



PHOTO: AFP

Hertha Berlin's Pal Dardai (18) fires the winner against Bayern Munich on December 2. The Bundesliga champions lost 2-1.

Bundesliga Hertha baffle Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

Hertha Berlin stopped Bayern Munich's title bid in its tracks on Sunday with a surprise 2-1 win over the Bavarians.

Nico Kovac headed the freshly-crowned Intercontinental Cup champions into the lead just moments into the second half but Bayern then relaxed their grip and Andreas Neundorfer levelled matters on 71 minutes.

Pal Dardai then conjured up the winner with six minutes remaining to hand Bayern a second straight away loss and leave them in third place four points behind Bayer Leverkusen and two behind Borussia Dortmund.

Bayern, not content with their triumph over Boca Juniors in Tokyo last week and their hunt for a second straight Champions League success, are also out for a fourth consecutive Bundesliga win.

But they failed dismally to take advantage of Leverkusen's first league loss of the campaign

Saturday at Werder Bremen, who had beaten Bayern as well last month.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld bemoaned missed chances.

"We missed too many chances in the first half and Hertha pinned us back in the second, when we lost our shape and concentration," Hitzfeld said.

Hertha, meanwhile, jumped into the top six and have managed to put together a run of ten matches without loss thanks to Neundorfer's first goal of the season and then Dardai completed the job.

Bayern had to rest keeper Oliver Kahn and although his replacement Stefan Wessels played well, making a brilliant first half stop from

Brazilian forward Marcelinho, he was powerless to stop either goal.

With the half-way mark of the season all but reached Leverkusen have 36 points from their 16 games with Dortmund on 34 after their 2-0 win Saturday at struggling Cologne and Bayern are on 32 after this their third league reverse.

In Sunday's other match Hamburg won a thrilling city derby against tailenders Sankt Pauli 4-3, Bosnian international playmaker Sergei Barbarez hitting what proved to be the winner at the Volkspark Stadion.

Leverkusen, regularly the bridesmaids in Germany as they have never won the league, thus finally had some luck at the end of a

dreadful week.

They were thrashed 4-0 by Juventus in Thursday's twice-postponed Champions League encounter and had Jens Nowotny sent off 20 minutes from the end as they crashed in Bremen despite taking the lead through Germany international Bernd Schneider seven minutes before the break.

Bremen hit back seconds later through veteran Marco Bode and Dutchman Frank Verlaat bagged the winner on the hour.

Borussia Dortmund kept up their title challenge as first-half efforts from Marcio Amoroso his goal a 17th-minute penalty and Ewerthon three minutes before the interval saw off Cologne.

Kaiserslautern also stay in the hunt in fourth following a 3-0 home win over SC Freiburg which ended a run of four straight home reverses.

Miroslav Klose scored either side of half time and Egyptian international defender Hany Ramzy scored in between times.

Bundesliga's top six

Bayer Leverkusen	15	11	3	1	38	17	36
Borussia Dortmund	15	11	1	3	26	9	34
Bayern Munich	15	10	2	3	31	7	32
Kaiserslautern	15	10	1	4	32	20	31
Werder Bremen	15	9	2	4	24	16	29
Hertha Berlin	15	8	3	4	25	19	27

Primera Liga Betis stay in contention

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Betis maintained their surprising title challenge, and moved up to second place in the Spanish first division, with a 1-0 victory over Tenerife on Sunday.

The Seville side defeated the Canary island visitors thanks to an outstanding volley from the edge of the area from Joaquin Sanchez after 55 minutes.

However, a farcical finale saw Tenerife end the match with just eight players.

In a scrappy affair which saw six Betis players also booked, Tenerife were down to ten men after 65 minutes when Argentine defender Federico Basavilbaso picked up his second yellow card.

Fellow Argentine Bruno Marioni received his marching orders ten minutes from time to reduce the Tenerife ranks even further and a few minutes later, having used all three substitutes, Bichi Fuertes was

injured and unable to continue.

Betis took their one and only league title in 1935 but their consistency since the start of the season suggests that they have a chance of adding to their sparse silverware collection, despite the protestations of their coach Juande Ramos.

