verdelli, brought in by Moratti in the summer, will take charge of the team for Tuesday's Champions League match away to Lokomotiv Moscow and Zaccheroni will take the reins from



ALBERTO ZACCHERONI

Ronaldo hails Cuper sacking

AFP, Rome

Former Inter Milan striker Ronaldo said Sunday he was pleased to see Hector Cuper sacked as coach of the Serie A giants.

Cuper was shown the door by Inter president Massimo Moratti and replaced by Alberto Zaccheroni early on Sunday.

On Saturday Inter could only manage a 2-2 draw away to Brescia which left them seven points behind league leaders Juventus.

Ronaldo, who played for Inter between 1997 and 2002 before falling out with Cuper and joining Real Madrid, welcomed the news of his former coach's dismissal.

"I speak as an Inter fan when I say I hoped this coach would go as soon as possible," the Brazilian World Cup winner told Italian news agency ANSA.

"It's true I didn't see eye to eye with Cuper. He was too defensive and we didn't get on."

Mobile evidence may hurt Ferdinand

AFP, LONDON

Rio Ferdinand's defence that he simply forgot to take a routine drugs test and could not be contacted has been hurt by revelations his mobile phone was switched on that fatal day.

Newspaper reports on Monday said the Manchester United star used his mobile at least five times before acting on a message left by United doctor Mike Stone.

The Football Association was also understood to be angry the mobile phone records had yet to reach them but were splashed across newspapers.

The FA has yet to decide whether to charge Ferdinand with simply missing the test or willfully missing the test.

The latter carries a two-year ban.