

## Bundesliga

## Bayer on track, Bayern hopes fade

AFP, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen beat bottom club Cologne 2-0 on Saturday to stay on course for their first ever German title as Bayern Munich lost almost all hope of retaining their crown after being held by Werder Bremen.

Leverkusen strolled to their two-goal victory at their BayArena stadium with the first goal coming from a 13th-minute penalty converted by goalkeeper Jorg Butt. Brazilian defender Lucio completed the job 12 minutes later.

Klaus Toppmoller's side now have a seven-point lead over second-placed Borussia Dortmund, who play Munich 1860 on Sunday, and look capable of wrapping up the Bundesliga crown in their four remaining matches.

Leverkusen can now look ahead to overturning a 1-0 deficit when they host Liverpool in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final on Tuesday.

Goalkeeper Butt was handed a rare chance to grab glory in the opponent's penalty area after Cologne defender Jens Keller had obstructed German international Michael Ballack.

Butt stepped up and made no mistake with the spot kick.

Minutes later Lucio's right-foot shot ended the hopes of Cologne, who with just 20 points from 30 matches look doomed to relegation.

Meanwhile, Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said he was disappointed after Werder Bremen's Mladen Krstajic grabbed a last-minute equaliser in the Olympic Stadium.

The 2-2 draw leaves the reigning European champions in fourth position, nine points adrift of Leverkusen. Bayern would have to win all four remaining matches and hope Leverkusen and Dortmund collapse in theirs for the champions to regain their title.

Claudio Pizarro opened the scoring for Bayern in the 21st minute but Alton equalised with a penalty just two minutes later.

Roque Santa Cruz restored Bayern's lead 10 minutes after the break before Krstajic got his head to an Ivica Banovic free kick to leave Oliver Kahn stranded in the dying seconds of the match.

Bayern are even at risk of slipping out of the Champions League placings as Schalke 04 sneaked into third place with a 2-0 home win over Nuremberg with first-half goals from Emile Mpenza and Ebbe Sand.

Hertha Berlin are fifth after a 3-1 win over VfL Wolfsburg.

## Maldini again injured

AFP, Milan

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini received an injury in the UEFA Cup semifinal match against Borussia Dortmund. Maldini was out of action for three months and had recovered recently.

This time he harmed his thigh, and the term of his absence will be known after next week's medical. As of today physicians think that he has to miss for one week.

"I felt pain in the first half of the game against Borussia, but after consulting with physicians I decided to continue playing," Maldini announced.

The absence of the captain creates problems in the defence line of Milan. Besides, Contra and Costacurta are also out of action. However, Milan head coach Carlo Ancelotti must not be worried because Rui Costa and Andriy Shevchenko will play in the game against Cheiro, although it is unknown whether the Ukrainian forward will perform from the first minute of the match.

## French First Div Leaders lose momentum

AFP, Paris

French league leaders Lens could only draw 0-0 with Troyes on Saturday and their title challenge seems to have lost momentum.

Lens have a five-point lead but second-placed Lyon can cut the gap to two if they win at Auxerre on Sunday.

Lens threw everything at their opponents and were unlucky to hit the crossbar twice but they failed to score, although they remain unbeaten at their Felix-Bollaert stadium in northern France.

Lille had a disastrous night and damaged their chances of European competition next season when they were thrashed 4-0 at relegation-threatened Rennes.

The victory could be a lifeline for Rennes, who climbed to 14th position in the 18-team league thanks to two goals from Olivier Sorin and one each for Dominique Arribage and Toifouli Maoulida.

Paris Saint Germain stay third and trail Lens by six points after drawing 1-1 with reigning champions Nantes in a stormy clash at the Parc des Princes.

## Premiership

## Gunners cross Spurs hurdle

## Football

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger praised his players for keeping their cool as the Gunners beat neighbours Tottenham 2-1 at Highbury on Saturday to stay on course for their first title in four years.

In a thrilling end to the game at Highbury, Cameroonian midfielder Lauren scored from an 86th minute penalty to give the Gunners victory after Dean Richards had chopped down French striker Thierry Henry.

The spot-kick decider came just five minutes after Teddy Sheringham had converted a controversial penalty awarded when England goalkeeper David Seaman fouled Gustavo Poyet.

