

PRIMERA LIGA

Valdes lets Barca slip

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Valencia breathed new life into the Spanish title race on Sunday, snatching a 1-0 win at home to Barcelona that left them just six points behind the champions at the top of the table.

The match was decided by a dreadful error from Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes who scuffed the ball into the path of David Villa shortly before half-time, allowing the Valencia striker to lob the ball into an empty net.

Barca, missing influential trio Ronaldinho, Lionel Messi and Deco but welcoming back leading striker Samuel Eto'o from the African Nations Cup, could not prise open Valencia's rugged defence as they slipped to a second successive league defeat.

Frank Rijkaard's side lead the standings on 52 points ahead of Valencia with 46 and arch-rivals Real Madrid on 45 after their 2-0 win at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

"I'm not worried about the defeat as the side showed a great attitude out there and we fought very hard," said the Dutch coach. "A defeat always hurts but when it comes like this it is not a big concern."

"We played against a great team that are in very good form and it was a very interesting game."

Osasuna are fourth on 43 points, four clear of Celta Vigo who reclaimed fifth spot after a penalty from leading striker Fernando Baiano gave them a 1-0 win at home to an out-of-form Villarreal on Saturday.

Atletico Madrid, who ended Barca's 14-match winning run in the league with a 3-1 victory at the Nou Camp last week, continued their revival with their fourth success in a row after Mateja Kezman's late header in a 1-0 win over Real Sociedad.

Although they enjoyed far less possession, Valencia never let Barca settle at a packed Mestalla and were a constant threat with their electrifying counter-attacks.

Midfielder Miguel Angel Angulo had a fierce shot beaten away by Valdes after he broke down the right and Mario Regueiro drove his followup into a defender after a quarter of an hour.

Regueiro looked certain to score



Valencia's David Villa (L) is congratulated by teammate David Albelda after scoring against Barcelona during their Primera Liga clash at Mestalla on Sunday.

five minutes later when he was put clear after the referee waved play on in midfield, but his shot drifted wide of the post.

The Barca keeper came to the rescue once again when he stood up well to block a close-range shot from Pablo Aimar after the Argentine had collected a long pass with his toe and pirouetted inside Edmilson.

But Valdes turned from hero to villain when he gifted Valencia the lead with his howler just before half-time.

Receiving a seemingly harmless back pass from Giovanni van Bronckhorst, he scuffed the ball into the path of Villa who chipped a first-time shot into the back of the net to take his tally for the season to

15. Barca responded well after the break and laid siege to the Valencia area for most of the second period.

Keeper Santiago Canizares made one sharp save from Henrik Larsson as Valencia's determined rearguard kept the Catalans at bay and allowed them to extend their unbeaten run to 12 games.

Table with 7 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, G/F, G/A, Pts. Rows include Barcelona, Valencia, Real Madrid, Osasuna, Celta Vigo, Sevilla.

Mancini slams 'diver' Nedved

INTERNET, undated

Roberto Mancini has accused Pavel Nedved of being a serial diver to earn the freekick that allowed Juventus to defeat Inter.

"After the equaliser we tried to pour forward and get all three points, but Alessandro Del Piero scored a great goal. Having said that, Nedved is a diver. He always throws himself on the ground and the referees fall for it. This is not up for debate, it was a simulation and he must earn about 10 free kicks per game like that."

Ivan Cordoba brought down the Czech international for the decisive setpiece, as Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Walter Samuel had previously netted in Juve's 2-1 victory at San Siro.

"Juve certainly had a brighter start, as our objective was to win and therefore we were a little bit nervous, but we took more control as the game wore on. Veron is an important player and to lose him in the first half created a few more problems, but the team did well anyway," explained Mancini.

Inter went unbeaten for 21 games in all competitions, but have now fallen to two consecutive defeats against Fiorentina and Juventus.

"Recently we have been creating opportunities, but it's the finish that we're having difficulty with. We aren't as sharp or cynical as we should be," added the Coach.

"We are in second place along with Milan right now and these two defeats have been tough to swallow, but we must get back on track next week against Livorno."

Luis Figo was one of the angriest and made his feelings felt after the final whistle.

"This is an absolute scandal," slammed the ex-Real Madrid man. "The whole world must see what happened today."

Garcia blow for Real

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid have been rocked by the news that Uruguayan midfielder Pablo Garcia will be sidelined for two months.

