

Matthaeus' testimonial

Maradona wants some action

HAVANA, May 8: Looking fitter and happier under his treatment in Cuba for drug addiction, Argentine soccer ace Diego Maradona confirmed, Sunday that he hoped to play at German star Lothar Matthaeus' testimonial in Munich later this month, reports AFP.

"More than anything, I want to go to Lothar's game because he's a great friend," Maradona told Reuters during a World Cup qualifying game in Havana between Cuba and Barbados.

The 39-year-old — one of the world's greatest-ever soccer players but never far from drama and scandal in his personal life — said he would like to play at least one half of the scheduled May 26 game at the Olympic Stadium.

"I'm going to do everything possible to go," he said of the invitation from Matthaeus, also 39.

Maradona added, however, that a final decision would depend on the Cuban doctors attending him since mid-January at a foreigners-only health spa on the outskirts of Havana for grave heart problems attributed to drugs and alcohol.

"If they let me go, I'll travel," he said, watching the Caribbean-zone game at Havana's Pedro Marrero stadium.

During Cuba's 1-1 draw with Barbados, Maradona waved at cheering spectators, clowned with journalists, and chatted to other sports personalities at the game like Cuban boxing legend Teofilo Stevenson and US national team coach Bruce Arena.

"When they let me enter the United States, I will go and see him, either to train or to pay him a personal visit," Maradona said of Arena. The Argentine has reportedly been denied a visa to enter the United States several times.

The flamboyant Maradona has now abandoned the dyed, orange-blond hair he sported soon after arriving in Cuba to return to his natural, dark colour. Having landed on the Caribbean island looking shockingly overweight, he is now slimmer, thanks to a routine including daily gym workouts and three-mile (five-km) runs around the La Pradera spa grounds in Havana.

Maradona has settled into a relaxed lifestyle here, including frequent Argentine-style barbecues with new friends in Havana and sports nights watching his beloved Argentine national squad or local Buenos Aires-based Boca Juniors team. He was recently seen sunbathing on an Argentine journalist's boat in Havana bay with a large Cuban cigar in one hand.

A self-confessed admirer of President Fidel Castro, Maradona received a personal visit from the Cuban leader soon after his arrival.

With a tattoo of guerrilla legend Ernesto "Che" Guevara on one shoulder, Maradona has become highly popular with Cubans. A crowd of admirers waited for him after Sunday's game, applauding and cheering as he got into a waiting Mercedes with his manager, Guillermo Coppola.

Maradona is being attended by a team of top local neurologists, heart specialists and nutritionists in Cuba, whose public health system is considered one of the best in the Third World.

Maradona, who led Argentina to World Cup victory in 1986 in Mexico, first started taking drugs in 1983 while playing for a Spanish club in Barcelona. The habit led to drug scandals and ate away at his playing skills. He retired in 1997.

English Div One

Man City gain Premiership berth

LONDON, May 8: The day after Manchester United collected the Premier League trophy for the sixth time in eight seasons, Manchester City made it a double celebration by gaining promotion and joining the Reds in the top flight, reports AP.

Joe Royle's team did it the long way round, falling behind on Blackburn who then hit the post and bar four times, before hitting back for a 4-1 victory. But the result meant they first ever spell in Division Two last term.

City only needed a point at Ewood Park to join Division One champions Charlton as the two automatically promoted teams. But, when Blackburn led through Matt Janzen's first half goal and Ipswich was ahead against struggling Walsall, it looked as if George Burley's Ipswich were headed for the top flight instead.

But second half goals by Shaun Goater, Mark Kennedy and Paul Dickson, and an own goal by Blackburn's Scottish international defender Christian Dailly triggered a field invasion by the thousands of the City fans who had made it to Ewood Park.

C'paul, McLean

From page 13	
Ambrose not out	2
Extras: (lb-2, nb-18)	20
Total: (For 7 wickets in 87 overs)	222
To bat: C. Walsh, R. King	
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-69, 3-79, 4-106, 5-130, 6-139, 7-213	
Bowler	O M R W
W Akram	20 5 43 1
Waqar	15 3 46 1
Mushtaq	32 5 91 3
Razaq	10 2 13 1
Saqin	10 1 24 0



The victorious Nantes team celebrating their French Cup final victory over Calais at the Stade de France in Saint Denis on May 7. —AFP photo

French Cup

Calais go down with honour



SAINT-DENIS, France, May 8: Nantes won the French Cup for the second straight year at the Stade de France on Sunday, ending the brave dream of Calais' valiant amateurs in controversial fashion as a late penalty secured a 2-1 win, reports AFP.

