

Serie A Montella breaks Juve's heart

Football

AFP, Rome

An injury-time equaliser from Vincenzo Montella saw Italian First Division leaders AS Roma complete a stunning comeback and share a 2-2 draw with Juventus in Turin Sunday evening.

Goals in the first six minutes from Alessandro Del Piero and Zinedine Zidane had Juve cruising at 2-0 and until Roma's Japanese substitute Hidetoshi Nakata reduced arrears after 78 minutes they never looked like getting on terms.

But Montella, also a substitute, stabbed home the ball from close range after Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar failed to hold a Nakata shot.

With five games remaining defending champions Lazio, 2-0 victors over bottom club Bari earlier Sunday, are the closest challengers to their city rivals, five points adrift while Juve are a further point behind.

Two goals from Argentinian midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron at the Olympic Stadium had been enough for Lazio, who have arguably the easiest run-in of the three candidates for the title.

But after avoiding a defeat that would have seen Juve move within three points the title is there for the taking for Roma.

Roma coach Fabio Capello said: "It was all Juventus early on. We did so well to get back and as for Nakata what I can say. This was his greatest moment."

A clearly disappointed Juve coach Carlo Ancelotti said: "We have lost a great opportunity here tonight but that's football. You can't try and analyse it."

Juventus had stunned Roma in front of a capacity crowd at the Stadio Delle Alpi with two goals in the first six minutes.

First Del Piero's header beat stranded goalkeeper Francesc Antonioli and two minutes later Zidane fired home from the edge of the area.

It looked all over but Nakata's spectacular effort from 25 metres set up a spectacular finish and then Montella struck. Roma's Brazilian substitute Assuncao and Juve's Alessio Tacchinardi were sent off after a skirmish as tempers frayed in injury time.

Earlier Lazio made their move. Veron scored twice in 15 first-half minutes although his second was down to a dreadful goalkeeping error by Bari youngster Antonio Narciso.

Lazio coach Dino Zoff, speaking before the match in Turin, said: "Quite simply we have to win all our remaining matches."

In other fixtures Parma consolidated their hold on the fourth place that would earn them a place in next



PHOTO: INTERNET

A dejected Juventus goalkeeper Edwin Van der Sar (R) picks himself up off the pitch as AS Roma striker Vincenzo Montella celebrates his strike at Turin on May 6.

season's Champions League, beating Napoli 4-0.

Frenchman Johan Micoud opened the scoring while Yugoslav striker Savo Milosevic and Marco Di Vaio (two) also hit the target.

Di Vaio's second was unusual in that he profited when Italy's - and the world's - most famous referee Pierluigi Collina unwittingly deflected the ball into his path.

second half saw no further goals.

Reggina's Massimo Marazzina scored a goal early in the second-half at Vicenza but Marco Zanchi scored twice for the home side to earn a 2-1 win and the points for the hosts in a relegation dogfight.

Greek striker Zisis Vryzas gave Perugia an early advantage against AC Milan but Ukrainian forward Andriy Shevchenko equalised from

to commemorate the 100th anniversary of their first Scudetto.

Shevchenko stays one goal ahead of Fiorentina's Enrico Chiesa, also a scorer Sunday, in the Serie A goalscoring charts.

Verona boosted their survival fight when Emiliano Salvetti and Vincenzo Italiano scored second-half goals at home to Fiorentina for whom Chiesa reduced arrears in injury time from a freekick. It finished 2-1.

On Saturday Roberto Baggio bagged a hat-trick to lead Brescia to a 3-0 victory at Lecce.

The 34-year-old, whose outstanding recent form has almost single-handedly pulled his side away from the relegation zone, opened the scoring after four minutes.

His second came direct from a corner while his hat-trick goal and 10th of the season was a penalty.

Bologna were held 1-1 by Udinese whose Brazilian player Alberto equalised Renato Olive's opener for the hosts.

AS Roma 29 19 7 3 57 28 64
Lazio 29 18 5 6 53 30 59
Juventus 29 16 10 3 48 24 58
Parma 29 14 8 7 44 22 50
AC Milan 29 11 11 7 46 40 44
Inter Milan 29 12 8 9 41 35 44

Inter Milan made a blistering start at the San Siro against Atalanta with Christian Vieri scoring twice in the first 10 minutes and Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba netting on the counterattack for a 3-0 interval lead. The

penalty spot, his 21st Serie A goal of the season.

Vryzas struck again after the interval to complete a 2-1 win and a memorable double for Perugia over the Milan side wearing special shirts

After Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

AS Roma 29 19 7 3 57 28 64
Lazio 29 18 5 6 53 30 59
Juventus 29 16 10 3 48 24 58
Parma 29 14 8 7 44 22 50
AC Milan 29 11 11 7 46 40 44
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AS Roma's Japanese ace Hidetoshi Nakata (L) coming on to the pitch to replace Francesco Totti (R) at Turin on May 6.

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Nakata only played because of Friday's landmark decision by Italian football chiefs to scrap the limit on non-European Union players.

"The rule change could change my future," said Nakata whose first-team opportunities had been limited by previous rules that had required a maximum of three non-EU players in any team. "Now there is more

room for me but we will have to wait and see."

"As for the first goal I saw the space and decided to have a crack and the ball went exactly where I wanted it to go. I had another go for the second goal and fortunately Montella was there to finish it off."

Roma coach Fabio Capello hailed Nakata's show as "his finest moment" and that emotion was echoed by Roma fans chanting the Japanese player's name into the early hours of the morning in the Eternal City.

But Juan Carlos Valeron equalised in the 69th after a through ball from Walter Pandiani set him up. The result means that Deportivo are just two points ahead of third-placed Valencia who have 59 points as the race from the Primera Liga title heats up.

Valencia were the only top-five outfit to win at the weekend, a narrow 2-1 result at relegation-threatened Real Sociedad, who were reduced to just nine men in the second half.

Slovenian Zlatko Zahovic gave Valencia a late lead on the 66th minute, with Real Sociedad grabbing the equaliser through Agustin Aranzabal's 74th-minute penalty.

But Hector Cuper's side grabbed their vital three points when midfielder Pablo Aimar found the net on 82.

Meanwhile Barcelona's new coach Carlos Rexach failed to revive the fortunes of the struggling Catalan outfit after they were held to a 0-0 draw in their derby match played Saturday under driving rain at city rivals Espanyol which leaves them stuck in fifth position.

Fourth-placed Real Mallorca went down 1-0 at lowly Osasuna,

charts.

"I was afraid because I had my children and wife with me," said Zago. "I had gone to celebrate with friends who were celebrating their children's first holy communion and then I had planned to go to Turin to watch the team."

Zago added he had received a kick to the head in an incident where several children were present.

"They said all kinds of things to me, I got out of the car because they were trying to get in and assault me," continued the Latin American. "I tried to defend myself using the car door to keep them at bay then one jumped on the car roof, kicked me in the head and jumped off."

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