

Serie A Milan giants calling the shots

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan extended their unbeaten league record by securing a 2-0 victory at winless Como on Sunday to stay top of the First Division in Italy.

AC Milan remain second after winning by the same scoreline at home to Reggina and Juventus kept hold of third place thanks to a 1-0 triumph at Modena.

After absorbing plenty of home pressure, Italy international striker Christian Vieri settled Inter's nerves at Como, tucking home Sergio Conceicao's intelligent cut-back in the 58th minute.

Seven minutes later Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba's killed off the home side with a brilliant solo effort. The toothy South American cut inside from the left flank and curled a superb 15-yard shot into the top right-hand corner from an acute angle.

Recoba said the result was a little hard on Como who pushed Inter all the way before Vieri broke the deadlock.

"Como gave us plenty of problems and are a better team than their position in the table suggests," Recoba said.

"But when we scored they were forced to press forward and we enjoyed more space to play after that."

The Uruguayan admitted Inter's performance was way below their best, but was happy to take the points from an awkward fixture on a bumpy surface.

"Perhaps we do need to improve, but on pitches like this it's not always easy to play well," he said. "The important thing was to win and we did what we had to do."

Second-placed Milan kept on Inter's tail by defeating Reggina who had defender Fernando Vargas sent off for bringing down Manuel Rui Costa inside the penalty box in the



Rivaldo (Bottom), AC Milan's Brazilian superstar, celebrates with teammate Filippo Inzaghi after scoring against Reggina at the San Siro stadium on November 3.

20th minute.

World Cup winner Rivaldo took the penalty but saw his spot-kick saved by Luca Castellazzi.

Fortunately for the Brazilian, the alert Filippo Inzaghi was on hand to rattle in the rebound.

Rivaldo atoned for his early error however by netting Milan's second in the 63rd minute, side-footing in from eight yards out.

Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf said playing against 10 men proved to be more difficult than he would have hoped.

"It was a strange game because we lost our momentum after taking the lead," said the former Inter Milan star.

"But we recovered in the second half and it was nice to get a win after

successive defeats against Lens (in the Champions League) and Chievo."

At Modena, a second-half header from substitute Alessandro Del Piero was enough to give reigning champions Juventus all three points.

Juve midfielder Alessio Tacchinardi said the club's third victory in a week proved the Italian champions were back to their brilliant best.

"We've rediscovered the continuity we lost for a couple of games at the start of the season," he said.

"It was a difficult victory today because our Champions League win at home to Feyenoord on Tuesday took a lot out of us, but we know what to expect from this kind

of match."

Improving Lazio moved up to fourth thanks to Dejan Stankovic's late winner in a 2-1 win at Empoli.

Bernardo Corradi gave Lazio a 44th minute lead but Gianluca Atzori levelled the scores 60 seconds later.

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TOP SIX										
Italian league standings after Sunday's matches (played, won, lost, drawn, goals for, goals against, points):										
Inter	7	6	1	0	14	4	19			
Milan	7	5	1	1	21	5	16			
Juventus	7	4	3	0	11	4	15			
Lazio	7	4	2	1	12	7	14			
Bologna	7	3	3	1	8	5	12			
Roma	7	3	2	2	16	1	2			

Del Piero is divine

AFP, Rome

Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero said he asked to be dropped for this weekend's 1-0 Serie A win at newly-promoted Modena where he came off the substitutes' bench to score the late winner.

Coach Marcello Lippi agreed to Del Piero's request, so Chilean forward Marcelo Salas and Marco Di Vaio started up front for Sunday's league clash.

"Lippi and I spoke about it and we both came to the same conclusion," said the Italy international, who has now scored seven league goals this season.

"It is only right that players are rotated so that people can give their best throughout the whole season."

But Juventus' failed to find a way through a well organized Modena defence without Del Piero, so he was called into action by Lippi 11 minutes after half-time.

And the 28-year-old's introduction turned the match in Juve's favour, meeting Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved's free-kick to score with a rare header 16 minutes from time.

"It's always nice to come on and score, especially as this win was so important with Inter and AC Milan both winning."



