

European soccer scene

AFP European roundup after the end of Saturday's action:

Milan Fiorentina's in-demand Portuguese playmaker Manuel Rui Costa scored a late equaliser Saturday night to give his side a 1-1 draw at the home of Italian First Division strugglers Vicenza.

Vicenza had taken the lead with a first-half own goal from Fiorentina's Czech defender Tomas Repka before Rui Costa showed why his club this week slapped a 'not for sale' tag on him with AC Milan heading a queue of clubs interested in acquiring his services.

In the other match Saturday night bottom club Bari grabbed three priceless points in the Puglia derby when substitute Paolo Poggi scored an injury-time winner to snatch a 3-2 victory.

Earlier the crowd had been treated to two goals apiece from Lecce's Croatian forward Davor Vugrinec and Bari's Swedish skipper Daniel Andersson.

It took Vicenza 11 minutes to break the deadlock with the wound a self-inflicted one as far as Fiorentina were concerned.

Lamberto Zauli's cross was aimed at Sierra Leonian striker Mohamed Kallon but Repka snaked out a leg to deflect the ball past his own goalkeeper Francesco Toldo.

Vicenza missed several opportunities to double their lead and then Fiorentina made them pay when their Rui Costa squared the match after Vicenza's Croatian defender Stjepan Tomas inadvertently deflected an Enrico Chiesa pass into his path.

In the Puglia derby hesitation by Bari's Belgian goalkeeper Jean-Francois Gillet allowed Vugrinec to give visitors Lecce an early lead.

It completed a miserable week for Gillet who revealed that he is the Bari player who recently failed a dope test.

But Bari, bottom of Serie A, soon hit back when Andersson restored parity with a sweet finish.

However, with half-time looming Vugrinec powered a header past Gillet to restore Lecce's advantage.

At the start of the second period Bari coach Eugenio Fascetti brought on Poggi for AS Roma-bound Antonio Cassano, who last week was dropped from the Italian under-21 side after falling out with coach Claudio Gentile.

Shortly afterwards Andersson made it 2-2 from the penalty spot, a decision hotly disputed by Lecce players after a theatrical fall by Bari's Swiss international forward Yksel Osmanovski.

In injury time Poggi came up with a goal that takes Bari level on points with second bottom Reggina.

There were tense scenes before the match with some Bari fans, who had attempted to organise a mass stayaway in protest at the club's points plight, trying to prevent others from entering the ground.

On Sunday battle for the Scudetto resumes with leaders AS Roma hosting Verona, second-placed Juventus entertaining Brescia and third-placed defending champions Lazio visiting AC Milan at the San Siro.

Primera Liga

Madrid

Title favourites Real Madrid kept their title hopes alive with a 1-0 home victory over lowly Numancia, however fellow big shots Deportivo slammed home four for a 4-2 win over Villarreal to signal their title intentions.

Real, with 59 points, extend their lead to five over the reigning champions while third-placed Valencia, whose title hopes took a severe nosedive after an away defeat to Espanyol, are kept safely at bay on 49.

A number of Real players had been in action for Spain in their midweek win over world and European champions France, and at times it showed as Real and co. only just failed not to be whistled at by the Santiago Bernabeu faithful.

The tension was eased somewhat when Luis Figo scored in the 28th minute from a freekick, however failure to add to the score threatened a return to the atmosphere of mass impatience.

Real's fans are getting nervous only 10 games away from the end of the season, and on seeing Deportivo's sweeping performance they'll certainly have reason to worry.

The Galician side, who remain unbeaten for over a year in the league, were inspired by their South American duo of Brazilian Djalminha and Argentinian Diego Tristan.

Djalminha opened the scoring in the 19th minute before Tristan made it two before the break on 41.

Villarreal struck back from the penalty spot on 66, but Tristan added his second on 84 before the vital European cog of Deportivo's smooth operation, Dutchman Ron Makaay, made it 4-1.

Villarreal added a consolation through Garcia on 90.

Valencia, who now sit 10 points adrift of the boys from the capital, will now be happy to book a place in Europe after Tamudo's effort six minutes after the break virtually ended their hopes of remaining in the title race.

