

Serie A

Juve climb, Inter crash

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus pulled off a 3-1 win against Fiorentina in Florence Friday evening, moving second in the Italian First Division ahead of Lazio and cutting AS Roma's lead to a provisional three points.

Meanwhile, AC Milan spanked city rivals Inter 6-0 in the Milan derby at the San Siro in the other match played in Serie A - an astonishing result in a normally fiercely-

Florence outfit before the interval. But a header from French striker David Trezeguet a minute from time settled the match for the 25-times champions from Turin.

"We deserved to win last week's game with Roma too," Zidane said after the match, in reference to the game in Turin where Juve led 2-0 but conceded two late goals to Roma, a result that prompted wild street celebrations in Rome.

Asked if Juve could still win the title the Frenchman said: "Of course and we will give the maximum to succeed in that task."

However, on Saturday Roma could restore the lead to six points by beating Atalanta at the Olympic Stadium, while defending champions Lazio could retake second spot by beating Napoli in Naples.

After Saturday's matches are complete there will be four games left for all three teams still in the title race.

Zidane scored from close range after being set up by a cushioned Trezeguet header while Tudor doubled the margin four minutes later by heading home from a Zidane corner.

Florentina's goal with Juve's Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar partially to blame.

Trezeguet's clincher came when he headed home a freekick from Uruguayan Fabian O'Neill.

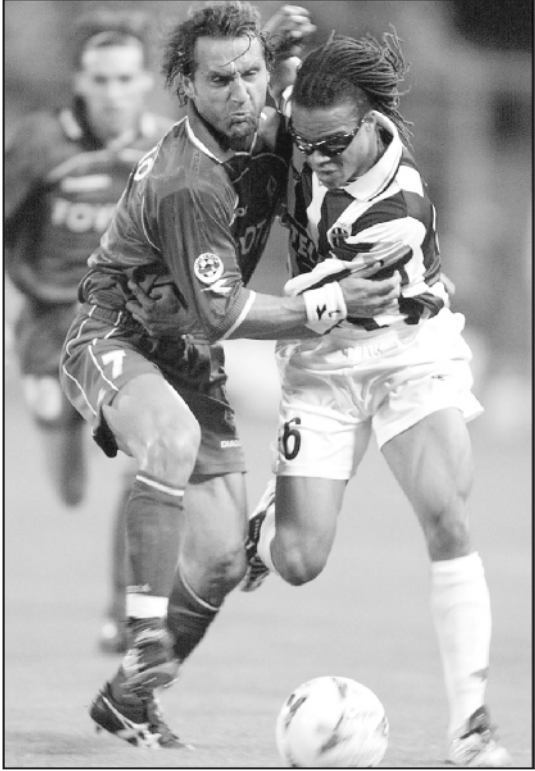
At the San Siro two goals each from strikers Gianni Comandini and Andriy Shevchenko and one each from Federico Giunti and Serginho

destroyed Inter, rekindling AC's slender hopes of a Champions League spot while Inter's are now virtually ended.

Two early goals from Comandini had Inter reeling and then Giunti killed the match after 54 minutes. A brace from Shevchenko and one from Brazilian winger Serginho - the outstanding player on the night - completed the memorable night for AC Milan.

Ukrainian Shevchenko, meanwhile, takes his goal tally to 23 for the season in Serie A, three clear of closest challenger in the goalscoring charts Enrico Chiesa of Fiorentina.

AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi, speaking in Rome at a campaign rally just two days before Italian elections in which he hopes to become prime minister for the opposition centre-right 'House of Liberties alliance', said: "I am happy with the win even if I regret the scoreline - 6-0 is an excessive result and I feel sorry for my old friend Moratti (Inter president Massimo Moratti)."



Fiorentina's Angelo Di Livio (L) and Juventus' Dutch international Edgar Davids fight for possession in their Serie A encounter.

Inter fans reacted angrily to the performance. One fan tried to confront AC Milan defender Alessandro Costacurta but was halted by the defender and referee Pierluigi Collina.

Bottles were also hurled at the players as they left the field although fortunately - unlike during last week's game with Atalanta - no scooters were hurled.

The remaining matches will be played Saturday with no games on Sunday, which is Election Day in Italy.

