

Celta, Valencia split points

MADRID, Apr 25: Spanish champions-elect Barcelona were sitting pretty Saturday after two of their closest rivals, Celta Vigo and Valencia, parted 2-2 in Valencia, reports AFP.

The draw means Barca, chasing their 16th title, have an eight-point lead over Vigo going into their Sunday clash at struggling Atletico Madrid.

Vigo were denied the win by just seconds when Francisco Farinos notched a last-gasp equaliser for Valencia, who leapfrog Real Madrid into third place on goal difference.

Croatian international striker Goran Vlaovic put Valencia ahead in the 11th minute but Vigo fought back to level six minutes before the break through Juan Sanchez.

And the visitors looked to have secured a fine win when Valery Karpin fired them in front four minutes into injury-time.

But Farinos just had time to squeeze home Valencia's second before the final whistle.

Newcastle after Dani

LONDON, Apr 25: Newcastle United have launched a 10-million-pound bid for Real Mallorca striker Dani, who is also a target for reigning Premiership champions Arsenal and Sheffield Wednesday, reports AFP.

Dani, who starred in Mallorca's Cup Winners Cup semi-final win over Chelsea last Thursday, recently turned down a 6-million-pound move to Wednesday even though Mallorca had accepted the bid for the former Real Madrid striker.

Real Mallorca president Guillermo Corbella told the News of the World: "I received a fax from Newcastle two days ago outlining a deal.

"It is worth 10m and that's a lot of money, especially for a club like this."

Corbella added: "Arsenal and Sheffield Wednesday also inquired but the Newcastle contract is much more than they have offered."

Mia Audina's allegation

JAKARTA, Apr 25: Indonesia's badminton star Mia Audina has revealed how she was driven to the brink of suicide after suffering "physical and mental" abuse from her ambitious father, reports said Sunday, according to AFP.

"This is the first time that I have told reporters, that I wanted to commit suicide years ago. My father abused me mentally and physically," Audina was quoted by the Jakarta Post as telling journalists Saturday.

She declined to go into details of the kind of abuse her father, Rivan Ciptawan, who was also her coach and an ex-boxer, inflicted on her, saying she still respected him.

"He always told me 'You must pay back what I have given you'. That's really mean and depressing. I couldn't stand it," Audina said.

Audina, a 1996 Olympic silver medalist now ranked number 11 in the world, rose to stardom at the age of 15, when her victory won Indonesia the Uber Cup in 1994.

She has been locked in controversy on her participation in the world mixed men and women's team championship in Copenhagen following her absence from the training center for two weeks.

Audina said he had taken time off to marry her 23-year-old Surinamese fiancé, Tyllo Lobman, in the Netherlands after the All England tournament last month.

The marriage had been widely criticized at home, with many saying she was still too young and that marriage could harm her performance at a time when she had not yet reached the peak of her career.

"When I met Tyllo two years ago, he (Ciptawan) said he was the right man for me. But now he wants me to leave Tyllo and return to him," Audina said.

"He can't do that. I'm not a child anymore" she added.

Di Stefano admits Serb military link

GLASGOW, Apr 25: Italian businessman Giovanni Di Stefano admitted Friday that he holds a military rank in the Serbian armed forces, but questioned whether it should stop him buying Dundee, reports AFP.

The Scottish Premier League (SPL) are to hold an emergency board meeting after indications that Dundee are to accept finance from the controversial Yugoslav businessman.

Di Stefano has rejected newspaper claims that he has already bought the ailing Dens Park outfit.

Vital work to repair their dilapidated stadium started six weeks late and club owners Peter and Jim Marr have yet to reveal where the estimated 2 million pound (3.2 million dollars) cost will come from.

Vice-chairman Derek Souter has threatened to resign if Di Stefano does not take control of the club and the SPL are quickly losing patience with the Dark Blues.

Di Stefano, who has admitted links to Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, is a close personal friend of Serbian militia leader Zeljko Raznatovic, who is known as 'Arkan' and who is wanted for crimes against humanity by the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

But Di Stefano, far from keeping his head down to avoid the barrage of insults coming his way, has come clean about his military past.