DEL PIERO

Juventus' victory kept them in third place on 15 points, one less than Milan and four behind leaders Inter.

Lippi was very happy to collect three points from a tricky fixture which could have proved very difficult had Modena not had a goal disallowed for offside when the scores were level.

"It's difficult to come to places like this and win because teams raise their game when they're playing Juventus," Lippi said.

"We started well and had two great chances which Di Vaio and Salas missed. After that we struggled to break through because Modena defended so well.

"They impressed me very much. No team will find it easy here."

Lippi, who hopes to have injured French striker David Trezeguet back in 10 days time, said he was content with his side's position in the table after a slow start to the campaign.

"We've had a good run of results and we are well placed behind the top two," he added.

"But we need to maintain this level of consistency and be more clinical in front of goal."

Scottish Premiership Celtic blitzkrieg

AFP, Glasgow

John Hartson made an emphatic case for a regular starting place at Celtic with a four-goal blitz as the Scottish champions thumped stricken Aberdeen 7-0 on Sunday.

The Welsh international's performance of a powerful display that moved Martin O'Neill's side back to within one point of leaders Rangers at the top of the Scottish Premier League.

Hartson, who has hinted he might leave Parkhead if he does not get regular first team football, scored twice in either half to take his season's tally to an astonishing ten goals in four starts.

Aberdeen had been forced to postpone their midweek League Cup tie with Motherwell after a flu bug wiped out their squad and they were laid low again by a Celtic side on a high after their UEFA Cup win over Blackburn.

Things might have been different but for another impressive display from Rab Douglas, the Celtic goalkeeper who prevented Aberdeen going ahead after only five minutes.

Russell Anderson flicked on Roberto Bisconti's corner into the path of Derek Young and his shot was kept out by the Scottish number one from point-blank range.

Aberdeen continued to threaten but Hartson's 26th minute header from Steve Guppy's cross changed the pattern of the match.

Nine minutes later, Henrik Larsson sprung the off-side trap to run onto Guppy's throughball and he centred for Hartson to side foot home from close range.

After Larsson had claimed his 20th goal of the season with a free-kick two minutes before the break, Hartson completed his hat-trick in the 51st minute.

Big defender Bobo Balde got in on the act in the 71st minute, Hartson got his fourth ten minutes later and Shaun Maloney - who was overlooked by Aberdeen as a youngster growing up in the city - completed the rout four minutes from time.

Hearts meanwhile followed up their 5-1 drubbing of Edinburgh rivals Hibs on the opening day of the season with a late smash-and-grab operation at Easter Road to move into third place alongside Dunfermline.

Premiership Gunners' sigh of relief

Football

AFP, London

A French connection helped Arsenal end their worst run in nearly two decades with a 1-0 win at Fulham on Sunday, cutting Liverpool's lead in the Premiership back to four points.

Manchester United, 2-1 winners over Southampton on Saturday, were left on their own in third place after the two teams behind them, Spurs and Chelsea, fought out a goalless draw at White Hart Lane.

After losing four on the trot for the first time since 1983, Arsenal returned to winning ways with the help of a bizarre own goal by Steve Marlet.

Fulham looked to be out of danger when French striker Thierry Henry failed to get any height on his 31st minute corner.

But as it arrived in the six-yard box, Henry's international teammate Marlet took a huge swing at the ball and sliced it past his own goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar.

"It's a massive win for us because we came here in a must-win situation," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger admitted.

"That's why I believe the boys were fantastic today. They showed great concentration and great determination. Maybe it was not the greatest game in a footballistic (sic) sense but we had to dig, dig deep for this win."

Arsenal's recent slump has been all the more traumatic because it

has come in the wake of a spectacular start to the season which had Wenger, and a number of pundits, talking about the possibility of the double winners going through the entire campaign unbeaten.

"When you win for such a long time and then you can't win, of course it is a shock to the system. So it is a relief to win again."