Serie A's top six

Italian First Division table after Friday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

AS Roma	29	19	7	3	57	28	64
Juventus	30	17	10	3	51	25	61
Lazio	29	18	5	6	53	30	59
Parma	29	14	8	7	44	22	50
AC Milan	30	12	11	7	52	40	47
Inter Milan	30	12	8	10	41	41	44

Vieira goes full circle

Football

REUTERS, London

A season that started with Patrick Vieira collecting a pair of red cards

could end with the Frenchman being handed his second FA Cup winners' medal with Arsenal.

When the 24-year-old flung his red and white shirt on to the Highbury turf after being sent off against Liverpool on August 21, his

whole future in England was in doubt.

The dismissal, for two rash challenges, was the moody Frenchman's second in three days following his red card for a retaliatory elbow on Sunderland's Darren Williams in the opening game of the season.

Vieira was clobbered with a five-game ban and, after six red cards in his four years at Arsenal, it seemed English football wanted rid of him.

Despite the close season departure of Emmanuel Petit to Barcelona, Arsenal's French connection had remained strong and the club rallied round their totem pole midfielder.

"He is no angel," said manager Arsene Wenger at the time. "I know that, but he is very emotional because he is only a human being."

Thierry Henry, Robert Pires and Gilles Grimandi were also on hand to lift Vieira's Gallic spirit and his response was magnificent.

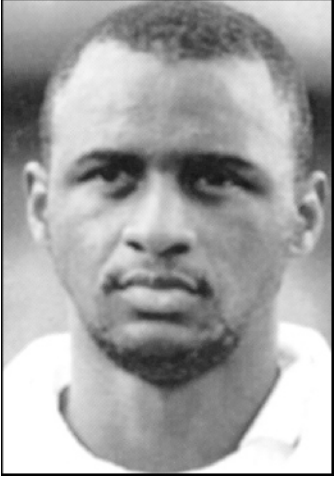
In his last appearance before the ban started he scored twice in a thrilling 5-3 win over Charlton Athletic.

Vieira did not pick up so much as a booking in his next 28 games and scored twice against north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur -- first to earn a 1-1 draw at White Hart Lane in a league match in December, then to help Arsenal beat their bitter rivals 2-1 in the FA Cup semifinals.

But Vieira's finest performances of the season came in the two legs of their depressing quarter-final exit from the Champions League at the hands of Valencia.

Vieira must have run miles in those two games, prompting attacks with accurate passes, surging forward with the ball, tackling back and winning defensive headers.

His teammates could not match



PATRICK VIEIRA

his personal excellence, though, and after their elimination on the away goals rule Vieira caused a stir by urging the club to strengthen its squad.

His comments served as both a warning that he might leave if they did not and as a hint that he wanted to stay if they did.

"I don't talk without a cause," Vieira said. "I think it's important for the club to realise that I only want the best for them, that I am committed to them."

Against Liverpool in Cardiff on Saturday Vieira will display that commitment again as he tries to repeat his starring role in Arsenal's 2-0 win in the 1998 FA Cup final win against Newcastle United.

Cup specialists Liverpool will be a far tougher challenge and Vieira has not had much joy against Gerard Houllier's side this season. In addition to his August red card he was in the Arsenal side that lost 4-0 at Anfield in December.

Saturday offers him the perfect chance to make amends.

UEFA reduces both fines

AFP, Nyon

The UEFA appeals body said Saturday it had reduced the fines for both Paris Saint Germain and Galatasaray after serious crowd disturbances at the Parc des Princes on March 13.

The body decided to reduce the one-million-Swiss-franc (571,000-dollar) fine on Paris Saint Germain to 200,000 Swiss francs and reduce their stadium ban in Europe from three matches to two.

Galatasaray had a 200,000-Swiss-franc fine reduced to 50,000 francs.

Fayed steps in to save Wembley

REUTERS, London

Fulham chairman Mohamed Al Fayed says he would be willing to save Wembley Stadium by moving his Premiership newcomers to play there while Craven Cottage is renovated.

The Harrods tycoon told Saturday's Daily Mirror he would help the Football Association (FA) to finance a complete refurbishment of the national stadium rather than see it knocked down and re-built.

