



Real Madrid French superstar Zinedine Zidane (R), race compatriot Peter Lucin of Celta Vigo at the Balaidos Stadium in Vigo on March 2.

Primera Liga Real return with Raul

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid left it late to get their winner at Celta Vigo but a Raul Gonzalez goal nine minutes from time was enough to give them a 1-0 victory and put Real back on top of the Spanish First Division.

Real now have 49 points from 28 games but Valencia, who started the weekend as league leaders, could regain pole position on Sunday if they win at Real Zaragoza.

For much of the match Real toiled in vain to break down the tough Celta defence, whose coach Victor Fernandez had declared beforehand that no quarter would be given, but a piece of individual brilliance down the left wing from Zinedine Zidane set up Raul for his 13th goal of the season.

The Frenchman again justified his world record transfer fee by having the vision to see Raul running into space in the penalty box, and his cross glanced off Raul's head before dribbling past an anguished Jose Manuel Pinto in the Celta goal.

Before Raul's clincher, the best Real chance had fallen midway through the first half to Fernando Morientes, but the Spanish international striker sent the ball skimming wide across the face of the Celta goal.

Celta's Brazilian midfielder Everton Giovannella nearly put the home side ahead after 35 minutes when his thunderous shot from the edge of the area went just over the crossbar.

The away win was Real's first in the league this year and comes just two days after their coach Vicente Del Bosque declared that the Real players had started to believe they could again win anywhere after

Wednesday's European Champions' League victory at Porto.

Deportivo La Coruna kept up the pressure on Real and Valencia with a vital 1-0 win at Sevilla, the only goal of the game coming from the Galicians' Dutch striker Roy Makaay after 52 minutes.

Makaay connected at close range with an outstanding in-chest perfect cross from the Spanish international midfielder Victor Sanchez.

Deportivo now have 45 points from 28 games, and rested five first choice players in preparation for the Spanish Cup final on Wednesday against Real Madrid.

Primera Liga's top six

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

Real Madrid	28	14	7	7	53	31	49
Valencia	27	12	11	4	32	22	47
Deportivo La Coruna	28	14	5	9	41	33	47
Real Betis	28	12	10	6	32	24	46
Barcelona	27	12	7	8	42	25	43
Celta Vigo	28	10	12	6	43	32	42

Lazio losing Nesta?

Football

AFP, Rome

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti admits he may be forced to sell club captain and Italian international defender Alessandro Nesta, the Italian sports press reported Saturday.

Nesta has spent his entire career at Lazio but with Real Madrid and Milan giants AC and Inter reportedly interested in acquiring him Cragnotti, who recently admitted that his club's golden age was over, says he may have to offload the defender who was a revelation in Italy's Euro 2000 campaign.

"Nesta is not unsellable," said Cragnotti. "Whether he stays or

goes depends on the strategy of the club in the close season."

Barring injury Nesta is a certain member of Giovanni Trapattoni's starting line-up for the 2002 World Cup in the centre of a three-man defence with Parma's Fabio Cannavaro on his right and AC Milan's Paolo Maldini on his left.

Born in the Roman suburb of Cinecitta associated with legendary film director Federico Fellini Nesta is hugely popular with Lazio supporters as one of the club's few home-grown players.

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni, speaking on Friday afternoon and apparently unaware of Cragnotti's comments, had said that Nesta and the club's Argentinian striker Hernan Crespo would stay at the club.

Kadhafi wants Italian club

Football

AFP, L'Aquila, Italy

Libya's ruling Kadhafi family is negotiating to buy Italian Third Division outfit L'Aquila, the Italian sports press reported Saturday.

El Saadi Kadhafi, son of Libyan leader Moamer and himself an accomplished footballer, has been negotiating with L'Aquila president Michele Passarelli.

"I have had many contacts with the engineer (El Saadi Kadhafi) during my visits to Libya and also in Italy and he is a person who is very

serious and competent about football," said Passarelli.

Kadhafi junior recently took a 5.308 percent stake in Italian First Division giants Juventus on behalf of the Lafico holding company of the ruling family and has since trained with Juve at their training camp at the Stadio Comunale.

The 27-year-old has let it be known that he would like to raise his stake to 20 percent in Juve.

L'Aquila, situated in the centre of Italy in the Abruzzo region, is more known as a rugby-playing town than for its football feats.

Bundesliga Bayern charge on

Football

AFP, Berlin

On form Bayern Munich beat Stuttgart 2-0 on Saturday to climb into third spot in the German league and are hot on the tails of leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who drew 2-2 at Freiburg.

With nine games to go Leverkusen have 50 points, Borussia Dortmund have 48 points and should climb back top on Sunday with a win over strugglers St. Pauli, but Bayern are breathing down their necks in third with 47 points.

It was a great day all round for Bayern, who saw rivals Schalke 04 beaten 2-0 at Energie Cottbus and Hertha Berlin drop two points with a 1-1 draw in Cologne.

