

Serie A Inter's last gasp relief

 Football

AFP, Milan

A spectacular injury-time equaliser from Clarence Seedorf saw Inter Milan snatch a 2-2 draw at home to Juventus Saturday at the San Siro to stay top of the Italian First Division by a single point from the visitors from Turin.

Dutchman Seedorf, who had earlier given his side a sixth-minute lead with an equally spectacular strike, followed up with a candidate for goal of the season after goals from Frenchman David Trezeguet and Croatian substitute Igor Tudor looked set to put Juve top of *Serie A*.

It also denied Juve coach Marcello Lippi a famous revenge win over the club that sacked him on day one of the 2000-1 season when Inter lost to Reggina just days after being eliminated from the Champions League preliminary round by Helsingborgs of Sweden.

However, champions AS Roma will join Inter at the top of the division if they win Sunday evening's Roman derby with Lazio.

Lippi said: "It is disappointing because we were finishing the game so well. Compliments to Seedorf not only for the two goals but also the way he played.

"I believe in the Scudetto and so do the players."

Inter's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper said: "They were two great goals, he played really well and I did not think he had a chance scoring from that far out for the second. You have to be happy when you score in the 90th minute. We started very well but Juve were strong after the interval.

"As far as the Scudetto is concerned all three teams have equal chances."

Seedorf's goal ensured a thrilling end to a match that had also started in the thrilling mode.

The game got off to a frantic start and in the first minute Juve goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon needed treatment when he injured himself, diving at the feet of Inter's Alvaro Recoba.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Inter Milan's Dutch international star Clarence Seedorf (R) unleashing a volley to score his first against Juventus at the San Siro on March 9.

Then Buffon's opposite number Francesco Toldo almost embarrassed himself when he kicked the ball straight to Juve's Pavel Nedved but the Czech international screwed his shot wide.

But six minutes into the match Inter took the lead. An attack seemed to have broken down when Mark Iuliano headed the ball clear. However, the ball fell to Seedorf on the left side of midfield who controlled it and fired a spectacular volley into the far corner.

After 11 minutes it was nearly 2-0 to Inter when Cristiano Zanetti's header forward beat the offside trap only for Inter's Colombian defender Ivan Cordoba, admittedly at full

stretch, to fire wide from point-blank range.

Seconds later Inter were made to rue that miss as Juve drew level.

The ball was quickly moved out to Juve's Gianluca Zambrotta on the right and his pinpoint cross fell perfectly for Trezeguet, who made no mistake with a simple header for his 18th goal of the *Serie A* campaign.

It was thrilling stuff and Alessandro Del Piero had already netted seconds after referee Gennaro Borriello had blown for offside when Inter nearly went 2-1 up after 20 minutes.

Uruguayan Recoba got free down the left and centred only for

the ball to cannon off the shin of Juve's French defender Lilian Thuram onto the post and back safely into the arms of Buffon.

Thuram was spared the embarrassment of an own goal but immediately had to leave the field injured, replaced by Tudor, a severe blow to Juve who had moved the Frenchman from right back to central defence to cover for Uruguayan Paolo Montero and Ciro Ferrara who were both unavailable.

The second period had a scrappy start and within the space of 30 seconds Borriello rejected two Juve appeals for a penalty against Inter defender Marco Materazzi.

Just as the game appeared to be drifting towards a 1-1 draw Juve struck.

Nedved floated in a freekick and an unmarked Tudor glanced his header inside Toldo's left-hand post.

It looked all over but as the game drifted into injury time Seedorf struck from 30 metres with his swerving shot leaving Buffon stranded to deny Lippi a priceless victory and cheer the majority of the 80,000 crowd.

Serie A's top six

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

Inter Milan	26	15	8	3	46	23	53
Juventus	26	14	10	2	49	21	52
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

Perez eyeing Owen

AFP, London

Real Madrid president Florentine Perez is used to buying only the best of the football market has to offer - and Liverpool goals machine Michael Owen would be no exception.

"Owen can be one of the world's great players and the best players must play for Real Madrid," Perez told The News Of The World here Sunday.