Swedish international Freddie Ljungberg gave Arsenal a deserved lead after 24 minutes of a fiercely contested north London derby to register his 12th goal of the season.

The Gunners now have 72 points with a game in hand over Manchester United who stay second, two points behind, after beating Leicester 1-0, a result which saw the Foxes relegated.

Liverpool, who did not play this weekend, stay third in the table with 68 points, four behind Arsenal.

Wenger saluted his side for staying calm when Tottenham levelled the scores with just nine minutes to go.

"There was a lot of tension and nerves but we found the mental strength to bounce back," said the Frenchman.

"It was an important victory as it is still in our hands."

"The fact that we won will give us even more belief. Now our performances will decide. We are very confident and we have a great belief in our team that we will do it."

Wenger gave a special mention to Lauren who took the penalty because Henry was hobbling after Richards' heavy challenge.

"When Thierry was down, nobody took the ball. But Lauren took the responsibility and did very well," Wenger added.

"He has scored some important penalties with Cameroon and he has the nerves. He is a strong boy in his head."

Manchester United had briefly returned to the top of the table while condemning Leicester to First Division football with victory at

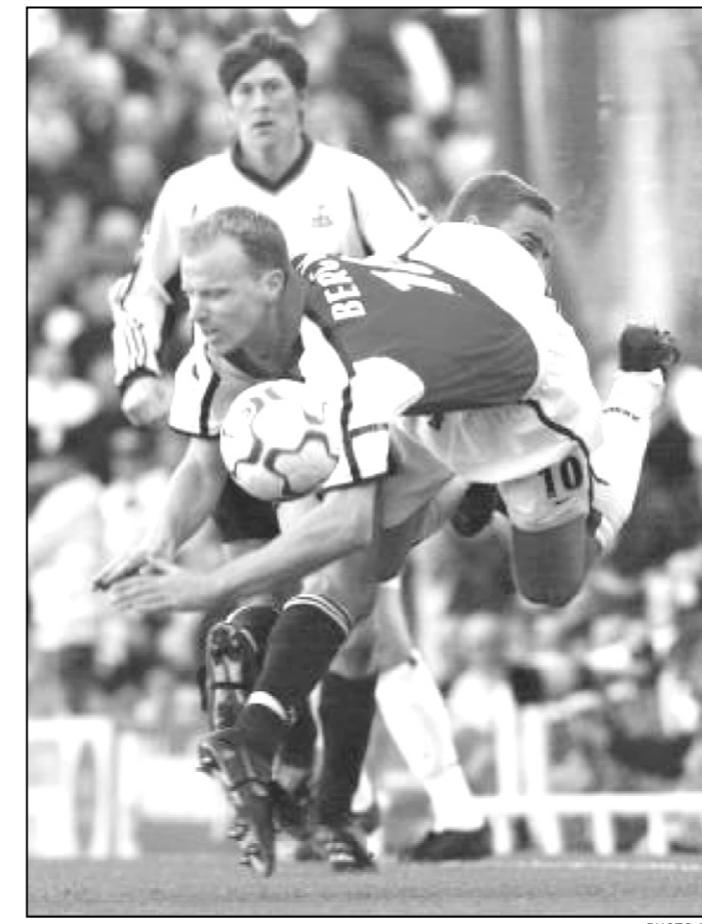


PHOTO:AFP

Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal's Dutch superstar, is thrown into the air by a tackle from Tottenham's Chris Perry at Highbury on April 6.

Filbert Street.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's 61st minute strike sent Leicester crashing out of the Premiership after six years in the top flight.

United boss Alex Ferguson was full of admiration for Norwegian international Solskjaer whose goal settled a match dominated for long periods by bottom club Leicester.

"Solskjaer has been in great form this season," Ferguson said.

"It was very difficult to keep your

shots down in the windy conditions like that.

"It was a great finish and it has given us a chance."

Leicester could be joined in the First Division by Derby County, who lost 2-0 at Southampton, and Ipswich who were crushed 4-1 by fellow strugglers Bolton with German international Fredi Bobic scoring a first half hat-trick.