Fayed said: "Wembley must be preserved as the historical monument of English football so that major games can again be played there like the cup final, semifinals and other international matches.

"To even think about knocking it down, to demolish the twin towers, is sheer madness.

"All it needs is modernisation and I'm ready to help and would definitely take Fulham there for two years while we are rebuilding Craven Cottage."

Fayed has offered to begin talks with Home Secretary Jack Straw's newly-formed Wembley think tank.

Plans to redevelop the stadium stalled after the FA conceded that it had been unable to raise enough money from the private sector.

Lennart for smaller Champs League

AFP, Berlin

UEFA president Lennart Johansson on Friday called for a review of the current Champions League format and a reduction of the number of teams taking part.

The head of soccer's European governing body said that he wants a return to the format whereby only national champions can take part.

"I think that we should return to the old Champions League system," Johansson told the Aachener Zeitung newspaper. "We would have matches played on Wednesday's and reduce the number of participants."

UEFA are currently engaged in a consultation exercise with clubs, leagues and national associations about any changes to the Champions League and UEFA Cup. The decision will be taken in December by the whole UEFA executive committee, but Johansson's public support for a slimming down of the competition has put a question mark over the current competition after 2003.

Johansson said: "I believe it should be a league for champions and therefore the number of participants should be reduced.

"I have this feeling that we will go back to having a competition for the champions and the champions alone. That is my personal wish but I can't decide it on my own."

Johansson is concerned that there is a danger of overkill, with Champions League matches being played two days a week leading to saturation TV coverage.

He added: "There has been criticism - which is justified - of the fact that there is too much football on television.

"Too much is not good for anybody and we cannot carry on as we have been."

Michel shown the door

AFP, Dubai

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) coach Henri Michel of France was fired right after his team's 1-2 defeat in a World Cup qualifier in Yemen, the Emirati football federation announced Saturday.

The decision to sack Michel, who took over in March 2000, was taken by the president of the federation, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who is also the Gulf state's information and youth minister.

He was replaced by Emirati coach Abdullah al-Sager after Friday's defeat against Yemen in an Asia Zone group qualifier. The UAE, playing the return at home, must now beat Yemen in their last game on May 18 to qualify for the next round.

Under Michel, the UAE has lost for the first time to Yemen, Palestine and India.

Michel has also coached Morocco, France and Cameroon.

Sociedad barred

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Sociedad have been banned from playing at their Anoeta stadium for one game following

incidents during the club's recent 2-1 defeat at home to Valencia.

Referee's assistant Benjamin Plego was hit by a bottle during the controversial game on May 5 which was won 2-1 by the Champions League finalists after Real Sociedad had two players sent off.

Real Sociedad, who are in deep relegation trouble in 18th place in the Spanish first division, are unlikely to have to complete the sanction this season, however.

They are almost certain to appeal against the decision and by the time their appeal is heard their final home game of the season, against Osasuna on June 17, will have been played.

Primera Liga

Deportivo thwart Alaves

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Deportivo Coruna kept their faint Primera Liga title hopes alive on Friday as they recovered from a goal down and the early sending-off of Nouredine Naybet to beat UEFA Cup finalists Alaves 2-1 in a game of three penalties.

Alaves, who face Liverpool in their first European final on Wednesday, were gifted the lead on 15 minutes as Moroccan defender Naybet was sent off for what appeared to be an arm to the face of Javi Moreno, who scored from the resulting spot-kick.

Deportivo came back to take the points, though, as Diego Tristan stroked in two penalties either side of halftime following two Cosmin Contra fouls on Victor.

The result strengthened Deportivo's hold on second place in the table and took them to within five points of leaders Real Madrid.

Real have 69 points from 33 matches, with Deportivo on 64 having played a game more.

Vicente del Bosque's Real side can regain an eight-point lead with four games left to play with victory at home to Espanyol on Sunday.

Deportivo started the game in vibrant form and Fran came close to opening the scoring inside the first minute as he headed wide from



PHOTO: INTERNET

Alaves' Argentine player Pablo Brandan (R) tries to control the ball in front of Deportivo Coruna's Victor del Amo during their Primera Liga match on May 11.

close range.

