

Bundesliga L'kusen make no mistake

REUTERS, BERLIN

Bayer Leverkusen gained a measure of revenge over SpVgg Unterhaching by winning a Bundesliga match 2-1 on Sunday.

Leverkusen remain in title contention - they are third, two points behind leaders Bayern Munich, who won 3-1 at VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday, and equal on points with Schalke 04 who lost 4-1 at Energie Cottbus.

Leverkusen striker Oliver Neuville hit the winner by heading home from a Ze Roberto free kick in the 53rd minute as his side returned to the stadium where they suffered the most embarrassing defeat in their history.

Leverkusen needed just a draw at the modest club from a Munich suburb in the final game of last season to clinch their first German crown. But they lost 2-0 and were beaten into second place by Bayern Munich on goal difference.

All started well for the visitors this time, former Germany striker Ulf Kirsten exploiting a blunder from Unterhaching's Hendrik Herzog to put them ahead in the 26th minute.

But Unterhaching equalised through Oliver Straube in the 32nd minute after Leverkusen goalkeeper Pascal Zuberbuehler had failed to block an effort from Abdelaziz Ahanouf.

In Sunday's other game, troubled Eintracht Frankfurt restored some pride as first half goals from Pawel Krysalowicz and Marco Gebhardt earned them a 2-0 win at Hansa Rostock in an eventful match featuring three red cards.

Hansa defender Rayk Schroeder was the first to leave, after a second bookable offence in the 36th minute.

Eintracht defender Torsten Kracht followed him off for a vicious tackle in the 66th. The visitors were reduced to nine men when Chinese striker Chen Yang was hooked for the second time with a few seconds remaining.

It was Eintracht's first outing since coach Felix Magath was sacked last Monday after six defeats in a row.

Eintracht's director of sport, Rolf Dohmen, took over on a caretaker basis and sat on the bench on Sunday.

The Frankfurt club, who moved up to 13th, are expected to name their new coach on Monday. The favourite is Klaus Toppmoeller, currently with Second Division Saarbruecken.

Defeat saw Rostock slide to second from bottom.

Socceroos-Mexico friendly Feb 21

APP, Sydney

Australia will play Mexico in San Jose, California, on February 21, Soccer Australia said Monday.

The match will be used as Australia's buildup to this year's qualifiers for the 2002 World Cup finals in Japan/Korea.

Australian national coach Frank Farina said he expected to field a similar squad that beat Scotland 2-0 in Glasgow in November.

Farina said he expected to be without injured British-based players, Harry Kewell, Tony Vidmar and Craig Moore for the match against 12th-ranked Mexico.

Soccer Australia has also arranged for the national side to play World and European champions France in Sydney or Melbourne on November 11.

Berlusconi unpopular

AFP, Milan

AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi was targeted by supporters of his own club Sunday in the latest indication that fans of the San Siro outfit are unhappy with their leader's political ambitions.



South Korean protesters chanting anti-Japan slogans in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul yesterday.

Tension intensifies

AFP, Seoul

South Korean football fans staged a demonstration outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul on Monday, demanding the 2002 World Cup Final be taken away from Japan because of a dispute about the tournament's name.

But despite a warning from South Korean soccer chiefs that they might seek to renegotiate an agreement to allow Japan to stage the final, Japanese organisers insisted they would await a verdict on the dispute by football's world governing body, FIFA.

About a dozen placard-waving football fans shouted anti-Japanese slogans outside the Japanese embassy in central Seoul. "Japan must return the final to South Korea," said one banner.

The co-hosts are in dispute because Japan wants to put its name first in the event title on tickets and other material to be sold in Japan.

Under an accord when they were jointly awarded the finals in 1996, the tournament is to be called the "2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan". The opening match is in South Korea but Japan won the right to host the final.

Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KOWOC) co-chairman Chung Mong-Joon, a FIFA vice-president, side-stepped questions on the dispute at a press

conference to give details of ticket sales which start on February 15.

But he has previously suggested that if Japan continued to argue against using the official title then there should be new talks on the venue of the final.

