

One down two to go for Celtic

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic manager Martin O'Neill claimed his first trophy since taking charge of the Glasgow giants with a 3-0 win over Kilmarnock in the Scottish League Cup final at Hampden Park on Sunday.

A Henrik Larsson hat-trick gave Celtic the spoils and leaves them on course for a domestic treble. They lead the Premier League by 13 points and face Dundee United in the semi-finals of the Scottish Cup.

Former Leicester City boss O'Neill said: "It's fantastic, absolutely fantastic."

"The players were absolutely magnificent from start to finish. It's been a long, hard season for them. They have been leading the league for months and months and it was difficult for them today, but they were fantastic."

Larsson took his season's tally to 47 goals, and O'Neill described his prolific Swedish striker as "sensational, a world-class footballer."

Injuries and suspensions stretched Celtic's squad, and O'Neill also praised young Colin Healy, called into the side as cover after Stilian Petrov suffered a broken leg against St Johnstone on Wednesday.

"I thought he was excellent," said O'Neill.

"He has not played in the first team for a long time and it was a brilliant effort by him."

The only downside for Celtic was the sending off of striker Chris Sutton.

Celtic led 1-0 when Sutton was shown the red card, but O'Neill refused to condemn the player.

"From where I stood I thought it was harsh, but I'll have to see it again," he said.

Hat-trick hero Larsson said: "Obviously I'm pleased. They made it very hard for us today. The second goal was important after Chris had been sent off and once we got three the game was finished."

Scotland midfielder Paul Lambert played a key role for Celtic in the centre of midfield and was pleased with the way his side performed once down to 10 men.

"The referee called it the way he sees it," he said. "But with 10 men we were very solid and didn't let Kilmarnock back in the game. I think we deserved to win."

His midfielder partner Neil Lennon, who followed O'Neill from Leicester, said: "It's always nice to win trophies, but obviously it's my first for Celtic and it's very special."

"I've been to Wembley a few times, but this is something else."

"It was Henrik again - he's the man. It was a tremendous performance again," added Lennon who admitted however that completing the Treble "would be asking a lot".

French First Div. PSG sink further

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain's season of woe continued Sunday with a 2-0 defeat against title-chasing Bordeaux.

Goals either side of half-time from French international Christophe Dugarry and Tony Vairelles sealed victory for Bordeaux, the result moving them up to fourth place.

Dugarry opened the scoring on 41 minutes, the forward side-footing home after some clever interplay on the edge of the area.

They doubled the lead midway through the second half when Vairelles blasted home on 62 minutes.

The victory keeps Bordeaux in the hunt for a place in next season's Champions League, level on points with third-placed Lyon but fourth in the table on goal difference.

But defeat piles on the problems for PSG coach Luis Fernandez, who has struggled to revive the club's fortunes since arriving midway through the season.

The Parisians are now languishing in 12th spot in the table with little prospect of a place in Europe next year, a grim prospect for a club which went on a record 75-million-dollar spending spree last summer.

Okocha stays at PSG

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian international Austin 'Jay Jay' Okocha said Saturday he will see through his contract at struggling French club Paris Saint-Germain.

"I have two more years left of my contract with PSG and nobody has asked me to leave," Okocha told a local newspaper here.

"I also want to win something with this club and so I have no plans to leave."

The midfielder star added: "The team may not be doing too well at the moment but I strongly believe we can only get better and I will continue to give my best to the club."

Okocha joined the French giants from Turkish team Fenerbache after featuring for Nigeria at the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

PSG have been knocked out of the Champions League and the domestic cups and are struggling in the league, forcing top club officials to promise a major reorganisation at the club.



Karel Pbrosky (L), Lazio's Czech star in pursuit of Juventus hot-shot Edgar Davids at Rome on March 18. PHOTO: AFP

Serie A Classic Lazio

AFP, Rome

Defending champions Lazio thrashed second-placed Juventus 4-1 at Rome's Olympic Sunday to rekindle their fading hopes of successfully defending their Italian First Division title.

Two goals apiece from Pavel Nedved and Hernan Crespo ensured Dino Zoff's side overcame the Turin giants, who finished with nine men after Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids and French substitute David Trezeguet were sent off.

Alessandro Del Piero scored for Juve.

With Serie A leaders AS Roma held to a 0-0 draw by struggling Reggina the result means third-placed Lazio are now nine points behind their city rivals who despite their indifferent display now extend their lead over Juve to seven points with eleven rounds to go.

Lazio took the lead midway through the first half with Nedved finishing off a move started by fellow Czech Karel Pbrosky.

Argentinian forward Crespo doubled their lead in the second period with his 15th goal of the season and it looked like curtains for the Turin side when Davids, who had already been booked, was sent off after 58 minutes.

