

Juve must win and pray



AFP, Paris

ated with his own men, a point behind Manchester United in the Premiership with a game in hand - hence the importance of the three points Tuesday.

Veteran defender Lee Dixon says the team will not be found wanting.

"From a team point of view, when everybody is fit and available we have got the best chance of winning this competition this season," he told the club's official website.

"The squad is well adapted for it, we've got cover in all positions and lots of experience."

But Deportivo defender Lionel Scaloni warns that the Spaniards' autumn win at Old Trafford and the Spanish Cup success over Real were no fluke.

"We believed in ourselves because we beat Manchester United at Old Trafford earlier this season by playing in the same way."

TUESDAY FIXTURES

Group C

Real Madrid (Spa) v Sparta Prague (Cze)
FC Porto (Por) v Panathinaikos (Gre)

Group D

Arsenal (Eng) v Deportiva La Coruna (Spa)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) v Juventus (Ita)

Arsenal are thus forewarned.

Juve have the greater pressure, however, with their three points to make up on the leading pair.

Although they swamped Leverkusen in Italy they will be destabilised by the loss with a thigh strain of French defender Lilian Thuram suffered in Saturday's draw with Inter Milan.

Coach Marcello Lippi may further have to shuffle the pack up front as Alessandro Del Piero has a damaged ankle and freescoring Frenchman David Trezeguet has a twisted knee which makes him doubtful.

Leverkusen are a point clear of Dortmund in the Bundesliga after seeing off Cottbus 2-0 on Saturday and coach Klaus Toppmoller insisted before the game that "for this club the match against Cottbus is even more important than the Champions League match against Juventus."

Yet his side are level on points with the Italians and thus everything is still to play for even if the Germans are bottom of the group on goal difference.

In Group C, Real, going for a ninth continental crown, are already through ahead of facing Sparta Prague of the Czech Republic.

Vicente del Bosque's men won in Porto with several first-teasers out and the reserves - although they would no doubt walk into most other sides - are set for another outing as Real look to make it five wins out of five ahead of meeting Barcelona in the Liga next week.

That could mean a rare start for England winger Steve McManaman.

Porto, chasing a first win, host Panathinaikos with the Greeks currently enjoying a four-point lead over Prague ahead of hosting Real in their final game.

Wenger knows equally well that the title of 'nearly men' could become one just as easily associ-



4-STAR MONTELLA: AS Roma striker Vincenzo Montella celebrates in trademark fashion after completing his hat-trick against Lazio at Rome on March 10.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Serie A

Montella massacre



AFP, Milan

A superb display of goalscoring by Vincenzo Montella saw champions AS Roma thrash Lazio 5-1 in the Rome derby at the Olympic Stadium Sunday to move joint top of the Italian First Division with Inter Milan.

Italian international Montella bagged four as his team routed their arch-rivals to move level with Inter, who had shared a 2-2 draw with Juventus on Saturday night at the San Siro to stay a point clear of their visitors from Turin.

But Inter are now joined at the summit by a Roma side who lead by a goal on goal difference although that is a purely academic advantage as any two teams who finish the season level on points at the top will play off for the Scudetto.

Montella's magic night began with a first-half hat-trick - two headers and a rebound - which gave Roma a 3-0 interval lead.

Yugoslav midfielder Dejan Stankovic briefly raised hopes of a Lazio comeback when he scored early in the second period but then Montella killed the match with a well-taken fourth before Francesco Totti rounded off the scoring.

Roma boss Fabio Capello said: "We played exceptional football especially in the first half. In my time with Roma I have rarely seen us play like that, we hardly put a foot wrong throughout the match. I am absolutely delighted with them."

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who sidestepped questions about whether his job was in jeopardy, said: "We just have to put this game behind us and congratulate Roma who were a formidable side tonight."

Elsewhere Sunday Bologna beat AC Milan 2-0 to consolidate their grip on fourth place and a possible berth in the preliminary round of next season's Champions League.

