

Primera Liga

Magnificent Morientes

Football

AFP, Madrid

Five goals from Fernando Morientes in Real Madrid's 7-0 thrashing of Las Palmas on Sunday sent the champions back to the top of the Spanish first division and emphatically ended a streak of four league games without a win.

However, it's tight at the top. Valencia could only draw 0-0 with Celta Vigo on Saturday but they only trail Madrid on goal difference, both clubs having 43 points from 25 games.

Celta are third, two points adrift of the leading pair, while Deportivo La Coruna are fourth, also on 41 points.

Las Palmas had never won a league game in Madrid in 30 visits and never looked like making their own bit of history against Real, who became the first team in the top flight of Spanish football for more than a year to put seven past an opponent.

Morientes headed home Real's first goal after 20 minutes, connecting with a Luis Figo cross, and the pair repeated exactly the same trick 15 minutes later.

Sandwiched in between Morientes' first two goals, Zinedine Zidane showed how much he had been missed by tapping home Madrid's second goal with his left foot.

The world's most expensive player had missed Real's last two games with a sprained ankle.

Morientes then completed his hat-trick after 53 minutes, changing the recipe for success and firing in from close range with his right foot.

Las Palmas' defender Angel Lopez headed into his own net after 70 minutes and less than 60 seconds later the Canary islanders' demoralised defence showed it had learned nothing from the first half as Figo fired over another inch-perfect pass for Morientes to head home.

Morientes hadn't finished and 11 minutes before the whistle he headed his 15th goal of the season, this time thanks to service from Pedro Munitis, which puts him well ahead in the race to be the Spanish first division's top scorer.

The only bright moment for Las Palmas' goalkeeper Nacho Gonzalez was when he saved a 88th minute penalty by Morientes,



FERNANDO MORENTES

after Oscar Minambres had been brought down.

The Spanish international became the first player for eight years - and only one of two men in the last 23 seasons - to score five goals or more in a Spanish first division game.

"Morientes is someone whose

confidence soars when he scores goals. I'm sure this performance will have a big effect on what he does in future games," added Del Bosque, which should fighten Real's next few opponents.

Not surprisingly, the 26 year-old player himself was jubilant.

"This is probably the best game

Primera Liga's top six

Spanish football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

	Real Madrid	Valencia	Celta Vigo	Deportivo	Barcelona	Real Betis
25	12	11	10	12	11	10
6	48	29	42	8	37	6
28	21	27	27	30	21	22
43	43	41	41	41	40	39

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