Derby remain second from bottom with 29 points while Ipswich

Premiership's top six									
English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Arsenal 33 21 9 3 68 33 72									
Man Utd 34 22 4 8 83 44 70									
Liverpool 33 20 8 5 55 26 68									
Chelsea 34 16 12 6 63 32 60									
Newcastle 32 18 6 8 61 43 60									
Leeds 33 14 12 7 48 36 54									

## The 'Psycho' to hang up his boots

INTERNET, London

Manchester City defender 5 is retiring from football because he fears he would "embarrass himself" in the Premiership, the Evening Standard reported.

The former England defender helped City to promotion to the top flight with Saturday's 5-1 in over Barnsley confirming Kevin

United lead 2-0 from the first leg in Spain, but injuries and suspensions mean they will be without midfield stars Roy Keane, David Beckham and Paul Scholes for the second leg of the quarter final clash.

Veron has missed United's last three matches with a heel injury but Ferguson told the Mail on Sunday: "I have no worries about Seba."

"This is a situation he will love. He has been involved in many huge football occasions and he relishes in them. He will be up for this one."

"He would look forward to a game like this and he couldn't be coming back at a more opportune time for us."

Liverpool are four points adrift of

## Larsson, Celtic revel

dous.

"You never get used to winning trophies. It feels absolutely fantastic."

Lambert, who earned the man-of-the-match award, said Celtic simply outclassed their visitors.

"The first half was as good as we have played at home all season," said the Scotland international.

"It is a massive achievement. Everybody here knows how hard it is."

"Arsenal have some great players and seasoned pros but they have yet to pass the test of character in the run-in when nerves are tested to the full."

"They won't win at Old Trafford. If it comes down to the wire there will only be one winner."

Liverpool are four points adrift of



CELTIC TIME: Henrik Larsson, Glasgow Celtic's Swedish goal-machine, celebrates with his son Jordan after Celtic retained their Scottish Premier League title on April 6.

PHOTO: INTERNET

have 33 points.

At Stamford Bridge, Chelsea kept up their hopes of clinching a Champions League spot with a 3-0 win over Everton after a first half double from Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink after 26 and 44 minutes.

They were the Dutchman's 28th and 29th goals of the campaign and his first for five matches.

Gianfranco Zola added the third in the last minute.

Chesterfield boss Claudio Ranieri admitted Newcastle are still favourites to finish fourth, but said his side will do their utmost to pip the Magpies.

"I hope, I fight to keep us in fourth place but I don't know if we will make it," said the animated Italian.

"Newcastle have two games in hand on us but our will is to try."

Benito Carbone hit a 39th minute goal for Middlesbrough against fellow mid-table team Aston Villa at the Riverside in his side's 2-1 win.

Colombian striker Juan Pablo Angel equalised for Villa on the hour mark but England defender Ugo Ehiogu, a former Villa player, restored Boro's lead in the 65th minute.

At Upton Park, Paolo Di Canio opened the scoring against Charlton on his 100th league appearance for West Ham.

The Italian converted a 23rd minute penalty after he was brought down by Markins before Freddy Kanoute added a second for the Hammers in the 34th minute.