Despite talk at the Bavarian club that third place in the Bundesliga is their target after a slow start to the season, a fourth straight title is now well within their capabilities.

Coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said he believed things had clicked finally into place for his side.

"I am very happy with the result, as it puts us back in touch with the top."

"We saw the necessary solidity in our game and we now want to keep our positive series going. I'm happy we're in with a chance of another title," said the Bayern boss.

Bayern's midweek goal hero Roque Santa Cruz, who scored a late winner against Boavista in the Champions League, opened the scores just after the half hour after

fine work from strike partner Giovane Elber.

Mehemet Scholl sent Bayern in 2-0 up at half time after his 20-yard free-kick curled round the Stuttgart wall and into the back of the net.

Bayer Leverkusen battled back from 2-0 down at Freiburg with goals from Bulgarian Dimitar Berbatov and the league's top marksman Michael Ballack to show their 4-1 defeat at Arsenal on Wednesday did not mean they were entirely spineless.

Hertha Berlin ended a three-match winning streak under new boss Falko Gotz with a 1-1 draw at bottom club FC Cologne, who had not scored a league goal for 1,033 minutes, a miserable record dating from the last week of November.

The capital side took the lead after 16 minutes through Stefan Beinlich, but defender Thomas Clichon made sure he will be the toast of Cologne after he rescued a point with a 76th-minute equaliser.

Schalke 04 started the day in third but were caught cold by Energie Cottbus. The easterners went ahead with a strike from Romanian Vasile Mirutua and doubled the lead through Poland's Radoslaw Kalunzy.

A brace from Martin Max gave 1860 Munich a 2-0 home win over Hansa Rostock while mid-table rivals Werder Bremen lost 1-0 at Borussia Monchengladbach and Hamburg beat lowly Nuremberg 3-1.

Kaiserslautern can push Bayern back into fourth spot Sunday if they win their tie at home to Wolfsburg.



Bayern Munich's Brazilian ace Giovane Elber (Front) being tackled from behind by Stuttgart's Fernando Meira at Stuttgart on March 2.

Bundesliga's top six

German league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Bayer Leverkusen	25	15	5	5	59	31	50
Borussia Dortmund	24	14	6	4	38	20	48
Bayern Munich	25	14	5	6	49	19	47
Schalke 04	25	13	6	6	39	25	45
Kaiserslautern	24	14	3	7	46	34	45
Hertha Berlin	25	12	7	6	42	29	43

Premiership Gunners gun Magpies down

Football

AFP, London

Away-day specialists Arsenal went second in the English Premiership on Saturday after winning 2-0 at title rivals Newcastle United, the Gunners' 10th league win on the road this season.

Dutch international Dennis Bergkamp put Arsenal ahead in the 11th minute at St James' Park, supplying a sublime finishing touch to a sweeping three-man move.

France international Patrick Vieira won a crunching tackle on the halfway line and fed Bergkamp who then squared the ball to Robert Pires.

Vieira's international team-mate went charging down the left wing and picked out Bergkamp in space on the edge of the Newcastle penalty box.

Bergkamp struck when he did as Arsenal were under the cosh in the first 10 minutes.

"We were under a lot of pressure but we soaked it up and Dennis stuck one away to make it easier for us," the England defender told Sky Sports.

"I grabbed the second and that kind of killed the game. They kept on going and had the crowd behind them but we put in a good performance."

Leaders Manchester United, who play at struggling Derby on Sunday, can restore their three point advantage over Arsenal with a win at Pride Park.

United and Arsenal both have 57 points from 28 matches but the reigning champions have a superior goal difference.

Earlier Saturday French flier Nicolas Anelka showed all his predatory instincts, moving Liverpool firmly back into title contention with the opening goal in a 2-

more for what proved to be the Charlton winner.

Aston Villa gave Graham Taylor his first win since he returned to the club as coach last month with a last-gasp 2-1 home success over West Ham.

Paolo di Canio gave West Ham a 13th-minute lead from the penalty spot after Olof Mellberg fouled Jermaine Defoe but Villa equalised before the break through a header from Colombian Juan Pablo Angel.

Darius Vassell secured victory with Villa's second in the final minute but the Midlanders stayed seventh.

Elsewhere, Southampton pushed Ipswich back towards the drop zone with an impressive 3-1 win at Portman Road thanks to Brett Ormerod's first goal for the club and one from recent Derby arrival, Rory Delap.

Nigerian Finidi George pulled one back as Ipswich attempted to stage a late rally but Saints sealed



Nicolas Anelka, (C), Liverpool's French striker, unleashing a left-footer to open the scoring against Fulham at Craven Cottage, Fulham on March 2.

The Dutchman touched the ball beyond the last defender, spun round, and calmly slotted the ball past Shay Given for his fourth goal in as many matches.

Bergkamp was involved in Arsenal's second four minutes from the interval, curling a free-kick into the area for Sol Campbell whose powerful diving header from close range gave Given no chance.