"No, this isn't the time to start thinking about the Champions' League or the UEFA Cup," said Ramos.

Betis have 27 points, the same as league leaders Alaves but an inferior goal difference.

Alaves beat Barcelona 2-0 on Saturday to go to the top of the Spanish first division for the first time in nearly 71 years.

Athletic Bilbao moved up to fourth place on Sunday, with a 2-1 win over Real Zaragoza.

Ismael Urzaiz got both the Basque club's goals to take his tally for the season to eight goals and to head the Spanish first division scorers.

His second strike which will reinforce calls for his recall to the Spanish national team after being out of Jose Antonio Camacho's plans for nearly a year - was an exquisite effort.

On the hour, Urzaiz picked up a long ball forward and went around two Zaragoza defenders before blasting it home.

Few pundits would have predicted seeing a top four in the

Spanish first division the places which gain entry to next season's Champions League minus both Barcelona and Real Madrid after 15 games.

However, Real continue to surge up the table, after one of their worst starts in their history, and are now in fifth place after their fifth win in six games on Saturday.

The defending Spanish champions beat Osasuna 2-1 thanks to early goals from the Spanish international pairing of Fernando Morientes and Raul Gonzalez.

Rayo Vallecano remain rooted to the bottom of the first division after going down 3-1 at Villarreal on Sunday.

It was little consolation for the struggling side, who have yet to win away from home this season, that their Bosnian international striker Elvir Balic got his first goal for Rayo.

Balic moved from north to south across the Spanish capital two weeks ago, arriving on loan from Real Madrid.

Real Sociedad remain just one place above Rayo after losing 1-0 at Malaga.

Primera Liga's top six

Alaves	15	8	3	4	17	9	27
Real Betis	15	8	3	4	18	13	27
Deportivo La Coruna	15	8	2	5	28	21	26
Athletic Bilbao	15	7	5	3	21	19	26
Real Madrid	15	7	4	4	27	19	25
Celta Vigo	15	6	6	3	29	18	24

Premiership Fowler fails to inspire Leeds

Football

AFP, London

English international striker Robbie Fowler failed to make an impact on his debut for Leeds as David O'Leary's men were held to a frustrating 0-0 draw at Fulham on Sunday.

The 26-year-old marksman ended his 15-year association with Liverpool this week when the Merseyside club finally agreed to sell him.

The deal, which will tie Fowler to Leeds until 2006, is thought to involve Leeds paying Liverpool around 11 million pounds (15.4 million dollars).

So often a substitute for Liverpool, Fowler started up front alongside Australian striker Mark Viduka, but the pair failed to make an impression at Craven Cottage as the sides produced their first goalless draw against each other for 81 years.

Zidane Pele's choice

AFP, Singapore

French midfield maestro Zinedine Zidane is undoubtedly the world's best soccer player at the moment, Brazilian football legend Pele said here Monday.

"Zidane to me now is still the best player no doubt," Pele, speaking to journalists, said of the Frenchman who joined Spanish giant Real Madrid from Italy's Juventus in a 65-million-dollar transfer this year.

The 29-year-old Frenchman, who has struggled to find his form since moving to Spain, was last month voted Europe's top player for the third time in his career.

Pele, widely regarded as the greatest player of all time, also rated Manchester United midfielder player Argentine Juan Sebastian Veron and Zidane's Spanish team mate Raul Gonzalez at the top of his list of the world's elite contemporary players.

England's Liverpool striker Michael Owen is also a favorite of Pele and according to the Brazilian master is tipped to have an explosive run at the World Cup next year in South Korea and Japan.

"I like him very much. I think he will be one of the good players at the World Cup," said Pele.

Pele gave his strong backing to beleaguered Brazilian coach Felipe Scolari, who struggled to get the four-time world champion into next summer's finals, thereby keeping intact its record of having participated in every World Cup.

"In this moment, no doubt Felipe is the right one," said Pele, who stopped by Singapore after attending the weekend draw held in South Korea for the World Cup finals.