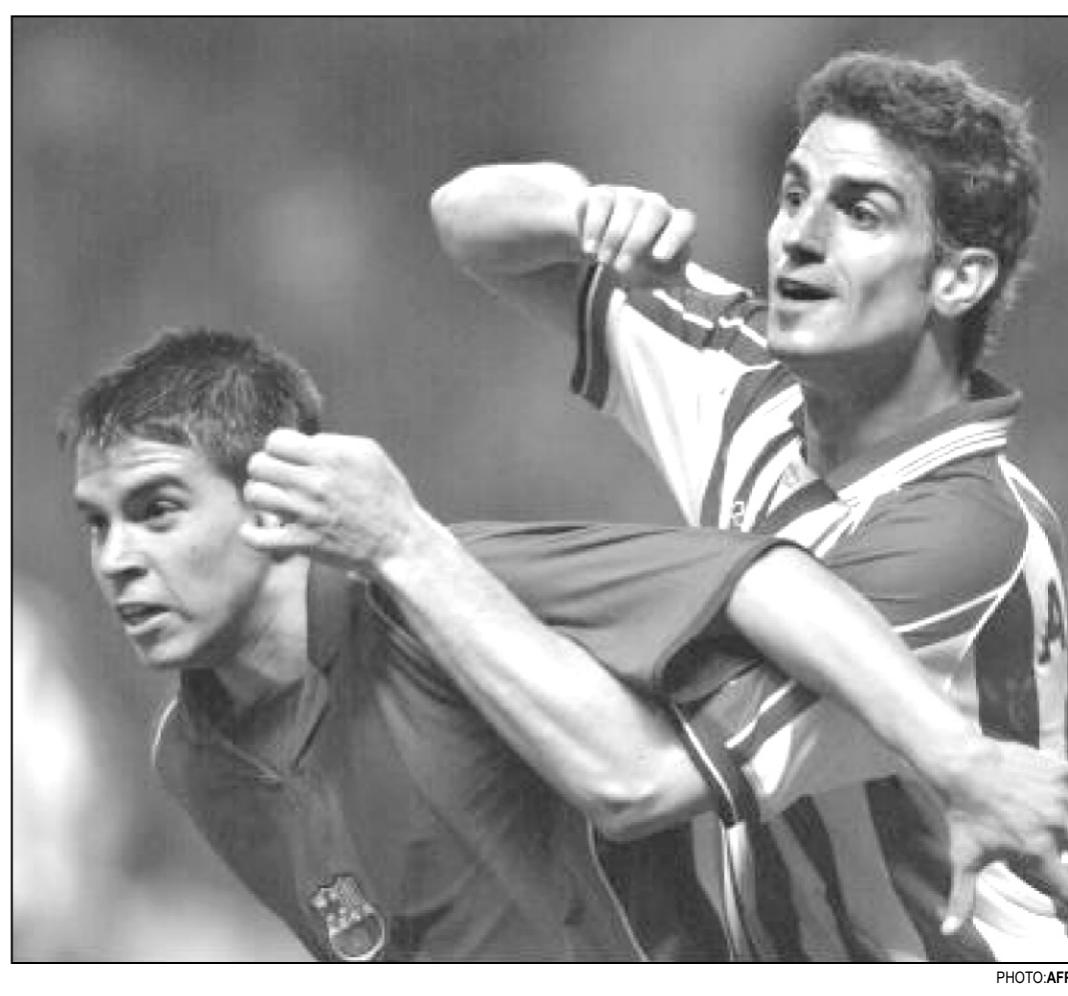
Charlton missed an opportunity to pull one back but Paul Konchesky hit a second half penalty over the bar.

After the match Di Canio was taken to hospital for a scan which will reveal whether or not his season is over.

The West Ham skipper collapsed in agony after twisting his knee and was carried off on a stretcher in the 69th minute.

Hammer boss Glenn Roeder said: "Paolo has gone for a scan but it appears that he has damaged the medial ligament in his left knee. He was in quite a bit of discomfort."

In Sunday's match, Leeds face Sunderland while, on Monday, Newcastle continue their push for a European place with a home clash against struggling Fulham.



Javier Saviola, Barcelona's Argentinian striker (L) under pressure from Athletic Bilbao's Aitor Ocio in San Mames Stadium in Bilbao on April 6.

## Primera Liga

## Real celebrate Figo return

## Football

AFP, Madrid

The post before striking the legs of Valleceno goalkeeper Imanol Etxeberria and rolling into the net.

Morientes rounded Etxeberria for the second goal in the 38th minute.

Figo made his return after a month out with an ankle injury as he came on for Zinedine Zidane in the 77th minute.

Within a minute, Guti had been fouled to earn a penalty and Figo stepped up to stroke the spot kick into the net.

Jean Francois claimed a consolation for Valleceno but Madrid looked impressive before they host Bayern Munich on Wednesday for the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final with the

Real Madrid.

Germans leading 2-1.

Deportivo La Coruna striker Diego Tristan was roundly condemned after a dreadful challenge on Manchester United star David Beckham in their Champions League match in midweek.

But Tristan showed his real talent by scoring a hat-trick in Deportivo's 5-0 thrashing of Real Mallorca. He needed just 13 minutes to take all three goals as Victor and Sergio added the finishing touches.

Deportivo are third, four points