



Real Madrid midfielder Reyes (C) is under pressure from Racing Santander's Pinillos (L) and Tomas during their Primera Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Saturday.

Rivaldo keeps rolling

AFP, Athens

Two goals from Rivaldo inspired a second-half fightback from Olympiakos Piraeus who beat Aris Salonika 3-2 on Saturday to stay top of the Super League.

In the other game played, AEK Athens leapfrogged Panathinaikos into second place when they hammered Kerkyra 4-1.

Olympiakos lead the table with 27 points, three clear of AEK. Third-placed Panathinaikos, who face Atromitos on Sunday, are a further two points back on 22 points.

Trailing 2-0 at halftime to goals from Spaniard Sergio Koke, Olympiakos began their comeback in the 62nd minute.

Rivaldo rose unchallenged at the far post to head home a cross from Grigoris Georgatos who was fortunate to still be on the field after escaping a second yellow card for a foul on Francisco Xavito.

Four minutes later, Rivaldo teed up a direct free-kick some five metres outside the penalty area and fired beyond Greece's number two goalkeeper Costas Chalkias.

Nery Alberto Castillo clinched the points for Olympiakos when, after having had one attempt cleared off the line and fired just wide with another, he scored from close range after good work by Haruna Babangida.

AEK, who face AC Milan on Tuesday in the Champions League, followed last week's 5-0 thrashing of Larissa by putting four past Kerkyra.

Their defence let them down in the second minute but, having gone 1-0 behind, they responded with a Julio Cesar equaliser.

In the 29th minute, Nikos Liberopoulos put them ahead from the penalty spot after Stavros Tziortzopoulos was shown a red card.

Gustavo Manduca added a second penalty before halftime and Liberopoulos added his second goal and AEK's fourth in the second half.

Pardew praises Tevez

REUTERS, London

West Ham United manager Alan Pardew said Argentina forward Carlos Tevez was finally starting to adapt to the English game after a shaky start and had shown his class against champions Chelsea on Saturday.

The 22-year-old, signed from Brazilian side Corinthians on the last day of the transfer window in August, was hailed as the key to renewed West Ham success this season but, partly because of injury, has found it hard to settle.

Before Saturday's match he had started just two of a possible 12 league matches and made four substitute appearances. He also started both of West Ham's UEFA Cup matches against Palermo but has yet to find the net for his new club.

Although West Ham lost 1-0 on Saturday, Tevez, playing on the right, proved creative down the wing particularly in the first half.

"He showed the quality which he can give to the club," Pardew said. "We've been patient with him and he's been patient with us."

"I was bowled by his performance today. His work rate was fantastic for a world-class player. He's brought on board what we do at West Ham."

Pardew said Tevez could play most positions and that argued well for the rest of the season with West Ham aiming to climb out of the bottom half of the table.

"He's versatile. That's one of his gifts."

REAL SAIL EASY

Sevilla humble Valencia

REUTERS, Madrid



The UEFA Cup holders scored from the resultant free-kick through French defender Julien Escudé.

Brazilian striker Luis Fabiano and Mali striker Frederic Kanoute completed the victory, their sixth straight home win, after the break.

"We are candidates for the title," said Sevilla defender Aitor Ocio after the game.

Sevilla are top with 25 points, two ahead of second-placed Barcelona who visit Real Mallorca on Sunday.

Earlier on Saturday, Real Madrid went level on 23 points with arch-rivals Barca after an efficient if uninspiring 3-1 win over Racing Santander at the Bernabeu.

Sergio Ramos headed Real in

front from a corner after five minutes but they laboured to overcome a resilient Racing.

Jose Antonio Reyes scored after a swift break in the 58th minute and Mali midfielder Mahamadou Diarra wrapped up the points in the 71st.

Racing's Argentine defender Ezequiel Garay pulled a goal back for the visitors with a thundering free kick 14 minutes from time, but Real's night was spoilt when playmaker Guti was shown a straight red card at the end.

Sevilla's Sanchez Pizjuan stadium witnessed a highly-charged opening quarter with a flurry of niggly challenges, which culminated in Valencia's Silva being sent off for catching Dani Alves in the face with his arm.

To rub salt into the wound Sevilla then scored from the freekick as Fabiano nudged the ball into the path of Escudé, who drilled a low shot under Santiago Canizares.

Almost immediately Canizares pulled off a magnificent save from Kanoute's point-blank header, before Valencia settled into the

game with a man less.

Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop denied effervescent lone striker David Villa either side of the break, before the home side effectively settled the game.

Fullback Alves had been a constant threat down the right and played a great pass through for Fabiano to spin clear on the edge of the area, and fire home in the 55th minute.

