



Raul, the Real Madrid ace, is ecstatic after scoring the winner against Deportivo la Coruna at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on December 14.

Primera Liga

Raul decides Depor's fate

Football

FP, Madrid

Real Madrid's apparent quest to lure the cream of world football to the club was kicked into touch Sunday when Arsenal sent a clear message to any interested parties that Thierry Henry is not for sale.

But with the likes of Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane - who along with Henry are contending FIFA's player of the year award - ably assisting their bid to retain the Spanish league title, Real may not even need the prolific Frenchman, who has been the subject of a reported 40 million pound (70 million dollar) bid from Chelsea.

On Sunday Ronaldo was one half of Real's stellar strike force, the other being Raul Gonzalez, who scored a goal apiece to ensure they stay top of the Liga after an entertaining 2-1 win over Deportivo la Coruna.

Raul maintained Real's perfect home record in the league this season with the winner five minutes from time.

"The work of Raul was very important for us. Today we saw a fantastic Raul, and when he's on form he's almost certain to score," said Real coach Carlos Queiroz.

"In the first half, we played some of the best football of the season and we could have scored more goals. In the second half, we had the ball less and suffered unnecessarily.

"With the game at 1-0, I think we might have felt that we had got to grips with Deportivo, but that wasn't the case," reflected Queiroz.

In a thrilling game Raul and Deportivo's Alberto Luque had goals disallowed for dubious reasons before Ronaldo opened the scoring seconds before half-time.

Zidane sent in a long cross from out on the left wing and the Frenchman's inch-perfect cross found the Brazilian World Cup winner in front of goal.

Deportivo equalised just after the hour mark when Sergio Gonzalez provided a long-range defence-splitting pass for Walter

Pandiani to latch on to and the Uruguayan striker found the net with a perfect finish.

The Galician visitors then looked set for a share of the points until Raul's late strike.

Apart from Raul, Deportivo goalkeeper Francisco Molina had good claims to be the unofficial Man of the Match.

The former Spanish international was not to blame for Real's two goals and produced an outstanding display, including a point-blank save from Oscar Minambres in injury time, to press his claims for a recall ahead of the Euro 2004 finals.

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the Spanish league after the weekend's matches:

- 13 - Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
9 - Fernando Torres (Atletico Madrid), Salva Ballesta (Malaga)
8 - Mista Ferrer (Valencia), Samuel Eto'o (Real Mallorca)
7 - Raul Gonzalez (Real Madrid), Walter Pandiani (Deportivo La Coruna)
6 - Sonny Anderson (Villarreal), Rodolfo Bodipo (Racing Santander), Dario Silva (Sevilla), Ariza Makukula (Valladolid), Savo Milosevic (Celta Vigo), David Villa (Real Zaragoza)

The game however ended on a sour note when Real's David Beckham and Deportivo's Lionel Scaloni started a pushing match after the whistle had blown.

The pair hand tangled minutes earlier, earning each a yellow card, with the Deportivo winger lucky not to get sent off for attempting to stamp on the England captain.

Real now have 36 points from 16 games, two ahead of Valencia who won 1-0 at Real Betis on Sunday thanks to an own goal from Betis defender Juanito Gutierrez.

The 17th-minute blunder will be of little consolation to Juanito but Valencia still deserved the three points.

"I have got to give my players ten out of ten for their effort and work rate. This has been a

week when we have hardly had time to catch our breath," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez.

Osasuna continued their impressive start to the season with a 0-0 away draw at Racing Santander to consolidate fourth place.

Pierre Webo looked to have got the late winner for Osasuna with a spectacular overhead shot just before the whistle but it was disallowed for apparent dangerous play.

However, the Pamplona-based side may yet be awarded the win as Racing had four non-European Union players on the pitch for two minutes.

The Spanish football federation has historically taken a tough stance on such infractions and on two similar occasions in the last decade the offending side has forfeited the game.

At the other end of the table, Albacete eased their relegation fears with their first away win of the season, winning 1-0 at fellow strugglers Real Zaragoza.

Mikel Aguirre got the only goal of the game after Zaragoza keeper Raul Valbuena had fumbled an attempt to gather in a Libero Parri freekick.

Real Mallorca's five-game winning streak came to an end at Malaga as the Costa Del Sol side ran out 3-1 winners over their visitors from the Balearics while Murcia got a useful away point with a 0-0 away draw at Valladolid but remain second from bottom.