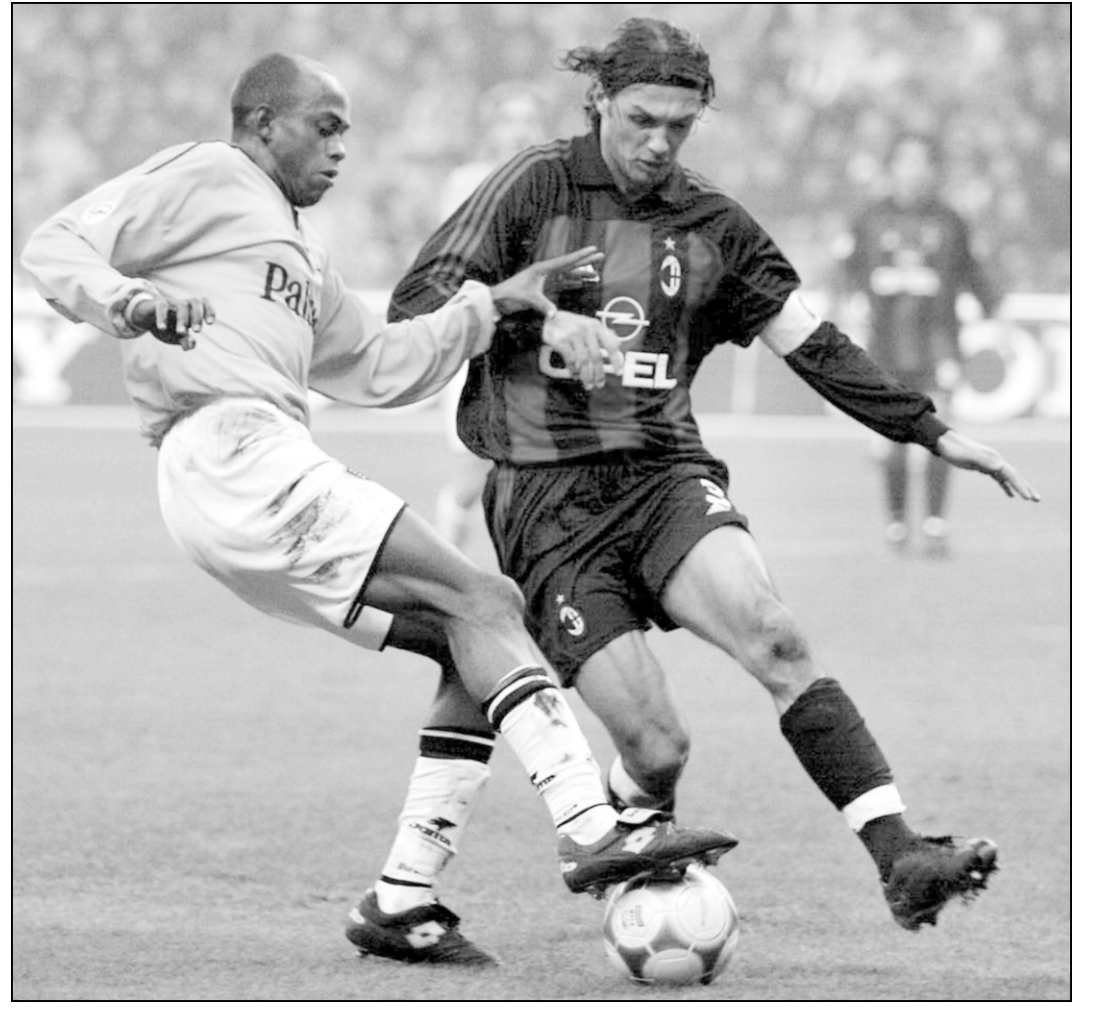


PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini (R) blocks Chievo's Brazilian player Eribeto in their Serie A match on December 2.

Serie A Inter gain at Chievo's cost

Football

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan stormed back to the top of the Italian first division Sunday with a 4-2 win over Atalanta at Bergamo.

Two second-half goals from Christian Vieri and one from Mohamed Kallon ensured Inter prevailed after Atalanta's Cristiano Doni had bagged a first-half pair in reply to Luigi di Biagio's opener for the visitors.

Inter return to the summit because arch-rivals AC Milan defeated former leaders Chievo 3-2 at the San Siro, ending the fairytale six-week spell at the top of the side from Verona who had dislodged Inter on October 21 thanks to another AC Milan win in the Milan derby.