Japan is now saying it will await the decision of a FIFA executive committee on March 15. And at

day: "This is a matter to be settled not by Japan or South Korea, but by FIFA. I heard that there was a demonstration at the Japanese embassy today. I hope that the two countries do not waste energy on such things."

He added: "JAWOC hopes this will be settled as quickly as possible. We understand that FIFA will make a final decision when its top officials are to meet next month."

"Japan is ready to follow their decision. But we believe our claim is common sense. For example, in Japan, the security treaty between Japan and the United States is called Japan-US Security Treaty. In the United States, its name is the other way round (US-Japan Security Treaty)."

Despite the official comments, there is concern in South Korea that the dispute should be settled to avoid derailing organisations for the first co-hosting of a World Cup and the first to be held in Asia.

The Korea Herald newspaper called for a compromise and said in an editorial "the controversy has already shown signs of developing into a major row between the peoples of the two countries."

FIFA is said to have proposed a compromise saying the Japanese organisers could remove the country names from domestic promotional literature. JAWOC rejected the move.



Hattrick hero Henrik Larsson of Celtic is euphoric after scoring his second goal against Hearts in their Scottish Premiership clash at Tynecastle in Edinburgh on February 4.

Scottish Premier League Larsson Hearts-breaker

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic restored their nine-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premier League on Sunday thanks to Henrik Larsson's hattrick in a comfortable 3-0 win at Hearts.

The Swedish international gave the visitors a dream start with a thumping header after four minutes before further second-half strikes killed off Hearts who struggled to adapt to the wintry conditions.

One sour note for Martin O'Neill's men was the loss of influential Belgian defender Joos Valgaeren who was carried off with an ankle injury.

Celtic have the chance to increase their advantage over second-placed Rangers next Sunday when the bitter Glasgow rivals meet at Parkhead in a potential championship decider.

Man-of-the-match Larsson refused to take all the accolades and instead paid tribute to his Celtic team-mates.

Celtic, who had already beaten Hearts on three occasions this season, took the lead after just four minutes.

Alan Thompson fired in a dangerous free-kick from the left wing and Larsson got ahead of Grant Murray to head into the bottom corner for his 34th goal of the season.

But the visitors were dealt a cruel blow in the sixth minute when Valgaeren was carried off after appearing to fall awkwardly after going up for a header with Gordon Durie and Tom Boyd came on in his place.

Celtic were rampant in the opening exchanges and almost created another great chance for Larsson in the eighth minute when Ramon Vega crossed from the right but Steven Pressley made a vital interception.

Hearts goalkeeper Antti Niemi became the hero in the 12th minute after Didier Agathe had left Stephen Pressley and Colin Cameron in his wake with a burst down the right.

The Frenchman got to the by-line and cut the ball back, but the former Rangers star made a telling save as Larsson set himself up for a shot.

Hearts were clearly rattled and Niemi again had to keep his side in the match as Chris Sutton got to Thompson's free-kick - but the goalkeeper did well to get down low to his right to deny him.

The visitors were unlucky not to double their lead in the 24th minute following a flowing move which ripped the Hearts defence wide open again.

Celtic continued to press Hearts back after the break and on the hour mark Chris Sutton was presented with a glorious chance.

Jackie McNamara found the striker on the edge of the box and after Sutton had jinked past Pressley only a crucial block from Murray denied him a shot on target.

French First Division Lille leap in front

AFP, Paris

Lille moved into first place in the French First Division on Sunday with a hard-fought 1-0 win at Lens.

The victory means the northern club, promoted last year, are again looking down on bigger, richer clubs in this strangest of French seasons.

The goal came after fine work from Djerson Bouteille, who shrugged off his defender in the Lens penalty area to centre towards Dagui Bakari.

The ball was eventually bundled over his own goal line by Lens defender Cyril Rool to the disappointment of the 40,000 crowd at the northern derby.

Lille have the same number of points as Nantes but are ahead on goal difference and not surprisingly, their young squad celebrated in the changing rooms afterwards as if they had won the title.