With the match moving into injury time Calais defender Fabrice Baron appeared to impede Nantes striker Alain Cavaglia, who collapsed in a heap and referee Claude Colombo awarded a penalty amid angry protests from the first fourth division side ever to appear in the final.

Antoine Sibierski smacked home the penalty past keeper Cedric Schille and Nantes, nicknamed the Canaries for their yellow and green kit, were home and dry — though next week they could be relegated from the First Division.

For 45 minutes, however, neutrals might have been forgiven for wondering who were the professionals and who the amateurs as Calais showed no traces of early nerves.

And the collection of shopkeepers and students even had the temerity to take the lead after 34 minutes through Jerome Dufre, a 24-year-old sports teacher, who turned the ball in from close range through the legs of Nantes keeper and skipper Michael Landreau.

Four minutes before the break Mickael Gerard, a 27-year-old supermarket shelf stacker away from football, sent a low right-foot drive skidding just inches past the far post as the rank outsiders came so close to a two-goal lead.

But after half-time Nantes began to impose their superior technique and they levelled five minutes after the restart through Sibierski, who fired home from eight yards out after a low cross from the right by Alioune Touré.

Moments later former Auxerre star Sibierski sent in a long-range effort which flew just wide.

Then came the penalty to crush Calais, several of whose players were in tears at the end.

But there were kind words from watching President Jacques Chirac afterwards.

"I'd say there are two winners

Nantes for the result but also Calais for their spirit. I'd like to offer Calais my heartfelt congratulations for their sterling showing," said Chirac.

Calais coach Ladislav Lozano shrugged off his bitter disappointment to tell French television: "I'm very proud of my team but I congratulate Nantes for their win. See you next year!"



Fabrice Baron (L), the Calais defender, being consoled by teammate Gregory Lefebvre after their loss in the final of the French Cup. —AFP photo

Real, Valencia virtually there



PARIS, May 8: Real Madrid have been there before, Valencia dared hardly dream of the start of the season but both sides stand on the threshold of a place in the Champions League final going into this week's semi-final returns. Both sides turned in confident showings to win their home legs with ease — in Valencia's case in exhilarating style as they handed Barcelona a 4-1 pasting, reports AFP.

Real travel to Bayern Munich 2-0 to the good after the

at least once in Munich and then they'll have to get four," said the former Liverpool star following the first match.

Real have several defensive problems, however, with right-sided Michel Salgado and Aitor Karanka both suspended.

Add to that the injury absence of Fernando Hierro and Real may well play veteran Manolo Sanchis alongside Ivan Campo instead of the unimpressive Brazilian Julio Cesar.

Salgado's place will go either to Cameroon international Geremi or Frenchman Christian Karembeu.

Bayern, who won the German Cup at the weekend in seeing off Werder Bremen 3-0, have a welcome addition to their squad as Steffen Effenberg returns from a calf injury which forced him out of the first leg.

But striker Alex Zickler, who scored twice against Real in a group phase encounter two months ago, is still not recovered from a torn leg muscle.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque took a gamble on Saturday in resting strikers Fernando Morientes and Raul as well as Argentinian playmaker Fernando Redondo and Ivan Campo.

But their replacement Anelka-Savio strike tandem failed to click as Alaves bagged the points to move themselves into the Champions League frame by going third.

Real will hope history can repeat itself in that the last time they won 2-0 in a home leg against a German club was when they saw off then titleholders Borussia Dortmund in 1998.

A few weeks later Real defeated Juventus in the final — although Del Bosque will not want to share the fate of winning coach Jupp Heynckes, who was promptly sacked for finishing eighth in the Primera Liga.

Del Bosque at least is sitting somewhat more comfortably in his hot seat than Barcelona's Luis van Gaal, who will surely be on his way if the Catalan club fail to overturn their deficit against Valencia.

