

French First Division

Morale boosting win for Marseille

PARIS, Sept. 27: Marseille went some way to silencing the boo-boys Sunday with a 2-1 win at Rennes, a much-needed tonic ahead of next Wednesday's Champions League showdown at Manchester United, reports AFP.

Roland Courbis had demanded the side show their class after a poor start of just two wins in seven league games and Marseille eventually pulled the match out of the fire after Franck Gava had put Rennes ahead after just five minutes.

Italian forward Fabrizio Ravanelli levelled from the spot after 35 minutes and Frederic Brando bagged the winner ten minutes after the restart to send the Mediterranean side fifth in the table, two points behind leaders Lyon.

Both scorers blotted their copybook with bookings, however.

Rennes thought they were robbed after Jean-Luc Dogon had a header ruled out after just 60 seconds for a foul.

The win capped a good week for Courbis' side, who won at Croatia Zagreb in midweek as the French set their sights for their Old Trafford date.

Elsewhere Sunday, Lens slid to a demoralising 2-0 home defeat against promoted Saint Etienne.

Two goals in five minutes late in the first half from Brazilians Alex and Aloisio silenced the 40,000 home crowd and plunged Lens, the 1998 league champions, into the relegation zone after a dreadful start to the season.

Bundesliga

Kirsten takes Leverkusen atop

BERLIN, Sept. 27: Bayer Leverkusen went top of the heap in the German Bundesliga on Sunday following a stylish 3-1 come-from-behind home win over Kaiserslautern, two late Ulf Kirsten goals doing the damage, reports AFP.

The veteran German international striker struck in the 82nd and 85th minutes after Thomas Brdaric had levelled Michael Schenker's 27th minute opener for the visitors to leave Leverkusen a point clear of Borussia Dortmund, who scored a 1-0 victory at home to Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

That result, courtesy of a Lars Ricken goal before a 68,000 crowd, sent Dortmund top for the first time since March 1997. Leverkusen quickly reestablished their preeminence as Kirsten's efforts gave the side their best start in 20 seasons, although coach Christoph Daum said the first half performance was like watching a team of old men.

Elsewhere, Hamburg, who have endured a long barren run since their European Cup success in 1983, placed third after a 2-2 draw with Wolfsburg, while the shock of the weekend was reigning champions Bayern Munich suffering a 1-0 home defeat Friday against Borussia Dortmund.

Bulgarian Krassimir Balakov scored the winner from the spot with 15 minutes remaining to hand Bayern their first home loss in 19 months.

Bayern are now fourth, four points behind the leaders.

In Sunday's other match, Arminia Bielefeld edged SC Freiburg 2-1.

Kaiserslautern were their own worst enemies in Leverkusen, with Andreas Buck sent off shortly after half-time and have lurched perilously close to the bottom of the table less than two seasons after winning the title.

Hansa Rostock and 1860 Munich parted goalless Saturday even though Rostock had Victor Agali and Rene Schneider red carded in the final eight minutes.

Champions League participants Hertha Berlin had a lucky escape at Unterhaching, sharing the points with a 1-1 draw. The home side was denied in the final minute when a foot reflex by Hertha's keeper Gabor Kiraly blocked a hard Alfonso Garcia shot.

Rough start

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one-day tournaments in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Canada and Kenya over the last one month.

The fly-play schedule has forced captain and star batsman Sachin Tendulkar, vice-captain Ajay Jadeja and young allrounder Ajit Agarkar to miss matches because of injuries.

India is due to play a home series against New Zealand next month, four Australia for three months from November to February, before facing formidable South Africa in another home series on their return.

"We need quality, not quantity," Kapil said.

BCCI secretary Jaywant Lele, however, turned down Kapil's appeal, saying India was not going beyond the International Cricket Council stipulation of 12 Tests and 40 one-dayers in a year.

India may have played only five Tests in 1999, but are certain to cross the maximum requirement of 40 one-dayers.

They have already played 35 one-dayers this year with three more to go during the current tournament in Kenya and another five at home against New Zealand.

About Kapil's demand of a longer tenure as coach, Lele said there was no provision in the BCCI constitution to give anyone a longer term.