TOP SIX

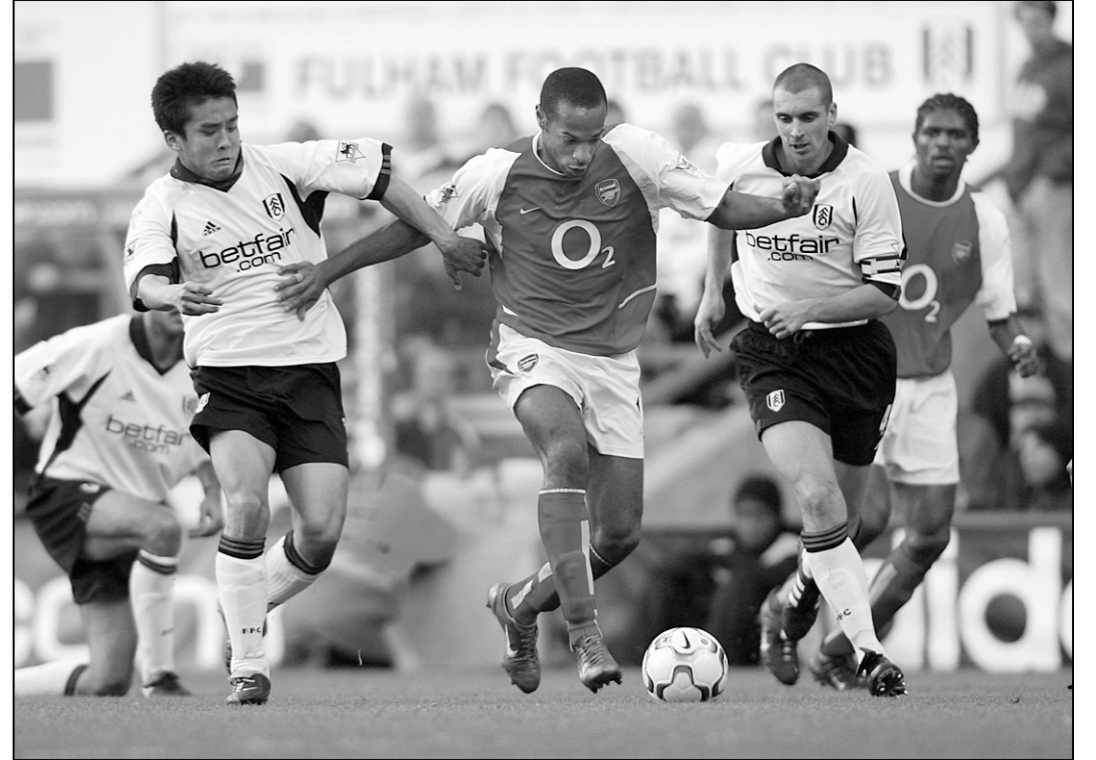
English Premier League standings after Sunday's matches (played, won, lost, drawn, goals for, goals against, points):

Liverpool	12	9	0	3	24	9	30
Arsenal	12	8	2	2	27	13	26
United	12	6	2	4	16	9	22
Chelsea	12	5	2	5	20	12	20
Tottenham	12	6	4	2	17	16	20
Everton	12	6	4	2	15	15	20

Marlet's own goal was a cruel blow for Fulham, who might have had a 9th minute penalty when former Arsenal forward Luis Boa Morte was bundled off the ball by Sol Campbell.

The Cottagers were also left to rue a first minute miss by full-back Steve Finnan, who headed Steed Malbranque's cross over the bar from only six yards.

The goal seemed to settle Arsenal's nerves and they might have gone further ahead in the 36th minute when Sylvain Wiltord picked out Freddie Ljungberg with an exquisite chip over the top of the Fulham defence.



Arsenal ace Thierry Henry (C) trying to burst through Fulham's Junichi Inamoto (L) and Andy Melville at Loftus Road in west London on November 3.

Primera Liga Sociedad maintain form

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Sociedad maintained their three-point lead at the top of the Spanish First Division as a goal from Turkish forward Nihat Kahveci earned them a 1-0 win away to Villarreal on Sunday.