Garcia was forced off after 26 minutes of Real's 2-0 win at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday, having been the victim of a stiff challenge from Ismael Urzaiz.

The midfielder, who has played a key role in Real's revival this year, was sent for a scan on his knee and tests have confirmed severe ligament damage.

Garcia has ruptured ligaments in his left knee and has been informed he will be sidelined for upwards of two months.

Real coach Jose Ramon Lopez Caro has admitted it is a major blow to lose a player whose style has complemented the array of attacking talent at the El Santiago Bernabeu.

"This is negative news for us at such a key point in the season for Europe and the Liga," said Caro. Garcia was replaced by Thomas Gravesen and the Dane could now secure an extended run in team, having been on the periphery for much of the campaign.

Eriksson not Inter-ested

INTERNET, undated

Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini has revealed that current England manager Sven Goran Eriksson will not be joining the club next season.

Reports last week suggested the Swede could be drafted in at the San Siro to work alongside Mancini as director of football following England's World Cup campaign.

But Mancini said: "It's not true Eriksson is coming to Inter. He called me and explained that the reports about his exit were not true and he did not know anything about moving to Inter."

"Also, Eriksson is a trainer and if he arrived at Inter I would have to leave. I don't know if I could find another job as good as this."

"I repeat, if Eriksson was to ever come to Inter it would probably be to replace me."

Janakantha champs in Meril Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Janakantha lifted the fourth Meril Cup Media Football title with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Sangbad in an ill-tempered final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Janakantha, who twice finished runners-up in the competition, took the lead through a first-half own-goal by Sangbad's Shamim before player-of-the-final Asif Iqbal doubled the lead after the break. Ripon scored a consolation goal for Sangbad. Asif was also adjudged the man-of-the-tournament.

SERIE A

Juve close in on Scudetto

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus look set to retain their Serie A title after they beat nearest challengers Inter Milan 2-1 at the San Siro on Sunday to extend their lead at the top of the table to a daunting 12 points.

Second-half substitute Alessandro Del Piero was Juve's match-winner, curling a sublime freekick into the top corner from 25 yards with five minutes remaining.

Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic had tapped home Mauro Camoranesi's cross to put Juve ahead in the 63rd minute before a towering header from Inter's Argentine defender Walter Samuel levelled the score.

Inter came within inches of snatching a draw in stoppage time, but substitute Alvaro Recoba saw his freekick strike the crossbar.

Inter's Brazilian striker Adriano had the ball in the back of Juve's net three minutes before half-time with a curling freekick, but the kick was supposed to be indirect and not direct and the goal was ruled out.

Juventus' 21st win in 25 matches left them on 66 points, followed by Inter and AC Milan on 54, with 13 games remaining.

Despite their command of the title race, Ibrahimovic insisted his Juve side were taking nothing for granted.

"The championship isn't over yet," said the giant Sweden international.

"It's not impossible for Inter to catch us, but we are 12 points ahead."

"We're very happy, but there are many games to go. It was an important win and we have to keep doing what we have been doing."

History Real's inspiration

Football

AFP, Madrid

David Beckham was just a six month old baby in arms at the time but Real Madrid are invoking the spirit of one of their greatest comebacks as they bid to redeem last week's Spanish Cup humiliation with a second-leg revenge showing against Real Zaragoza on Wednesday.

If overturning their 6-1 hiding looks too much to ask, Real, who after Saturday's 2-0 league win in Bilbao maintain even La Liga is not lost, have vowed to go down fighting after the Cup had initially seemed to provide their one means of trophy salvation this season.

"If we can pull it back it would be one of the great matches in history. It'll be tough but it's not impossible," said Brazilian star Robinho, whose goal in Bilbao helped close the gap on leaders Barcelona to seven points ahead of the Catalan club's match Sunday at second-placed Valencia.

Beckham, kept out of the Bilbao visit with a back strain, is likely to return for the Zaragoza match ahead of which Real have already deployed their club historians to repair the team's self-belief after their first leg thrashing, their heaviest defeat since a 6-0 Cup mauling by Valencia in 1999.

It was on November 5, 1975 that Real faced English champions Derby County at the Bernabeu in the second round, second leg of the European Cup facing a 4-1 deficit from the opening match at the old Baseball Ground.

Moody looks to Murali Series deciding final in Brisbane today

Cricket

AFP, Brisbane

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody believes Muttiah Muralitharan will bounce back from the worst 10-over spell in limited-overs cricket history in the deciding triangular one-day series final here Tuesday.