Peter Schmeichel (R), the Manchester United custodian, lies scrambling on the ground while Leeds United's Dutch international striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink starts celebrating his goal during their English Premiership meeting at Leeds yesterday. The match ended 1-1. —AFP photo

Uniteds draw at Leeds

LEEDS, England, Apr 25 (Reuters/Internet): Leeds United held up European Cup finalists Manchester United's charge for the treble on Sunday with a pacey and hard-fought 1-1 draw at Elland Road.

The draw allowed Arsenal, who hammered Middlesbrough 6-1 on Saturday, to stay on top of the premier league by a single point.

Leeds's enthusiastic and youthful squad, also chasing a European place next season, took the game to Manchester United from the start.

In the 33rd minute Harry Kewell pounced on Nicky Butt's sloppy pass inside the Leeds half, accelerated downfield and slid the ball past two defenders to Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink on the right.

The big Dutchman kept his head as Schmeichel advanced

and slipped the ball under the Danish keeper's legs, off the post and into the net.

Manchester United, fresh from a magnificent turn-around 3-2 victory over Juventus in the European Cup semifinals on Wednesday, looked a metre short early in the game but found their feet in the second half.

Andy Cole equalised in the 55th minute after a cross by Roy Keane found Nicky Butt. Butt's header was parried by goalkeeper Nigel Martyn and Cole pushed it home.

"We slacked in the first half and that gave them the chance," coach Alex Ferguson said afterwards.

"Just when we needed an injection of pace at the end of the second half we couldn't find it," Ferguson said he could forgive Dwight Yorke for missing an open goal in injury time after a one-two with Teddy Sheringham, because he had played so well recently.

"I'm proud of them. They've achieved so much in the last couple of weeks," he added.

Manchester United have a game in hand and are still on target for a treble of European Cup, FA Cup and championship.

Leeds remain in fourth place four points behind Chelsea, due to play Sheffield Wednesday later on Sunday, and eight adrift of Manchester United.

"The title is still in our own hands," Ferguson said. "There's still a way to go and there will be many twists and turns," he said. United have five games still to play.

Leeds coach David O'Leary, who said he signed a new five-year contract to stay with the Yorkshire club on Sunday, was delighted with his side's enthusiastic performance.

"It was a very good game for us. We played fantastically against the European finalists," he said.

Lens stun Marseille

PARIS, Apr 25: RC Lens, who are not giving away their French title easily, crushed possible heirs Olympique Marseille 4-0 on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Marseille clung to their one-point lead at the top of the standings only because second-placed Girondins Bordeaux also lost 2-0 away to bottom club Sochaux.

French international Tony Vairelles put Lens in front just before the interval when Marseille goalkeeper Stephane Porato failed to hold a shot by midfielder Frederic Dehu and the winger nipped in to chip the ball into the net.

Vairelles and under-21 midfielder Daniel Moreira, with two goals, scored three more in the space of 11 minutes in the second half as Lens overran Marseille, who five days ago reached the UEFA Cup final.

It was Marseille's worst defeat of the season in all competitions and only the second time they have conceded four goals since their 5-4 home win over Montpellier in August.

In two meetings between the two sides at Lens' Felix Ballaert World Cup stadium this season, Lens have put seven goals past Marseille following their 3-1 French Cup second round victory in February.

Lens, who lost 1-0 in the league at the Velodrome in November, also eliminated Marseille from the League Cup on penalties following a 1-1

draw after extra time at Caen in the first round in January.

Marseille, who brought on France's Robert Pires after the interval, came close to equalising twice early in the second half.

But first Pires shot straight at goalkeeper Guillaume Warmuz in the 47th minute, then five minutes later striker Titi Camara hit the bar with a fine drive from the edge of the box.

In the 67th, Moreira increased Lens' lead when he turned a cross from the right from Vairelles past the diving Porato.

Three minutes later Vairelles rose to head home a free kick from the right by striker Philippe Brunel. Moreira finished Marseille off with his second in the 78th.

Bordeaux, who have now dropped five points in successive games against sides in the relegation zone after a 0-0 draw at home to Lorient, fell behind to a Sebastien Dallet goal in the 27th minute.