"We have decided to make him coach for two years," Lele said. "It can be extended after that. We have to review his performance."



Lazio forward Alen Boksic (L) and Lilian Thuram of Parma fight for possession during their Serie A encounter on September 26. —AFP photo

Serie A

Vieri does it again

MILAN, Sept. 27: Inter Milan and Lazio opened up a two-point gap at the top of the Serie A on Sunday, after Christian Vieri and Matias Almeyda both scored second-half winners for Italy's title rivals, reports AFP.

Almeyda will be a candidate for goal of the season after his 30-metre piledriver earned Lazio a 2-1 victory over Parma, whose coach Alberto Malesani is now clinging onto his job by a thread.

Vieri meanwhile made another re-payment on his world record transfer fee: the 50-million dollar man heading home in a tense 1-0 win over Torino that kept Inter ahead of Lazio on goal difference.

There was drama though after 25 minutes at Parma as home team captain Antonio Benarrivo was knocked unconscious, albeit briefly, after suffering a head injury in a collision with Lazio's Chilean striker Marcelo Salas.

Stretched off and rushed to hospital, doctors said he was in no danger but would nevertheless keep him in overnight for observation.

Back on the pitch, Parma's World Cup winner Alain Boghossian managed the rare feat of scoring at both ends.

The Frenchman deflected a shot by Salas in the 30th minute but then nodded Parma's equaliser in the 62nd, only for Argentinian Almeyda to unleash a match-winning drive which plunged Parma into crisis.

Candidates for the league title when the season started only a month ago, Parma are currently candidates for relegation, lying third from bottom with just two points on the board.

Malesani may have guided his team to the Italian Cup, the UEFA Cup and the Italian Super Cup trophies over the last six months, but the memories of Italian club officials are notoriously short.

There was nothing but smiles though for Inter Milan after Vieri nodded home their winner in the 75th minute.

However, the burly centre-forward had to share the limelight with goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi, who made a stunning penalty save early in the second half.

Peruzzi used his fingertips to deflect the spot-kick from Torino striker Marco Ferrante, who had converted his previous 17 penalties.

Peruzzi said: "Ferrante hit the ball hard, but goalkeepers

need their share of luck when it comes to saving penalties. And today I had that."

Coach Marcello Lippi said: "The team did well in the first half and created four or five or clear scoring chances, but didn't convert them."

"And after missing out like that, you're bound to let your opponents take some of the initiative and we did suffer in the second half. But then in the Serie A these days, you have to suffer for 20 or 30 minutes."

Vieri said: "Winning against Torino isn't easy for anyone. We had loads of chances in the first half, but weren't able to finish them. Unfortunately, there are days when the ball just doesn't want to go in."

Top scorer in the Serie A, Vieri has scored five and made three of Inter's nine league goals this season.

Inter and Lazio have 10 points from four games and lead four clubs on eight points apiece - AC Milan, Fiorentina, AS Roma and Lazio.

Newly-promoted Reggina, who are enjoying a fairytale start to the southern club's first ever season in the Serie A.

AC Milan thrashed Bologna 4-0 on Saturday night, while Fiorentina drew 1-1 with Udinese on Sunday.

Udinese striker Paolo Poggi missed a penalty after only two minutes and six minutes later Fiorentina skipper Gabriel Batistuta acrobatically chipped in a cross by Yugoslav Predrag Mijatovic.

But Udinese hit back in the second half and Stefano Fiore steered their equaliser through a packed goalmouth.

Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni said: "We've taken a small step forward. We ran a few risks and it's just as well they missed the penalty or it

would have been really uphill."

Trapattoni said the team still hasn't recovered mentally from last week's 4-2 hiding in Barcelona.

"Our problem is a psychological one," he said. "In the first 10 minutes, we handed Udinese three scoring chances."

Like the match in Barcelona, we were frightened of our opponents, even though we were better organised this time. As soon we came under pressure, we were in crisis."

New signing Vincenzo Montella scored his first league goal for AS Roma as they beat nine-man Perugia 3-1.

Montella pounced on a loose ball after striker partner Marco Delvecchio's effort was blocked, while Perugia had Roberto Ripa sent off just before the break.