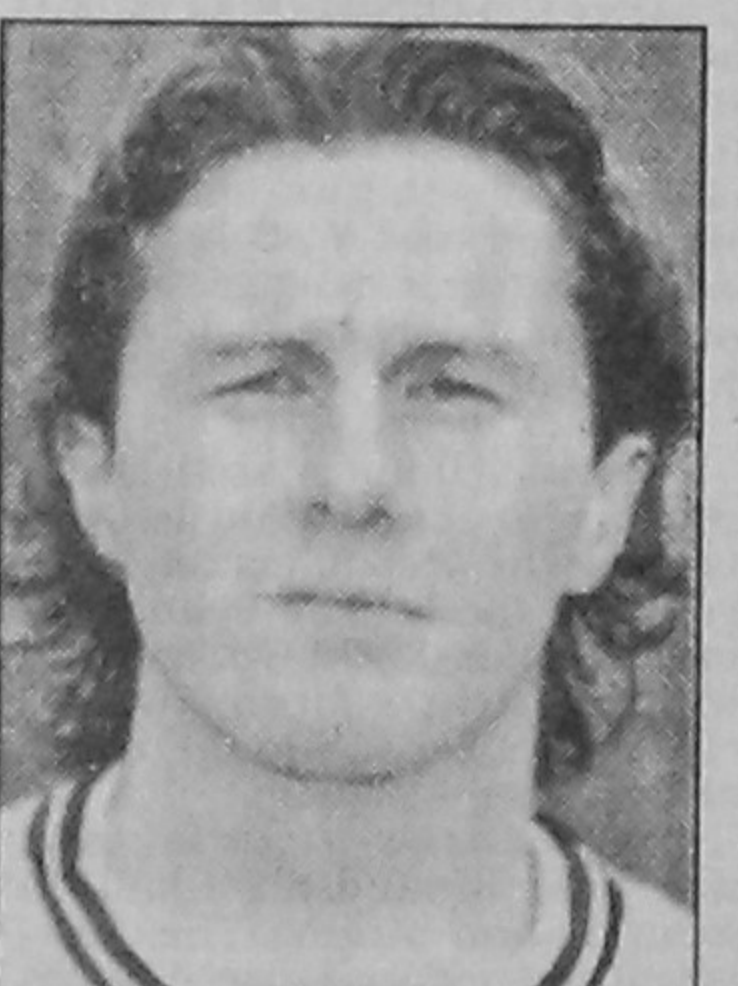
A poll by sports magazine Marca showed that 70 percent

of Spanish fans believed the Dutchman should pack his bags with the club having forfeited the Spanish Cup, suffered a battering in Valencia and then lost 2-0 on Saturday at home to Rayo Vallecano inside a fortnight.

Fans have also called for president Josep Lluís Núñez to step down.

Van Gaal admitted on Saturday that there could be no more excuses and called on his players not to squander the work of an entire season inside five days.

Portuguese playmaker Luis Figo, suspended for the first



STEVE McMANAMAN

match, remains an injury doubt and medical sources said he was recuperating and could still make the squad.

Valencia are on the crest of a wave and Hector Cuper's men are in no mood to allow Barcelona blitz them at the Nou Camp the way Van Gaal's side did Chelsea in the last round.

Chelsea were ripped apart 5-1 after a 3-1 win in London but Valencia's extra goal advantage and their current form suggest they will not buckle so easily.

And on Saturday they showed the punishment they meted out to Barcelona was no fluke by blitzing lowly Real Sociedad 4-0, midfield general Gaizka Menditia weighing in with a superb volley.

Sir Alex's wish

LONDON, May 8: Sir Alex Ferguson has revealed he will retire from his post as Manchester United manager when his current contract expires — and has outlined for the first time the kind of role he wants to take at Old Trafford, reports AFP.

Ferguson's comments at the weekend that he wanted to stay on with the Premiership champions prompted confusion as to whether he intended to remain in charge of the first team.

But Monday he told "The Scotsman" newspaper: "The last thing I want to do is continue in first-team management. What I have in mind would have nothing to do with that."

"The thing about retirement is that if you wait too long you won't be able to do the things you've talked about over the years because you won't be fit to do them. Old age doesn't come alone."

Ferguson believes he can best serve United in future by acting as a kind of global ambassador for the club but made clear it might be a part-time role to allow him more time with his family.

He added: "The way United are growing it is becoming a very big organisation. We already have alliances all over the world in Cape Town, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland and many other places. We'll probably be venturing into Australia."

"I think there could be an opening for a co-ordinator, somebody who could take some of the duties I now have off the next head coach."

"I would like to travel and see certain places properly, like Australia, South America or China where I've never been."

"In football we travel the world, but we don't get a chance to see these places."