TOP SIX

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

Table with 6 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, PTS. Rows include Real, Valencia, Deportivo, Osasuna, Atletico, Bilbao.

Obscene Beckham!

AFP, Madrid

Deportivo's Argentine winger Lionel Scaloni accused David Beckham of making an obscene gesture at him towards the end of Real Madrid's 2-1 win over the visitors on Sunday.

The England captain and Scaloni tangled in the dying seconds of the match with Beckham appearing to kick his opponent's heels from the rear.

Both men ended on the floor and Scaloni tried to hit and stamp on Beckham while being restrained by Real's Roberto Carlos.

"After that Beckham offered to shake my hand but I refused it because it was a false gesture," the former Argentine under-20 international said.

"At that moment, when he was walking away, he touched his genitals," added Scaloni, using more diplomatic language than he had appeared to use on the pitch.

Scaloni then appeared to confront Beckham after the whistle, and pushing and shoving then ensued between the pair before they were ushered into the dressing rooms.

"It was because of this (gesture) that I went after him after the end of the game," explained Scaloni.

Deportivo midfielder Aldo Duscher also jumped into the fray to lay his hands on Beckham after the game.

Whether Duscher, who is also Argentine, was trying to tell Beckham to back off or whether he was backing up his compatriot, remains unresolved.

However, the appearance of Duscher in the melee added, if not a chapter then at least a footnote to his controversial history with Beckham.

A wild tackle from Duscher infamously broke a bone in Beckham's left foot in the Champions League quarter-finals two seasons ago, when the England captain was a Manchester United player.

The injury, which thanks to an avid English press led to most people discovering what a metatarsal bone was for the first time, almost caused Beckham to miss last year's World Cup and he was still far from fully fit during England's games in Japan.

Matthaeus takes over Hungary

AFP, Berlin

New coach Lothar Matthaeus believes he can end Hungary's 20-year exile from World Cup action and lead the country to the 2006 finals in Germany.

Matthaeus, who garnered a record 150 caps for the German national side, quit his post at Partizan Belgrade to succeed Imre Gellei as Hungary boss on Sunday and now has his radar fixed on returning to his homeland in June 2006.

Premiership Bergkamp's timely magic

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal rounded off a successful week by returning to the top of the English Premiership after Dennis Bergkamp's first-half goal proved enough to beat Blackburn on Sunday.

The 1-0 win at Highbury lifted Arsene Wenger's side a point clear of champions Manchester United and two ahead of Chelsea who slumped to a shock 2-1 home defeat to gussy Bolton on Saturday.

Arsenal's victory came four days after they beat Lokomotiv Moscow to reach the last 16 of the Champions League.

They could have added to their lead by half time when Robert Pires hit a post but they eventually needed a series of saves from goalkeeper Jens Lehmann to preserve their advantage.

Markus Babbel had the ball in the net for Blackburn after the break but his effort was controversially disallowed by referee Andy D'Urso after the German was deemed to have climbed on Kolo Toure.

Blackburn boss Graeme Souness said Arsenal had reaped the benefit of home advantage.

"I can see how it has been disallowed but it's a question of how you see it," Souness said. "If that had been at the North Bank, Stretford End or Kop for the home side, it might have stood.

"Markus got up early and he had his arm over Toure's shoulder but then he is 6ft 4in (1.95m) tall."

Blackburn, who remained just three points outside the relegation zone, almost took the lead in the opening minute when Sol

Campbell failed to cut out Lucas Neill's volleyed cross and Dwight Yorke clipped his shot narrowly wide from 12 yards.

Arsenal went ahead when Toure pushed the ball past Vratislav Gresko before cutting back to Bergkamp, who stabbed his shot into the near post.

Pires was unlucky to see his curling shot beat Brad Friedel but not the post.

In the second half Blackburn

bid by Chelsea which Arsenal said they had rejected - missed two chances to kill the game but the Gunners did enough to remain unbeaten.

At the other end of the table on Sunday, struggling Leeds threw away a two-goal lead before beating Fulham 3-2 to make it seven priceless points from their last three matches.

Goals either side of half-time from Michael Duberry and Australia's Mark Viduka looked to have left Leeds well on the way to only their fourth league win of the season.

But high-flying Fulham hit back through two goals from French striker Louis Saha, the second coming in the 86th minute.