Nihat bagged his sixth league goal of the season eight minutes before half-time, reacting sharply at the far post as Villarreal failed to clear their lines.

Champions Valencia stayed within three points of the leaders thanks to a 1-0 win away to a much improved Espanyol, Brazilian fullback Fabio Aurelio curling in a freekick for the only goal.

It was a disappointing weekend for the other title hopefuls, however. Celta Vigo suffered a 2-1 defeat at Athletic Bilbao, while Real Madrid could manage no better than a goalless draw away to Deportivo Coruna on Saturday.

Barcelona dropped further off the pace as they needed a Fernando Navarro header five minutes from time to snatch a 1-1 draw at Racing Santander in Sunday's late game.

Racing took the lead after just 75 seconds with a freak Javi Guerrero

goal after a Phillip Cocu clearance had deflected back into the area to give him a free header.

Patrick Kluivert and Juan Roman Riquelme both missed good chances before the Argentine playmaker swung over the free kick for the fullback Navarro to equalise.

After eight games, Real Sociedad lead the standings with 20 points, followed by Valencia on 17.

Real Mallorca's fifth successive

TOP SIX

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

Sociedad	8	6	0	2	20	12	20
Valencia	8	5	1	2	17	5	17
Mallorca	8	5	3	0	11	10	15
Celta	8	4	2	2	11	6	14
Betis	8	3	1	4	16	9	13
Real	8	3	1	4	14	8	13

victory, 3-1 away to Valladolid on Saturday, took them to third on 15 points, with Celta Vigo now fourth a point further back.

Real Betis moved up to fifth on 13 points, ahead of Real Madrid and Deportivo Coruna on goal difference, after a 3-0 win at home to Malaga.

Real Madrid, the overwhelming

favorites for the title at the start of the season, are now seven points behind Real Sociedad.

Barcelona are a point behind their arch-rivals from the capital in eighth spot.

None of the leading sides played particularly well in the eighth round of matches, with Real Sociedad and Valencia moving clear at the top despite showing only flashes of brilliance.

Real Sociedad's sixth victory of the season was based on an immense work rate in the first half.

Villarreal were never able to feel comfortable in possession, with the Real Sociedad forward partnership of Dmitry Khokhlov and Nihat tracking back every time the ball was lost.

"That was one of the best away games we've played," said Real's French coach Raynald Denoueix.

"We wanted to keep up the same pressure that we showed in the first half but Villarreal were working hard as well.

"It's a very satisfying win. We're on exactly the right lines."

Valencia had the bulk of the possession in their game against Espanyol but were going nowhere before Aurelio's excellent free kick put them ahead.

The visitors then concentrated on tight defence and clinched the win despite a couple of promising runs from Raul Tamudo.

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A break for Beckham

AFP, London

David Beckham could have a week off football in the wake of an alleged plot to kidnap his wife.

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson is set to field a weakened team against Leicester on Tuesday in the lightly regarded English League Cup.

That means key midfielder Beckham is all set to miss the match while he is also suspended for Saturday's derby match against Manchester City at Maine Road.

And he might sit out next week's final first round Champions League match against Bayer Leverkusen as United have already qualified for the second phase.

England captain Beckham is due to meet Ferguson later Monday to discuss his immediate plans.

Meanwhile Ferguson confirmed he would again be fielding a second string side in the League Cup, a tournament many leading club managers have little time for as they chase more valuable prizes.

Since losing to Aston Villa in the 1994 final, United have suffered 'upset' defeats in the League Cup against York City and Leicester among other reverses.

But Ferguson insisted Monday: "I will be playing a mixture of first team and reserves."

"We have been unlucky in the Worthington (League) Cup over the years, getting away draws to Arsenal, Aston Villa and Sunderland," Ferguson said.

"Being away from home when you have younger players in your team makes it much more difficult. Although we have played very well in those games, we have been knocked out."

When Ferguson last picked an under-strength team, against Maccabi Haifa in last week's Champions League match in Cyprus, the Israelis won 3-0.

Vieri caught by TV!