"Retirement for me would be about remaining just active enough to spread out the week. For example, two or three days' work and three or four days off to pursue other interests such as my rachoneros."

"And the odd fortnight here or there to allow me to visit the countries I've talked about."

Graham spells it out for Ginola

LONDON, May 8: Tottenham manager George Graham assured David Ginola Monday that the Frenchman has a future at the English Premiership club — on condition that he accepts being left out of the team on occasions, reports AFP.

Ginola's future at White Hart Lane was thrown into doubt after he was dropped for Saturday's clash against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Graham wants the stylish French winger to stay at the club but is not prepared to guarantee him an automatic place in the starting line-up.

"David has an important part to play for Tottenham next season, and I want him to stay," Graham told The Evening Standard.

"Everyone is aware how much I want to bring in new players to strengthen the squad, and if I manage to do that then hopefully we will be able to do what clubs like Chelsea and Arsenal do in using their players."

"I would bet David has started more games than the likes of Gianfranco Zola, Dennis Bergkamp, Marc Overmars and Kanu. If I get it right with my squad that is the kind of situation I want to happen at Tottenham."

"No one will be able to take his place for granted, and that is how it should be."

Saturday was only the second time Ginola has been dropped by Graham. But he is amazed, having also lost his place for Spurs' UEFA Cup defeat by Kaiserslautern, that the axe has only fallen on him for the big games.

Gonzalez grabs US Clay Court crown

ORLANDO, Florida, May 8: Fernando Gonzalez was a late entry who took advantage of some early exits.

The Chilean qualifier upset countryman and sixth seed Nicolas Massu in straight sets Sunday to win his first career ATP Tour title at the US Clay Court Championships, reports AFP.

Gonzalez, 19, cruised to a 6-2, 6-3 win over Massu, 20, in the youngest final on the ATP Tour this year.

The last qualifier to enter the 32-player main draw, Gonzalez dropped only one set en route to the title, although he did not face a seeded player until Sunday. Six of the eight seeds did not get out of the second round.

Gonzalez offset eight double faults with seven aces and broke Massu with a forehand crosscourt winner to seal the victory, jumping into the stands to hug coach Raul River in celebration afterwards. Gonzalez earned 46,000 dollars.

Also appearing in his first career ATP Tour final, Massu lost his serve four times and never had a break opportunity. He had just three aces and won only 48 points to Gonzalez's 65.

This was the first all-Chilean final on the ATP Tour since November 28, 1982, when Jaime Fillol defeated Ricardo Acuna in Salvador.

Massu finished 1999 as the second-ranked player in Chile behind Marcelo Rios after winning three Challenger events, all on clay.