A Brazilian newcomer Assuncao made it 2-0 with a ballistic 20-metre shot after Delvecchio laid the ball back, shortly before another Perugia defender, Alessandro Calori, was ordered off.

Both captains then made it onto the scoresheet, with Renato Olive scoring for Perugia and Roma's Francesco Totti slotting home an 84th minute penalty.

Roma coach Fabio Capello was satisfied with the points, but not with the sloppy defending.

"I'm very angry with the defence for having given away a goal like they did," he said. "We had chances to score more goals but lacked the killer instinct. And it was that laxity which cost us the goal."

Swedish striker Yksel Osmanovski headed Bari's winner against Verona, while Reggina snatched an identical 1-0 win over Piacenza thanks to Bruno Cirillo's 85th minute strike and Cagliari drew 1-1 with Venezia.

STANDINGS

Italian Serie A table on Sunday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points)										
Inter Milan	4	3	1	0	9	1	10			
Lazio	4	3	1	0	7	2	10			
AC Milan	4	2	2	0	10	4	8			
Fiorentina	4	2	2	0	8	4	8			
AS Roma	4	2	2	0	7	3	8			
Reggina	4	2	2	0	5	3	8			
Juventus	4	2	1	1	6	4	7			
Udinese	4	1	2	1	6	6	5			
Lecce	4	1	2	1	5	5	5			
Bari	4	1	2	1	2	5	5			
Perugia	4	1	1	2	6	7	4			
Torino	4	1	1	2	2	5	4			
Verona	4	1	0	3	3	8	3			
Venezia	4	0	2	2	4	7	2			
Piacenza	4	0	2	2	2	6	2			
Parma	4	0	2	2	2	6	2			
Bologna	4	0	2	2	1	6	2			
Cagliari	4	0	1	3	2	7	1			



Rayo Vallecano's Alcazar (L) and Velisca of Real Madrid are in pursuit of the ball during their Primera Liga clash on September 26. —AFP photo

STANDINGS

Spanish Primera Liga table after Sunday matches (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points)										
Barcelona	5	4	0	1	12	4	12			
Rayo Vallecano	5	4	0	1	7	3	12			
Real Madrid	5	2	3	0	10	6	9			
Celta Vigo	5	3	0	2	6	4	9			
Alaves	5	3	0	2	7	7	9			
Espanol	5	3	0	2	7	8	9			
Deportiva La Coruna	5	2	2	1	8	4	8			
Real Zaragoza	5	2	2	1	6	3	8			
Real Sociedad	5	2	1	2	9	8	7			
Malaga	5	2	1	2	8	7	7			
Real Valladolid	5	2	1	2	5	7	7			
Racing Santander	5	2	1	2	7	8	7			
Numancia	5	2	1	2	5	8	7			
Real Mallorca	5	2	0	3	8	7	6			
Real Oviedo	5	2	0	3	4	6	6			
Athletic Bilbao	5	1	1	3	5	6	5			
Athletic Madrid	5	1	1	3	5	9	4			
Real Betis	5	1	1	3	2	8	4			
Seville	5	0	3	2	6	8	3			
Valencia	5	0	1	4	3	8	1			

FA to meet Beckham

LONDON, Sept. 27: Hot-headed Manchester United star David Beckham is set to be asked to attend an informal meeting with English football's ruling body the Football Association (FA) to discuss his behaviour - but he does not face any disciplinary action, reports AFP.

The FA are concerned by some of the unsavoury incidents the 24-year-old English international midfielder has been involved in and he has already collected five bookings this season.

The FA appreciate the extra pressures Beckham is under and is regularly taunted by opposition fans during matches particularly over his sending off in last year's World Cup final against Argentina.

Beckham snapped earlier this season at Old Trafford and aimed a V-sign at Leeds fans who provoked him in the Premiership clash.

No other player suffers the same provocation and the FA will remind him of what is expected of him.