Despite defeat, United still look certain to win a seventh Premiership title in nine seasons. Sir Alex Ferguson's side have a 13 point lead over second-placed Arsenal, who beat North London rivals Tottenham 2-0.

League Cup winners Liverpool are also involved in Europe next

maybe were a bit lucky they were a bit off today, because that sometimes happens.

"To beat them you have to make sure that they are not at their best and ensure that you must have at least nine or 10 players at their best.

"In the end we won because we showed a lot of resilience and char-

minutes of play as they crushed Auxerre 4-1 during extra time in the French Cup quarter-final Saturday.

Auxerre will have trouble digesting the fact they missed two second-half penalties, but holders Nantes are now licking their lips in anticipation of a crack at their third consecutive French Cup.

ess, if somewhat late, suggests they could well make history.

The match needed extra-time after Auxerre opened the score on 53 minutes from Djibrill Cisse before Nantes defender Nestor Fabbri equalised five minutes later.

But Nantes' France under-21 keeper Mickael Landreau was the hero of the night, saving two penalties in the 77th and 88th minutes to gift Nantes their extra-time lifeline.

Nicholas Laspalles then put the Canaries ahead on 114mins before a late double from Tahitian 20-year-old striker Marama Vahirua sealed the match for the holders.

Friday's first semi-final between First Division Troyes and Alpine Third Division high-flyers Grenoble also went into extra time as Troyes came from 2-0 down to win 4-2.

Amiens, who beat league rivals and former big boys Reims 1-0 Saturday, are the only Third Division side left in the competition.

Peter Sampil's 71st-minute goal kept the Picardy boys in with a shout of walking in the footsteps of Calais, who last year became the darlings of French football just for making it to the final of a competition that was later romantically dubbed "One Cup: two winners".

Bundesliga

Berlin Bayern Munich fell to a 3-2 home defeat to Werder Bremen while Schalke 04 shocked Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 to end their goals drought and jump four league places Saturday.

The Bavarians, who meet Manchester United in the quarter-final of the Champions League Tuesday, remain top on 49 points, with Schalke now three points adrift on 46.

Both shock results change the shape of the top of the Bundesliga, however things are still as tight with the next four clubs in Bayern's slipstream all sitting on 46 points.

That formation could change again Sunday when Borussia Dortmund, who sit sixth on 45, visit fifth-placed Kaiserslautern in what is proving to be a skin-tight title chase.

Schalke, the 1997 UEFA Cup champions who topped the table at the halfway stage, bagged their first victory over Leverkusen - one which is all the more surprising as they had failed to score in nearly six and a half hours of play going into the game.

Leverkusen gave Schalke a gentle push on the way to their 3-0 win when defender Boris Zivkovic scored an own goal in the 17th minute.

Schalke, however, provided the



Real Madrid ace Raul (C) comes under a tackle from a Numancia defender while team-mate Luis Figo looks on during their Primera Liga match at Madrid on March 31.

PHOTO: AFP

Celta Vigo, who now sit seventh, grabbed a 4-1 away win at mid-table Malaga, who languish in 10th.

Premiership

London

Liverpool beat bitter rivals Manchester United 2-0 at Anfield on Saturday to complete a league double over the runaway Premiership leaders - their first over the Old Trafford club since 1979.

Two first half goals by Steven Gerrard and Robbie Fowler gave Liverpool the victory which takes them up to fourth in the table and boosts their chances of qualifying for the European Champions League next season.

Liverpool had to play the last 20 minutes with 10 men following the dismissal of midfielder Danny Murphy for a second bookable offence.

Gerrard Houllier's men, who won 1-0 at Old Trafford earlier in the season, outplayed United, who may have been distracted by Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final against German champions Bayern Munich.

week with a UEFA Cup semi-final clash against Spanish giants Barcelona.

Ferguson was philosophical after United's defeat - only their third of the season in the Premiership.

"I thought it was a good game between two good sides and in that situation, the first goal can usually decide it," said Ferguson.

"The atmosphere here is terrific and the players enjoy coming here. It is the kind of game you want to play in.

"It was a magnificent goal from Gerrard and from then on they used the counter-attack against us, and in the first half they could have scored again.

"We started to get control of the game (after Murphy's dismissal), but just could not find the goal we needed."

