

## Primera Liga Rivaldo rules the day

### Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid retained their place as the league leaders in Spain after a hard fought 1-0 win over Valencia, but Rivaldo propelled Barcelona back into Championship contention on Sunday.

The defending champions extended their lead over the chasing pack to four points, and preserved their unbeaten home record, thanks to a scrambled goal by Spanish international striker Fernando Morientes after 69 minutes.

Real Madrid now have 38 points from 20 matches while Athletic Bilbao - who beat Basque rivals Real Sociedad 2-1 on Saturday - are second with 34 points.

Five teams are on 33 points. Celta Vigo are third on goal difference after a 1-1 draw at home to Osasuna while Barcelona rise to fourth after an impressive 3-1 victory over Sevilla.

Real Madrid claimed all three points when Luis Figo flew down the right wing in familiar fashion and unleashed a cross into the box.

Real's Raul Gonzalez touched the ball on and a misunderstanding between Valencia defenders Mauricio Pellegrini and David Albelda allowed Morientes to sneak in and stab home his eighth goal of the season.

"Valencia are a very good team and obliged us to work hard. They were on top of us during the first half but we got away with it and then took control in the second period," said Real Madrid coach Vicente Del Bosque.

However, Del Bosque acknowledged that the hectic programme his players were having to endure was starting to take its toll. In addition to the Spanish league, Real Madrid are still contesting the Spanish Cup and the Champions' League.

"You'd have to be blind not to see the effect it is having, but fortunately

our fans know what is happening so I don't think they will blame us for being less-than-impressive during the first half," added Del Bosque.

Valencia can count themselves unlucky to leave the Spanish capital without any points though.

After just seven minutes, Adrian Ilie had a goal disallowed for being offside but television replays showed that the referee was wrong in cancelling out the effort by the Romanian international.

"The referee was definitely on their side," commented Valencia president Jaime Orti bitterly.

Rivaldo demonstrated to Barcelona once again that he is priceless by getting two goals, and going closes on several other occasions, despite not being fully fit.

The performance of the former World Player of the Year should give club president Joan Gaspart pause for thought if he is considering selling the Brazilian striker.

Several Spanish newspapers reported on Sunday that Gaspart has had talks with Inter Milan over the past few days with a view to off-loading Rivaldo at the end of the season, for a possible world record transfer fee.

After Barcelona had fallen behind to a Tomas Hervas goal after just four minutes, Rivaldo equalised just three minutes later, finishing off from close range a cross from his Dutch colleague Patrick Kluivert.

Eleven minutes after the break Rivaldo unleashed a stunning left-foot shot which Sevilla goalkeeper Antonio Notario could only parry away and Gabri Garcia was on hand

to put Barcelona ahead.

Rivaldo wrapped up his one-man show with a strike direct from a free kick on the hour for his sixth goal of the season, despite a long absence before Christmas due to injury.

"Rivaldo is still not one hundred per cent, but he gives us confidence by just being on the pitch because the team knows he can score at any moment," said Barcelona coach Charly Rexach.

Rexach admitted that he now felt more "relaxed" about celebrating his 55th birthday, which also fell on Sunday, after recent pressure following a run of five games without a win in the league before Christmas.

"We are back in contention in the league and, if we can win all our games in January, we can look forward to February when we have to face the likes of Deportivo and Valencia," added Rexach.

Deportivo, league leaders prior to the Christmas break, plunged to seventh place with another poor performance.

The Galicians crashed 3-0 at Valladolid and have now not won away from home for three months.

Alberto Marcos opened the scoring for Valladolid after 30 minutes and just a minute later Fernando Fernandez put the hosts further ahead, with Fernandez finding the net again after 56 minutes.

Alaves found that an 11th minute goal from Magno Mocellin was enough to give them a 1-0 win over relegation-threatened Tenerife.



UNSTOPPABLE! Barcelona superstar Rivaldo (R) scoring his first goal against Sevilla at the Nou Camp on January 13.

## Serie A Inter hot on Roma's heels

### Football

AFP, Milan

AS Roma showed champion pedigree Sunday when they came from two goals down to beat Verona 3-2 and ensure they stay top of the Italian First Division.

The defending Scudetto holders had trailed to two goals from Verona's Romanian striker Adrian Mutu but prevailed thanks to an injury-time goal from Argentinian substitute Gabriel Batistuta.

Earlier strikes from Assuncao and another substitute Antonio Cassano had restored parity for Fabio Capello's side.