Leeds to grabbed a dramatic winner with two minutes remaining when their captain Dominic Matteo scored with a header.

Leeds are still second from bottom in the table but just a point away from Leicester who are currently outside the relegation zone on goal difference alone. Fulham remained fourth.

Juan-Pablo Angel's scored twice - his first Premiership goals since October - to inspire Aston Villa to a crucial 3-2 victory over bottom club Wolves. Villa coach David O'Leary was left underwhelmed.

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the English Premiership after weekend's matches:

- 15 goals - Alan Shearer (Newcastle)
12 - Ruud van Nistelrooy (Manchester United)
10 - Thierry Henry (Arsenal), Louis Saha (Fulham)
8 - Nicolas Anelka (Manchester City), Michael Owen (Liverpool)
7 - Frederic Kanoute (Tottenham), James Beattie (Southampton)
6 - Mikael Forssell (Birmingham), Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink (Chelsea), Hernan Crespo (Chelsea), Teddy Sheringham (Portsmouth)
5 - Robbie Keane (Tottenham), Kevin Davies (Bolton), Harry Kewell (Liverpool), Les Ferdinand (Leicester), Alan Smith (Leeds), Robert Pires (Arsenal), Andy Cole (Blackburn), Luis Boa Morte (Fulham), Steve Watson (Everton)

showed renewed purpose typified by Babbel's disallowed effort and Barry Ferguson was then denied by Lehmann who then saved Craig Short's header from a corner and Yorke fired the rebound over the bar.

At the other end Thierry Henry - the subject of a reported 40-million-pound (70-million-dollar)

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Table with 6 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, PTS. Rows include Arsenal, Man Utd, Chelsea, Fulham, Newcastle, Southampton.



Arsenal's French international playmaker Robert Pires (R) is sent flying by a challenge from Craig Short of Blackburn Rovers at Highbury on December 14.

Serie A

Roma do the minimum

Football

AFP, Rome

Roma may have lacked their recent swagger but they still managed to scrape a 1-0 win over a stubborn Modena side to open up a three-point lead at the top of Italy's Serie A on Sunday.

With AC Milan excused from duty due to their Intercontinental Cup match against Boca Juniors in Japan which the European champions lost after a penalty shoot-out, Roma threw down the gauntlet to their closest title rivals with a deserved but nervy victory at the Olympic stadium.

Talismanic captain Francesco Totti scored the decisive goal from the penalty spot for his seventh goal of the campaign as Roma maintained their unbeaten start to the season.

Roma have 33 points from 13 matches played, three more than Milan who have a game in hand on the 2001 champions.

Modena remain in ninth place

but are only seven points clear of the relegation zone.

Roma were gifted the lead in the eighth minute when Totti surged into the box after a one-two with Mancini only to be scythed down by Jacopo Balestri.

Referee Domenico Messina pointed straight to the spot and Totti picked himself up to slot the penalty home.

Earlier on Sunday, reigning champions Juventus showed they will not give up their title without a fight after thrashing Parma 4-0 at the Delle Alpi stadium.

Juve came into the match on the back of successive league defeats to Inter Milan and Lazio, but a home win rarely looked in any doubt.

Fabrizio Miccoli, enjoying a rare start in place of the injured David Trezeguet, scored twice in the first half before Alessandro Del Piero and Pavel Nedved, architect of Juve's first two goals, completed the rout in Turin.

Juve's victory kept them in third place, four points behind Roma.

Inter Milan, dumped out of the Champions League in midweek, kept up the pressure on the top two after winning 2-0 at Bologna.

Obafemi Martins converted Kily Gonzalez's cross to give Inter a 30th minute lead and the Nigerian teenager set up Alvaro Recoba for an easy second just before half-time.

Lazio, another Champions League failure, leapt above Parma into fifth place after a 1-0 victory at bottom club

TOP SIX

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

Table with 6 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, PTS. Rows include Roma, Milan, Juventus, Inter, Lazio, Parma.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 25 mins and a solution key at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 grid of letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP
P V G M L X L P B H O A D D P U
Q M L T O U F D H O Y A G T A
Z A T G X L U G G M L B B Y F Z A
O A T T P V P Q D A O J T M V P O
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: LAST MONTH, I SAW SOME GUYS GO SIT DOWN UNDER AN OAK TREE AND MAKE A SHADY DEAL.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals R
The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.