As the visitors, who had only won once in their last five league matches, pressed to get back into the game they were hit on the break.

Along pass from Antonio Puerta was chipped down by Kanoute in the area and dinked past a helpless Canizares in the 71st minute. The goal made Kanoute the league's top scorer with nine.

Valencia, who already have a number of key players out injured, saw striker Villa limp off with an injured ankle after the third goal, and Brazilian midfielder Edu was carried off on a stretcher with what appeared to be a serious knee injury.

Bayern topple Stuttgart

REUTERS, Berlin



Bayern Munich knocked VfB Stuttgart off the top of the Bundesliga with a come-from-behind 2-1 victory in the rain at home on Saturday.

Schalke 04 took over as leaders with a 4-2 victory at Energie Cottbus that gave them 26 points while Bayern stayed fourth on 23 points

and Stuttgart, who had won four straight games before Saturday, slipped to third with 24 points.

Werder Bremen, who are second also on 24 points, stumbled ahead of Wednesday's Champions League clash at home to Chelsea, with a disappointing 2-2 draw at lowly Alemannia Aachen.

"We're back with the leaders of the pack," said Bayern coach Felix Magath, who had feared losing touch with the title contenders before picking up six points in their last two games.

"Stuttgart showed why they deserved to be in first place. There's nothing shabby about beating a strong side like Stuttgart by just one goal. We're satisfied."

Stuttgart's Mario Gomez took a pass in midfield from Christian Gentner and overshot three defenders before beating Oliver Kahn from 18 metres in the eighth minute.

It was the eighth goal of the season for Gomez, who is expected to soon get a call-up from Germany coach Joachim Loew. It put the 21-year-old surprise package at the top of the goalscoring table with Hertha Berlin's Marko Pantelic.

The goal jolted the Bavarians into action. Just as they bounced back last week with two late goals to beat Bayer Leverkusen 3-2, Bayern scored twice in quick succession to the delight of the sell-out Allianz Arena crowd of 69,000.

They got a deserved equaliser in the 27th minute when Roy Makaay outjumped Stuttgart's Ivory Coast defender Arthur Boka, to head a Phillip Lahm cross from the left past Timo Hildebrand.

It was the Dutchman's seventh goal of the season.

Claudio Pizarro put Bayern ahead nine minutes later. Mark van Bommel slotted over a cross from the right that Martin Demichels wisely let go through his legs at the near post and Pizarro streaked in to tap the ball into an empty goal.

The only highlight of the second half was the return of Bayern's long-injured Germany midfielder Sebastian Deisler, who came on for the last two minutes to a loud ovation. It was his first match since picking up a knee injury eight months ago.

"We started well but Bayern took control after we went ahead and dominated us," said Stuttgart coach Armin Veh. "We were too passive and let them push us around. Bayern deserved to win."

Bundesliga and German Cup champions last season, Bayern have been feeling the pressure after their worst start in 32 years with three defeats in their first 12 matches - two to teams who were bottom of the table at the time.



Bayern Munich's Roy Makaay is ecstatic after scoring against Stuttgart during their Bundesliga match in Munich on Saturday.

McClaren believes in England

AFP, London

Steve McClaren insists England will still make the Euro 2008 finals despite them sinking into third place in their qualifying section this week.

While England were drawing 1-1 in a friendly against Holland in Amsterdam, Group E rivals Croatia and Macedonia respectively to shove England out of the two automatic qualifying spots.

McClaren's men only picked up a single point from a home game against Macedonia and a trip to Croatia in October leaving them needing a positive result from the trip to Tel Aviv where they face Israel on March 26.

"I will be judged on a longer period than the Israel game," said McClaren.

"There will be quite a few touchstone games in this group. That is the first and we will be ready for it. There is still a long way to go in this group. I was confident before, and I still am, that we will qualify."

"I never said it would be easy. There are teams out there with good coaches and good players. Away games anywhere in Europe these days are difficult."

"I have been involved in three qualifying campaigns with England and there are always hiccups. You have to expect things will go down to the last two or three games."

McClaren will not send a team out again until February 7, when Spain visit Old Trafford for a friendly.

'Negative' Reds worry Xabi

INTERNET, undated

Xabi Alonso believes the doom and gloom engulfing Liverpool has already all but scuppered their hopes of competing for the Premiership title.

Another below par performance from The Reds in a goalless draw at Middlesbrough on Saturday evening means the team trail leaders Manchester United by 16 points after just 13 matches.

