

## Serie A preview Baggio haunts Juve

### Football

AFP, Milan

Italy's favourite footballer Roberto Baggio again finds himself at the centre of attention Sunday as he and his Brescia team-mates stand in the way of title hopefuls Juventus in the penultimate round of games.

Juventus host Brescia in Turin only one point behind leaders Inter Milan who meet Piacenza at the San Siro while third-placed AS Roma, a further point back, face a tough home encounter with fourth-placed Chievo.

But while relegation candidates Brescia have naturally been overshadowed by the three-way fight for the Scudetto, there is no doubt that 35-year-old Baggio is Italy's most talked-about footballer.

Having defied doctors by returning to score twice against Fiorentina last week as a substitute the 35-year-old now bids to thwart the title ambitions of his former club for a second consecutive year.

Last year his equaliser at the Delle Alpi helped ensure safety for Brescia and inflicted a near-fatal wound to Juve who eventually lost out to Roma.

This year it's personal. Marcello Lippi, who has since replaced Carlo Ancelotti as Juve coach, is no friend of Baggio who has claimed Lippi drove him out of Turin in his first spell in charge.

Should Baggio strike again it would increase the pressure on Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni who has been inundated by appeals to reconsider his decision not to pick the player for the World Cup.

Juventus will also tremble when another name on the Brescia team-sheet is announced. Unheralded defender Alessandro Calori scored the goal on the last day of the 1999-2000 season that gave Perugia a 1-0 victory over Juve, allowing Lazio to

steal the Scudetto.

Inter coach Hector Cuper, meanwhile, has both a dream scenario and nightmare scenario for Sunday's home battle with Piacenza.

The dream is a long shot: Inter win the title with a week to spare as Juve lose and Roma fail to win. The nightmare would see Inter concede spot going into the final game.

Last week Inter were within two of going four points clear with two matches to play but first Juve's Pavel Nedved scored at Piacenza and then Chievo's Federico Cossato equalised to hold Inter to a 2-2 draw.

Now only a single point separates Inter and Juve as Argentinian Cuper strives to lose his reputation as perennial runner-up - he has lost two Champions League Finals with Valencia and one Cup Winners Cup Final with Real Mallorca.

"We have to learn how to better

#### FIXTURES

Sunday (1300 GMT): Atalanta v Perugia, Bologna v Lazio, Fiorentina v Parma, Inter Milan v Piacenza, Juventus v Brescia, Lecce v Udinese, AS Roma v Chievo, Venezia v Torino, Verona v AC Milan

organize our play and spread it out over 90 minutes, and keep our concentration from beginning to end" said Inter's Argentine captain, Javier Zanetti.

If Inter doesn't pull it all together in this 33rd and penultimate week of the Italian league season, the title race could go down to Serie A's final day on May 5.

"We must win these two games and we're in position to do it," said Inter's veteran midfielder Luigi Di Biagio. "I'm already anticipating a celebration."

If Inter was completely healthy, the title winner might have been certain by now. But with the status of

star strikers Christian Vieri and Ronaldo in the air for Sunday, it's not a sure thing.

The Italian national team forward sat out last week's match with a sore leg and the multitalented Brazilian pulled a tight muscle against Chievo. However, both practised on Thursday and looked in good shape.

Ronaldo admitted that he was still not 100 percent and a bit jaded as he had to play a number of games within a short period but added that it was time for him to forget about physical problems.

"Twenty long and difficult days. Quite a few matches, Feyenoord, 90 minutes against Brescia, national team and Chievo. Fortunately this week we were able to recuperate properly. I still do not have 90 minutes in my legs, but it is the moment to exceed our limits. Against Brescia I suffered from cramps in the second half. However physically I feel great and it is time to go over our limits."

Roma tackle a Chievo side determined to hang on to fourth spot and secure a Champions League place. The champions are struck by defensive injuries that leave Christian Panucci, Frenchman Jonathan Zebina and Brazilian Antonio Zago all unlikely to play.