It was the third defeat of the season for Serie A newcomers Chievo, all by a 3-2 scoreline although at least this time they did not surrender a two-goal lead.

AC Milan struck first. Brazilian winger Serginho crossed to Filippo Inzaghi, who headed the opener.

But Chievo, playing at Italian football's most famous arena for the first time, replied with a fine equaliser from Massimo Marazzina and three minutes later Bernardo Corradi put Chievo ahead.

The game turned in the second half when Milan were awarded a hotly-disputed penalty converted by Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko who then headed the winner.

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti shrugged off any controversy, saying: "There were many important incidents in the match - it looked a clear penalty to me."

Chievo coach Luigi del Neri repeated for the umpteenth time that the club's only aim is to avoid relegation.

"We must not lose sight of the fact that this is our real objective," said del Neri. "But I am never happy when I lose."

At Bergamo di Biagio gave Inter

Milan an early lead from close range but the hosts fought back when Doni equalised. The same player, who recently made a scoring debut for Italy against Japan, put Atalanta in front from the penalty spot.

The match, played in an intimidating atmosphere, was briefly halted as Atalanta's French midfielder Ousmane Dabo was treated after a firecracker exploded.

Christian Vieri restored parity for Inter from the penalty spot and added his second by heading home a freekick by substitute Alvaro Recoba, making his first appearance of the season.

Uruguayan Recoba also set up Sierra Leone international Kallon for a deflected clincher and Inter now lead Chievo by two points.

Chievo are joined in second place by champions AS Roma who were lucky to escape with a 1-0 win at home to bottom club Venezia with an injury time goal from substitute Diego Fuser after Roma's veteran Brazilian defender Aldair had been sent off.

Roma coach Fabio Capello said ruefully: "All's well that ends well."

Udinese pulled off a fine 3-2 comeback win at home to crisis club Parma.

Marco Di Vaio got Parma off to a flyer with two goals in the first four minutes, the Italian international taking his tally to seven for the season with his first - a delicate chip - stopping the clock at 24 seconds.

Udinese's own goal-mine Roberto Muzzi hit back with two of his own including a penalty to restore the score to 2-2.

After the interval Dane Martin Jorgensen scored a fine solo winner for Udinese, who completed their

first win on home soil for eight months.

Even quicker than Di Vaio was Piacenza forward Paolo Poggi, who scored a goal timed at eight seconds but Fiorentina's Mirko Benin equalised after the break.

Piacenza defender Nicola Mora was then sent off but Dario Hubner struck a deflected freekick goal for Piacenza, his 10th of the season meaning he remains the Italian first division's leading goalscorer.

Pierpaolo Statuto added another to make the final score 3-1 to Piacenza.

Lazio continued their fine run with a 2-1 victory at Lecce. Argentinian Hernan Crespo gave them the lead from the spot before Simone Inzaghi added a second.

Bruno Cirillo pulled one back for Lecce.

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni was delighted, saying: "I am just really happy with the team they all played really well."

Renato Olive gave Bologna an early lead at home to Torino and that proved sufficient for a 1-0 victory.

Verona's Liechtenstein international forward Mario Frick scored both goals as his side defeated Brescia 2-0 in a match where Verona goalkeeper Antonio Pegolo saved a Luca Toni penalty.

On Saturday Juventus defeated 10-man Perugia 2-0 to boost their domestic campaign.

After Emanuele Blasi of Perugia had been dismissed before the break Juve sealed victory with headed goals after the break from Czech Pavel Nedved and Frenchman David Trezeguet.