The champion spinner endured one of his most miserable days ever, returning 0-99 as Australia powered to its highest one-day international score of 368 for five and a 167-run win in the second tri-final in Sydney on Sunday.

Muralitharan also had to contend with a majority of the Australian crowd taunting him over his much-scrutinised bowling action, with calls of "chucker" and "no ball" every time he approached the bowling crease.

Moody is confident his beleaguered star will strike back in the third and deciding match of the series at the Gabba -- only the first time since 1994 that the Australian tri-series has required a third final.

"He's obviously disappointed," Moody said Monday. "He's a world-class performer and he likes to perform at his best all the time."

"This hasn't happened that often in his career. The opposition got the better of him, but knowing the character and knowing the quality of the person and the bowler, he'll bounce back."

The Sri Lankans must turn around a significant momentum shift in the series after centuries from skipper Ricky Ponting (124 off 127 balls) and man-of-the-match Andrew Symonds (151 off 127 balls) lifted the Australians to their massive 368 for five on Sunday.

Sri Lanka found it a far too difficult assignment and succumbed to be all out for 201 off just 36 overs. The heavy defeat came after Sri Lanka's stunning 22-run win over Ponting's team in the opening final in Adelaide last Friday.

Muralitharan was shielded from the media on Monday and was unavailable for comment. But former Sri Lanka skipper Arjuna Ranatunga urged him to stop



AC Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi celebrates his hat-trick against Reggina during their Serie A clash at the Granillo Stadium on Sunday.

Earlier Sunday, Filippo Inzaghi scored a hat-trick as AC Milan thumped Reggina 4-1, while Roma beat Siena 2-0 for their ninth consecutive league victory, leaving them one win short of equalling the Serie A record.

Carlos Paredes headed Reggina in front before Milan turned on the style in Calabria to claim only their sixth win in 13 away from home.

Brazilian midfielder Kaka set up Inzaghi for the equaliser before Alberto Gilardino dived to head home a left-wing cross from substitute Serginho.

Inzaghi gave Milan a two-goal cushion by converting Kaka's cutback before the veteran Italy international completed his treble

with an easy tap-in from Serginho's cross.

Roma's tigerish midfielder Daniele De Rossi broke the deadlock at Siena in the 70th minute, his swerving shot deceiving Marco Fortin.

Fortin was beaten again in stoppage time by Amantino Mancini's sublime chip, bringing welcome relief to Roma who had to dig deep in the closing stages.

Siena were left to rue a first-half penalty miss by Enrico Chiesa.

Roma's gritty win boosted their hopes of a Champions League place next season, leaving them with 48 points, two behind fourth-placed Fiorentina who crashed to a 2-0 defeat at Tuscan rivals

Livorno. Luca Toni missed a first-half penalty for Fiorentina before Cristiano Lucarelli's double -- his first a coolly converted penalty after Per Kroldrup had fouled Giuseppe Colucci -- ensured a first win for Livorno's recently-installed coach Carlo Mazzone.

Table with 7 columns: Team, P, W, L, D, G/F, G/A, Pts. Rows include Juventus, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Fiorentina, Roma, Livorno.

Rani, Liza join Eva atop

SPORTS REPORTER

International Woman Master Rani Hamid and defending champion Shamima Akhter Liza joined Nazrana Khan Eva atop the table after the fifth round of the Camellia 27th National Women's Chess Championship yesterday.

Eva, who enjoyed solo lead after four rounds, crashed to Zakiya Sultana in the fifth round clash at the BCF hall-room while Rani and Liza both won their games, against Shabana Parveen Nipa and Shamima Sharmin Shimmi respectively. All three now have four points each.

Woman FIDE Master Tanima Parveen, Nipa and Arifa Khatun Moni were breathing on the leaders' necks with 3.5 points.

In other matches, Masuda begun beat Tanima, Moni beat Sharmin Sultana Shirin and Mahmuda Haque Moly drew with Kishwara Shajrin Evana.



Did U Know?

In soccer, the first international match (Scotland vs England) was played in Glasgow, Scotland on November 30 in 1872.



Ronaldinho (Barcelona's Brazilian super star) "I had the chance to play for Manchester United and turned it down, so why would Chelsea be any different? I love life in Spain and I have no desire to leave Barcelona."