Houllier, meanwhile, played down the victory, saying that his side have got a long way to go before catching up with United.

"Look at the number of points between their team and our team and look at the achievements they have done in Europe," said Houllier.

"They are a tremendous side and

acter in the second half."

Tottenham, who unveiled Glenn Hoddle as their new manager on Friday night though the paperwork will be finalised on Monday morning, went down to second half goals at Highbury from French duo Robert Pires and Thierry Henry - his 20th goal of the season in all competitions.

Leeds moved up to third with an impressive 2-0 win at Sunderland. Alan Smith opened the scoring for the visitors with a header after 33 minutes but was later sent off. Australian Mark Viduka wrapped up the points for Leeds with a goal a minute from time.

David O'Leary's side, who meet Spanish champions Deportivo La Coruna in the quarter-finals of the Champions League on Wednesday, lost inspirational France midfielder Olivier Dacourt who suffered a neck injury before half-time.

Stuart Pearce was sent off for West Ham in their 2-0 home defeat against Everton. His second bookable offence gave the visitors a first half penalty which was converted by David Unsworth and Nicolas Alexandersson sealed the victory with Everton's second.

Bottom club Bradford look doomed after throwing away a two goal lead in a 2-2 home draw against Newcastle.

Bradford looked to be in control when David Weatherall and Robbie Blake fired them in front but Carl Cort and Chile international Clarence Acuna levelled the scores for Newcastle.

Coventry boosted their chances of beating the drop with a 2-0 win over relegation rivals Derby at Highfield Road.

Mustapha Hadji and John Hartson were on target for Coventry but Hadji was later sent off for spitting.

Manchester City face a battle to avoid returning to the First Division after being promoted last season with a 3-1 home defeat against Aston Villa.

Sean Goater put City in front but goals from Paul Merson, Dion Dublin and Lee Hendrie condemned the Maine Road club to their 10th home defeat of the season.

Chelsea rose to seventh with a 2-1 win at home to strugglers Middlesbrough. Gianfranco Zola flicked home a near-post header to put Chelsea ahead before debutant Dean Windass equalised for Bryan Robson's men.

But after 63 minutes a poor back-pass by Noel Whelan allowed Iceland international Eidur Gudjohnsen to score the winner at Stamford Bridge.

On Sunday Charlton entertain Leicester at the Valley and on Monday Southampton, who have named Stuart Gray as caretaker manager following Hoddle's departure, host Leicester at the Dell.

French Cup

Paris Nantes needed extra-time, but in the end welcomed the extra 30

Raynald Denoux's side now join league rival Troyes, who eliminated Third Division Grenoble on Friday, and Third Division Amiens, who beat their league rivals Reims 1-0 on Saturday, in the April 8 draw for the semifinals, being played on April 21.

Lyon are largely expected to grab the fourth semifinal spot on Sunday when they travel to the First Division's basement club Strasbourg, meaning that a possible



Robert Pires, Arsenal's French star, curling the ball to score during their Premiership game against Tottenham Hotspurs at Highbury on March 31.

PHOTO: AFP

Nantes v Lyon final could top the bill at the Stade de France on May 26.

However, after last year's fairytale final, which Nantes won against Third Division Calais, anything is possible - although Nantes remain hot favourites to hold on to a title which they have won two years in a row.

The Canaries, who sit level with leaders Lille in the French top flight, also meet Lyon in the semi-finals in the League Cup. That means both Lyon and Nantes are pushing for the treble honours this season - a feat that has yet to be accomplished in France.

On this showing Nantes' prowess,

international Marco Bode put the northern port side ahead once again before Jancker restored parity with a 67th minute goal.

The stage was set for Peru's Claudio Pizarro to head home his 13th goal of the season to earn Bremen's first victory at Bayern since October 24, 1992.

Bayern's setback comes before their duel at Old Trafford with Alex Ferguson's Manchester United - who also lost Saturday, against Liverpool - a repeat of the 1999 final won by the English side.

Scottish Premiership

Glasgow

Rangers manager Dick Advocaat admitted that his gamble to play half a team of unfit stars had backfired after his side went down 2-0 at home to Dundee United.

United snatched three invaluable points in their quest to avoid relegation with second-half goals from substitute Steven Thompson and Derek Lilley.