A run of just two points from 21 available away from home has left their title hopes hanging by a thread. Alonso admits he would be able to see a light at the end of the tunnel, were it not for the negativity pervading the Anfield dressing room.

"The fight for the title is getting more and more difficult for us," said Alonso.

"Not just because of the points difference but because of the atmosphere I see at the club."

"I see pessimism and in that respect it is going to be very hard to come back."

Ganguly tells toss delay story

PTI, New Delhi

Former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly has finally revealed the story behind turning up late for the toss during the famous 2001 India-Australia series, saying it was a pre-meditated strategy aimed at provoking the Aussies.

Ganguly's turning out late for the toss had aggravated rival skipper Steve Waugh no end, prompting him to mention the incident later in his autobiography as well.

And Ganguly admitted the plan was to provoke the Australians and give them a dose of their own medicine.

"When we played them in India, I was a novice as captain while Steve knew the tricks of the trade. He was also utilising the columns he wrote for Indian newspapers to say my Sachin (Tendulkar) was a spent force and how good the Australians were," Ganguly said at the HT Leadership Summit here on Saturday.

"Having already lost the Test series, John Buchanan once asked Javagal Srinath in an ODI at Vizag why he was leaving the field, in a rude manner. So, we decided to give a taste of their own medicine to the Australians. We wanted to tell them that they were in our country and not vice-versa. The idea was to provoke them, and it worked."

On his best behaviour ever since being sidelined from the team - first as a captain and then as a player, Ganguly made light of coach Greg Chappell's remark that he wanted to cling on to his job as skipper for money.

"We were good friends for many years before he became the Indian coach and friends can fight and behave irrationally in anger. By God's grace, I was born in a family where things were never so bad financially. It was a statement made in anger."

Rooney keeps Chelsea at bay

REUTERS, London



Wayne Rooney scored twice as Manchester United came from behind to beat Sheffield United 2-1 and stay three points clear of champions Chelsea at the top of the Premier League on Saturday.

Chelsea beat West Ham United 1-0 at Stamford Bridge where Geremi scored the only goal with a 22nd-minute free kick to stretch Chelsea's unbeaten home league run to 51 matches.

Arsenal, though, who moved into third place last week, lost ground after being held to a 1-1 draw at home by Newcastle United. They dropped back to fourth after Portsmouth beat Watford 2-1 to move above them.

United, who have won their last seven league games, top the table with 34 points from 13 matches, Chelsea have 31 from 13, Portsmouth 23 from 13 and Arsenal 22 from 12.

Sheffield United and Manchester United, meeting in the league for the first time for 13 years, played out a full-blooded match at Bramall Lane where the home side struck first.

Keith Gillespie, who began his career at Manchester United and played a handful of games before leaving in 1995 as part of the deal that took Andy Cole from Newcastle to Old Trafford, opened the scoring with a diving header after 13 minutes.

Gillespie, who subsequently played for Blackburn Rovers, Wigan Athletic and Leicester City,

was making his 44th appearance for Sheffield United -- and that was his first goal.

But 17 minutes later the leaders were level with Rooney scoring his sixth league goal of the season and the striker, who scored England's goal in the Netherlands in midweek, secured United the points with a 75th minute winner.

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson told Sky Sports News: "They scored an early goal and made it difficult for us, but getting a goal back before halftime gave us confidence, and the patience to wait."

At Stamford Bridge, Geremi scored his first goal since October 2005 with a superbly taken 22nd-minute free kick awarded after Danny Gabbidon fouled Didier Drogha.

It was enough to give Chelsea all three points and keep the Hammers firmly entrenched in the battle for survival at the wrong end of the table.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho said: "I think we deserved the points but at the same time I think West Ham gave us a game."

"Normally we should score a second goal and kill the game, but it was a good game because both teams played with a good attitude. West Ham did not come here to get just one point."

While Manchester United and Chelsea were both winning, Arsenal were forced to settle for a draw at the Emirates Stadium against Newcastle, who have not won in nine league matches.

Kieron Dyer, making his first

league start of the season after coming on as a substitute against Manchester City last week, scored his first goal for 20 months after 30 minutes when he curled a low shot past Jens Lehmann in the Arsenal goal.

Despite the home side having most of the possession, they only scored once when Thierry Henry, a second half substitute, equalised with a 70th-minute free kick.

Liverpool's toothless away form continued as they could only manage a 0-0 draw with Middlesbrough at the Riverside.

Jonathan Woodgate turned one late Peter Crouch header onto the crossbar, but apart from that it was clear to see why Liverpool have managed just one away goal in the league.

Liverpool move up one place to ninth with 18 points while Boro remain in 14th place.

