

Serie A

Last laugh Lazio's

ROME, May 15: Lazio were crowned Italian champions for the second time in the club's history on Sunday after they beat Reggina 3-0 here and overnight leaders Juventus suffered a shock 1-0 defeat at Perugia, reports AFP.

Lazio, who won their only other league title back in 1973 but had been runners-up to AC Milan in 1999, finished the season with 72 points.

Juventus stayed on 71 pts - a two point lead over Lazio evaporating with their upset at Perugia in a match that was interrupted for 75 minutes by a rain-storm.

They had been nine points clear at the top in late March but a run of defeats saw them caught by Lazio, who could yet do the league and Cup double. The Rome club beat Inter Milan 2-1 in the first leg of the Italian Cup last month.

Lazio's victory prompted celebrations in the streets here with car horns sounding, motorbikes being ridden with Lazio flags and banners flying, and fans singing and chanting in the ancient city squares.

Lazio coach Sven Goran Eriksson said: "It wasn't just me, it was the team who did a great job. They believed they could do it right until the very end and now we've won. And we're just delighted."

Winning Serie A is like winning the Champions League, said the Swede, whose team lost in the quarter-finals to eventual finalists Valencia.

Juventus were sporting in defeat, with honorary president Umberto Agnelli saying: "Compliments to Lazio - a great team has won. We'll meet again next year. But thanks to Juventus for all they've done."

Juventus coach Carlo Ancelotti said: "This was a really bad afternoon - and it's one that will stay in my thoughts and my memories, unfortunately."

But he added: "Despite all the great bitterness, for a league title lost by hair's breadth, I have to say that this has been an excellent season for Juventus."

"I don't think any of the players have let me down. All of them have given everything."

And he summed up: "We deserved to win, but so did Lazio."

Elsewhere, outgoing champions AC Milan beat Udinese 4-0 to finish third and reach the preliminary rounds of the Champions League.

Milan's Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko, who scored a penalty, finished as the Serie A's top scorer with 24 in his debut season - a remarkable feat.

"I never thought that I'd score so many goals," Shevchenko said.

But teammate Gennaro Gattuso added: "If we'd played like this all season the league title would have been ours. No-one could have taken it away from us."

The other place in the Champions League preliminaries will be decided by a play-off between Inter Milan, who had beaten Baggio to thank for a lacklustre 2-0 win at relegated Cagliari, and Parma, who thumped Lecce 4-1.

Gabriel Batistuta scored a hat-trick in Fiorentina's 3-0 win over Venezia, earning them a place in the UEFA Cup, but they asked to be transferred.

Alessandro Calori only needed to score once to deny Juventus a 26th league trophy - volleying home just four minutes after play re-started.

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STANDINGS

ROME, May 14 (AFP): Final Italian league table of the season on Sunday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points; Lazio champions, bottom four clubs relegated to the Serie B):

	34	21	9	4	64	33	72
Juventus	34	21	8	5	46	20	61
AC Milan	34	16	13	5	65	40	58
Inter Milan	34	17	7	10	58	36	58
Parma	34	16	10	8	52	37	58
AS Roma	34	14	12	8	57	34	54
Fiorentina	34	13	12	9	48	38	51
Udinese	34	13	11	10	55	45	50
Verona	34	10	13	11	40	45	43
Perugia	34	12	6	16	36	52	42
Bologna	34	9	13	12	32	39	40
Reggina	34	9	13	12	31	42	40
Lecce	34	10	10	14	33	49	40
Bari	34	10	9	15	34	48	39
Torino	34	8	12	14	35	47	36
Venezia	34	6	8	20	30	60	26
Cagliari	34	3	13	18	29	54	22
Piacenza	34	4	9	21	19	45	21

Simone Inzaghi, the Lazio striker, sends Reggina custodian Taibi(R) the wrong way to score from the penalty spot during their crucial Serie A fixture at Rome on May 14.

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