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan striker Christian Vieri could become the latest player to face trial by television after the Italian international was caught on camera stamping an opponent.

Vieri was seen treading on Ezio Brevi's outstretched leg as the Como defender lay on the ground during Inter's 2-0 win at the Giuseppe Sinigaglia stadium on Sunday.

The Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) rules state that television evidence can only be used if the referee did not witness the incident.

Pierluigi Collina, who refereed this year's World Cup, was close to the incident, but it was not clear whether he actually saw what Vieri did to Brevi.

Therefore Collina's report, which will be submitted to the FIGC this week, will decide whether Vieri faces punishment.

If Vieri is suspended he will join Paolo Maldini, Alessio Tacchinardi, Igor Tudor and Luigi Di Biagio, who have all been suspended for similar crimes this season that were caught on camera.

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United have been linked to a trio of Brazilian stars, including England's World Cup nemesis Ronaldinho and former European golden boot winner Mario Jardel.

United boss Alex Ferguson has been given a green light to sign a



RONALDINHO

new striker once the transfer window reopens on January 1.

And according to Sunday's News of the World, Jardel could be on his way to Old Trafford after falling out with his current club Sporting Lisbon.

"There has been interest from Italy and Spain, but Manchester are in front," Sporting boss Laszlo Boloni was quoted by the newspaper as saying.

Jardel, 28, was Europe's top scorer last year with 42 goals from 34 games.

But he has been sidelined this season after telling the club he

was too depressed to stay in Portugal following the break-up of his marriage.

The Mail on Sunday claimed Ferguson has set his sights on Ronaldinho and that the Brazilian's French club Paris Saint-Germain had already been sounded out on a transfer fee that would be likely to top 40 million dollars.

Ronaldinho, who was instrumental in Brazil's World Cup



KAKA

triumph in the summer, is currently enjoying his best season yet at PSG, scoring twice in the 3-0 humbling of Marseille last weekend.

But his relations with coach Luis Fernandez have been strained at times and he could be tempted by a move to a bigger club.

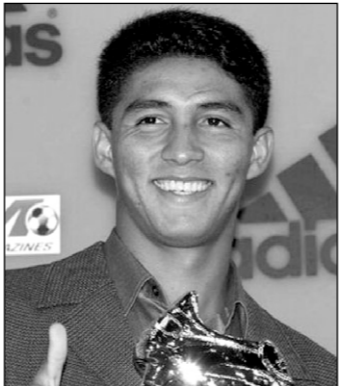
The third Brazilian reportedly targeted by United is 20-year-old Sao Paulo striker Kaka, who was a member of the World Cup squad.

News of United's interest in him came from the Manchester Evening News, which is generally

well informed about Ferguson's plans.

The United manager has said he would consider signing a striker who has already played in the Champions League this season, even though this would mean they could only play in domestic games.

The Brazilian trio however are all available for Champions League duty, making them more attractive options.



MARIO JARDEL

Another potential target identified by the British media is Argentinian teenager Fernando Cavenaghi.

The River Plate 19-year-old is earning a reputation as the kind of finisher Ferguson needs as a regular partner for Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Ferguson is an avid admirer of the technique of Latin American players and has been a stern defender of Argentina's Juan Veron and Uruguayan Diego Forlan, and despite their problems adapting to English football.

League One Sedan spoil PSG plans

Football

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain's hopes of going top of the French First Division were left in ruins on Sunday after they were trounced 3-1 at humble Sedan.

Rocked by a 30-metre pile-driver from Sedan's Stephane Noro after just eight minutes, PSG levelled through Frederic Dehu - only for Ludovic Asuar to score twice after the break.

Despite suffering only their second league defeat of the season, the Parisians stay second in the table - a point behind leaders Auxerre but just ahead of Nice and Olympique Marseille.

But the defeat - the first time

this season PSG have conceded three goals in a match - was fully deserved as they failed to get to cope with more enterprising opponents.

Sedan's fourth win of the season moved them up one place to 14th, while Girondins Bordeaux, who drew 0-0 at Nantes in the final match of the weekend, jumped two places to 11th.