Okpara poised to sign for PSG

PARIS, Apr 25: Strasbourg's Nigerian defender Godwin Okpara said on Friday he is poised to sign for French First Division rivals Paris Saint Germain next season, reports AFP.

The 26-year-old said he had reached a verbal agreement with club bosses and the transfer depended on a medical test.

Sochaux, who had not won in their previous 14 league games, increased their lead in the 75th with striker Bernard Bouger's ninth goal of the season.

Their former Sporting Lisbon midfielder Didier Lang was sent off in the final minute for a tackle from behind on Bordeaux's French international striker Sylvain Wiltord.

"Up to now, we had good matches but didn't manage to win," Sochaux coach Philippe Anziani said. "We always lacked that little extra we had tonight."

Bordeaux coach Elie Baup said: "All the teams are desperate for points, all the teams are aware that they must surpass themselves...and we must, too."

Marseille are on 64 points and Bordeaux 63 with four games to go.

Third-placed Olympique Lyon, who are on 56, entertain Rennes, who have 50, today.

Monaco also have 50 points after snatching a 1-1 draw at home to Bastia with an injury-time equaliser, a superb volley inside the post by midfielder Sylvain Legwinski.



French international defender Laurent Blanc (L) of Olympique Marseille tries desperately to intercept Lens striker Daniel Moreira during their French First Division clash at Lens on April 24. The home side won 4-0. —AFP photo

Castle Cup soccer Dramatic win for Angola

BLANTYRE, Apr 25: Angola struck twice within five minutes during the closing stages to grab a 2-1 victory over Malawi in a Castle Cup Southern Africa championship match here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Antonio Mendonca, a 16-year-old debutant, equalised after 76 minutes with a close-range shot and Malawi captain Patrick Mabele turned a Paulo Tomas cross into his own net.

Another own goal had put Malawi ahead in the 60th minute when a Meck Mwase cross struck Moses Almeida on the shoulder and left goalkeeper Mario Joao stranded.

The exciting finish before a 40,000 crowd at Chichiri Stadium compensated for some dismal first-half fare with the teams lacking urgency and creativity in attack.

Angolan defender Juliao Kunda won the official man-of-the-match award and received a gift from the South African brewery that sponsors the annual championship.

Defending champions Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Lesotho have already qualified for the quarterfinals and Swaziland host Mozambique on May 9 in the final first-round match.

First-round losers get a second chance to reach the last eight when they play off during May for two places.

O'Leary Leeds' for another five years

LONDON, Apr 25: Leeds United boss David O'Leary has committed himself to the club for the next five years and vowed to lift the Premiership title after signing an extended five-year contract worth six million pounds, reports AFP.

O'Leary, who replaced international O'Leary's previous deal had two years to run but chairman Peter Ridsdale moved swiftly to end speculation over his long-term future.

The new deal has no get-out clauses, unlike former boss George Graham, who left Elland Road in September for Tottenham.

O'Leary said: "I'm delighted to commit myself to Leeds with this long-term contract. My ambition now is to see the club become genuine title challengers and I hope within the next five years we can win the championship again."

"The contract doesn't just secure my future, it points the way forward for the club and it's important we now ensure our outstanding youngsters also sign long-term deals so we can work together."

O'Leary has transformed Leeds since taking over from Graham and has steered them into fourth place in the Premiership ahead of Sunday's clash against European Cup finalists Manchester United.

Ridsdale told the Mail on Sunday: "Given what David has demonstrated as a manager we had to back him to guide us to greater success."

Forest's Premiership days over

LONDON, Apr 25: Even "Big Ron" Atkinson, one of the most colourful characters in the English game, could not stop former European Cup winners Nottingham Forest from slipping out of England's top flight after a controversial season, reports Reuters.

Saturday's 2-0 defeat at the manager's former club Aston Villa finally ended Atkinson's short campaign to keep the 1979 and 1980 Champions' Cup winners in the Premier League after just one season.

Less than two decades ago Forest were dominating Europe with the likes of former England international Trevor Francis and Scot John Robertson scoring goals in glamorous finals in Munich and Madrid.

Now they must prepare for more trips to Grimsby and Stockport.

Forest won the First Division championship last year. But the Midlands team did not have the quality to survive in the lucrative and competitive Premier League.

