



PHOTO: AFP

ONE FOR THE SCRAPBOOK: Inter Milan's Argentine star Hernan Crespo skips past the challenge of Roma's French defender Philippe Mexes during their Serie A match at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

Palermo atop as Inter pip Roma

AFP, Rome



Palermo beat Sicilian rivals Catania 5-3 to become outright leaders of Italy's Serie A on Wednesday. Catania were level at 2-2 with 26 minutes left in a pulsating derby at the Renzo Barbera stadium, but a late surge by the home side produced goals for Eugenio Corini, Amauri and Andrea Barzagli. Gionathan Spinesi pulled another one back for the visitors in stoppage time, but it failed to dampen Palermo's celebrations in the first Serie A meeting between the two clubs since the 1962/63 season. A third win in as many matches for Francesco Guidolin's dark horses left them two points clear of Inter Milan and Messina. "Difficult moments will come, but for now we will enjoy being top," said the Palermo coach. Inter won 1-0 at title rivals Roma

thanks to Hernan Crespo's first-half strike, and the reigning champions were even able to afford the luxury of a missed penalty by Zlatan Ibrahimovic. Inter's joy was slightly soured by the late sending-off of Patrick Vieira, his second dismissal in three matches following his red card against Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League last week. Roma coach Luciano Spalletti admitted Inter deserved the three points as his side dropped to fourth. "There's little to say -- tonight Inter were better than us," he said. Inter scorer Crespo surprised himself with his dribble which led to the winning goal. "I haven't done that since I was at Parma and I left there six years ago," he joked. Christian Rigano netted twice as another Sicilian side, Messina, overcame Reggina 2-0. AC Milan, who started on minus eight points for their part in the match-fixing scandal, moved into positive territory after their third successive win, a 1-0 defeat of

Ascoli at the San Siro where Marek Jankulovski grabbed the winner. Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti paid tribute to his team for not letting the points penalty sap their confidence. "We couldn't have done anymore, but the road ahead is still long and we have a lot of ground to make up," he said. A Massimo Oddo penalty gave Lazio, docked 11 points for match-fixing, a 1-0 win at Chievo, while Mario Frick scored twice as Siena beat Torino 2-1. Atalanta and Empoli ended goalless and Cagliari drew 2-2 at home to Livorno. Fiorentina grabbed their first win, a 1-0 victory at home to Parma,

TEAM	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PTS
Palermo	3	3	0	0	11	7	9
Messina	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Inter Milan	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Roma	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Siena	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Atalanta	3	1	2	0	3	1	5

but they remain firmly rooted to the bottom on -16 points due to their match-fixing crimes. Sampdoria drew on all their fighting spirit to come back from 3-0 down to draw 3-3 at home to Udinese. Inter broke the deadlock a minute from half time at the Olympic stadium. Crespo cut inside from the left wing and turned French defender Philippe Mexes inside out with some neat footwork. Having set up a shooting chance, the Argentine striker fired towards goal from a tight angle, and although his shot was not particularly well struck, it clipped the body of Roma keeper Alexander Doni and crept in. Inter had the chance to double their lead when Mexes pulled down Crespo in the box shortly after the break, but Ibrahimovic's weak penalty was easily stopped by Doni. Vieira saw red in the closing stages after receiving his second yellow card.

Crespo a la Ronaldinho

AFP, Rome

Hernan Crespo did his best Ronaldinho impression to score the goal which gave Inter Milan a precious 1-0 win at Roma, their likeliest rivals for the Serie A title. Wednesday's victory not only lifted Inter above Roma into third place on seven points, two behind leaders Palermo, but also silenced the critics who said the club were in crisis after an unconvincing start to the season. Crespo is known for his clinical finishing rather than his dribbling skills, but he showed some neat footwork to skip past Philippe Mexes before firing home the only goal just before half-time. Crespo, 31, said it had been a long time since he had scored a similar goal, casting his mind back to when he was with Parma between 1996 and 2000. "I haven't scored a goal like that since my Parma days," said the Argentina international. "I have to say I enjoyed it a lot. I will never be Ronaldinho, but I always give 100 per cent." Crespo was delighted to give the perfect response to the critics who rounded upon Inter after their disappointing 1-1 draw against Sampdoria last Saturday. "Too much was said after the Sampdoria game, and we gave a great demonstration of character by winning at the Olympic stadium," he said.

Palermo, Catania fans clash

AFP, Rome

Fifty people were injured as rival fans clashed before and during Wednesday's Sicilian derby between Palermo and Catania, the first Serie A match between the two clubs since the 1962/63 season. The trouble started two hours before kick-off as the 2,000 visiting Catania supporters made their way to the Renzo Barbera stadium. The violence continued inside the ground after four Palermo stewards were attacked by Catania fans, triggering an exchange of missiles, including flares and fireworks, between the two sets of supporters. Among the 50 injured were five police officers, while five fans were arrested. Palermo won the match 5-3 to go top of Serie A.

