

Primera Liga

Real hail Ronaldo

 Football

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian idol Ronaldo shrugged off a thigh strain and a late fitness test to score a stunning goal in Real Madrid's 2-1 victory over Villarreal on Saturday.

Real's win means that they leapfrog Valencia to go top of the Spanish first division, but their lead may only last 24 hours as the 2001-02 champions have a game in hand and play host to Osasuna on Sunday.

Madrid have 46 points from 21 games with Valencia two points back.

Ronaldo picked up the thigh strain in Wednesday's 3-0 Spanish Cup win over Valencia, but he was still capable of unleashing a vicious shot from 30 metres to grab Real's second goal after 54 minutes.

Coach Carlos Queiroz preferred not to single out his star Brazilian for praise but the whole stadium chanted 'Ronaldo', 'Ronaldo', everytime the 'Phenomenon' touched the ball clearly illustrating his cult status among the hard to impress Real fans.

But Queiroz could scarcely contain his glee at an outstanding performance which will help silence a recent volley of criticism.

"Real were playing like a team, compact and dominating. We've shown our rivals that it will be very difficult to get a point at the Bernabeu," said the Portuguese coach.

Real have now won all 11 of their league games in the Bernabeu this season and were in the driving seat from the outset, although fifth-placed Villarreal didn't lack ambition and contributed to an entertaining game.

After a few early forays by the visitors, who were trying to exploit and expose Real's make-shift central defence, the reigning Spanish champions went ahead from Santiago Solari after 15 minutes.

The Argentine utility player, who has played everywhere from left back to centre forward but was deputising in the midfield for Zinedine Zidane, played a clever one-two with Luis Figo before firing home under the diving body of Villarreal goalkeeper Jose Manuel Reina.

However, Villarreal kept going forward in a bid to pull level and Real Madrid will have been grateful to keeper Iker Casillas for thwarting Brazilian marksman Sonny Anderson on several occasions.

Ronaldo's goal, a 30-metre left footed scorch, from an alert lateral pass by Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez on the left wing, meant Real could relax a fraction for the remainder of the game, although



PHOTO: AFP

Teammates converge on an ecstatic Ronaldo (R) after the Real Madrid superstar had scored against Villarreal at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on January 24.

their frailty at the back was confirmed when Villarreal got a late consolation goal.

Three minutes from time, Sergio Ballesteros rose high above a motionless Real defence to head home a corner, the defender's first goal for three seasons.

Nevertheless, Queiroz could afford to cast aside any criticism on this occasion.

"If we don't have people who defend well against headers, they are in the team for their other qualities. It is also only the second goal we've conceded (in the league) to a header," added Queiroz.

The game will be chiefly remembered for Ronaldo's thunderbolt, his 16th league goal of the season, but, to be fair, it was

almost the only contribution of the night for the league's leading scorer.

The player now universally known in Spain as Gordito - Little Fatty - was only passed fit earlier on Saturday and exhibited little of his usual acceleration.

Real's local rivals Atletico lost their chance to keep pace with the league leaders when they could only draw 1-1 at struggling Albacete but stay in fourth place thanks to Villarreal's loss.

Atletico opened the scoring when Nano Maceda scored direct from a free kick after 32 minutes, although the ball was helped on its way into the net with two deflections off Albacete players.

Albacete got their equaliser just before the hour when Atletico defender Matias Lequi turned a Libero Parri cross into his own net.

TOP SIX

Spanish league table ahead after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|----|---|---|----|----|----|
| Real | 21 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 40 | 21 | 46 |
| Valencia | 20 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 36 | 14 | 44 |
| Deportivo | 20 | 12 | 4 | 4 | 36 | 16 | 40 |
| Atletico | 21 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 29 | 24 | 35 |
| Villarreal | 21 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 28 | 24 | 33 |
| Osasuna | 20 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 21 | 16 | 30 |

Bycycle Silva no more

AP, Sao Paulo

Former Brazil star Leonidas da Silva, credited with inventing the bicycle kick, died Saturday from complications of Alzheimer's disease, doctors said. He was 90.

Da Silva had been suffering from the disease since 1974.

His bicycle kick, which requires a player to kick the ball from an upside down position, made him Brazil's first professional soccer superstar. His elasticity and acrobatic kicks earned him the nickname "Rubber Man."

Da Silva, who was later known as the Black Diamond, was the top scorer at the 1938 World Cup with eight goals. Brazil finished third in that tournament.

He also played for Brazil at the 1934 World Cup, where he scored the team's only goal before being eliminated in the first round.

Da Silva scored 25 goals for the national team in 26 appearances.

Born in Rio de Janeiro, da Silva played for Flamengo, Vasco, Sao Paulo and Botafogo. He also played for

Uruguay's Penarol.