Charlton, playing under new manager Les Reed for the first time following Iain Dowie's departure on Monday, stayed nailed to the bottom with eight points after losing 2-0 at Reading where Seol Ki-hyeon and Kevin Doyle scored for the home side.

Portsmouth came from behind to beat second-to-bottom Watford 2-1 with goals from Nwankwo Kanu (44) and a last-minute penalty from Lomano Lua Lua after American Jay DeMerit had given Watford the lead after 32 minutes.

Manchester City beat Fulham 3-1 in the luncheon kickoff while Everton ended a run of three league matches without a win by beating Bolton Wanderers 1-0 at home with Mikel Arteta scoring the only goal after an hour.



Manchester United's mercurial striker Wayne Rooney celebrates one of his two goals against Sheffield United during their English Premiership match at Bramall Lane in Sheffield on Saturday.

UEFA sides with Domenech

AFP, Glasgow

Scottish football bosses have been left bemused but relieved after being warned about the time the ball boys at Hampden Park take to give the ball back into play.

France coach Raymond Domenech made the complaint to UEFA after Scotland's 1-0 shock defeat of the former world champions last month in their Euro 2008 qualifier at Hampden.

European football's ruling body upheld Domenech's complaint, but Scottish Football Association chief executive David Taylor called the whole affair extremely bizarre.

"It surprised us to be charged with such an offence," Taylor said. "It's the most bizarre thing I've encountered with Scotland."

Domenech was unhappy with the conduct of the ball boys during France's defeat on October 7 and said after the game: "Before the game I knew that the Scottish fans and team were a nation who believe in fair play."

"It surprised us to be charged with such an offence," Taylor said. "It's the most bizarre thing I've encountered with Scotland."

Domenech was unhappy with the conduct of the ball boys during France's defeat on October 7 and said after the game: "Before the game I knew that the Scottish fans and team were a nation who believe in fair play."

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"We'll need to make sure before the next game, which is against

"But I was disappointed with the attitude of the ball boys who slowed the game down whenever the ball went out of play. That was very disappointing for me from a country known for their fair play."

Scotland manager Walter Smith laughed off Domenech's claims.

He said: "It was brilliant that wasn't it. Seriously I think that is something that would happen in any country in the world."

And Taylor said he was surprised the conduct of the ball boys had been made an issue.

"It was in the referee's report and in the match delegate's report. The referee said the ball was not returned to play quickly enough."

"It was strange to end up with a disciplinary charge against us for it."

Taylor defended Scotland's conduct during international games and said, if anything, the side "err on the side of being sporting."

"We brief the ball boys during the game. They are Queen's Park's youth players."

"We'll need to make sure before the next game, which is against

Georgia at home in March, even if we're 1-0 up with five minutes to go, even if the players are saying 'do you have to give the ball back so quickly?' that they do it."

Juventus held as Buffon sees red

AFP, Rome

Fallen Italian giants Juventus had keeper Gianluigi Buffon sent off in Saturday's 1-1 Serie B draw away to AlbinoLeffe.

The Italian World Cup winner saw red in the 24th minute for tripping up Ruben Garinini in the 18-yard box.

Brazilian striker Inacio Joelson netted the resulting penalty-kick before Raffaele Palladino equalised for the 10 men shortly after the break.

A draw left Juventus on 21 points, one behind joint leaders Napoli and Piacenza. Napoli won 1-0 at home to Bologna while Piacenza play away to Mantova on Monday.

Robben on red alert

AFP, London



Chelsea are reportedly lining up a move for Lyon midfielder Florent Malouda

and that news has ruffled the feathers of Dutch winger Arjen Robben, according to a report here Sunday.

The News of the World reported that Robben has threatened to quit Chelsea after hearing that Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho is set to table a 15 million pounds (28.4 million US dollars) bid for the French ace.

The 22-year-old Dutch winger has struggled to hold down a place since recovering from an early-season injury.

And he warned: "If I am not in the team I will have to consider other options. Chelsea said I would be playing more regularly so let us wait and see."

"There are some players here who get a lot of money for doing nothing but I don't want to be one of them. I am too young for that."

The newspaper quoted a "close pal" of 26-year-old French midfielder Malouda as saying: "It's true Chelsea are very interested in

Florent for next summer and it's very possible the move will go ahead."

"Florent would be keen on the switch as he is a close friend of Didier Drogha."

Malouda, who has 26 caps and three goals for France, is considered the latest in a steady line of talents to emerge from France's top club.

After a protracted transfer that dragged on for much of the 2005 close season, Chelsea signed Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien from the five-time French league champions.