The sending off capped a miserable night for Davids, who had been racially abused by sections of Lazio's notorious supporters.

Juve hauled themselves back into the game through Del Piero but Nedved's second of the night all but killed the match before Crespo rubbed salt into the wounds.

Trezeguet got his marching orders in the last minute.

Lazio coach Dino Zoff, who all but conceded defeat last week, retracted, saying: "We must always keep looking towards heaven - we are not giving up yet."

His Juve counterpart Carlo Ancelotti said: "Lazio got to grips

with the game better than us. The sending-off of Davids changed the course of the match."

In Reggio Calabria struggling Reggina made most of the running against Fabio Capello's Serie A leaders with Davide Dionigi missing three clear chances for the minnows.

Substitute Mozart missed a glorious chance to win it for the hosts three minutes from time and it finished goalless.

Primera Liga Loss doesn't hurt Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid suffered a rare Primera Liga loss on Sunday - but remained firmly in control of the title race after all their main rivals were beaten at the weekend.

Madrid were downed 1-0 away at Real Mallorca by a 40th-minute goal from Alberto Luque.

But none of the chasing pack was able to capitalise on Real's slip-up and Madrid retained their five-point lead at the top of the table as second-placed Deportivo La Coruna and third-placed Valencia lost.

"That was the worst we have played since the start of the season," Real coach Vicente Del Bosque fumed after watching the 'Merengues' labour to defeat.

Valencia could have gone to within four points of Real, but were beaten 3-2 at Celta Vigo in Sunday's late match.

Two penalties in a nine-minute spell scuppered Valencia's chances of securing a win at Celta's Balaidos Stadium.

Russian Valeriy Karpin converted spot-kicks in the 51st and

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Goals For	Goals Against
Real Madrid	27	17	5	5	60	30
Deportivo La Coruna	27	15	6	6	52	31
Valencia	27	14	7	6	43	21
Barcelona	27	13	7	7	55	38
Real Mallorca	27	12	9	6	37	33
Villarreal	27	12	6	9	38	42

Davids abused

AFP, Rome

Juventus midfielder Edgar Davids was subjected to racial abuse by Lazio fans in the Italian First Division match between the two clubs at Rome's Olympic Stadium here Sunday evening.

A systematic campaign of abuse began after around 20 minutes with Lazio fans in the 'Curva Nord' section of the ground where hardcore supporters of the defending champions traditionally congregate whistling and jeering Dutchman Davids, who is black, every time he touched the ball.

Lazio fans have frequently racially abused black players in recent seasons and currently are serving a suspended sentence with Italian football chiefs threatening to close their ground.

Vieri junior in the news

AFP, Ancona

Australian-born striker Massimiliano Vieri, brother of Inter Milan forward Christian, scored a hat-trick on Sunday as his Italian club Ancona thrashed Second Division leaders Chievo 5-2.

Vieri, born and raised in Sydney, scored goals in the 18th, 36th and 90th minutes as his mid-table outfit dispatched Verona-based Chievo who nonetheless retain a three-point lead in Serie B.

Chievo are looking good for one of the top four berths that would earn them a first ever season in the top flight.

Massimiliano's elder brother Christian, who in 1999 joined Inter for a then world record fee from Lazio, was born in Bologna and is an Italian international but spent much of his childhood in Sydney.

Beckham retains Captaincy

AFP, Liverpool

Manchester United midfielder David Beckham will captain England in the World Cup qualifiers against Finland and Albania, coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said here Monday.

Asked if Beckham would retain the captaincy, Eriksson told a press conference: "Yes, there is no reason to change this."

Beckham was captain in the 3-0 friendly match win over Spain last month. England play Finland at Anfield on Saturday and Albania in Tirana on March 28.

England squad for WC 2002 Qualifier

AFP, London

England squad announced Sunday for Group Nine World Cup qualifiers against Finland in Liverpool on March 24 and Albania in Tirana on March 28:

SQUAD
Goalkeepers: David Seaman (Arsenal), Nigel Martyn (Leeds United), David James (Aston Villa), Richard Wright (Ipswich).

Defenders: Gary Neville (Manchester United), Phil Neville (Manchester United), Chris Powell (Charlton), Ashley Cole (Arsenal), Jamie Carragher (Liverpool), Sol Campbell (Tottenham), Wes Brown (Manchester United), Rio Ferdinand (Leeds United).

Midfielders: David Beckham (Manchester United), Paul Scholes (Manchester United), Steve McManaman (Real Madrid/Spa), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Frank Lampard (West Ham), Joe Cole (West Ham), Michael Carrick (West Ham), Gavin McCann (Sunderland), Nicky Butt (Manchester United).

