

# Serie A Who else but Vieri

## Football

AFP, Milan

Christian Vieri was once again basking in glory Monday morning after his late goal gave Inter Milan a 1-0 derby victory over AC Milan - and a one-point lead in Serie A with nine games remaining.

Vieri has almost single-handedly piloted Inter to the top with 18 goals in just 17 Serie A starts in a season where he missed eight matches through injury but his strike on Sunday sets up Inter perfectly for Saturday night's home match with closest challengers Juventus.

Hector Cuper's side approach Saturday's showdown with Juve at the San Siro with a one-point lead over Juve who only defeated Bologna 2-1 courtesy of a late and farcical own goal by Bologna defender Massimo Tarantino.

A further point behind are defending champions Roma who slipped up with a 1-1 draw at Lecce.

It promises to be another weekend of drama with Roma hosting rivals Lazio in the Eternal City derby on Sunday night just 24 hours after Inter and Juve clash at the San Siro.

With Brazilian Ronaldo still getting back to fitness in Rio de Janeiro Vieri has been a talisman for Inter's title challenge as they seek to win the Scudetto that has eluded them since 1989-90 when Giovanni Trapattoni's side featuring German aces Lothar Matthaus, Jürgen Klinsmann and Andreas Brehme won the title.

Sierra Leonian Mohamed Kallon started the season well but has not added to his tally of nine goals since before Christmas while Nicola Ventola is also failing to impress.

Next up for Vieri is a date with his former club Juve whom he nearly rejoined last summer in a swap deal which would have seen Juve's French striker David Trezeguet move the other way.

Roma coach Fabio Capello admitted he would love a striker like Vieri.



PHOTO: INTERNET

VIRTUOSO VIERI: Inter Milan superstar Christian Vieri (R) is over the moon as he takes off his shirt in celebrating his goal against AC Milan at the Meazza Stadium in Milan on March 3.

"I envy Cuper for having Vieri," said Capello. "He always scores goals at the least likely moments. We have drawn so many games because we are not scoring as often as we did last year although I am sure we will get back on track."

Argentinian Cuper returned the compliment to Capello, saying: "Well I envy the way his team does not concede any goals."

But Vieri is certainly the player of the season so far, his 18 goals bettered only by Piacenza's Dario Hubner who has netted 20 and has played all his club's 25 matches.

Juve are still in fine fettle, however, although Tarantino's headed own goal was certainly a candidate for clanger of the season.

Tarantino admitted so himself, saying: "If someone could have given me a spade I would have dug myself a grave and had myself buried."

The goal in effect also buried Bologna's slender title chances and now it is clearly a three-horse race between Inter, Juve and Roma.

But Phillips' agent Phil Smith rejected any suggestion of a move on Monday.

"We can only reiterate that there

have been no discussions of any kind with regards to Kevin Phillips and the story regarding a possible transfer to Newcastle United," he said.

"Kevin wishes to reassure all Sunderland fans that his only efforts at this time are entirely focused on helping Sunderland attain the best possible league position this season," Smith added.

## Serie A's top six

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

Inter Milan	25	15	7	3	44	21	52
Juventus	25	14	9	2	47	19	51
AS Roma	25	13	11	1	35	15	50
Bologna	25	12	5	8	28	26	41
Chievo	24	11	6	7	42	35	39
AC Milan	25	9	11	5	35	26	38

## Premiership

# MU survive Derby scare

## Football

AFP, London

Premiership leaders Manchester United blew the chance to open up a three point gap on second-placed Arsenal Sunday after being held to a 2-2 draw by a struggling but spirited Derby at Pride Park.

But United, who hit the wood-work twice, were lucky to escape with a point when Derby striker Malcolm Christie had a stoppage-time goal disallowed for kicking the ball out of Fabien Barthez's hands before slotting home.

The United goalkeeper had both hands on the ball but did not appear to have full control of it. However, referee Steve Dunn penalised Christie and United were let off the hook.