The game turned with the first of several controversial decisions from referee Rafael Ramirez.

Naybet received his marching orders on 14 minutes as Moreno went down clutching his face as the two jostled for the ball in the area.

The referee also awarded a penalty in what looked a harsh decision and Moreno stepped up to score his 21st goal of the season.

Alaves had asked for the match to be brought forward a day to allow

more time to prepare for Wednesday's UEFA Cup final against England's Liverpool in Dortmund and the Basque side certainly looked distracted for the remainder of the game.

Apart from a couple of chances on the break missed by Moreno, Deportivo enjoyed almost all the possession and might even have won by a wider margin.

Tristan showed superb skill to bring the ball down in the area on 37 minutes, only to shoot straight at the keeper.

Deportivo pulled level as the referee awarded them a penalty a few seconds before halftime as Victor went down under pressure from Cosmin Contra.

Tristan scored from the spot and a similar action brought Deportivo the winner nine minutes after the break, Tristan again notching the penalty after Contra had brought down Victor.

Primera Liga's top six

Spanish League table after Friday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Real Madrid	33	21	6	6	70	36	69
Deportivo	34	19	7	8	64	40	64
Valencia	33	17	8	8	51	26	59
Mallorca	33	15	11	7	46	39	56
Barcelona	33	14	11	8	69	51	53
Celta Vigo	33	14	9	10	47	45	51

Stampede victims buried

Football

AFP, Accra

Ghanaians on Friday buried 30 victims of Africa's worst sports tragedy amid mounting attacks on police, who are widely blamed for creating a football stampede that killed at least 126 people.

As a three-day period of national mourning began Friday, public anger against police rose with the burial of 30 Muslims killed in Wednesday's stampede.

Hundreds of enraged youths in Accra pelted policemen with stones, forcing them to retreat from Accra's biggest mosque where prayers were being held for the victims.

In other incidents, they attacked two police stations, burnt tyres and roadside kiosks, blocked traffic at arterial intersections, and shouted slogans such as "Police will die one after the other."

Ghana's police chief Ernest Owusu-Poku late Friday publicly apologised on national television.

"I wish on behalf of the Ghana police service to apologise for the deaths and injuries as a result of last Wednesday's incident," he said.

"The six officers in charge of the contingent (at the stadium) have been interdicted and the administration will not shield or protect anybody who the committee will find has broken the law," he said.

Interior Minister Malik Yakubu late Friday said police had been

replaced by army soldiers in several parts of Accra as "the police now will only inflame people."

"Peace has been one of Ghana's trademarks and once we are in mourning we must continue to be peaceful," he said.

Thirty Muslim victims were, meanwhile, buried in a sombre ceremony attended by some 8,000 people, including Vice-President Alhaji Aliu Mahama and Ghanaian football legend Abedi Pele at Accra's sprawling Awudome cemetery.

Pele told AFP: "It's a tragedy for not only Ghanaians or Ghana but for African football. I am not going to blame anybody ... it is a time for sober reflection."

Earlier, funeral prayers for Muslim victims were conducted by Ghana's head cleric, Imam Sheikh Usman Nuhu Sharubutu, at Accra's largest mosque.

It was attended by President John Kufuor and about 20,000 Muslims, many of whom were weeping.

Kufuor, in an emotion-filled speech at the mosque, vowed to punish those responsible for the tragedy.

"I make a solemn promise to all of Ghana -- the commission of enquiry will do its work and those who contributed to this tragedy will be punished according to the law of the land."

"There will be no cover ups," he said, adding that the government would pay 2.5 million cedis (350 dollars) to each bereaved family and offer compensation to the injured.

Wednesday's stampede at the

Latinos bewitched

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

The coach of Ecuador is shot, two players are injured by a car bomb in Colombia and the Argentine championship is paralysed by a players' strike.

Brazilians use the saying "a witch is on the loose" when everything goes wrong and in the last two weeks she appears to have chosen South American football to wreak her havoc.

The world's most flamboyant footballing continent is no stranger to the bizarre and exotic, so much so that when a Brazilian referee sent off seven players in a match last weekend and then needed a police escort out of town, local newspapers barely batted an eyelid.

But when a national team coach is shot in the lobby of a five-star hotel, even South Americans look up.