Strikers: Michael Owen (Liverpool), Robbie Fowler (Liverpool), Emile Heskey (Liverpool), Andy Cole (Manchester United), Teddy Sheringham (Manchester United).

Petit regrets joining Barca

AFP, Barcelona

Emmanuel Petit, Barcelona's bench-wary French World Cup winning midfielder, revealed on Sunday that he regretted joining the club in an interview published in the football review "Don Balon".

The 30-year-old, who joined Barcelona from English Premiership side Arsenal in the summer of 2000, rarely gets a run out at his new club and never in his preferred central midfield role.

"If I could go back in time, I'd take advice from different people before signing for Barcelona," he said.

"Any player who isn't getting a game and tells you he's happy is a liar."

Premiership Sluggish Gunners, L'pool

AFP, London

Arsenal will be the happier of the two sides at Villa Park with a point which cements their second place in the Premiership and they had the game's best player in French international Patrick Vieira.

He was a dominant figure in the centre of the park, constantly winning the ball and setting up Arsenal's few attacks of note.

Villa began in positive fashion and Lee Hendrie, sent off at Highbury earlier in the season, was only just wide with a low deflected shot.

A corner from Paul Merson picked out the recalled Juan Pablo Angel whose header was punched clear by Alex Manninger.

But after that bright opening Villa went off the boil and Arsenal came more into the game with Vieira

Premiership's top six

AFP, London

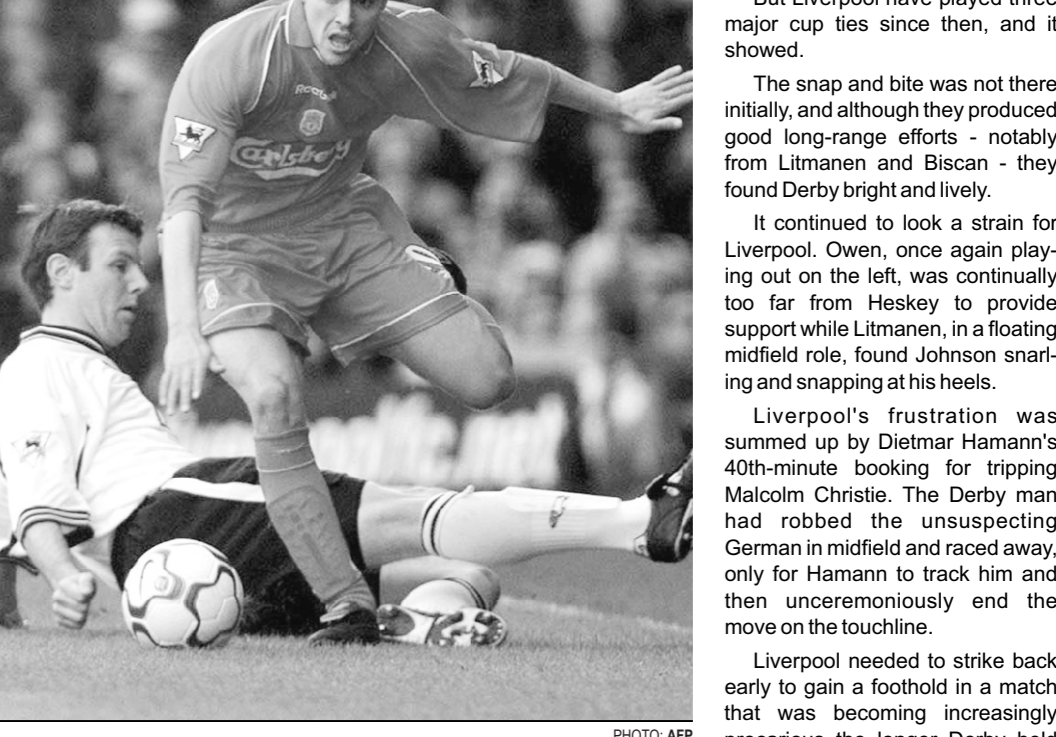
English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Goals For	Goals Against	Points
Manchester United	30	21	7	2	68	19	70
Arsenal	30	15	9	6	47	29	54
Ipswich Town	30	15	4	11	44	36	49
Sunderland	30	13	9	8	37	30	48
Leeds United	30	13	8	9	44	38	47
Liverpool	28	13	7	8	48	31	46

referee Barry Knight for a second yellow card after bringing down Villa striker Darius Vassell.

That red card will cost Grimandi making his presence felt.

It was his defence-splitting pass that set up one of the best chances of the opening 45 minutes as



Liverpool superstar Michael Owen (top) evading a tackle from Derby County's Steve Burley at Anfield on March 18. PHOTO: AFP

his place in the Arsenal line-up for the FA Cup semi-final against Tottenham next month.