They also had to go through a much-publicised one-man strike by Dutch striker Pierre van Hooijdonk earlier in the season.

"Our performance (today) showed we don't deserve to be in this league. We have not performed on a consistent level," Forest's Mark Crossley admitted after the Villa defeat.

Atkinson, who has a reputation for helping clubs avoid the drop, took on the biggest challenge of his career in January after Dave Bassett was sacked after 22 months in charge following an FA Cup defeat by unglamorous Portsmouth.

Key marksman Van Hooijdonk called a one-man strike before the start of the season after claiming Forest had refused his request for a transfer. He said the club had not bought enough quality players to survive.

He eventually came back at the end of October but his behaviour annoyed Bassett intensely.

"You can forgive for a while, but you can't forget because the whole thing has been a nightmare," the former manager said at the time.

Now Atkinson's future at the club is the subject of talk in the Midlands city.

The former Manchester United manager has no regrets about taking over at the City Ground but Forest must now decide whether they want to rebuild the squad or look for a new face to try to bring back the glory days.

Arsenal abase Boro

LONDON, Apr 25: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger watched his side demolish Middlesbrough with out Dennis Bergkamp to climb to the top of the English Premiership on Saturday and then admitted that anything less would have shattered his side's title hopes, reports AFP.

Arsenal made light of their injured Dutchman's absence by crushing Boro 6-1 at the Riverside Stadium, the Teessiders' worst home defeat in 90 years. It was enough to see Wenger's men leapfrog leaders Manchester United, who visit Leeds on Sunday.

But the Frenchman revealed that the top quality performance was down to the knowledge within the camp that any slip-up could prove fatal.

"They knew they had to win today and anything else would not be good enough," Wenger said.

"We did what we wanted to do and what we had to do basically because if we had lost today and Manchester United win tomorrow it was all over."

"At least it keeps an interesting situation for everybody. They have two games in hand and we are two points in front."

A penalty from Dutchman Marc Overmars in the fourth minute was followed by goals in open play from Frenchman Nicolas Anelka (38 and 78), Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu (45 and 60) and another Frenchman, Patrick Vieira (58), to ensure the Gunners would oust previous leaders Manchester United in style -- at least for 24 hours.

Alun Armstrong reduced Boro's arrears three minutes from time but the scale of Arsenal's victory cut United's superior goal difference to just one.

Nottingham Forest became the first of the year's casualties at the bottom, consigned to division one football next season by a 45th minute strike from Jamie Redknapp and Mark Draper and a second from

Gareth Barry in the 57th for a 2-0 defeat at Aston Villa.

Forest manager Ron Atkinson would give little away regarding his own future afterwards and said he had no regrets regarding taking over at the City Ground as a successor to Dave Bassett.

"I have no regrets and in the last three months we have battled away," he said. "It has always been uphill and at this level you need quality."

A goal on the stroke of half-time ruined Coventry's day too, Ian Marshall's strike spelling a 1-0 reverse at Leicester and keeping the Sky Blues stuck in the thick of the relegation tussle.

The same can no longer be said of Everton, though, after their 4-1 win at home to prime relegation candidates Charlton.

A 24th-minute strike from Don Hutchison set Everton on their way, and then two goals from on-fire Kevin Campbell (31 and 60) and a fourth from Francis Jeffers were answered only by a Graham Stuart penalty nine minutes from time.

Everton boss Walter Smith paid tribute to goal hero Kevin Campbell after the on-loan striker's two-goal salvo put Everton just one point from safety.

Campbell has hit a brace of goals in each of his last three games for the club, all victories, that have taken them away from the relegation dogfight.

"When Kevin came here he said he was not an out and out goalscorer. Well he's certainly done enough in his last three games to make that remark look pretty daff," said Smith.

Charlton's misfortune was good news for Blackburn but how Rovers needed it after going down 3-1 to Liverpool at Ewood Park.

A defensive mix-up let Steve McManaman in for Liverpool's first in the 23rd minute, and then Jamie Redknapp and Oyvind Leonhardsen made it

three with two goals in a minute just after the half-hour.

Damien Duff got one back for Blackburn just after the hour, but that was all the comeback amounted to.