Lens best hope in an uninspired performance came from Antoine Sibierski, who had one fine half-volley pushed away by Lens goalkeeper Guillaume Warmuz.

Nantes had snatched pole position on Saturday with a second-half strike from Olivier Monterrubio for a 1-0 win against struggling Paris Saint Germain.

Lyon, 3-2 winners away at Guingamp on Saturday, kept up the pressure on the pack thanks to a last-minute goal from Brazilian Sonny Anderson, his 101st in the French league.

Last season's champions Monaco will hope they have turned the corner in a dismal season after a 6-1 thrashing of Metz - but the multi-millionaires from the Principality are still seventh from the bottom of the table.

Fulham held

AFP, London

A determined performance by Sheffield United earned them a point but few friends in a hard-fought 1-1 draw against runaway First Division leaders Fulham at Craven Cottage on Sunday.

Despite taking one point rather than three, Fulham still look certain for promotion to the Premiership with a 10-point advantage over second-placed Bolton.

Almost from the start of the game the visitors, nicknamed the Blades, gave a master class in time-wasting that frustrated the Fulham players as much as the home crowd.

Portugal's Luis Boa Morte, back after a two-game ban, put the Londoners ahead in the 17th minute.

Frenchman Louis Saha's clever pass beat the offside trap and Boa Morte finished coolly to put his side ahead.

United's equaliser came four minutes before half-time when Laurent D'Jaffo headed home from a free-kick taken near the left corner flag.

The pitch was muddy and the home side found it hard to play their normal passing game.

In the first half it was United who had more efforts at goal - with Rob Kozluk, Mick Brown and D'Jaffo all going close.

Fulham improved after the interval but dogged defending by the Yorkshiremen kept them at bay.

Former German international Karlheinz Riedle and Boa Morte both forced fine saves from goalkeeper Simon Tracey but near the close United could have snatched a winner if Maik Taylor had not been alert enough to save smartly from Nick Montgomery.

Hodde keen for int'l stint

AFP, London

Former England coach Glenn Hodde, now Southampton manager, has declared an interest in returning to international management.

He told the Mail on Sunday: "I'm still young enough and I would love the particular challenge of international football."

"It would probably not be with England but with another country. Somewhere like the USA would be a great challenge one day."

Real dogfight

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid restored their seven-point lead in the Spanish Primera Liga thanks to a pulsating 4-3 home victory over Malaga on Sunday.

Malaga levelled after Guti had opened the scoring for Real on 16 minutes and then went ahead through a well-taken goal from striker Dely Valdes.

But two headers from Spanish international striker Raul gave the home side a 3-2 halftime advantage.

Real head the table with 48 points, seven clear of Deportivo Coruna, who narrowly beat bottom club Racing Santander 2-1.

Barcelona are third, a point behind Deportivo, after their astonishing 7-0 demolition of Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

Valencia stay in fourth place, but drop to 12 points behind Real after they were held to a 2-2 draw

at Real Mallorca.

Hector Cuper's side lost concentration and allowed Alberto Luque to sneak in at the far post to level the match in injury time after they had taken a 2-1 lead in the second half.

Real Zaragoza powered to a 6-1 victory over Rayo Vallecano, pushing them up three places to 12th.

Malaga signalled their attacking attentions from the start with strike combination Dario Silva and Dely Valdes a constant threat in the face of a rather passive Real defence.

But it was Real who took the lead against the run of play. Guti, lurking among the Malaga defenders, latched on to a Roberto Carlos header and clipped the ball into the top corner with a well-timed shot.

Malaga continued to threaten and gained a deserved equaliser 10 minutes later after a poor punch by Iker Casillas was headed over the Real keeper and into goal by Miguel Roteta.

Panamanian international Dely Valdes gave the visitors the lead on 30 minutes. Snapping up a pass from team mate Dario Silva, he sped around the advancing Casillas and struck home with his right.

The game ebbed and flowed as both teams exchanged attacks. But it was the Raul-Figo combination that provided the home side with two goals in three minutes.

The first came on 39 minutes when Raul got to a Figo cross ahead of former Real keeper Pedro Contreras and headed home.