First-half goals from Salvatore Fresi and Julian Cruz saw Bologna distance themselves from sixth-placed Milan.

After just three minutes of a match at Bologna delayed by traffic problems Fresi headed home a rebound after Giuseppe Signori's deflected freekick struck the bar to give the hosts a flying start.

And Bologna doubled up when in-form Argentinian Cruz rounded Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati before scoring.

"We are not in the Champions League yet," warned Bologna coach Francesco Guidolin. "But it is in our hands now and if we keep our nerve and our concentration we will obtain our reward."

"To say it's a catastrophe is an exaggeration," said AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"It's not over yet but we can't afford any more mistakes."

Fifth-placed Chievo also lost ground on Bologna although after having Christian Manfredini sent off they did well to get a 2-2 draw with Torino at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Manfredini was dismissed for a petulant swipe at Gianluca Comotto shortly after Bernardo Corradi had put Chievo in front.

Experienced Torino striker Marco Ferrante squared the match and after Corradi bagged a second for Chievo it was Riccardo Maspero who netted Torino's second equaliser from a freekick.

Piacenza boosted their hopes of staying up with a 2-0 victory over Perugia.

Defender Eusebio Di Francesco opened the scoring and victory was sealed by Dario Hubner's 21st of the season, a goal that extends his lead at the top of the division's goalscoring charts.

At Verona it was a tale of two penalties. Parma's prolific striker Marco Di Vaio had his early effort saved by Verona goalkeeper

Fabrizio Ferron while Verona took full advantage when their Romanian forward Adrian Mutu converted his for a 1-0 win.

Bottom club Venezia's plight looks hopeless after a 2-1 home defeat by fellow strugglers Brescia.

Uruguayan midfielder Federico Magallanes gave the Venice-based outfit the lead but after the interval a Federico Giunti penalty and a goal from Chilean player Jimenez Salgado gave Brescia the points.

Brescia coach Carlo Mazzone was far from satisfied, saying: "We are in big trouble and if we want to get out of it we will have to play better than we did today."

Fausto Rossini and Alex Pinardi gave Atalanta a 2-0 first-half lead at Bergamo against fellow strugglers Lecce.

Lecce defender Bruno Cirillo pulled one back but the 2-1 defeat leaves the southerners in big trouble.

Fiorentina drew 0-0 at home to Udinese, a result that leaves the Florence club looking doomed while the visitors from Udine are themselves perilously close to the drop zone.

Saturday's clash between Inter and Juve at the San Siro proved a thriller with Inter's Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf the star performer.

After Seedorf's spectacular opener goals from Frenchman David Trezeguet and Croatian substitute Igor Tudor looked set to give Juventus top spot before Seedorf levelled the scores at 2-2 in injury time with a fine 30-metre shot.

Atletico Madrid's Jean Tigana's side

Serie A's top six

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

	26	14	11	1	40	16	53
AS Roma	26	14	11	1	40	16	53
Inter Milan	26	15	8	3	46	23	53
Juventus	26	14	10	2	49	21	52
Bologna	26	13	5	8	30	26	44
Chievo	25	11	7	7	44	37	40
AC Milan	26	9	11	6	35	28	38

Primera Liga

Valencia stay on course



AFP, Madrid

Valencia will not win many awards for entertaining football this season, but they have a bigger prize in mind, and moved a step closer to their first Spanish championship since 1971 with a 2-0 win over Sevilla on Sunday.

Valencia took the initiative against a dozy Sevilla side content to defend, but their patient fans had to wait until the 66th minute before Juan Sanchez almost leapt out of his boots to connect with a Kily Gonzalez cross, and find the net with a header.

Sanchez, at a mere 1.72 metres, was dwarfed by his partner up front on Sunday, the giant Norwegian international striker John Carew, who is 22 centimetres taller.

The scrappy game saw both teams end with 10 men.

Ten yellow cards and two reds were dished out, the last one to Valencia midfielder Miguel Angel Angulo, who scored Valencia's second goal two minutes into injury time and then only moments later was given his marching orders for his over-zealous celebrations.