Pancalli Italy's new football chief

AFP, Rome

Luca Pancalli was named as the new emergency commissioner of the Italian football federation (FIGC) on Thursday. His appointment was made by Gianni Petrucci, president of the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), the country's highest sports authority. Pancalli, CONI vice-president and the president of the Italian Paralympic Committee, replaces Guido Rossi who quit on Monday. Italian football legend Luigi 'Gigi' Riva, who scored 35 goals in 42 internationals for the Azzurri and was general manager of the national team at this year's World Cup, has been named as FIGC vice-president. Pancalli's job will be to restore the FIGC's credibility in the wake of the Italian match-fixing scandal that saw Juventus relegated and AC Milan, Fiorentina, Lazio and Reggina all deducted points for rigging matches. The emergency administration of the FIGC will end on February 28 after which a new permanent president will be elected. When asked what was needed for Italian football to clean up its act, Pancalli replied: "Lots of hard work and dedication with one objective -- to restore calm."

"When I think of all the young kids playing football, I don't think football is ill. With regards to our management, the emergency administration has to perform above itself. Together we have to rebuild so that we don't have another dark season, but a bright one which restores hope." Pancalli, a 42-year-old lawyer, represented Italy in the pentathlon at junior level before suffering a tragic fall while riding a horse in Austria which left him in a wheelchair. He lost none of his competitive edge, though, taking part in the 1984 Paralympic Games, winning two gold and three silver medals in the pool. At the 1996 Games in Athens he closed his athletic career with another two gold and three silver medals. Pancalli said he would approach his new job in the same way he would approach a race.

Alonso stuns Magpies

AFP, Liverpool



Xabi Alonso struck a stunning goal from inside his own half for the second time in eight months to seal Liverpool's 2-0 Premiership victory over Newcastle on Wednesday. The Spanish international's most recent appearance on the score-sheet for the club had arrived in similar circumstances in the FA Cup victory over Luton Town in January. And the midfielder was at it again 11 minutes from time at Anfield, spotting Steve Harper off his line to embarrass the flailing Newcastle goalkeeper -- who was only on the side because first choice keeper Shay Given suffered a serious injury at the weekend -- in amazing style from almost 70 yards. Until Alonso's late intervention, the hosts looked like having to settle for Dirk Kuyt's first Liverpool goal as they returned to winning ways following back-to-back defeats. The margin of victory should have been more emphatic, as the excellent Luis Garcia struck the post 17 minutes from time. And Kuyt, a summer target for Newcastle before his 10 million pounds move to Anfield from

Feyenoord, missed two clear second-half openings as Liverpool made hard work of stretching their opponents' winless run here to 13 games. In front of watching England manager Steve McClaren, Kuyt broke the deadlock to reward Liverpool for their dominance of the first half hour. Steve Finnan's run down the right was met by Alonso's perfect through ball, and Kuyt had the simple task of sliding home the full-back's inviting centre as he outpaced Craig Moore to meet the centre five yards out. Liverpool should already have been ahead at this point as Craig Bellamy wasted a clear early chance to put the hosts in the ascendancy. The Wales striker used his pace to latch onto a defence-splitting pass from Garcia, the Spaniard who was restored to Liverpool's starting line-up in place of Jermaine Pennant following the defeat at Chelsea. Bellamy had ample time to weigh up his options as he bore down on the Newcastle goal, only to fire a low shot from inside the area straight at Harper, who was starting his first Premiership match for 17 months. Celestine Babayaro was fortunate to stay on after flooring Kuyt with a first in the face at a first-half

corner, which went unseen by the officials. The Nigerian international defender could still face censure when the Football Association review the incident on video. Garcia was exerting an increasing influence on the encounter, but overstepped the mark in his efforts to double Liverpool's advantage, earning a booking immediately after the break as he punched Alonso's free-kick into the net. Newcastle had strong penalty appeals turned down either side of Garcia's handy-work, as Shola Ameobi tumbled under Daniel Agger's challenge, before England defender Jamie Carragher charged down the striker's shot with his arm. Both times well-placed referee Mark Halsey ignored the claims. Bellamy spurned another clear chance to put the outcome beyond doubt 10 minutes into the second half, racing onto the loose ball as Gerrard blocked an attempted clearance from Peter Ramage. The former Newcastle striker's chip over Harper looked perfect, only for the effort to drift narrowly wide. Harper was by far the busier of the goalkeepers, and he again kept Newcastle in the hunt with a fine 63rd-minute save from a long-range Fabio Aurelio free-kick which was heading for the bottom right-hand corner following Moore's foul on Kuyt.



PHOTO: INTERNET

XABI MAGIC: Liverpool's stylish midfielder Xabi Alonso blows a kiss to the crowd after his astonishing 65-yard strike in their Premiership clash against Newcastle at Anfield on Wednesday.