Figo was the provider once more for Raul's second. The European Player of the Year spun another cross into the heart of the area and again Raul rose high to head home.

The second half was just as entertaining. Real had the better of the possession, but Malaga levelled with a superb goal in the 74th minute.

Rufete swung in a perfectly weighted cross from the right and Dario Silva directed a header beyond the reach of Casillas.

But Real showed character as they restored their lead within two minutes. Contreras pulled off a superb point blank save from a Hierro header and Ivan Helguera blasted home the rebound to give Real the victory.

Real Madrid's Luis Figo (in the background) rises above Ariel Silveo Zarate of Malaga to head the ball during their Primera Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on February 4.



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Serie A Roman holiday

Football

AFP, Milan

Rome and Argentina ruled in the Serie A Sunday with leaders AS Roma coming back to defeat Parma 2-1 and defending champions Lazio eclipsing Lecce 3-2 to go joint second with Juventus.

Roma trailed Parma until two superbly-executed second-half volleys from Argentine Gabriel Batistuta helped them soar six points clear of Juventus, beaten 2-1 by Atalanta Saturday night. They are joined in second by Lazio.

Roma celebrated in style the 'winter championship' - a purely honorary title bestowed on the leaders at the season's halfway point - and now turn for home with at least some margin for error.

But the one cloud on the horizon is the ominous run by the real champions Lazio who continued

their 100 percent form under new coach Dino Zoff.

That victory was also made in Argentina with Hernan Crespo (two) and Juan Sebastian Veron the scorers.

Roma were given a rude awakening at Parma, managed for the first time by Renzo Ulivieri.

First Francesco Totti missed a penalty and six minutes later Parma scored the dividend when Marco Di Vaio scored.

But Batistuta's two goals again saw him go level with AC Milan's Ukrainian forward Andriy Shevchenko as the division's capocannoniere (leading scorer) with 13 goals.

Capello beamed: "It was a very fast and competitive game and I am absolutely delighted with the whole team, not just Batistuta."

But the wily coach clearly had his eyes on the prize that really matters when he said he would not celebrate the winter title. "Champagne? I prefer wine," he

quipped.

Back in Rome Lazio's Crespo put them on course for a fourth consecutive win since Zoff succeeded Sven Goran Eriksson.

Alessandro Conticchio squared the match before Crespo struck again. Veron made it 3-1 and Cristiano Lucarelli's penalty for Lecce was not enough.

"When the team is playing better as a whole it is obvious that it is going to help the performance of an individual player like Crespo," said Zoff.

Florentina lost further ground when they were downed 1-0 by Napoli in the Sunday evening match played at Palermo because of crowd misbehaviour by fans of the Naples club. Fabio Pecchia scored the decider in injury time.

Inter Milan's Christian Vieri notched his fourth goal of the season at Bologna, confirming both player and club are returning to form.

Luigi Di Biagio and veteran Yugoslav Vladimir Jugovic added further goals for a 3-0 win.

Brescia missed two penalties but still beat Bari 3-1 in their relegation clash with Bari reduced to 10 men after only three minutes when Swiss defender Giuseppe Mazzarelli was sent off.

Albanian striker Igli Tare gave Brescia the lead after team-mate Dario Hubner had fluffed the first spot-kick.

After 58 minutes Brescia won another. This time Andrea Pirlo blundered and Bari's Moroccan defender Rashid Negrouz took full advantage six minutes later, equalising.

But two late goals from Hubner ensured no damage was done.

Danish midfielder Martin Jorgensen gave Udinese the lead at Vicenza but the home side's striker Luca Toni squared the match from a penalty.

But in-form Massimo Murgio's injury-time winner gave Udinese a 2-1 victory.

AC Milan needed a second-half goal from Brazilian Leonardo to beat Reggina 1-0 at the San Siro. Juventus were victims of an Atalanta comeback at Bergamo. A Massimo Paganini own goal with 17 minutes remaining looked like giving Juve the points but Stefano Lorenzi equalised before Nicola Venola notched the winner.

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