Fiorentina, already relegated, host a Parma side determined not to join them while the same situation applies at Lecce where the already-doomed local favourites host a Udinese side striving not to fill the last of four relegation spots. At Venice another already-banished club Venezia host Torino.

Bologna and Lazio meet head on in a battle between two of the three clubs still hoping to deny Chievo a place in the Champions League.

AC Milan, the third of that trio, visit Verona who are not yet safe while Atalanta host Perugia in a battle between two teams in a match with no relegation interest.

"But that doesn't mean to say

the title at any moment. The fans feel that the team want it so much and they got behind us brilliantly. We are in the final sprint now."

Wenger was particularly impressed with the way his players refused to panic on Wednesday even after being given a rough first half ride by an in-form West Ham side.

Only an oversight by a linesman prevented Arsenal falling behind when Frederic Kanoute's 'goal' was ruled out just before the break even though the ball crossed the line

**FIXTURES**  
Saturday: Aston Villa v Southampton, Charlton v Sunderland, Derby v Leeds, Fulham v Leicester, Ipswich v Manchester United (1635 GMT), Middlesbrough v Chelsea, Newcastle v West Ham, Tottenham v Liverpool (1100 GMT)  
Sunday: Everton v Blackburn (1500 GMT)  
Monday: Bolton v Arsenal (1900 GMT)

before Ashley Cole cleared it.

Freddy Ljungberg eased mounting nerves with his 15th goal of the season when he converted Dennis Bergkamp's through-ball with 13 minutes left, and the Swede then crossed for Nwankwo Kanu to seal the victory soon afterwards.

Wenger was delighted with the way his players kept their nerve against a determined West Ham side.

"I'm proud of the boys as they dug deep again," he added. "There is a great resilience in the team and now it's even more in our hands."

Arsenal have now won 10 consecutive league games, equalling the run which took them to the title in 1998, when they also lifted the FA Cup.

Middlesbrough manager Steve McClaren saw Ipswich provide themselves with a Premiership lifeline in midweek and then suggested they are capable of beating his old club Manchester United on Saturday.

Ipswich closed to within two points of safety thanks to teenager Darren Bent's close-range effort in a 1-0 win over Boro at Portman Road.

But they will still have to beat either United or Liverpool in their final two matches to have a realistic chance of catching either Sunderland, Bolton or Blackburn and staying up.

After George Burley's side's first victory since February 2 - a 10-game stretch without a win - McClaren, former assistant to Ferguson at Old Trafford, said: "On their day any team can win any match."

"If they show the same attitude and quality of football they showed tonight anything can happen."

Meanwhile, Liverpool's assistant coach Phil Thompson has urged his players to remain focused on the Premiership title run-in and not turn their minds to the World Cup.

Many of the club's internationals will be heading for Japan and South Korea this summer but Thompson wants his team to concentrate on domestic duties, starting on Saturday away at Tottenham.

"We have a championship to go for so that should make them forget about all the things that will happen at the end of the season," he said.

"This is their bread and butter - challenging for the Premiership. The World Cup can wait."

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"I signed a contract with a Japanese TV station for the World Cup finals and I need to prepare myself for that," he said.

Leonardo, who played for several top European clubs winning the Italian title with AC Milan in 1999 and reaching the 1997 Cup Winners Cup final with French outfit PSG, revealed the importance of the World Cup had not really hit him until the 1994 renewal.

"I was born in 1969 so I was too young to appreciate the enormity of Brazil's win in 1970."

"I only realised what an enormous impact winning it had when we won in 1994," he said.

Leonardo added he would be devoting a lot of his time with Rai concentrating on their charity, the GoldeLetra Foundation, which raises funds for poor children in the areas of education, healthcare and sport.

The official magazine of European football's governing body,

positive.

"I began my career at Flamengo, whom I had dreamt as a child of playing for, and it is there that I draw the curtain on it," he added.

Leonardo, who also won the 1997 Copa America with Brazil, denied the parlous state of Brazilian football's finances had persuaded him to retire.

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