

Sport

Sacchi's ship rocked again

ROME, Dec 23: European Champions Juventus moved further ahead in the Serie A title race Sunday despite only drawing in struggling Piacenza as nearest rivals Vicenza slumped to a 2-1 defeat at Sampdoria, reports AFP.

Those results left the Zebras, six points clear of the pack making up for their midweek Italian Cup exit at the hands of Roy Hodgson's Inter Milan.

But the spotlight again fell on crisis' club, AC Milan, who slid to their fifth defeat of the campaign in losing 1-0 at the San Siro to recently out of sports Parma.

Croatian striker Mario Stanic hit the only goal on the stroke of half time.

Milan fell a point behind city rivals Inter, who needed a Youli Djorkaeff penalty to prevent tailenders Reggiana notching their first win of the season.

Sunday's defeat for Milan came after Arrigo Sacchi had steadied the ship with two wins since replacing Oscar Tabarez as coach earlier in the month.

Parma's win was a relief for new coach Carlo Ancelotti, who reportedly faced the axe after a disastrous first third of the season.

Juventus' lead could have been even bigger with other title chasers slipping up. But after Michele Padovano opened the scoring with a header on 57 minutes at Piacenza having come on for Angelo di Livio, the sat back and Delle Carri rescued a point five minutes from the end.

Unsung Vicenza, a revelation this season in which they briefly sat atop the Serie A for the first time in their 94-year history, missed their chance to close the gap after being hit by a double blast from Sampdoria's 22-year-old discovery Vincenzo Montella inside the first 25 minutes.

A Marcelo Otero penalty was all the visitors could summon up in reply as they slid to their third defeat of the season. Sampdoria's win took them up to fourth.

Napoli rocketed up to third, level on points with Vicenza as they saw off Lazio 1-0 with an injury time goal from Brazilian Andre Cruz.

Bologna meanwhile dropped a place to fifth after their 0-0 home draw with struggling Perugia.

Barca secure second spot

MADRID, Dec 23: Deportivo la Coruna failed to grab a share of the lead in the Spanish First Division when they were held to a 1-1 draw at Sporting Gijon on Sunday, leaving them two points' adrift of Real Madrid, reports AFP.

Brazilian striker Rivaldo Vito gave La Coruna a ninth-minute lead, but they were then pegged back by Julio Salinas' 23rd-minute equaliser which forced the visitors to content with a share of the spoils.

Barcelona leapfrogged the north westerners into second spot with a hard-earned 1-0 win at home to Celta Vigo, defender Miguel Angel Nadal scoring a minute before the break.

But Barca's workmanlike performance still fell some way short of satisfying the Catalans' demanding fans, who have demonstrated their unhappiness with manager Bobby Robson in recent days.

Two weeks ago, Robson's men committed what it Catalonia ranks as the cardinal sin, losing to hated rivals Real and sending the Madrid side four points clear at the top.

Real's draw in Valladolid on Saturday and Barca's win 24 hours later meant that lead was cut to just two points.

A goal by Croatian international striker Davor Suker put the title favourites ahead but Rafael Alkorta's won goal on the hour secured a point for Valencia.

Valencia, currently drifting in midtable, face relegation-threatened Hercules Alicante today.

Basten plans to draw the line

ZURICH, Dec 23: Former Ajax and AC Milan striker Van Basten has revealed that he wants to turn his back on the football scene while he considers his future, reports AFP.

Van Basten, 32, a three-time European footballer of the year, told this month's edition of *FIFA* magazine to be published next that "there's the possibility that my life will not be dominated by football any more."

"I've got to get completely away from the football scene to make up my mind what I really want," he explained, saying it was only after three painful years battling his injury "I wanted a normal life again."

He added he was now free of pain and had been able to enjoy a game of beach soccer with friends during the summer.

Van Basten, who attended a recent *FIFA* taskforce meeting on the future of the game, meanwhile said he believed the red and yellow card system was insufficient to clean up football.

He proposed the introduction of a basketball-style system whereby a player would be penalised for each foul and then substituted after five fouls.



Indian left-arm spinner Venkatapathy Raju (not in the picture) is on the verge of getting Eastern Province's Phillip Amm caught behind on the final day of a three-day match at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth, South Africa on Dec 23.

— AFP/UNB photo

Melbourne Test begins Thursday**Enter Langer, exit Ponting**

SYDNEY, Dec 23: Queensland opener Matthew Hayden and Western Australian left-hander Justin Langer were today recalled to the Australian cricket team for the third Test against the West Indies in Melbourne starting Thursday, reports AFP.

Hayden replaces the injured Matthew Elliott for his second Test, while Langer returns after an absence of three years.

Langer, 26, cracked an unbeaten 274 against South Australia in Perth Sunday and has 596 runs this season at an average of 119.60.

He takes over from young Tasmanian Ricky Ponting, who was dropped and will instead play for Australia A against Pakistan in one day match Saturday.

Ponting, 22, and rated a long-term prospect at No. 3, made 88, nine and four in the first two Tests after being promoted up the order.

Veteran all-rounder Steve Waugh has recovered from a groin strain after missing the second Sydney Test and regains his place.

Waugh proved his fitness beyond doubt Sunday with a match saving nine and a half hour 186 not out for New South

Wales against Queensland.

One of the bowlers he faced was young Queensland paceman Michael Kasprowicz. Who was wicketless in his first two Tests and has been dropped.

This leaves a batsman the likely 12th man at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Hayden, 25, played his only Test in South Africa in March

and each productive summer brought more howls of Queensland protest that he had again been overlooked.

The burly left-hander hit 224 and 13 not out for the Australian XI against the Windies by next year and has provided Queensland's main club with a budget of about five million dollars.

"Our president wants to give a present to thousands of football fans in Queensland, who could witness a great player firsthand."

Local Uralan finished in seventh place in Russia's Second Division last season but the ambitious president wants to see his club among the elite Russian teams in the top flight by next year and has provided Kalmikia's main club with a budget of about five million dollars.

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