Serie A's top six

Inter Milan	12	7	4	1	21	11	25
Chievo	12	7	2	3	24	14	23
AS Roma	12	6	5	1	18	8	23
AC Milan	12	6	4	2	21	14	22
Juventus	12	5	5	2	19	11	20
Lazio	12	5	5	2	15	7	20

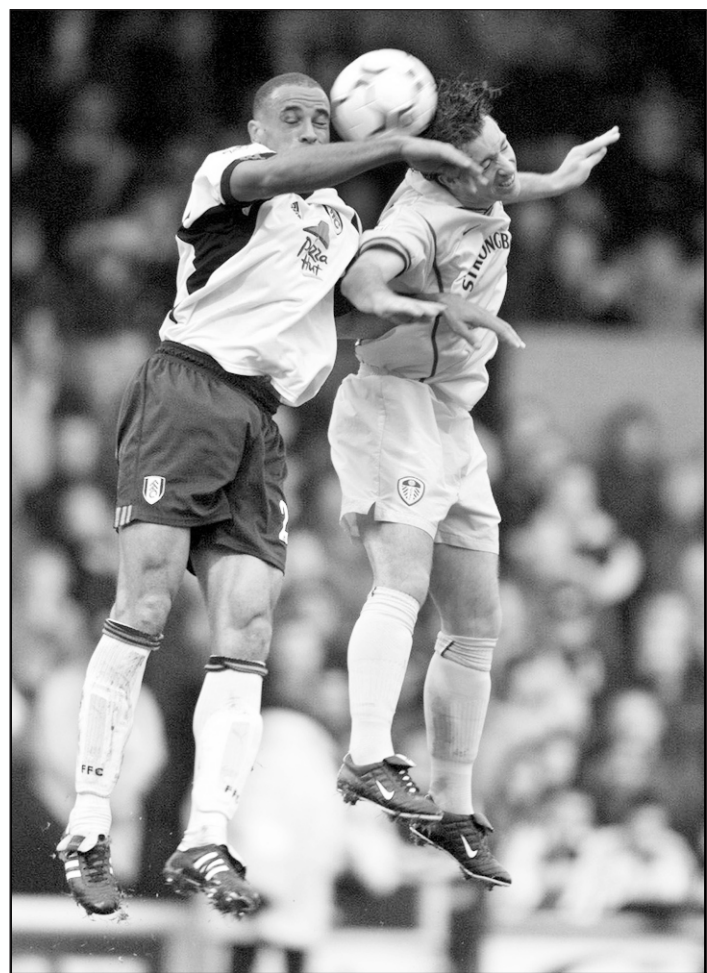


PHOTO: AFP

Leeds United's Robbie Fowler (R) and Fulham's Alain Goma engage in an aerial tussle during their Premier League encounter on December 2.

Ticket frenzy



AFP, Seoul

Tickets sales for next year's World Cup finals shot up Monday after the draw revealed the top matches, officials said, but South Korea still has hundreds of thousands left.

All games involving China sold out within hours of Saturday night's draw in the South Korean city of Pusan, the Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KOWOC) said in a statement.

A rush on tickets sold on the Internet started as soon as the draw was completed. And there were queues Monday morning at South Korean banks and post offices that have only been slowly selling tickets up to now.

The World Cup, which is being co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, starts on May 31 in Seoul.

A KOWOC spokesman said about 80,000 tickets had been sold on the Internet alone between Saturday night and mid-day Monday.

Internet tickets for China's first round group matches sold out right after the draw. Those in banks and post offices went Monday. Only those reserved for the handicapped are left, said KOWOC.

China, which has qualified for the first time, is in Group C in South Korea and plays Costa Rica in Kwangju on June 4, Brazil on the island of Cheju on June 8 and Turkey on June 13 in Seoul.

South Korean soccer leaders had specially asked for China to be based in the country and FIFA, the world governing body, used a special regulation to allow this.

Korean organisers had been counting on China to boost ticket sales and the number of visitors during the 31-day tournament.

But tickets are still selling slowly for the world's biggest sporting event.

There are 1.46 million tickets for all 32 matches in South Korea, with 732,779 intended for the domestic market and 736,698 for overseas.

KOWOC said 290,244 of the 508,737 for public sale had gone by Monday. The 224,042 not for public sale will go to the Korean Football Association and clubs and other affiliate bodies.

Officials have refused to say how many tickets have been sold abroad. While top matches such as those involving World Cup holders France and four-time winners Brazil have sold well, sales agents said there were still tens of thousands left for matches involving smaller nations.

The KOWOC spokesman said however: "We are confident that most tickets will be sold. This is going to be a spectacular World Cup."