Euro 2000

Czech Republic team for qualifier

PRAGUE, Sept. 27 (AFP): Czech Republic squad for Group 9 Euro 2000 qualifier with Faroe Isles in Prague on October 9.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Ladislav Maier (Rapid Vienna), Pavel Srnec (Sheffield Wednesday), Tomas Postulka (Sparta Prague)

Defenders: Marek Nikl (Nuremberg), Karel Rada (Slavia Prague), Petr Vitek (Slavia Prague), Tomas Repka (Flamengo), Jan Suchoparek (TB Berlin)

Midfielders: Miroslav Baranek (Sparta Prague), Martin Hasek (Sparta Prague), Radek Bejbi (Atletico Madrid), Karel Poborsky (Benfica), Pavel Nedved (Lazio), Jiri Nemec (Schalke 04), Patrik Berger (Liverpool), Tomas Galasek (Widzew Lodz), Pavel Horvath (Slavia Prague), Radomir Slonick (Banik Ostrava), Martin Cizek (1860 Munich)

Forwards: Jan Koller (Anderlecht), Pavel Kuka (Stuttgart), Vratislav Lokvenec (Sparta Prague), Vladimir Smicer (Liverpool), Pavel Verbir (FK Teplice)

Aussie custodian for Ajax

MELBOURNE, Australia, Sept. 27: Melbourne Knights' goalkeeper Joe Dolidica left here Monday to join Dutch football giants Ajax Amsterdam, reports AFP.

The Australian Olympic team goalkeeper agreed to terms with Ajax and will move to the Netherlands on a 410,000 dollar (\$65,000 US) transfer fee.

Soccer violence in Pisa

PISA, Italy, Sept. 27: Groups of masked soccer fans went on the rampage smashing shop windows, vandalising cars and demolishing street signs here on Sunday, despite a 500-strong police escort, reports AFP.

A Tuscan derby between third division Pisa and Livorno was overshadowed by violence before and after the match, prompting accusations from shop owners that police had completely underestimated the risks.

About 1,000 Livorno fans arrived by train for the game and the walk to the stadium became a cue for the first wave of violence.

Premiership

Spurs draw at Wimbledon

LONDON, Sept. 27: Welsh international striker John Hartson scored for Wimbledon and was later sent off in a 1-1 draw with Tottenham Hotspur at Selhurst Park in the English Premiership on Sunday, reports AFP.

The Dons' record 7.5 million pound (12 million dollar) signing headed his side in front after 57 minutes but picked up his second yellow card after 79 minutes when he elbowed Luke Young in an aerial challenge.

Ireland full back Steve Carr rescued a point for Spurs with a brilliant run and strike after 76 minutes - his first Premiership goal for the club.

The result lifted Tottenham to eighth on 14 points, seven less than leaders Manchester United. Wimbledon jumped two places to fifth from bottom on eight points.

Wimbledon's aerial superiority was shown up as the big difference between the teams when Hartson headed them into the lead after 57 minutes.

It was a sucker punch as Jason Euell curled in a corner from the left, and Hartson powered the ball past Walker.

Carr came to Tottenham's rescue with his first league goal for the club, a spectacular effort after 76 minutes.

Allan Nielsen played a nice ball into his path and he raced into the right edge of the box and hammered the ball into the roof of the net.

But Wimbledon were reduced to 10 men three minutes later when hero Hartson elbowed Young in an aerial challenge.

The offence was spotted by the referee's assistant and the big striker was already walking before Pohl pulled out the yellow and red cards.

No looking back for Chelsea

PARIS, Sept. 27: Chelsea are finding the step up to the Champions League from the English Premiership a tall order and cannot afford any more slip-ups as they prepare to host Turkey's Galatasaray at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday, reports AFP.

An entertaining albeit goal-less draw against Group H rivals and five-time European champions AC Milan in the Londoners' first outing left even the Italians impressed - but Chelsea then ruined the effect by losing to Euro novices Hertha Berlin in Germany last week.

The unexpected 2-1 reverse means Gianluca Vialli's side have a mountain to climb and suddenly things don't look quite as "terrific" as Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni first forecast for Chelsea a fortnight ago.

The Blues showed character in grinding out a 1-0 win Saturday at Middlesbrough and more of the same - and possibly less fire - appears the primary requirement against the Turks, who started by recovering from two goals down to draw at home to Hertha Berlin before going down 2-1 in Milan.

Anything less than a win at the third attempt would compromise Chelsea's chances of a place in the second group phase - handing the initiative to group favourites Milan, who host Hertha Berlin at San Siro.

