

## 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 Ailton 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 Cheivo, 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 Sorlin and one each for Dominique Arribage and Toiflou 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 Freddy 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		

# 'Not so fast' says Giggs



Football

AFP, London

Arsenal might be in pole position, but Manchester United winger Ryan Giggs on Sunday sent a warning to the "over-confident" English Premiership leaders as they edge towards their first title since 1998.

"There is no question that Arsenal are in the driving seat but (Arsene) Wenger's over-confidence could be his downfall," Giggs told the Sunday Mirror.

"He's become too cocky, which is dangerous."

The Highbury side hold a two-point lead over United and have a game in hand after both sides snatched narrow wins on Saturday, the Gunners' outshooting Tottenham 2-1 while the reigning champions edged out relegation-doomed Leicester 1-0.

Wenger's side will also be

buoyed by the fact they have three of their five remaining games at home to Premiership strugglers Ipswich, West Ham and Everton.

However a visit to Old Trafford, and an away match at Bolton, could prove the turning points in any eventual slip-up by Arsenal.

According to Giggs, if it comes down to a decisive clash at Old Trafford, there will only be one winner.

"I see he (Wenger) predicts that Arsenal will win their remaining games and clinch the title before they face us," added the Welshman.

"And even if they don't wrap up the title before coming to Old Trafford, they will win it at our place.

"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

Arsenal and level on games played and are still mathematically in the title equation.

Meanwhile, United boss Alex Ferguson says Juan Sebastian Veron will be fit to play in Wednesday's Champions League clash with Deportivo La Coruna.

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 revels 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."

## 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



STUART PEARCE

Keegan's side as First Division champions.

The 39-year-old, nicknamed the 'Psycho' for his uncompromising and tough style of play, told Radio 5 Live's Sportsweek programme: "I would embarrass myself in the Premiership. I'm a First Division player who gets away with it because of my experience."

Pearce continued: "It's a young man's game and you've got to be quick nowadays."

Asked if it would hurt to miss out on playing another season in the top flight, he said: "It would hurt me more to get in my car after a game having had a problem with a player who 10 years ago I would have had no problem with.

"It hurts me to play badly and to let the team down and I know that physically I'm not good enough."

"I was an electrician once and then someone asked me to play for England.

"I've been promoted with [Nottingham] Forest, played under Brian Clough and won promotion in my last season with Manchester City and I'm proud and honoured to have represented my country and the clubs I have done over my career and I feel very fortunate.

"I'll be sitting down with the manager and the manager will talk to the chairman with regard to my position but I won't play beyond this season.

"I would be caught out and I just wouldn't be good enough. The club needs a better player than me but if there is anything I can do in regard to coaching I am interested to talk."



PHOTO:AFP

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

## Primera Liga

# Real celebrate Figo return



Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid stayed top in Spain with a 3-1 defeat of city rivals Rayo Vallecano here on Saturday as Portuguese international Luis Figo made a goal-scoring return from injury.

Real have a three-point lead over Valencia, who play Real Sociedad on Sunday, after putting on a superb display of attacking football at the Bernabeu.

Their first goal was farcical as Brazilian international defender Roberto Carlos unleashed a fierce left-foot shot which rebounded off

the post before striking the legs of Valleciano 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 Valleciano but Madrid looked impressive before they host Bayern Munich on Wednesday for the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final with the

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 behind Real Madrid.

Barcelona's Argentinian youngster Javier Saviola underlined what he could achieve at this year's World Cup finals when he scored both goals in his side's 2-0 win at Athletic Bilbao.

Saviola will hope he has earned a first-team place for Barca's Champions League return with Panathinaikos on Tuesday after being left on the bench for the 1-0 defeat in the first leg.

The Catalans sit fourth after their victory.

Las Palmas drew 1-1 with Real Zaragoza in Saturday's other match.

# Barca want Ranieri



Football

AFP, London

Spanish giants Barcelona are attempting to lure experienced Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri away from Stamford Bridge in a bid to revive their flagging fortunes, according to reports here Sunday.

Barcelona, whose lost hopes of winning the Spanish Primera Liga title have topped off another mediocre season at the Nou Camp, say they have already spoken to the Italian coach who if hired would replace outgoing Carles Rexach.

Barcelona vice-president Angel Fernandez told the Sunday Times: "We have spoken to Claudio Ranieri, Javier Irureta of Deportivo La Coruna and Carlos Bianchi (ex-Boca Juniors).

"There was also some contact with Fabio Capello, but we could not accept some of his demands," added Fernandez, whose team's Champions League prospects were hit by a 1-0 defeat midweek in their quarter-final first leg tie at



CLAUDIO RANIERI

Panathinaikos.

Fernandez added: "We will finish this season and then the directors will take over from May and make the signings. Carles Rexach will finish this season.

"But yes, we have talked to Capello and will not be taking him on, and we are talking to Ranieri."

Ranieri, who joined Chelsea in September 2000, has an admirable track record in Spain fter he took Valencia to Spanish Cup victory and launched them on to the Champions League stage between 1997-99.

In previous years he also took Italian outfit Cagliari from Serie C to the top flight Serie A, coached Napoli for two seasons and helped Fiorentina to promotion and an Italian Cup.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	43 Eins, zwei, —	3 Pink-slipped	23 Poked with the patella
1 Discoverer's cry	44 Without delay	4 Establish firmly	25 Prom-night carrier
4 On the rocks	46 Only veep to resign	5 Train component	26 Sub in a tub
8 Type of snail	50 School area	6 Inventor	27 "Wunner-ful" band-leader
12 Whammy	13 Guy	7 Fender bender	28 Silly solo
14 Tower city	55 Menu phrase	8 Muffet's startler	29 Therefore
15 Earlier than	56 Staffer	9 Back talk	30 Mars' counter-part
16 School VIP	58 Card table call	10 Don	31 Equipment
18 Hero's award	59 Bartlett or Bosc	Passos trilogy	35 Visionary
20 Young Mr. Lincoln	60 Harbor structure	11 Cowboy's sweetie	38 Less sparse
21 Stare stupidly	61 Blue	17 Urban transport	40 Humon-gous
24 Downstairs		19 Farming (Abbr.)	42 "Mayday!"
28 School activity		22 Lean and sinewy	45 Conceal a gift
32 Anger			47 Kvetches
33 Bobby of hockey fame			48 Director Kazan
34 Cornered			49 Tinker-bell's handful
36 Actor Gibson			50 Upper limit
37 On in years			51 Fib
39 School publication			52 Okla-homa city
41 He took two tablets			53 Kyoto cummer-bund
			54 Flamenco cheer

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CRYPTOQUIP

V I J V X V V C C X A V R G V  
K J T X O J P X U D J A C Y G Q I U U  
I J Q X G P A X Q R U D X K J X P  
C U I R G T Y G V C O J A  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: THAT MAN MUST BE A NATURAL-BORN MOUNTAIN CLIMBER. HE IS BUILT TO SCALE.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: V equals T

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



PHOTO:INTERNET

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.