He will be buried Sunday in Sao Paulo's Cemiterio da Paz. It was not immediately clear whether he left any survivors

Brazilian inspires hosts



AFP, Tunis

Brazilian import Silva dos Santos became an instant Tunisian hero on Saturday when he hit the winning goal in a 2-1 win over a battling Rwanda in the opening match of the African Nations Cup.

The striker's second half goal also saved coach Roger Lemerre from enduring another upset night after becoming a laughing stock when he presided over France's humiliating opening round defeat to Senegal at the 2002 World Cup.

Santos struck in the 57th minute after Rwanda, playing in their first Nations Cup, had gone into the break level after Joao Henriette Rafael Elias scored a brilliant free-kick to cancel out Zied Jaziri's opener.

In what was a tough-tackling match and both sides finished with ten men while Rwanda had six players booked.

"The Senegal match is in the past but I can't forget it," said Lemerre.

"But I think if we win this tournament I will be the happiest man in the world.

"We had to work very hard today but I am pleased with the way we played."

Rwanda's Serbian coach Ratimir Djukovic said that despite the defeat,

he was proud of his players.

"There were mistakes in the game but these things happen," he said and added that the team proved they can help put their country's recent murderous history behind them.

"I am also very proud that we showed that we are a united team and that we can play together."

Dos Santos, who looked lively in the opening moments, created the first opportunity when he won an eighth minute free-kick after being brought down by Canesius Bizimana.

But Paris Saint Germain midfielder Slim Benachour's drive was well saved by goalkeeper Ramadhani Nkunzingoma.

Nkunzingoma was then quick to cut out a cross from Zied Jaziri seven minutes later with Santos again hovering.

The Rwandan keeper then saved at the feet of Jaziri with the Tunisian player through on goal from Dos Santos' accurate pass.

Santos then had the best chance on 22 minutes when he was clean through but again Nkunzingoma frustrated the new recruit saving with his feet as he bravely closed down the striker.

Tunisia's pressure eventually told in the 26th minute when Jaziri, who plays his club football at Turkish side Gaziantepspor, latched on to a clever Benachour pass, broke between two defenders and smashed the ball into the top corner past Nkunzingoma.

But, incredibly, the Rwandans were level within five minutes.

They won a free-kick on the edge of the area and Elias curled a delightful left-footer over the Tunisian wall and off the post past the despairing dive of Ali Boumnijel.

Elias, who plays for Belgian lower league side Kortrijk, celebrated with a jig around the corner flag, Roger Milla style, much to the delight of the tiny contingent of Rwanda fans.

The turning point in the game came in the 56th minute when Rwanda had Abdul Sibomana sent off for a second bookable offence and from the resulting free-kick from Benachour, Sochaux striker Santos scored from close range.

Cameroon referee Evehe Divine then caused controversy on the hour when he booked Benachour for diving in the penalty area and sent him off for protesting, reducing both sides to ten men.

To their credit Rwanda fought on gamely, relying on tough tackling and quick breaks to try and disrupt the smooth Tunisian passing game and they could have levelled again in the 78th minute had Olivier Karekezi kept a cool head after being put clear on goal by substitute Jean Lomami.

Santos almost added a spectacular goal with seven minutes left but Nkunzingoma saved his overhead kick.

Group A is also made up of Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo who meet in Tunis on Sunday.

Robson not amused

AFP, London

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson has threatened to quit following newspaper reports of a club insider slamming Carl Cort's performances, the Sunday Mirror reported.

Robson was so upset by the comments on Cort, who is moving to Wolverhampton Wanderers, that he threatened to walk out if the 'club insider' quoted was not found and dismissed.

An article claimed Cort was dubbed 'The Invisible Man' during his injury-plagued time at St James Park.

Robson told the Sunday Mirror: "I will definitely speak to the chairman. I don't see why a club insider should be able to do things like that.

"I feel so angry about the situation. I'm livid about it. I'm going to see him about it. I will tell him how unhappy I am about this affair and the wording that was used about Carl Cort.

"He should really investigate where these sort of statements come from. If it is a club insider those statements are unacceptable.

"When I see the chairman I will tell him, 'Find the club insider and sack him! If you don't, I am going!' That's how bad I feel about that story."

Cort only appeared 25 times and scored eight goals for the Magpies after his seven-million-pound (12.8-million-dollar) move to Newcastle in July 2000.

However Robson dismissed claims that the former Wimbledon frontman had been as much of a flop as Spanish misfit Marcelino, whose contract was eventually paid up last season after a disastrous spell on Tyneside.

"He will prove to be a Premiership player and he might kick us in the teeth one day - and I hope he does," said Robson.

"That boy has gone from one horrendous injury to another - he was never Marcelino. He never gave me one moment of problems.