India punish Pakistan

FROM PAGE 13

First-change Singh then struck two telling blows, sending Kamran Akmal (34) and Mohammad Yousuf (one) back to the pavilion as the home team failed to capitalise on four dropped catches -- all off Sreesanth.

Yousuf, however, completed his 7,000 one-day runs with the single, becoming the fifth Pakistan behind Inzamamul Haq, Saied Anwar, Javed Miandad and Salim Malik to reach the milestone.

Malik and Inzamam took Pakistan to 128 before Tendulkar dismissed Inzamam (16), while Singh returned for his second spell to have Younis Khan (16) caught behind.

Once Malik holed out to Pathan in the 47th over, Razaqqa lifted the total by smashing seven fours and two sixes to get Pakistan to a challenging total.

Pakistan won the first match at Peshawar by seven runs. The fourth match will be played at Multan on Thursday and the fifth and final in Karachi on February 19.

SCOREBOARD Scoreboard in the third limited-overs international between Pakistan and India at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Monday: PAKISTAN

Table with 4 columns: Player, Runs, Wickets, Overs. Rows include Butt c Gambhir b Pathan, Afridi c Kaif b Pathan, Akmal c Pathan b Rudra Pratap, Malik c Dravid b Pathan, Yousuf c Dhoni b Rudra Pratap, Inzamam c Dhoni b Tendulkar, Younis c Dhoni b Rudra Pratap, Razaqqa not out, Naved run out, Arafat not out, Extras: (lb-5, nb-6, w-11), Total: (For 8 wkts in 50 overs) 288, Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-39, 3-75, 4-82, 5-128, 6-158, 7-244, 8-277

Indian fans

FROM PAGE 13

"We have got only a three-day visa and after travelling on Sunday we will have to go back on Tuesday which is a very short period. Apart from cricket we can't do anything else," said fan Amrit Sethi.

"I spent the whole Sunday in the queue for the ticket. I appeal to both countries to relax the visa process. It is a must -- it is more important than opening rail tracks and air and bus links," added Sethi, an eye surgeon.

Hundreds of Indian fans lined up outside a Lahore hotel from early Sunday morning and were still busy getting their tickets until Monday afternoon. Some of them shouted at authorities for missing the first half of the match.

Table with 5 columns: Player, O, M, R, W. Rows include Bowler, Pathan, Sreesanth, Singh, Agarkar, Tendulkar, Zaheer.

Table with 5 columns: Player, O, M, R, W. Rows include Gambhir b Asif, Tendulkar c sub (Farhat) b Razaqqa, Pathan c Akmal b Asif, Dravid run out, Yuvraj not out, Kaif b Gul, Dhoni not out, Extras: (lb-11, nb-5, w-6), Total: (For 5 wkts 47.4 overs) 292, Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-12, 3-84, 4-189, 5-190

Table with 5 columns: Player, O, M, R, W. Rows include Bowler, Asif, Gul, Naved, Arafat, Afridi, Razaqqa.

Result: India beat Pakistan by five wickets and take 2-1 lead in the 5-ODI series. Man-of-the-match: Mahendra Dhoni. Toss: India. Umpires: Simon Taufel and Asad Rauf.

Two transfers

FROM PAGE 13 March 15 because there would be a workshop in April.

There would be no relegation in the first two editions of the Pro-League as the BFF would take a couple of years to start a lower division.

Among the criteria set for the clubs are to have under-19 squads by two years apart from having an exclusive practice ground. They will also have to prove bank solvency and no coach without at least a C-Licence would be eligible to be in charge.

Jayawardene

FROM PAGE 13

He used his bat to push away a spectator who looked like he was going to hug the batsmen. "I was just exhausted," Symonds said in the Sydney Morning Herald. "I had my head down. As I looked up, the bloke had his arms in the air and I thought he was going to hug me."

"I just would have collapsed because I had nothing left. I just put my bat in his chest so he couldn't jump on me." Symonds was named Man-of-the-match as Australia sealed the game by 167 runs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP ZH BYT QI FQIPIJMA HQYO IJMIQZJK XJB FTR Z K T I D D Z M O I X J D

BYTPIRIJ AZD-RXQQIA. Saturday's Cryptopuzzle: OUR CHURCH FAIR STARTS TOMORROW, SO I BAKED DOZENS OF COOKIES FOR SOME BAZAAR REASON. Today's Cryptopuzzle Clue: Q equals R

The Cryptopuzzle 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.