Second-placed Inter Milan stayed within a point of Roma by winning 2-0 at Perugia in a match played in thick fog.

The goals came in the second half when Italian international Christian Vieri scored his 12th goal

sufficient to give his side a 1-0 win

over the Roman outfit and put the player on his own at the top of the division's goalscoring charts.

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni said: "With greater determination and a better attitude we could have obtained the result we wanted. We need results and unless we get them soon there is no point thinking about the Scudetto."

Parma had to settle for a 1-1 home draw to Lecce. French defender Martin Djétou gave them the lead but then Ivory Coast international Cyril Konan snatched a point for the southerners.

At Bergamo Atalanta's Cristiano Doni gave his side an early lead from the penalty spot following a foul which had seen Bologna defender Marcello Castellini sent off.

That was the recently-capped Italian international's 12th goal of the campaign and in-form Daniele Beretta then made it 2-0.

Before the interval Renato Olive reduced arrears and after Beretta had been sent off Emanuele Brioschi struck late for Bologna for a 2-2 draw.

Torino pulled off a 3-1 home win against Udinese. Striker Cristiano Lucarelli put them ahead with a first-half penalty but before the break Vincenzo Iaquinta levelled the scores.

But further goals from Riccardo Maspéro and Lucarelli settled the match for Torino, a boost for coach Giancarlo Camolese, reportedly facing the sack if his side had lost this match.



OUCH! Verona's Natale Gonnella (L), misses the ball and lands a kick on the back of AS Roma's Marco Delvecchio at Rome on January 13.

in just 10 matches of what for him has been an injury-hit Serie A season and then Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba bagged his first of the campaign with both chances created by Sierra Leonian forward Mohamed Kallon.

Inter's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper said: "It was a difficult game because of the fog and the poor pitch and it was inevitable that whoever made the first mistake would lose the match."

Juventus kept up the pressure by winning 2-1 at bottom club Venezia to go third ahead of 10-man Chievo. The minnows from Verona were held 2-2 by Fiorentina, who grabbed a point with an injury-time goal from Brazilian Adriano, who joined the club on loan from Inter Milan this week.

A penalty from Eugenio Corini, later sent off, and a Lorenzo D'Anna goal looked to have secured victory for the hosts after Fiorentina, whose coach Roberto Mancini resigned earlier this week, had struck early through Portuguese forward Nuno Gomes but despite this setback they still have a game in hand.

"We did not play badly," insisted Chievo coach Luigi del Neri. "It was more that Fiorentina played very well and they had someone like

after we had gone 2-0 up we gave them hope," lamented Verona coach Alberto Malesani.

Juve looked like making short work of bottom club Venezia when their French striker David Trezeguet headed them ahead after only five minutes.

But on a treacherous pitch Venezia hit back after 56 minutes when their Uruguayan midfielder Federico Magallanes scored after a well-worked move with Filippo Maniero.

Fifteen minutes from time Juve defender Mark Iuliano poached the winner.

"Our minds are focused firmly on the top of the table and the team is still growing in confidence even if Venezia made it difficult for us," said Juve coach Marcello Lippi.

AC Milan failed to make a significant move when they were held 0-0 by Brescia.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti, asked if his team's title ambitions were now compromised, said simply: "Certainly not. There is a long way to go."

Even more serious is the plight of Lazio who are rapidly losing ground. Piacenza striker Dario Hubner struck his 13th goal of the season at home to Lazio, a goal that was

## Painkillers doomed Ronaldo?

### Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Ronaldo's convulsions hours before the 1998 World Cup final were caused by a painkilling injection, sports journal Lance reported here on Sunday.

According to Lance, who claim they are sure of their story though it is from a second-hand source, the Brazilian striker received an injection of painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs in his right knee just seven hours before the final with France.

Lance reported: "The secret, which had been kept for four years, has been revealed by someone who heard the story from the player himself, and, for reasons which are not important, had no option but to tell all."

Ronaldo had apparently received seven previous injections during those finals but it was the eighth which had a devastating effect. Though he suffered convulsions just hours before kick-off, a well under par Ronaldo played the full 90 minutes.

The player had kept the events to



RONALDO

himself, the journal added, to protect team doctor Lidio Toledo.

Edmundo had initially been picked to play alongside Bebeto in the final, but, after a dressing room argument, Brazilian football federation official Ricardo Teixeira, concerned at the implications for their sponsors, allegedly insisted the 1996 and 1997 FIFA World Player of the Year start the match.

