



Luis Garcia (L) of Atletico Madrid watches his shot entering the goal past Real Sociedad's Dutch goalkeeper Westerveld at the Vicente Calderon stadium in Madrid on January 25.

Primera Liga Sociedad halfway there

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spanish league leaders Real Sociedad retained their unbeaten record this season with a 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid on Saturday and were proclaimed the 'winter champions' in the process.

Second half goals from Tayfun Korkut and Darko Kovacevic ensured three points for the visiting Basques, the latter responding to an Atletico equaliser from Luis Garcia.

Sociedad have 43 points from their 19 games while second-placed Real Madrid lie six points in arrears but have a game in hand and play at Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

After a first half of intermittent excitement, the game moved up a gear after the break.

Only 90 seconds had elapsed before Sociedad broke the deadlock.

Spanish international winger Javier De Pedro sent a pass in from the left and Tayfun crept in unmarked to stab the ball past Atletico goalkeeper Mono Burgos.

However, the hosts wasted little

time in getting back on level terms.

Two minutes later, Luis Garcia darted down the left wing and fired the ball under Sander Westerveld's body from an acute angle.

Kovacevic then headed his 11th goal of the season just after the hour, connecting with an Aitor Lopez Rekarte cross from the right touchline.

The Yugoslav striker, and arguably the most consistently dangerous header of the ball in the top flight of Spanish football, had gone close to giving Sociedad the lead a minute before half-time but headed a corner against the upright.

However, it was Westerveld who was Real Sociedad's true star on Saturday.

The Dutch goalkeeper saved his second penalty in as many weeks, parrying Fernando Correa's effort midway through the first half, after Bjorn Kvarme had felled Fernando Torres.

Westerveld also stopped a vicious, rasping, long-range thunderbolt from Correa early in the second half which few 'keepers could have contained, and had a series of excellent saves late in the game.

Nevertheless, Sociedad will not

be considering themselves the champions just yet.

They have twice before led the league at its halfway point, albeit in the 1930s, only to slip up down the home straight.

By contrast, the two seasons they took the title, in the consecutive years of 1981 and 1982, they came from behind in the second half of the season.

Among the key matches on Sunday is Barcelona's visit to Celta Vigo with the job of Barca coach Louis Van Gaal in jeopardy.

The struggling Catalans lie 10th and have lost more games than they have won in the league this season.

TOP SIX
Spanish football league table after Saturday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Sociedad	19	127	0	39	21	43
Real	18	107	1	39	18	37
Valencia	18	9	5	4	31	16
Deportivo	18	9	5	4	26	21
Betis	18	8	6	4	29	21
Celta	18	8	3	7	20	18

Nevertheless, Sociedad will not

Bundesliga

Berlin upset Dortmund plans

Football

AFP, Berlin

Reigning German champions Borussia Dortmund blew their chance of gaining ground on league leaders Bayern Munich when they were pipped 2-1 by Hertha Berlin as the Bundesliga returned to action on Saturday.

With Bayern playing Borussia Monchengladbach on Sunday, Dortmund could have closed the six-point gap but Hungarian international Pal Dardai put Berlin ahead in the capital after 69 minutes.

Jan Koller's header pulled Dortmund level with 10 minutes to play before Brazilian midfielder Marcelinho scored the winner with his head in the final minute.

Dortmund coach Matthias Sammer blasted his players for a lacklustre performance after the six-

week winter break.

"We made too many mistakes. My team needs to understand that the Bundesliga didn't end on the 18th match day," said Sammer.

Dortmund also lost second place in the table to Werder Bremen, who drew 2-2 at home to Arminia Bielefeld, all the goals coming in a frantic first half.

Ukrainian veteran Viktor Skripnik opened the scoring for Bremen in the third minute before Senegalese striker Mamadou Diabang equalised.

The league's top scorer, Brazilian striker Ailton, put Werder ahead with a penalty on 36 minutes for his 14th strike of the season but the South Korean international Cha Du Ri equalised for Bielefeld five minutes before half-time.

The 22-year-old son of one of South Korea's best ever players, Cha Bum Kun, has had a disappointing season but he used his strength to knock in the chance from

inside the area and gave his newly promoted side a point that leaves them safely in mid-table.

Schalke 04 consolidated fourth place with a 2-1 win away to VfL Wolfsburg while VfB Stuttgart beat financially-crippled club Kaiserslautern 2-1 away to hold on to fifth position.

A hat-trick from Markus Schrot fired 1860 Munich to a 4-1 win over Hansa Rostock which keeps the Bavarian club in contention for a place in Europe next season.

TOP SIX
German league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against):

Bayern	17	12	3	2	36	14	39
Bremen	18	10	4	4	36	29	34
Dortmund	18	9	6	3	29	15	33
Schalke	18	8	7	3	23	15	31
Stuttgart	18	8	6	4	29	23	30
Munich	18	8	4	6	29	25	28

Nevertheless, Sociedad will not



Alex Alves (L) of Hertha Berlin being pulled by fellow Brazilian Evanilson of Borussia Dortmund at Berlin on January 25.

Crazy about Woodgate!

AFP, Newcastle

Premiership highflyers Newcastle United are to make a one-off eight million pound (12 million dollar) bid to try and wrest England centreback Jonathan Woodgate from cash-strapped Leeds United, it was reported on Sunday.

The Newcastle Sunday Sun said manager Bobby Robson had sanctioned the take it or leave it offer for Woodgate, though should Leeds accept their boss Terry Venables could leave the club.

According to the newspaper insiders at Newcastle believe there is a "70-30" chance of Leeds agreeing to accept the bid as they seek to reduce their estimated 80 million pound debt.