Chelsea's Danish defender Jes Hogni, who moved to Stamford Bridge from Galatasaray's fierce rivals Fenerbahce, has already warned his side they have to make use of their home advantage against the Turkish double winners because the return in Turkey could be a fraught affair.

"I know all about Turkish football after my time there and I know it is going to be very difficult, especially in Istanbul. It is a very hard place to go if you need to get a result," warned Hogni looking ahead to the away trip.

Last season's runners up Bayern Munich meanwhile take on Spain's Valencia in Group F, while PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands face Glasgow Rangers.

PARIS, Sept. 27: Arsenal's young Austrian goalkeeper Alex Manninger was on Sunday facing an anxious 48 hours to discover whether he will be fit to face Barcelona in the Champions League at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old, who has deputised brilliantly for England international David Seaman this season, damaged his right wrist in Saturday's 1-0 win over Watford at Highbury and manager Arsene Wenger admitted he could be faced with a goalkeeping gamble.

Seaman has only just returned from an eight weeks lay-off after injuring a calf muscle a few days before Arsenal beat Manchester United in the annual pre-season Charity Shield curtain-raiser in August.

The 36-year-old veteran was hardly tested in Tuesday's 7-0 win by Arsenal reserves against Crystal Palace and Wenger rejected the option to rush him back into Premiership action on Saturday because

he would be dropped immediately Seaman returned to fitness - which was the case in both the previous seasons - and admitted after Wednesday's 3-1 Champions League win over Aik Solna: "It would be a deep disappointment for me if it happened again."

"To play against Barcelona is a dream for me because when

Bayern have assumed control of the group with a narrow home win over PSV and a last-gasp draw against Rangers in Glasgow.

Valencia finally got a point on the board in the Spanish league on Saturday after a disastrous start and like Bayern they have a win and a draw in date, suggesting a two-horse race.

Rangers received a boost Sunday when promising young midfielder Barry Ferguson joined the squad for their flight to Holland after a hamstring scare over the weekend.

Group E is also shaping into a two-horse race with seven-times champions Real Madrid and Porto leading the way - the Portuguese having won both

their fixtures while Real have a win and a draw behind them.

The two pacesetters meet in Madrid on Tuesday.

Porto started with a 1-0 win at Norway's Molde and followed that with a 2-0 home win over Greek side Olympiakos while Real were made to fight for a 3-3 draw in Greece before crushing Molde 4-1.

Real's problems concern a lack of consistency which had coach John Toshack tearing his hair out after Saturday's dismal draw at promoted Malaga which left the meringues third, three points behind Barcelona.

"That was our worst performance of the season," raged Toshack afterwards.

Toshack still has to cajole the best out of unhappy striker Nicolas Anelka - yet to score for his new club after his 37 million-dollar move from Arsenal and the player has already threatened to quit the game in frustration at the media hype surrounding him.

In the event of a Porto defeat on Tuesday Olympiakos can make up ground if they beat Molde at home.

Finally in Group G, French champions Bordeaux, while struggling to find their rhythm at home, face a crunch home fixture against a strong Spartak Moscow side anxious to make up for two dropped points at home to Sparta Prague, who host Dutch tallenders Willem II.

The Czechs also drew at home to Bordeaux before gaining a useful point in Moscow.

Bordeaux showed they are gradually coming to terms with the Champions League format with a gutsy 3-2 win over Willem II last week achieved with a brilliant late winner from teenager Pascal Feindouno, who chipped home after the French had first lost a two-goal lead.

Spartak Moscow, who were without a game at the weekend but who top the Russian league, have a superior goal difference to the French with both sides on four points - hence Tuesday is a key encounter.

The Russians have defender Yuri Kovtun and Brazilian striker Robson suspended, while Belarus international midfielder Miroslav Romashchenko is not yet ready to return after a knee injury.

Goalkeeper worry for Gunners

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Wenger, answering speculation that Manninger could be his number one goalkeeper before the end of the campaign, said after the Watford match: "The situation is simple. David Seaman is still the number one here but I didn't want to rush him back because until last week he had not even kicked a ball since his injury."