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier dismissed talk of a feud between his assistant Phil Thompson and Blackburn boss Brian Kidd after the victory.

Thompson and Kidd squared up to each other after former Anfield man Jason McAteer appeared to have fouled Liverpool striker Karheinz Riedle in the second half of the game as Rovers fought to retrieve a three-goal half-time deficit.

But Houllier just laughed off the idea as a throwback to the days when Kidd and Thompson were at Old Trafford and Anfield respectively.

"I said to Phil Thompson, I thought I was at a Manchester United against Liverpool game here," Houllier said.

"It came from a misunderstanding. There was a foul on Karheinz and Jason McAteer couldn't see Karheinz coming from the back and the referee couldn't see it because he was at the wrong angle."

Southampton had to settle for a 0-0 draw at Derby in the other match of significance down at the bottom.

Ian Wright came up trumps with a 30-year chip in the fifth minute to put West Ham on their way to a 2-1 win against his old foes Tottenham at White Hart Lane.

Marc Keller doubled the Hammers' advantage soon after the hour, and David Ginola got Spurs' consolation in the 73rd minute in a match that saw the visitors' John Moncur sent off for a second booking just before the final whistle.

There was a goal for each side at Selhurst Park, where hosts Wimbledon were indebted to a belated first goal for his new club from John Hartson (24) to equalise Alan Shearer's 18th-minute strike for Newcastle.



Nawankwo Kanu (C), Arsenal's Nigerian international, sneaks through a host of opposition defenders to head in a goal during their 6-1 drubbing of Middlesbrough in the English Premiership match at Middlesbrough on April 24. —AFP photo

Jubilo limber up well

TOKYO, Apr 25 (Reuters/Internet): Jubilo Iwata warmed up for next week's Asian Club Champi onshp semi-finals in Iran by crushing title rivals Shimizu S-Pulse 5-2 away in the J-League on Saturday.

Jubilo, who will play Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates in Tehran on Wednesday, trailed 1-0 at the break in the Shizuoka derby.

But a magnificent team effort in the second half reaped five goals, and the three points moved Jubilo five clear at the top of the table.

Midfielder Takashi Fukunishi began the comeback with a powerful header after 59 minutes and he was joined on the scoresheet by Masashi Nakayama with two goals, Nobuo Kawaguchi and Daisuke Oku.

Nakayama, last season's leading scorer with 36 goals and the only Japanese player to score a goal at the World Cup in France, found the target twice in three minutes.

The home side's scorers were Masaaki Sawanobori, with a

first-half penalty, and Masahiro Ando three minutes from time.

S-Pulse, managed by former Tottenham captain Steve Perryman, dropped to fifth place and now trail Jubilo by seven points after eight of the 15 rounds in the first stage of the championship season.

Jubilo, the 1997 league champions, lead the standings with 21 points, five clear of Verdy Kawasaki, who moved into second spot with a 1-0 home win over JEF United Ichihara.

Verdy, champions in the first two years of the J-League, 1993 and 1994, are rebuilding this season, and had new recruit Yoshiyuki Kobayashi to thank for the winning goal in the 50th minute of play.

The 21-year-old midfielder showed great technique in the rain-lashed conditions to fire a left-foot shot into the top corner from 25 meters.

Defending champions Kashima Antlers dropped two points by squandering a 3-1 lead late in the second half and drawing 3-3 away to the Yokohama F Marinos.

Antlers led 3-1 with 11 minutes to go but the home side pulled level with two goals in three minutes from Hideki Nagai and Shunsuke Nakamura, who equalised with a curling left-foot free kick.

Antlers are third on 15 points but have a game in hand on the two teams above them, while Cerezo Osaka, also with 15 points, are fourth after winning 5-2 away to Avispa Fukuoka.

In the night match, two second-half goals from Yugoslav World Cup captain Dragan Stokjovic swept Nagoya Grampus Eight to a 2-1 victory away to Kyoto.

Holmes regains WBC title

WASHINGTON, Apr 25: Keith Holmes regained the World Boxing Council middleweight title here Saturday, stopping Hacine Cherif in the seventh round to avenge a defeat by the Frenchman last year, reports AFP.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. Includes crossword clues and a cryptogram puzzle.