Hernan Dario Gomez, who is on the brink of taking Ecuador to their first World Cup, is making a quick recovery from the attack on Thursday night in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Police have detained the president of Second Division club Santa Rita.

Gomez, a former national team coach of his native Colombia, escaped with nothing more than an injury to his leg, where he was hit, and a broken nose.

But the damage to Ecuadorean football could be irreparable.

Gomez, who in March celebrated the greatest moment of his career when Ecuador beat Brazil for the

first time, said he has not decided whether he will carry on.

If he resigns, Ecuador's top players say they will go with him, wrecking the country's hopes of qualifying for Japan and South Korea.

He is so popular that on Thursday, hundreds of people marched through the streets of Quito imploring him to stay.

One month ago Hugo Gallego, another Colombian, resigned as the coach of the under-20 team after being attacked and beaten by a gang of men in Guayaquil.

The situation is equally tense in neighbouring Colombia, which is due to host the Copa America in July.

That is now in doubt after a car bomb exploded in Cali -- one of the host cities -- eight days ago.

Thirty-two people were injured when the blast sent broken glass flying through a luxury hotel. Those hurt included two players and the coach of the first division team Caldas who were in town for a league game against America. The match was called off.

"We can't overlook what happened in Cali and this incident is causing great concern," said South American Football Confederation spokesman Nestor Benitez.

He said Colombia's suitability as a venue would be discussed at a meeting next week.

In Argentina, players spent 10 days on strike over unpaid wages and bonuses, causing last week-end's programme to be cancelled.

The players, who say many of their members are on the poverty line, blame the crisis on alleged mismanagement by club directors, who they accuse of spending

beyond their means and of having what they describe as a "God will pay for us" philosophy to finances.

An agreement was reached on Thursday night after players were given guarantees they would be paid by the end of June.

There is no end in sight, however, to the problems facing one of Argentine's top players, midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron.

Veron, who plays for Italian champions Lazio, has been referred to the Italian League's disciplinary committee and is to stand trial in a civil court over allegations involved the falsifying of documents to obtain an Italian passport.

Scandals in Brazil have become so numerous that Congress has set up two commissions of inquiry to investigate the administration of the sport.

This week, the Senate commission concluded that nepotism was rife in the Brazilian game after interrogating a director who admitted to employing 20 of his own relatives in a workforce of 66.

"These clans act with impunity and with no control whatsoever," said commission president, Senator Alvaro Dias.

The week began badly in Brazil when seven players were sent off in the Volta Redonda-Bangu match in the Carioca championship.

The referee was locked in his changing room for an hour after the game to protect him from furious Volta Redonda officials. He was then escorted out of town by a convoy of 12 police cars.

AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

Paris

Brazilian international striker Ronaldinho was back in Paris again on Friday to spend 12 more days training with his future club Paris Saint Germain.

The former Gremio striker seemed at ease as he went through his paces with his new teammates at the club's Camp des Loges training centre.

"It's a good thing that he comes to us for these brief spells. It'll shorten his adaptation by months," said club coach Luis Fernandez.

RAPHAEL BANNED

Raphael Marquez, AS Monaco's 21-year-old Mexican international was given a one match ban by the

National Football League here on Friday after running up too many yellow cards.

The defender is being linked with a blockbuster summer move to Spanish giant Real Madrid. (AFP) **ETIENNE LOSE APPEAL**

St Etienne on Friday lost their appeal against league rival's Metz after the National League ethics commission found that Metz' Colombian goalkeeper Faryd Mondragon had been legally registered at the time the two clubs played.

Metz beat St Etienne 3-0 on March 3 and St Etienne, themselves docked seven points when their own 'keeper Maxim Levitsky was found to have a false passport, were

demanding that they be awarded three points from the match citing Mondragon's false Greek passport.

"The stated nationality of Mondragon changed several times between June 2000 and March 2001 and at the time of the concerned match he was legally registered," explained commission president Laurent Davenas.

St Etienne are set for relegation while Metz look set to escape such a fate. A similar appeal for points lodged by FC Toulouse against Metz for the same reason will be heard May 16.

Meanwhile Mondragon is appealing against a two-year ban from French territory for possession of the false documents.