Primera Liga

Atletico die at sixty-five

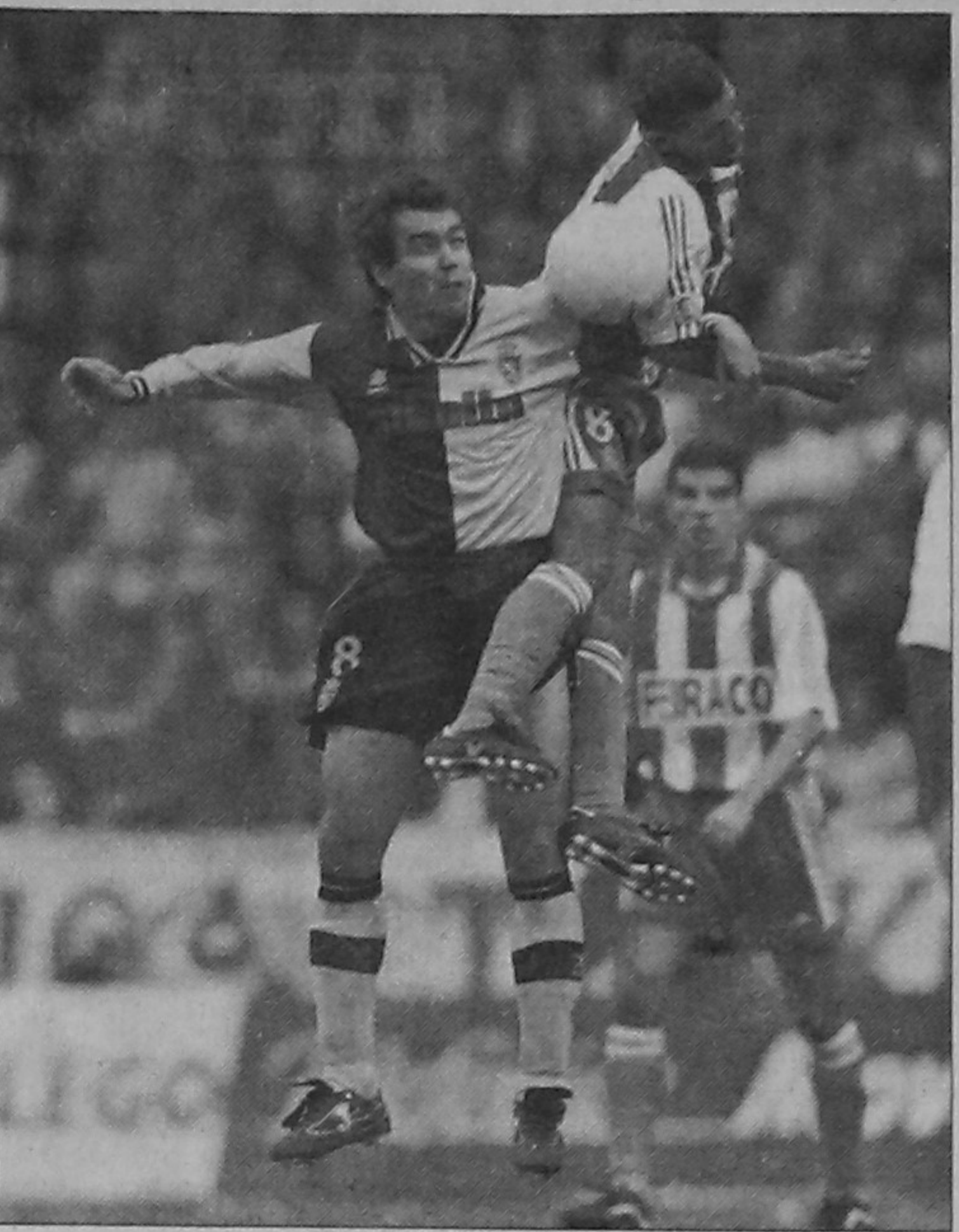


MADRID, May 8: Fallen Spanish giants Atletico Madrid, racked by financial worries and a criminal investigation, dropped out of the Spanish Primera Liga after 65 years on Sunday when a 2-2 draw with Real Oviedo saw them doomed to relegation, reports AFP.

ers were on international duty.

The future of Barca's Dutch coach Louis Van Gaal, who had insisted before the game that a third straight title was the Catalan club's priority — after earlier insisting the European Cup was the target — is now very much in doubt.

Deportivo's draw means they are three points clear of Barca with two games left and they are



Brazilian Daminha (C) of Deportivo La Coruna, locked in an aerial tussle with Aragon (L) of Real Zaragoza during their Primera Liga match on May 7. —AFP photo

At the other end of the table, nobody wants to win the title — Barcelona and Real Madrid losing at home on Saturday and Deportivo La Coruna only managing a 2-2 home draw against Champions League contenders Real Zaragoza.

Barcelona crashed 2-0 at home to Rayo Vallecano and were booed off by angry fans as their team now faces ending the season empty-handed after their 4-1 Champions League semi-final thrashing at Valencia.

They were also kicked out of the Spanish Cup after refusing to play Atletico Madrid in last month's semi-final second leg, saying too many of their play-

ers were on international duty.

Twice in the 1990s Deportivo lost the title on the last day of the season when leading at the start of the day — most famously in 1993-4 when their Brazilian striker Bebeto — who two months later won the World Cup with Brazil — missed a penalty that would have secured the crown.

But their rivals have been so inconsistent that the Galician club may now win the league almost by default.

Real Madrid, who in contrast to Barca are two goals to the good in Europe after beating

Bayern Munich in midweek, lost 1-0 at the Bernabeu stadium to Alaves, Jorge Azkoina scoring three minutes from time.

Zaragoza's point at Deportivo put them third on goal difference ahead of Valencia, who swamped Real Sociedad 4-0 on Saturday, and Alaves.

Real are sixth, a point further back and may now have to win the Champions League if they are to get back into that tournament next season.

Deportivo had looked set for three points after Dutchman Roy Makaay with his 21st of the season and Djalminha cancelled out a strike from Juanele. But Aguado levelled seven minutes from the end to frustrate the hosts and keep Zaragoza headed for the Champions League.