Perez is keen to add England international Owen to his prestigious players list at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Already Real have France World Cup winner Zinedine Zidane and Portugal's Luis Figo on their books, so the price tag attached to Owen, an estimated 71million dollars, is unlikely to scare off the free-spending Perez.

However Perez would not make his move - which he sees as a natural step in promoting the club's growing fan base - until after this summer's World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

"In England there are two great players - Owen and (David) Beckham. However, Beckham plays in the same position as Luis Figo.

"Geographical considerations are taken into account. With the signing of Zidane many French people and Arabs became Real Madrid fans.

"Now I would like to sign an English star. Our strategy at this club is to incorporate one of the world's top players every year.

"That (the World Cup) is very important for seeing players. We won't make a decision before the tournament."

Fergie on Nesta mission

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson had travelled to Rome Sunday on a scouting mission to watch Lazio's international defender Alessandro Nesta, it was reported here.

Ferguson is ready to offer Nesta's financially-troubled *Serie A* employers 30 million pounds for the player, a world record for a defender, the Sunday Times reported.

Nesta, Lazio's captain and widely regarded as one of the finest defenders in world football, has already been linked with Real Madrid and Juventus.

However The Sunday Times said United and Lazio have forged close links since the transfers of Argentine Juan Sebastian Veron and Jaap Stam last season.

The paper reported that Lazio still owe United a substantial chunk of the Stam transfer fee, which could be written off in any new deal.

If Ferguson is impressed by Nesta's showing in Sunday's city derby with AS Roma, negotiations between Lazio and United are expected to start shortly, the paper added.

Bundesliga Bayern take Munich honours

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Thorsten Fink bagged a last-minute goal Saturday at the Olympic Stadium to secure a 2-1 success over city rivals 1860 Munich and keep their title hopes burning brightly.

Bayern, their German Cup dreams destroyed in midweek by Schalke, fought back with a gritty showing which made it 100 derby wins over 1860.

Bayern, going for a fourth straight *Bundesliga* title, began the match fourth with a three-point deficit to close on leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who like themselves are still involved in the Champions League.

Leverkusen beat Cottbus 2-0, however, to stay in pole position with 53 points from 26 matches.

Borussia Dortmund stay second, one point behind Leverkusen and two ahead of Bayern after seeing off near neighbours Borussia Monchengladbach 3-1.

Blood tests at finals

AFP, Zurich

FIFA are set to add random blood doping tests to existing urine tests at the upcoming World Cup for the first time, an official with football's world governing body said Saturday.

Under existing regulations players are chosen at random to submit urine samples for analysis after matches.

However the addition of blood tests, on two players chosen at random from each team during every match, has been welcomed as a necessary step against doping in football.

"This possibility (of doing blood tests) came to light in February when we held discussions at a doping prevention workshop in Tokyo," the Belgian president of FIFA's medical commission Michel D'Hooghe told AFP Saturday.

"The 32 medical representatives from the qualified teams welcomed the proposal enthusiastically."

Mimicking existing procedures by international Olympic and cycling authorities, FIFA's blood tests will be carried out to determine haemoglobin (red blood cell) levels prior to competition.

The legal threshold for males is 17.5 (grammes per decilitre of blood). A result on or above that level would suggest the use of a substance which boosts red blood cell levels.

An eight-strong team of specialists from Brazil and Inter Milan -

Ronaldo can't wait

 Football

REUTERS, Tresopolis

Inter Milan's injury-plagued Brazil striker Ronaldo is raring to go after finishing a one-month recovery programme that specialists claim has turned him into a new player.

The former World Player of the Year said on Saturday he was fully recovered from the injuries that threatened to wreck a once-spectacular career and made his presence at the World Cup doubtful.

"I'm in excellent condition and I'm ready to play," said the Inter Milan forward after a 90-minute training session at the Brazilian national team's complex in Teresopolis, a mountain resort near Rio de

including doctors, a physiotherapist, dentist and nutritionist - have spent the last month effectively rebuilding the stricken star.

Saturday's practice, open to the media, consisted of sprinting between cones, shooting and taking on defenders in one-on-one situations. About 100 people, including staff and media, were present.