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez voiced his disgust with the dismissal of Angulo.

"The referee showed how much feeling he had for this game, doing something like that in injury time," said Benitez.

The victory gives Valencia 53 points from 29 games, one more than Real Madrid, who maintained their position in second place with an emphatic 3-0 victory over Villarreal on Saturday.

Celta Vigo kept up their challenge for a place in European next season with a 4-2 win at Valladolid to move up to sixth, helped by a hat-trick from their Brazilian-born Spanish international Catana.

The Galician visitors took an early lead through Sergio Fernandez, before his namesake Fernando Fernandez equalised for Valladolid after 32 minutes, heading home a Tote Lopez free kick.

Catana then struck twice before Celta were reduced to 10 men after 68 minutes, when defender Fernando Caceres was sent off after getting his second yellow card.

A minute later, Fernando got his second goal from the penalty spot after Celta defender Sebastian Mendez had handled the ball.

However, Valladolid dreams of salvaging a point from the match were to be short-lived as Catana got his third goal from close-range, 16 minutes before the whistle, bringing his total to 14 for the season.

Malaga were two ahead in 10 minutes, thanks primarily to their Dutch midfielder Kiki Musampa, but then had to hang on desperately to their lead for the rest of the game,

eventually running out 2-1 winners over Real Zaragoza.

Real Mallorca eased their relegation worries with a 4-2 win over Osasuna but had their supporters sitting on the edge of their seats throughout the match.

The island side threw away a two-goal lead, provided by Cameroonian international Samuel Eto'o, who got both of Mallorca's early goals, before making their superiority tell in the final ten minutes.

Osasuna drew level early in the second half thanks to goals from Leonel Gancedo and Cesar Palacios but Miguel Angel Nadal and Paco Soler got late goals to enable Mallorca to put some distance between themselves and the relegation zone.

Tenerife and Real Sociedad are still mired in the last three but it was the Canary island side that won the relegation battle between the two, getting a 2-0 victory in San Sebastian.

Espanyol notched up their seventh unbeaten game when they beat Athletic Bilbao 2-0, their fourth consecutive win in the Montjuic Olympic stadium.

Primera Liga's top six

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

Valencia	29	14	11	4	35	22	53
Real Madrid	29	15	7	7	56	31	52
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
Celta Vigo	29	12	12	6	47	34	45

Nesta sorry for horror show

AFP, Rome

Lazio defender Alessandro Nesta admitted Sunday night's Roman derby with AS Roma had been the worst performance of his career on the day that it was reported that he had come under the scrutiny of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

Nesta was replaced by coach Alberto Zaccheroni at half-time during the 5-1 thrashing by Roma after being responsible for all three first-half goals by Roma striker Vincenzo Montella who ended up with four goals.

For the first and third goals Nesta allowed Montella to beat him to head goals while for the second - although he had a big head start - he seemed to freeze, allowing Montella to make up yards of ground to stab home a rebound.

Nesta admitted he had lost the plot, saying: "I want to apologise to all of Lazio's fans. This evening my mind was just not on the job. I was all over the place and this was the worst game of my life."

"It was good that I was taken off. We decided it together, myself and the coach. But let's not make a drama of it: it won't happen again."

Zaccheroni felt the player had been unsettled by the transfer talk, saying: "The transfer rumours did not do Nesta any good even though it is something he will have to get used to."

Italian international Nesta is, barring injury, a certain starting member of Giovanni Trapattoni's Italy World Cup team in a three-man defensive unit that features Nesta in the centre, Parma's Fabio Cannavaro on the right and AC Milan's Paolo Maldini on the left.

Press reports earlier Sunday said that Sir Alex had identified Nesta as the man to fill the defensive void left at United by Dutchman Jaap Stam, ironically now Nesta's team-mate at Lazio.

Stam's United replacement Laurent Blanc, who is French, will quit football at the end of the season.