Mancini lost for words

INTERNET, undated

Roberto Mancini was forced to miss the post-match Press conference after Inter's vital win over Roma because he had lost his voice. The former Sampdoria hero instead handed the duty to his new assistant Coach, former teammate Sinisa Mihajlovic. The Nerazzurri giants came into the game after a few disappointing performances, but impressed at the Stadio Olimpico, with Hernan Crespo scoring the decisive goal. "I'm speaking in place of Roberto because he lost his voice after shouting from the bench for the whole match to give instructions to the team," explained the Serb. "He is exhausted and says he's sorry about his absence, that is why he sent me to talk. "We are satisfied because the Stadio Olimpico is a very difficult ground we were handed a challenging start with the two trips to Florence and Rome, but we managed to win both of them. "We played a good match this evening and we're pleased because Roma weren't that dangerous in attack." The Coach could not avoid questions on Adriano, who was once again dropped, with Crespo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic starting upfront. "At the moment Crespo is in better form than Adriano, but the latter is training hard and well," continued Mihajlovic. "We all know how important he is for Inter when he is at his best and he will give his all to reach top fitness, but we mustn't forget that we also have Julio Cruz and Alvaro Recoba on the mend." Ibrahimovic missed a penalty just before the hour mark, kicking very weakly and allowing Alexander Doni to keep Roma in the game.

Pauletta powers PSG

Football

AFP, Paris

A Pauletta brace seconds apart helped provide some rare cheer for ailing Paris Saint Germain in their 3-1 French League Cup win over Lorient on Wednesday. Held to a goalless draw by Derry City in the UEFA Cup last week and perched just four points off the relegation zone in the French first division PSG badly needed a pick me up in this last 32 tie. But it was Lorient, trounced by Lyon last weekend, took control when Rahman Barry fired them into a 26th minute lead. The result was sweet revenge for PSG who had lost to Lorient on the opening day of the season. PSG's bitter rivals Marseille avoided the banana skin waiting for them at their south coast neighbours Montpellier with a 3-1 victory over the second division outfit, while other topflight clubs to avoid the embarrassment of succumbing to lower league opposition were Lens, Rennes, Saint Etienne and Auxerre. The competition's holders Nancy kept the wheels on their defence of the trophy when Gaston Curbelo got the only goal of the game in their tie against Nice but Monaco only scraped through 5-4 on penalties at Valenciennes after the tie ended goalless after extra time. "When I think of all the young kids playing football, I don't think football is ill. With regards to our management, the emergency administration has to perform above itself. Together we have to rebuild so that we don't have another dark season, but a bright one which restores hope." Pancalli, a 42-year-old lawyer, represented Italy in the pentathlon at junior level before suffering a tragic fall while riding a horse in Austria which left him in a wheelchair. He lost none of his competitive edge, though, taking part in the 1984 Paralympic Games, winning two gold and three silver medals in the pool. At the 1996 Games in Athens he closed his athletic career with another two gold and three silver medals. Pancalli said he would approach his new job in the same way he would approach a race.



PHOTO: INTERNET

PSG forward Pauletta celebrates after scoring in a League Cup match against Lorient at the Parc des Princes in Paris on Wednesday.

Head-butt a hit for Materazzi

Football

AFP, London

Marco Materazzi may have felt the pain when Zinedine Zidane planted his infamous head-butt on him in the World Cup final but the Italian hardman defender has seen it pay off financially for him in a commercial. The Inter Milan star -- who was hit with a two-match ban and 2,500 pound (3,750 euro) fine for his part in provoking Zidane -- agreed to do the advertisement for sportswear giants Nike and was reportedly paid 25,000 pounds, the Daily Mail reported on Wednesday. In it the former Everton misfit -- who had an eventful World Cup being sent-off in the second round match with Australia, conceding the penalty that gave France the lead in the final and then heading the equaliser -- is seen taking blows to the chest. The various offenders are a tenpin bowling ball, an American footballer, a battering

'Newcastle goal my best'

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso admitted his wondergoal against Newcastle on Wednesday was the best of his career. Spanish star Alonso scored Liverpool's second goal in their 2-0 win at Anfield when his powerful drive from well inside his own half beat Newcastle goalkeeper Steve Harper, who slipped as he tried to save the shot. The former Real Sociedad player doesn't score many goals for Liverpool but when he does they are usually memorable. His last goal for the English Premiership club, against Luton in the FA Cup in January, was another incredible long-range effort from inside Liverpool's half of the pitch. But Alonso believes the strike against Newcastle topped even that one and told the club's website: "Yes, I think this was better. The Luton goal bounced a few times, this one went quite straight. "The Luton one was left-footed, it was different, but I am quite happy to score this goal. "At the beginning I was looking for the pass but the ref was in the