Lauren almost added a third just after half-time but the Cameroon defender shot into the side-netting after latching onto Bergkamp's brilliant through-ball.

Newcastle's best chance to reduce the deficit fell to Alan Shearer early in the second-half but his stooping header was superbly palmed away by David Seaman.

Campbell was happy that

0 win at Fulham. Jari Litmanen claimed the second in the dying moments as Liverpool bagged their third straight away win.

Anelka netted with a left-foot strike on 13 minutes to add to last week's effort against Everton and Litmanen poached the clincher as the visitors steamrollered their rivals to go third in the table.

Charlton poured cold water on Chelsea's lingering dream of a Champions League place with a 2-1 win at The Valley.

Jason Euell struck on the volley after 72 minutes of an intriguing contest to leave Chelsea keeper Carlo Cudicini flailing.

Frank Lampard levelled for the Blues but with time running out Euell produced the goods once

the win with a third goal from Chris Marsden.

In even deeper trouble are rock-bottom Leicester, who went down 1-0 at Middlesbrough.

Frank Sinclair's passback own goal from 30metres after four minutes was a gift for Boro and left Leicester keeper Ian Walker stranded.

In a scrappy relegation duel, Bolton and Blackburn parted 1-1 with Blackburn having last week's League Cup hero Andy Cole sent off for stamping on Mike Whitlow in the first half.

To make matters worse for Rovers, Rod Wallace shot Bolton ahead in first half injury-time but Matt Jansen levelled with a volley.

Tottenham beat Sunderland, still not safe from relegation, 2-1 as Gustavo Poyet hit his third goal in three games after Christian Ziege's corner created havoc in the visitors' defence.

Cameroon striker Patrick Mboma levelled with his first Premiership goal but veteran forward Les Ferdinand hit the winner after more good work from Ziege.

In Sunday's other match Everton are at home to Leeds.

Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Man Utd	28	18	3	7	67	35	57
Arsenal	28	16	9	3	57	3	57
Liverpool	29	16	8	5	47	2	5
Newcastle	28	17	4	7	52	3	5

Keane delight for MU

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United captain Roy Keane followed Sir Alex Ferguson's lead Saturday by agreeing a new deal with the reigning Premiership champions.

United were celebrating on Thursday when Ferguson, who had gone into this season claiming it would be his last, signed a new three-year deal.

Inspirational skipper Keane, following hot on his manager's heels, has agreed terms for a new four-year contract which will keep him at Old Trafford until June 2006.

Keane, 30 said in a statement released by the club: "I am delighted to be staying at United and I am looking forward to enjoying even more success with the team over the next few years."

Ferguson was naturally delighted that Keane had also pledged his future to the Red Devils.

He said: "This is great news. Roy is an unbelievable player whose leadership, passion and drive epitomise the best qualities of Manchester United. I am really pleased to have Roy on board for another four years."

United chief executive Peter

Kenyon said: "We are absolutely delighted to be signing Roy to a new contract. He is a fantastic player and we never doubted he wanted to stay at United."

"With our inspirational captain now signed up until 2006 the continuity and stability which is so important to United's success is guaranteed."

Now the only big-name player yet to commit his future to the club is England skipper David Beckham. The midfielder is in the middle of negotiations with the issue of image rights still to be resolved.

United are understandably delighted to have tied Republic of Ireland international Keane on a long-term deal, particularly as he had previously hinted that he would like to finish his career with Celtic.

Keane, who joined United from Nottingham Forest in 1993 for a then British record transfer fee of 3.75 million pounds (5.32 million dollars), has made 349 appearances for the champions, scoring 49 goals.

Two of United's promising youngsters have also agreed new deals.

Centre-half John O'Shea, capped once by the Republic of Ireland, and Scottish midfielder Michael Stewart have penned four-year deals.

Livestock bonus!

AFP, Lagos

Each player of Nigerian First Division club Kano Pillars has been given a goat as a bonus for beating league leaders Enyimba, Kano club officials said here Saturday.

Pillars, promoted to the top flight this season, beat Enyimba 2-0 to inflict the first loss of the season on the reigning league champions.

Club owners, Kano State Government, gave out 32 goats to the players while the coach and chairman got a cow each.

Pillars are second in the 18-team table with 21 points from 11 matches, three points adrift of leaders Enyimba.

French Cup Bordeaux battle to final

AFP, Paris

Bordeaux booked a League Cup final spot with a 1-0 win over a wasteful Paris Saint Germain after a full-blooded match at the Parc Des Princes here on Saturday.

Bordeaux will face either Lorient or Rennes, who play in the other semi-final on Sunday, in the final at the Stade de France on April 20 with a place in the UEFA Cup at stake too.

The goal came eight minutes from time when Portuguese striker Pauleta sent Paris' keeper Lionel Letzi the wrong way from the penalty spot.

The referee had given the penalty after a flying two-footed challenge on Christophe Dugary from PSG captain Frederic Dehu.