Jose Luis Runco, one of the doctors on the team, said the 25-year-old had undergone "muscular reconditioning" and "physical reconditioning" to get him back to full fitness.

Runco said one of their most important achievements was to reduce Ronaldo's body fat from 13.5 to 8.5 percent, which he described as "an excellent level for a professional athlete".

"He needed to be re-conditioned,

The latest, a pulled muscle at the back of his left thigh, has sidelined him since December 23.

Ronaldo said he would return to Inter Milan on Sunday and hoped to be given a game by coach Hector Cuper as soon as possible.

"I'm training, as you have seen today, and it depends on him (Cuper). I hope he plays me as quickly as possible. I don't feel any problem. I am running and sprinting with much more confidence."

Ronaldo said he also wanted to be in Brazil's squad for the friendly against Yugoslavia at the end of the month.

Ronaldo last played for his country in a friendly against the Netherlands in October 1999.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Superstar Ronaldo practices heading during an open training session at Teresopolis near Rio de Janeiro on March 9.

Janeiro.

"I'm dying to play again," added Ronaldo, who underwent two knee operations in two years, then suffered three muscular injuries in quick succession after his comeback late last year.

"This is another challenge, to prove wrong the people who didn't believe I could come back."

An eight-strong team of specialists from Brazil and Inter Milan -

especially on the nutrition side," he said, adding that the knee was no longer an issue.

"He has the same possibility of getting injured as any other player," Runco said. "Ronaldo's knee was cured a long time ago."

Ronaldo's career, which reached its peak with an astonishing 1996/97 season at Barcelona in Spain, has been thrown into doubt by his inability to shrug off injuries

In his absence, Brazil have gone into a spectacular decline, only narrowly managing to qualify for this year's World Cup.

But Ronaldo refused to be viewed as a potential saviour.

"The role of saviour doesn't exist," he said. "There are 11 players on the field and the reserves on the bench who are all in the same boat."

Primera Liga

Real back roaring

 Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid put behind their shock at losing the Spanish Cup final three days ago, in front of their home fans and on their 100th birthday, with an emphatic 3-0 victory over Villarreal on Saturday.

The win took Real Madrid back to the top of the Spanish First Division with 52 points from 29 matches.

However, their lead may last less than 24 hours as Valencia, who started the weekend in first place, play host to Sevilla on Sunday and are only two points in arrears.

"Without doubt, this match was even more important than next Saturday's match against Barcelona," commented Real coach Vicente del Bosque after the game.

"If we had lost, it would have been a tremendous shock. The victory keeps us in touch with the top of the table and we can now go to the Nou Camp in a calmer frame of mind."

"This was not a comfortable game to prepare for with all the outside pressures that accompanied it," added Del Bosque, referring to all the post-mortems conducted in the wake of Wednesday's defeat by Deportivo La Coruna.

Del Bosque also broke with his usual practice of the team having collective responsibility, for good or ill, and singled out Argentine international midfielder Santiago Solari and Spanish international striker Fernando Morientes for special praise, despite the fact that neither man got on the scoresheet.

"Solari stunned me with his work rate, he added a new dynamism to this side, while Morientes never forgot that he's still the top scorer in the Spanish First Division."

Raul Gonzalez opened the scoring for the defending champions, getting his 14th goal of the season in the 14th minute, by blasting home a cross from Solari - deputising for the injured World Player of the Year Luis Figo - after the Argentine had robbed Villarreal defender Sergio Ballesteros out on the left wing.

Real Madrid confirmed their superiority after the break, going further ahead when club captain Fernando Hierro scored from the spot on the hour.

Zinedine Zidane earned the penalty after being brought down by Quique Alvarez, although the debate will go on for a long time about whether the foul was actually in the area.

England midfielder Steve

McManaman added Real's third just three minutes later, and only two minutes after coming onto the pitch, by curling the ball spectacularly into the net from the dead ball line.

Real Betis defeated fellow championship challengers Barcelona 2-1, to their extend their unbeaten streak to ten games.