Despite having offloaded Rio Ferdinand, Robbie Keane, Oliver Dacourt and Lee Bowyer, Venables has been told he must still sell and with Robbie Fowler's proposed move to Manchester City and Seth Johnson's to Middlesbrough falling through, Woodgate is seen as the only hope of placating their bankers.

Robson admitted he had reflected on Woodgate's much-publicised problems off the pitch which resulted in him being convicted of affray over the assault on an Asian student for which he still faces a private prosecution from the victim's family.

However the former England manager said what was more important for him was Woodgate's ability on the pitch which has seen him win one cap under the regime of Kevin Keegan against Bulgaria and would have been more but for his court case.

"I have considered all the possible problems that come with signing Woodgate. I considered them with Lee Bowyer (who was acquitted) as well," Robson said.

"But my information was that Bowyer was only heading to London so I didn't waste much energy on him. But as a footballer he is first-class, just as Woodgate is - and that is my only concern."

"I like what Woodgate can do on the park and that is why I have gone for him," added Robson, who has guided his side into third in the Premiership despite dreadful away form.

Woodgate's ultimate ambition is to play on the continent.

"I'm one of those who eventually want to test their skills outside England," he told the Sunday Sun.

Arsenal made harder work of killing off Farnborough than the scoreline suggested.

A Sol Campbell header and a Francis Jeffers strike on his 22nd birthday had put the Cup holders two ahead before Farnborough were reduced to ten men with over an hour to play.

Christian Lee got his marching orders for scything down Jeffers as he closed in on goal.

That appeared to set the stage

FA Cup

End of surprises

Football

AFP, London

Dagenham and Redbridge's FA Cup dream was shattered in agonising fashion on Saturday.

The Football Conference side came within seconds of forcing First Division Norwich City to a fourth round replay only to be eliminated by a fluke last-minute goal.

A deflected cross wrong-footed the Conference side's defence and Norwich substitute Zema Abbey was able to smash home the winner from close range.

With fellow minnows Farnborough Town going down 5-1 to Cup holders Arsenal at Highbury, the cruel defeat brought an abrupt end to non-league interest in the competition.

"What can you say? It's a hard blow," Dagenham boss Garry Hill said afterwards.

Norwich have lost at home only twice this season but it wasn't tedium or a lack of discipline and concentration that have cost us the match. It was a wicked deflection.

"The boys are very upset and understandably so."

Rochdale, currently struggling in the bottom half of the Third Division, pulled off the biggest upset of the day when they eliminated the 1987 winners Coventry, who are gunning for promotion to the Premiership.

Paul Connor and Gareth Griffiths struck either side of the break to secure a famous 2-0 victory that left player-manager Paul Simpson praying for a glamour fifth round tie.

"We are in the next round and I want a massive one - a match big enough to get live on television and radio and make as much money out of it as possible because that's the way we've got to think about it at this football club."

Icelandic forward Heidar Helguson piled on the misery for Premiership strugglers West Brom with the goal that put Watford into the fifth round.

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Christian Lee got his marching orders for scything down Jeffers as he closed in on goal.

That appeared to set the stage

for a Highbury massacre but it was not until mid-way through the second half that Jeffers scored his second and Arsenal's third.

Rocky Baptiste then outpaced Pascal Cygan to earn Farnborough some extra respect before Dennis Bergkamp and Lauren completed the win.

Gunners manager Arsene Wenger paid tribute to Farnborough's efforts. "They had great resilience and fitness. I was

Leeds.

An Alan Smith free-kick four minutes after the break had put the Premiership side in sight of victory. But Mali international striker Mamady Sibibe equalised two minutes after Viduka earned a straight red card for elbowing Gillingham player manager Andy Hesson.

George Ndah and Kenny Miller grabbed a brace apiece as Wolves disposed of First Division rivals

Sunderland looked to be on their way through after goals from Marcus Stewart, Michael Proctor and Kevin Phillips put them 3-1 up with 20 minutes left.

But Andy Cole's second of the day and a last-minute equaliser from his strike partner Dwight Yorke kept Graeme Souness's side alive.

Sunderland boss Howard Wilkinson insisted his side had been robbed by poor refereeing.

"We should also have had two penalties, one in the first half and one in the second half."

Blackburn manager Graeme Souness was pleased with his team's spirit.

"We were dead and buried at 3-1

but we came back - that's the upside. Our defending was a shambles at times."

Paul Peschisolido put Sheffield United through with an 89th-minute winner in an equally dramatic seven-goal battle against First Division rivals Ipswich.

The home side had looked to be coasting into the fifth round when Michael Brown struck a stunning 25-yard volley for his second goal of the day to put them 3-0 up.

But a Thomas Gaardsoe strike, a Tommy Miller penalty and a Darren Bent goal saw Ipswich dramatically turn things around before Peschisolido snatched his winner.

At a trademark poacher's goal from Steve Claridge in the 17th minute put Millwall ahead against Southampton.

But the Premiership side survived to fight another day thanks to a 90th-minute equaliser from Kevin Davies, who ironically has spent most of the season on loan at Millwall and has only recently returned to St Mary's.

Millwall boss Mark McGhee and his Southampton counterpart Gordon Strachan were united in their admiration for Claridge's display.

"Last year I gave him the number 35 shirt because that was his age, and this year he is wearing 36," McGhee revealed. "Hopefully he'll get 37 next season although knowing him he probably likes to go on until he gets the number 40."

Gary Holloway (L) of Farnborough Town locked in an aerial tussle with Arsenal's Patrick Viera at Highbury stadium in London on January 25 during their FA Cup fourth round match.

surprised. Even when they had ten men it was not easy. They never gave up.

First Division Gillingham took full advantage of Mark Viduka's sending-off to earn a replay against