Moments before that incident Derby had claims for a penalty dismissed by Dunn when Barthez came rushing from his line to punch the ball clear but caught Christie on the back of the head.

Christie scored Derby's equaliser 13 minutes from time after Argentina international Juan Sebastian Veron had given United a deserved 2-1 lead.

Derby went in front early through

Christie only for Paul Scholes to restore parity before the half-time whistle.

United now have 60 points from 29 matches, one more than second-placed Arsenal who have a game in hand.

A point for Derby keeps them second from bottom, level on points with League Cup winners Blackburn Rovers who have a superior goal difference.

In the day's other match Leeds, dumped out of the UEFA Cup in midweek by Dutch side PSV Eindhoven, were held to 0-0 draw by Everton at Goodison Park where Dominic Matteo was sent off for two yellow card offences.

During the match Brian Kidd was abused by irate Leeds fans who blame the assistant coach for the club's dismal form.

"He doesn't have the benefit of television. It was nailed on to me and 14,000 in the stand behind me."

Christie did not comment on the

and chairman Peter Ridsdale jumped to the defence of Kidd and condemned their supporters for turning on Alex Ferguson's former assistant at Manchester United.

Derby manager John Gregory was disgusted by Dunn's decision not to give his side a late penalty against the reigning Premiership champions.

"It was a blatant penalty by Barthez," raged Gregory. "As Christie came through Barthez punched the back of his head. The ref binned it."

"Barthez chopped him Christie down. If that is not a penalty then something is wrong with the laws of the game. The referee made a huge mistake."

"He doesn't have the benefit of television. It was nailed on to me and 14,000 in the stand behind me."

Christie did not comment on the

penalty appeal but said he was disappointed that his late 'goal' was ruled out.

"It was a close call at the end. I tried to get there at the end and I think we got there at the same time so it was difficult to call," said Christie.

"To have scored a hat-trick would have been a great moment, though."

United boss Alex Ferguson also conceded that Christie's goal appeared legitimate at first glance and like Gregory slammed Dunn's performance.

"I thought Christie's goal might've been alright. The ref had a poor, poor game. He had a shocking game and he made so many bad decisions."

"I thought it (Christie's goal) should've stood."

Derby, battling to retain their top-flight status, took the lead in the eighth minute.

French midfieler Pierre Ducrocq found Fabrizio Ravanelli with a lofted pass and the Italian nudged the ball on for strike partner Christie who drilled the ball into the back of the net with his left foot.

Georgi Kinkladze almost increased Derby's lead eight minutes later when fed by Ravanelli on the right wing but the tricky Georgian international curled his shot inches wide of the upright.

The goal lifted United who carved out plenty of chances as they went in search of an equaliser.

Ole Gunnar Solskjær toe-poked a shot against the post before Derby goalkeeper Andy Oakes denied Scholes with a brilliant left-handed save.

United's pressure paid off four minutes from half-time. Giggs pounced on Ruud van Nistelrooy's angled pass and flew past Warren Barton to set up Scholes who tucked the ball low beyond Oakes.

Ferguson's men dominated the early second-half exchanges and got their noses in front in the 59th minute.

Ducrocq fouled Scholes in the centre circle and from David Beckham's short free-kick the ball broke to set up Scholes.

The Argentinian, unchallenged by either Ducrocq and Luciano Zavagno in front of him, shot low into the left corner of the net to put United ahead.

Beckham rattled the crossbar as United looked to kill the game off but Derby dug deep to level the scores with St Pauli and escape with a point.