Betis took all three points thanks to two goals from their impressive 20-year-old striker Dani Martin, who put Betis ahead after just three minutes, firing home a Joaquin Sanchez cross on the half-volley.

Barcelona got the goal their attacking play deserved after 54 minutes when Ito Alvarez headed a Barcelona corner into his own net.

However, Betis didn't panic and 13 minutes from time Dani scored his second, finding the net from an

exquisite long-range cross from Benjamin Zaranonda.

"Losing this match definitely makes life more difficult if we are going to win the championship," said Barcelona coach Charly Rexach.

"Although until the final whistle, I still thought we were going to get three points out of this game."

The Catalans did almost savage a draw in the dying seconds of the game when a Carles Puyol header spun of the fingertips off Betis goalkeeper Toni Prats - who otherwise was the Betis saviour on several occasions with his acrobatic saves - and then off the cross bar.

Betis moved up two places to third, and have 49 points, after Deportivo were held to a 1-1 draw by struggling Rayo Vallecano.

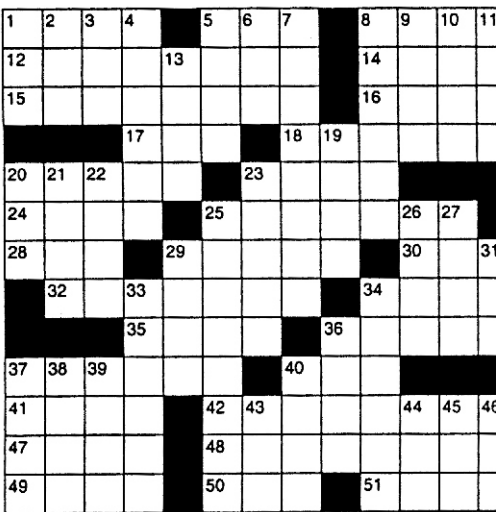
Primera Liga's top six

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

Real Madrid	29	15	7	7	56	31	52
Valencia	28	13	11	4	33	22	50
Real Betis	29	13	10	6	34	25	49
Deportivo La Coruna	29	14	6	9	42	34	48
Barcelona	29	13	7	9	48	28	46
Athletic Bilbao	28	12	9	7	40	39	45

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	37 Deli buy	4 Some piano keys	22 Theater section
1 Theater award	40 Intention	5 Egg on author	23 Thwart
5 Actress Merkel	41 "Exodus"	6 O.T. bk.	25 Marshals
8 "Howzat again?"	42 Disney classic	7 One fraction	26 Arduous journey
12 Trumpet flourishes	47 Marathon	27 Foolproof stars?	29 "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" duo
14 Playbill listing	48 Zealots	8 Christmas door decor	31 Auction action
15 Half-circle window	49 Settled up	9 Brewery ingredient	33 Pursued
16 Duel tool	50 Seek restitution	10 Sheltered	34 Plum or
17 Clitic quaff	51 Hematite and	11 Props for Vijay Singh	38 Carreras rendition
18 Wipes out	52 Willemite	13 Visual —	39 Canon role
20 Jars	3 Hostel	19 Anger	40 Mrs. Shakespeare
23 Sitter's bane	1 Vacation-ing	20 Puglist's tactic	43 Sports org.
24 Cookie-maker	2 Cote call	21 Actor Sharif	44 Round Table address
25 Snubs	3 Some	Solution time: 24 mins.	45 Boliano's arona
28 Valise	DOWN		46 Fool
29 — Line is it	1 Vacat- ing		
Anyways?	2 Cote call		
30 Massage	3 Hostel		
32 Go over the arithmetic			
34 Garr of "Mr. Mom"			
35 "Listen!"			
36 Jabbed			



C I V R K I H K E S H R U

G U P B I S T U W, K T B G U

T I X E B G P P I V B C, " K T F

H E K T B P U E K E K X U V

Saturday's Cryptokuip: I HAVE A GO! FEELING THAT A FROG'S FAVORITE THING SIT ON IS A TOADSTOOL.

Today's Cryptokuip Clue: G equals B

The Cryptokuip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostroph give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.