"We tried to keep him going with one injury on to another. He had a hazardous time, poor kid, went from one serious injury to another. He's not a hypochondriac, they were genuine injuries.

FA Cup

Big boys safely through

 Football

AFP, London

FA Cup holders Arsenal swept into the fifth round of this season's tournament with a 4-1 defeat of Middlesbrough on Saturday as Chelsea were given an almighty scare by non-league minnows Scarborough.

John Terry's 10th-minute header ultimately proved enough for Chelsea's 58-million pound starting XI to secure a 1-0 win over a Scarborough side that was put together for the grand total of 2,000 pounds.

Bruno Cheyrou scored twice as Liverpool went into the fifth round with a 2-1 win over Premiership rivals Newcastle at Anfield.

The millionaire superstars from west London did enjoy sufficient chances to have killed the match off as a contest long before the final whistle.

But a combination of good luck and the heroics of goalkeeper Leigh Walker ensured Scarborough came agonisingly close to securing a replay in the closing minutes, when they missed a golden chance to equalise and had a strong penalty claim turned down after William Gallas handled in the area.

Despite the frustrating finale, Scarborough manager Russell Slade said his side had deserved the standing ovation they received at the end.

"It was an emotional dressing room and the boys are rightly proud of themselves. The fact that we are disputing a late penalty against a Premiership side says it all."

Boro's battling performance also won praise from Terry. "We had our chances but at the end of the day they had a lot of pressure and made it difficult for us," said Terry.

Arsenal rested Thierry Henry but still had too much firepower for Middlesbrough at Highbury, a Freddie Ljungberg double helping the Premiership leaders to a comfortable win.

Boro had become the first English side to beat Arsenal this season when they won their League Cup semi-final first leg 1-0 in midweek but they

were only briefly in the contest when Joseph Desire Job cancelled out Dennis Bergkamp's opener.

Ljungberg restored the Gunners advantage in the 28th minute then headed home from close range midway through the second period.

Substitute David Bentley completed the rout with a superb strike in the final minute after Boro had been reduced to ten men by the sending off of George Boateng following a second yellow card.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger was delighted to see his side demonstrate a cutting edge without Henry.

"We know that Thierry is a very important player but today we compensated for his absence and played very well as a team," the Frenchman said.

France international Cheyrou has now scored four goals in his last five matches after being slated by Liverpool fans following some mediocre league displays.

He opened the scoring in the second minute before fellow Frenchman Laurent Robert levelled barely two minutes later with a spectacular free-kick.

Midfielder Cheyrou then settled the match just after the hour mark although Liverpool were indebted to keeper Jerzy Dudek who pulled off a decisive save to deny Newcastle skipper Alan Shearer in the second minute of extra-time.

Burnley's 3-1 win over first division rivals Gillingham meant far more than just a place in the fifth round.

The Lancashire club need to raise more than 500,000 pounds by the end of next month to avoid financial collapse - a sum they could easily generate with an attractive draw in the next round.

An Ian Moore header and two goals from Robbie Blake put the home side in sight of financial salvation before Darius Henderson got a late consolation for the Gills.

Bryan Hughes' 4th-minute strike was enough to see Birmingham into the next round at the expense of first division Wimbledon.

A double from England under-21 international Matthew Taylor gave Portsmouth a 2-1 win over Scunthorpe, for whom Andy Parton scored a minute from time.

Swansea, who had failed to score since the third round, produced two in as many minutes to come from behind and stun Preston in the biggest upset of the day.

Midfielder Dixon Etuhu had headed Preston ahead just before the hour mark but a 25-yard drive from Andy Robinson got Swansea level ten minutes from time and Lee Trundle secured a famous victory soon afterwards, continuing his record of scoring in every round of this season's tournament.

In the day's other games, Micky Mellon put Tranmere into the last 16 at the expense of Luton while Martijn Reuser was Sunderland's hero with an 89th minute goal that clinched a 2-1 win at Ipswich.

Coventry and Colchester will face each other again after a 1-1 draw.

Scarborough's defeat left Telford as the only surviving non-league side in the competition.

They were frustrated by the weather on Saturday, their home clash with first division Millwall postponed because of a waterlogged pitch.

A win win situation!

AFP, Sfax, Tunisia

Bafana Bafana of South Africa are guaranteed a handsome payout of 150,000 rand a man (about 20,000 US dollars) as appearance fee at the African Nations Cup notwithstanding their performance at the tournament.

Top team official Mohammed Mubarak told reporters that the South Africa Football Association have approved this latest incentive for the team.

Originally, the team's bonus was strictly based on their performance at Tunisia 2004 and in the event that they lost all three Group D matches, they would not have received any money for being part of the biennial tournament.

"This incentive has boosted our morale knowing now that we will be compensated for our sacrifice," said Belgium-based defender Aaron Mokoena.