By that time Rangers, who had rushed Barry Ferguson, Jorg Albertz, Claudio Reyna, Tugay, Rod Wallace and Tony Vidmar back from injury, had nothing left in the tank to reply.

"It is hard to say it but Dundee United deserved to win. They were sharper and fitter than Rangers today," said Advocaat.

"We created some chances to score goals but fitness-wise, sharpness-wise they deserved to win.

"It's not an excuse but you could see five or six players were lacking in match fitness.

"But I had to bring them back hoping that it could be to our advantage. It didn't work today."

Leaders Celtic travel to Aberdeen on Sunday looking to increase their 13-point lead over second-placed Rangers.

Martin O'Neill's men can win the title next week. Celtic play three times before Rangers take to the field again and three wins will mean Saturday's visit of St Mirren will settle it once and for all.

In other matches on Saturday Dundee drew 2-2 at home to Kilmarnock, Hearts thrashed Motherwell 3-0 and bottom club St Mirren were held 1-1 by Dunfermline.

Recoba, Dida to face disciplinary committee

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's Uruguayan forward Alvaro Recoba and AC Milan's Brazilian goalkeeper Dida and representatives from both clubs will appear in front of football disciplinary chiefs this week as hearings into the false passports affair begin.

Recoba, reputedly the highest paid footballer in Italy, and Brazil international Dida are the two best known players implicated in the scandal and if found guilty could be given bans while the clubs may lose points.

Other players under scrutiny are Udinese's Latin American quartet Alberto, Warley, Jorginho and Da Silva. Sampdoria trio Ondoa

Riquelme confused

AFP, Buenos Aires

Boca Juniors playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme complained on Friday he knew nothing of his 26-million-dollar move to Spanish giants Barcelona.

Boca Juniors president Mauricio Macri confirmed on Friday he had sold the player to the Catalan giants.

"It's madness," Riquelme said. "I was told I had been sold and that was it. I'm happy Barcelona are interested in me but I am tired of talking of my past and I just want to play football."

Riquelme had been at Boca since 1996 having started his career at Argentinian Juniors, the former club of Diego Maradona and AC Milan's Fernando Redondo.

Rivaldo won't move back to Brazil

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona's Brazilian forward Rivaldo said on Saturday he will move to another European club when his contract is up in two years' time.

The former World and European Player of the Year ruled out a move back to Brazil as he complained about being made the scapegoat for his country's defeats.

"I want to stay at Barcelona for the next two years but I won't renew my contract," he said on his website at www.rivaldo10.com.

"I'll be 31 then but it's not my intention to return to Brazil. I'll still want to play football and I suppose there will be other European clubs who want to sign me."

On the subject of the reaction he received from fans to Brazil's shock 1-0 defeat to Ecuador this week he added: "The worst criticism is always for me."

"When Brazil lose someone has to be guilty and it's always Rivaldo."

"It's different with Romario. He plays in Brazil and they love him more. I'm treated like a foreign player. I won't quit the national team, though. I want to play in the next World Cup."

Juve thinking of Vieira

Football

REUTERS, London

Italian giants Juventus are considering making a bid for Arsenal's French international midfielder Patrick Vieira, according to newspaper reports.

"Obviously we are interested in him but it all depends on what Arsenal want to do," Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi was quoted as saying in the News of the World.

"Vieira is a great player and we could buy him. We will make a final decision at the end of the season," he added.

Celtic wants Caniggia

Football

AFP, Glasgow

Scottish Premier League leaders Celtic have had secret transfer talks with Argentine star Claudia Caniggia, the Press Association reported Saturday, quoting the player's agent.

The Dundee veteran is also wanted by four Premiership sides, according to agent Fernando Consentino.

Dundee would want at least one million pounds (1.5 million dollars) to part with a player who has

become a cult figure at Dens Park.

Consentino told The Scottish Sun: "There is one club from Scotland and four from the Premiership who are interested in signing Claudio."

"The Scottish club is Celtic and although we have met just once with the club they are anxious to sign Claudio."

The 33-year-old knows that Celtic are all but assured of Champions League football next season, while Dundee's only hope of European involvement is to enter the InterToto Cup.