In Sunday's other match, Liverpool's bid for an automatic Champions League place suffered a blow with a 1-1 draw against Derby County at Anfield.

The result leaves Liverpool in sixth place, three points adrift of third-placed Ipswich, although the Merseysiders have two games in hand. The top three qualify for places in the Champions League.

Both sides struggled to find any rhythm and fluency and the number of clear-cut chances could be counted on one hand.

Freddie Ljungberg found himself with a clear run at goal.

But he over-ran the ball slightly and the presence of James was enough to put him off and saw the chance go begging.

There were ironic cheers from the Villa fans when striker Julian Joachim got in a low 25-yard volley which was easily saved by Manninger as it represented their side's first effort on target of the second half.

The boos then returned at full-time when Knight at last put the crowd out of their misery.

Bundesliga Impressive Kaiserslautern

AFP, Berlin

Kaiserslautern capped a week to remember by beating Werder Bremen 2-1 on Sunday to shoot into third place in the German First Division just three points behind leaders Bayern Munich.

A first-half double from Kaiserslautern's Czech international striker Vratislav Lokvenc was enough to win at Bremen, who failed to build on a 58th-minute goal from Austrian midfielder Andreas Herzog.

Kaiserslautern coach Andreas Brehme praised his fast-improving team, who beat PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands on Thursday to qualify for a UEFA Cup semi-final against Spanish minnows Alaves next month.

"When you think what we have achieved today and on Thursday, then it shows this team is on the right

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Goals For	Goals Against
Bayern Munich	26	15	4	7	51	28
Bayer Leverkusen	26	14	4	8	46	30
Kaiserslautern	26	14	4	8	39	33
Borussia Dortmund	26	13	6	7	44	34
Schalke 04	26	12	7	7	43	26
Hertha Berlin	26	14	1	11	47	43

fourth.

Elsewhere Schalke 04 ended the weekend in fifth after a goalless draw at home to SC Freiburg.

Relegation-threatened Energie Cottbus shook off the horror of a fire bomb attack on the home of their captain Christian Beack on Thursday by hammering Hertha Berlin 3-0.

The scalp of Hertha, who have slipped to sixth, helped Cottbus climb out of the relegation zone.

Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier refused to be downcast after the result and insisted his team were still well in the running for a Champions League berth.

"Okay, Sunderland won, Leeds won and so did Ipswich, but we have 10 games to play and matches in hand. Our fate is in our own hands."

"This result does not mean misery, it wasn't a disaster, it's not the end of the world, we just got one point instead of three and that's because of the amount of games we have played."

Earlier, Reds ace Michael Owen strengthened his claim for an England place against Finland and Albania next week with his first Premiership goal of 2001 and his second in three days following his UEFA Cup quarter-final strike against Porto.

The result was of greater use to Derby, who moved eight points clear of the relegation zone thanks to Deon Burton's ninth-minute goal.

Seth Johnson's corner was flicked on by Chris Riggott for Burton to stab over Liverpool goalkeeper Sander Westerveld from six yards out thanks to an unconventional combination of his shin and knee.

The Reds had brought in Emile Heskey, Jari Litmanen, Gary McAllister and Igor Biscan and given Vladimir Smicer, Robbie Fowler, Danny Murphy and Steven Gerrard a rest on the bench.

Derby, unbeaten in their last four matches, brought in only Burton for the injured Branko Strupar from the side that won two weeks ago against Tottenham.

But Liverpool have played three major cup ties since then, and it showed.

The snap and bite was not there initially, and although they produced good long-range efforts - notably from Litmanen and Biscan - they found Derby bright and lively.

It continued to look a strain for Liverpool. Owen, once again playing out on the left, was continually too far from Heskey to provide support while Litmanen, in a floating midfield role, found Johnson snarling and snapping at his heels.

Liverpool's frustration was summed up by Dietmar Hamann's 40th-minute booking for tripping Malcolm Christie. The Derby man had robbed the unsuspecting German in midfield and raced away, only for Hamann to track him and then unceremoniously end the move on the touchline.

Liverpool needed to strike back early to gain a foothold in a match that was becoming increasingly precarious the longer Derby held the advantage.

The breakthrough came six minutes into the second half thanks to Litmanen's close ball control and Owen's zest for goal.

Owen fed Litmanen on the right and the former Barcelona star found space where there appeared to be none to cross into the six-yard box.

Owen nipped in like a flash for a near-post shot that Villa keeper Michael Oakes palmed away but could do nothing when Owen stabbed in the rebound to notch up his 15th goal in all competitions this season.

Neither side could do enough to take all three points in a disappointing match.