Ronaldo played one of his worst ever matches for Brazil and the whole team, clearly not prepared for the match psychologically, were well under par as they lost 3-0.

## Nuno Gomes injured

### Football

AFP, Verona

Fiorentina's Portuguese international Nuno Gomes had to be helped off the field Sunday with an ankle injury in a 2-2 draw with Chievo.

Striker Nuno Gomes, who had earlier given his side a 1-0 lead against Chievo, landed badly in an incident that did not involve any opposing players and was quickly

replaced by Brazilian Amaral. Nuno Gomes is a key member of his country's probable World Cup squad but Fiorentina's caretaker coach Luciano Chiarugi played down worries that his forward might be a long-term absentee, saying: "I don't think it will be more than three weeks. But I hope he can be back sooner that."

But, however long the absence it was the last thing needed by Fiorentina, whose playing staff has been decimated by forced sales to alleviate financial problems and other injuries.

## Advocaat rejects Dutch overtures

### Football

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers director of football Dick Advocaat revealed Monday he had turned down the chance to coach the Dutch national side for a second time preferring to stay at the Scottish giants.

The 54-year-old admitted it had been a difficult decision to reach after he was approached by the Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) when Louis van Gaal stood down

after the national side failed to reach the World Cup finals.

However the Dutchman explained that he would not break his promise to Rangers chairman David Murray about staying on and helping new manager Alex McLeish, who replaced him in the post last month, instead of resuming his coaching career with the Dutch whom he guided to the 1994 World Cup finals.

"It was a difficult and emotional decision but, in the end, I have given a commitment to David Murray and to Rangers and that was very important for me," Advocaat said.

## Premiership United on a roll

### Football

AFP, London

Reigning champions Manchester United completed their miraculous revival on Sunday when they went to the top of the English Premiership table for the first time this season with a 3-1 victory over Southampton.

Later Sunday title rivals Arsenal failed to join United on 42 points when they could only manage a 1-1 draw with Liverpool.

That match saw Liverpool striker Nicolas Anelka, on loan from Paris Saint Germain, return to Highbury for the first time since his controversial departure two-and-a-half-years ago to Real Madrid.

At St Mary's first half goals from Dutch striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy and England captain David Beckham, his first for two months, together with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's second-half effort made it seven league wins in a row for United.

Earlier, Southampton led through striker James Beattie's third minute goal.

"It's terrific to be at the top of the table," United manager Alex Ferguson told Sky Sports afterwards.

"We were making too many mistakes, but other teams have too and that's given us half a chance."

Van Nistelrooy's equaliser saw him become the first Premiership player to score from open play in seven consecutive matches.

"The form he is in is remarkable,"

added Ferguson.

"He is putting the half chances away and he took his goal very well here today."

Other players who have scored seven in a row in the Premiership are Mark Stein (Chelsea), Alan Shearer (Newcastle) and Thierry Henry (Arsenal).

United lead the Premiership on goal difference from Newcastle just weeks after being virtually written off to retain the title when they trailed Liverpool by 11 points and having played a game more.

Beattie's early goal was just what Gordon Strachan's side, looking to build on Wednesday's 2-0 midweek win over Liverpool wanted.

But the match turned sour for Beattie, whose goal equalled last season's tally of 12, as he was stretchered off 20 minutes after scoring following an aerial challenge with Gary Neville and Laurent Blanc.

He was taken to hospital but fears of a broken ankle were allayed by Strachan. "It looks like he has dislocated it," said the former United midfielder.

"It is still a big blow because he's been in great form but it just wasn't our day today"

United were behind when Paul Telfer played Jason Dodd in on the right and his cross was headed in by Beattie.

But in the ninth minute Van Nistelrooy levelled after Paul Scholes through ball for his 23rd of the season.

And on the stroke of half-time United had the lead when Beckham, inevitably from a free-kick, scored from 25 yards out after a foul by Chris Marsden on Juan Sebastian

### Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Man United	22	13	3	6	54	32	42
Newcastle	22	13	3	6	42	2	9
Leeds	22	11	8	3	34	2	0
Arsenal	21	11	7	3	42	2	5

### Serie A's top six

Italian league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):							
AS Roma	18	11	6	1	28	11	39
Inter Milan	18	11	5	2	33	16	38
Juventus	18	9	7	2	32	14	34
Chievo	17	10	3	4	32	22	33
AC Milan	18	8	7	3	26	18	31
Bologna	18	8	4	6	17	18	28