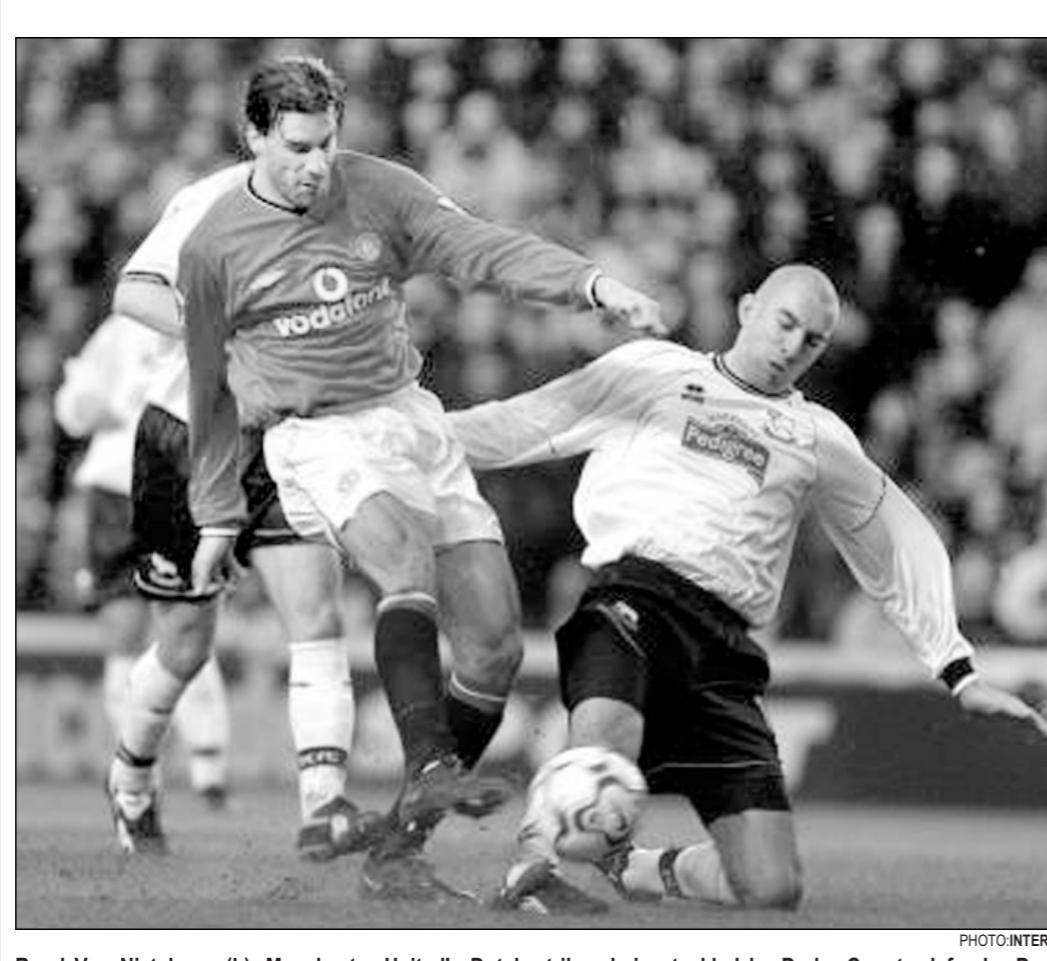
Kinkladze set substitute Lee Morris free down the left flank and he supplied Zavagno whose inviting low cross was turned past Barton to set up Scholes.

Marcio Amoroso converting a

## Premiership's top six

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

Man Utd	29	18	4	7	69	37	58
Arsenal	28	16	9	3	57	31	57
Liverpool	29	16	8	5	47	25	56
Newcastle	28	17	4	7	52	35	55
Leeds	28	11	12	5	37	29	45
Chelsea	27	11	11	5	47	28	44



## French Cup Lorient set Bordeaux date

AFP, Paris

Lorient booked a League Cup final place with a 1-0 victory over Brittany rivals Rennes in the semi-final on Sunday.

The Stade de France final on April 20 against Bordeaux, who beat Paris Saint Germain 1-0 on Saturday, should feature two of the league's most exciting marksmen.

Jean-Claude Darcheville, one of the revelations of the season with 15 league goals for the second bottom club Lorient, tapped home the second-half winner on Sunday after being gloriously set up by Pascal Feindouno.

Portugal international Pedro Pauleta, with 20 league goals this campaign, gave Bordeaux a 1-0 win over a wasteful PSG in a full-blooded encounter at the Parc Des Princes on Saturday.

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