Atletico, nine times champions and Cup winners as well as winning the 1962 Cup Winners Cup and World Club Championship in 1974, lie second from bottom eight points adrift and two matches remaining.

Atletico, who in March resorted to bringing back Yugoslav coach Rado Antic, their 1996 double-winning mentor, became the first Spanish side to be relegated in the same season as reaching the Spanish Cup final.

Atletico have struggled all season despite having one of the most expensively assembled squads — of whom only Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink has starred with over 20 goals.

Their fortunes were not helped when controversial club president Jesus Gil, his son and the club's entire board were dismissed on December 22 last year by the Spanish justice system.

The club was placed under the control of judicial administrator Luis Manuel Rubi, who declared last month that Atletico were "technically bankrupt" and needed a cash injection of 75 million dollars to make the club viable.

Gil, also mayor of Marbella, was handed back the club on April 11 after the administrators declared they had "fulfilled their mission in preventing the continuation of fraud and destruction of proof fundamental for the investigation", is also under investigation for a series of fraud allegations — he is suspected of syphoning off 54 million dollars.

Gil made a habit of changing coaches and sacked the unfortunate Antic after last season's loss to Valencia in the Spanish Cup final by telling him his successor was in the winner's dressing room.

Serie A

Ref kicks up a storm as Juve prepare to party



ROME, May 8: Italian soccer was in a state of turmoil on Monday after a controversial refereeing decision all but handed the league title to Juventus, reports AFP.

The Serie A leaders were 1-0 up on Sunday when Parma's Fabio Cannavaro headed home a 90th minute corner. But referee Massimo De Santis disallowed the strike, saying there had been pushing in the penalty area.

Juventus' victory kept them two points ahead of Lazio, with just one match to play, and left a furious Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti claiming that his club had morally won the championship.

"We're sorry, but it's a scandal," screamed the front-page headline of the Corriere dello Sport, referring to "the incredible decision by the referee."

"I have seen a colossal injustice... and something has to be

done," wrote editor Mario Sconcerti, as the theory that Italian referees help Juventus to become champions was advanced for the second time in three years.

Juventus edged Inter Milan to the 1998 title in what was dubbed "The Season of Poison" because of a series of dubious refereeing decisions in Juventus' favour.

Italy's biggest sports daily, La Gazzetta dello Sport, revived those same concerns on Monday headlining: "The poisoned league title" on the front page and adding: "Mystery foul: Cannavaro's 1-1 not given."

The Corriere della Sera published a list of five matches — four of them against title rivals — in which controversial refereeing decisions had been made this season, all of them in Juventus' favour.

Television replays appeared to confirm Cannavaro's version of events — that the penalty area confusion was no different to what happens with every corner

and that there was no major infringement.

Lazio could have faced their final match level on points with Juventus, opening up the prospect of a play-off for the title.

Instead, club chief Cragnotti was left dealing for a complete overhaul of Italian football and insisting that his team were the real champions.

"Our football has to be completely re-built," he told reporters. "Everybody, whether they are fans or not, saw what happened in Turin and no-one is able to explain why that goal wasn't allowed."

Everything that led up to it was perfectly normal, if anything the Juventus players were committing the worst first trying to hold back Crespo and then Cannavaro. But the referee disallowed it. Why, I don't know."

And he warned: "It's not going to change the result, but Lazio are going to make their voice heard where it counts. For the second season in a row, the championship is ending with the clear signal 'everything's against Lazio'."

"Once again, there's been a lack of sportsmanship and also a lack of professionalism by those who carry out certain duties."

"There's a lot of work to be done in the League and the federation, because it's just not possible for people to invest billions and billions of lira and then find themselves in situations where things are not clear."

Cragnotti said he couldn't wait for a pan-European league to emerge, one that employed full-time professional referees.

And he summed up: "Lazio deserve the league title, both morally and for their football. We've shown that we're clearly superior in the head-to-head matches and that it wasn't by chance that we beat the league leaders (last month)."

"For me, Lazio have won the league."

Lieke turn back to Ivic

LIEGE, Belgium, May 8: Player pressure at out-of-sorts Belgian First Division outfit Standard Liege has resulted in the reappointment as coach of Tomislav Ivic seven months after his dismissal, reports AFP.



Edgar Davids (R) Juventus' Dutch international midfielder, being brought down following a tackle from Parma's Claudio Benarrivo during their Serie A fixture at Turin on May 7. —AFP photo