

Primera Liga

Real owe Ronaldo two

Football

AFP, Paris

A last-gasp goal from Brazilian star Ronaldo, the second of a double for him, sent Real Madrid top of the Spanish table on Sunday, completing a 3-2 win at Valladolid after his side had been two goals down at the break.

but the second half saw a swift turnaround in their fortunes.

Within three minutes of the restart, Ronaldo nudged a Zinedine Zidane effort over the line to claim his 17th league goal of the season and a controversial case of what appeared to be ball to hand by Pena on the hour allowed Figo to blast home a penalty past Valladolid keeper Albano Bizzarri for 2-2.

Losada then skewed an effort

Valladolid were out to avenge a 7-2 drubbing at the Bernabeu earlier in the campaign and for a time it appeared they would do so hand-somely.

Yet Real had arrived with their tails up, boosted by a Spanish Cup success over Valencia which followed below par league showings at Real Sociedad and Betis.

The five points dropped in those outings had briefly handed Valencia

Real were pedestrian early on and fell two goals behind after a sterile opening period before Ronaldo put them back in the hunt to leave the meringues two points clear of Valencia, 6-1 winners on Saturday at Malaga.

England skipper David Beckham, who had one of his quietest games for Real before leaving the action 10 minutes from time, said the league leaders had shown great character in turning their fortunes around.

"It's nice to be in another team that can come back from 2-0 down. As soon as we started the second half I knew we had a chance of coming back," said Beckham in allusion to fightbacks pulled off during his time with former club Manchester United.

Regarding his late substitution, Beckham, who faces a gruelling month as Real prepare to take on Bayern Munich in the Champions League as well as face Portugal with England, said "I was tired - but there's no injury."

Coach coach Carlos Queiroz said Real had come through a stiff test.

"Valladolid's attitude was brilliant. They gave us a lot of problems. But we created a lot of chances in the second half when our movement was very good."

"We had to give our last drop of energy to pull off a very tight victory so we are very happy with these three points."

Valladolid went in front after 34 minutes.

Fernando Sales, finding space in a Real rearguard shorn of Roberto Carlos, crossed for Oscar, who drove low past Iker Casillas in the Real goal.

Four minutes before the break Oscar then rose to head in a Losada cross as the visitors once again left a void on their defensive left flank.

Real were lacking a cutting edge



PHOTO: AFP
Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo is jubilant as he celebrates his winning goal against Valladolid at the Jose Zorrilla stadium in Valladolid on February 1.

against Casillas' bar as Valladolid scented victory again and Beckham had a late effort blocked before giving way to Juanfran.

Just when it seemed Real would settle for the draw Ronaldo smashed home a poacher's strike and set the seal on a tremendous fightback.

In other early Sunday action, former Liverpool and Wales star Fernando Vazquez's midtable

the initiative which the latter regained with Saturday's superlative showing in Malaga, where Brazilian striker Ricardo Oliveira notched a hat-trick.

But it was fellow samba star Ronaldo who had the final say with his brace.

In other early Sunday action, former Liverpool and Wales star

O'Neil in, Fergie out?

AFP, London

Irish racing tycoon John Magnier is reportedly trying to get Celtic manager Martin O'Neil to replace Alex Ferguson at Manchester United.

Magnier, United's biggest shareholder with business partner JP McManus, is determined to remove Ferguson after he sued the pair over stardom to the champion racehorse Rock of Gibraltar, The Times reported Wednesday.

And regardless of any settlement that may be reached they have decided that Ferguson will go either at the end of this season or next.

Celtic's multimillionaire owner Dermot Desmond owns just under three percent of United and is regarded as an ally by Magnier and McManus, the Times reports.

Ferguson paid the price of his feud with Manchester United's biggest shareholder last week when the most successful manager in British football was forced to settle for a drastically scaled down new contract.

Instead of a four-year deal that would have netted him a total of 25 million pounds, the 62-year-old Scot instead put pen to paper on a new rolling 12-month contract that means he will be guaranteed only one year's employment after his current deal expires on June 30, 2005.

And Magnier and McManus, who have demanded an investigation into Ferguson's transfer deal and use of his son Jason as an agent, believe Ferguson can be forced out if United fail to win the Premiership this year after spending 130 million pounds on players since 2001.

United chief executive David Gill held a breakfast crisis meeting with Ferguson on Monday as the pressure mounted to end the feud with Magnier.

Gill and the United board are desperate for Ferguson to drop his legal action against Magnier, who owns 25.49 per cent of the club along with McManus.

But Jason Ferguson hit out at the Irish pair's attempts to discredit his father.

"I am very proud of what my father has achieved and I am proud of the way he has done it. He has sweated blood to put Manchester United where it is but I am disappointed to say blood is now being split over what is a private matter," he told The Sun.

"What has been said about me I know is part of a wider campaign to discredit my dad but I will not let that happen."

"It has been suggested that I am going to walk away because of what has gone on in recent weeks. But I can categorically state that I will not and want to say so to end any rumours that might destabilise this company."

"In all his years at the club nothing has been said about any transfers until now because of a private matter."

John Toshack, veteran of two spells coaching Real Madrid, took charge of his first home match since answering the distress call of tailenders Murcia against Real Zaragoza and saw his new charges sneak only their second win of the whole campaign with a 1-0 victory.

Murcia's only previous win came against Albacete in the opening week of October.

Barcelona, knocked out of the Spanish Cup in midweek, moved up to fifth place following a 5-0 thrashing of Albacete with goals from Xavi, Javier Saviola, Ricardo Quaresma, Edgar Davids and Luis Enrique.

Barca achieved the Nou Camp result without the suspended Ronaldinho and Michael Reiziger as well as the injured Patrick Kluivert.

And Deportivo La Coruna cemented their third place with a 1-0 home win over Sevilla thanks to a Diego Tristan penalty.

TOP SIX

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

Real	22	15	4	3	43	23	49
Valencia	22	14	5	3	42	16	47
Deportivo	22	13	4	5	37	17	43
Atletico	22	10	6	6	30	25	36
Barcelona	22	9	7	6	33	26	34
Osasuna	22	8	10	4	2	3	3
	17				34		

17 34

TOP SCORER

Leading scorers in the Spanish league after the weekend's matches:

18 - Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
12 - Fernando Torres (Atletico Madrid), Salva (Malaga)
11 - Mista Ferrer (Valencia)
9 - Raul (Real Madrid)
8 - Samuel Eto'o (Real Mallorca), Ariza Makukula (Real Valladolid), Sonny Anderson (Villarreal), Savo Milosevic (Celta Vigo), Nihat Kahveci (Real Sociedad), Ricardo Oliveira (Valencia)
7 - Walter Pandiani (Deportivo La Coruna), Villa (Real Zaragoza), Javi Guerrero (Racing Santander), David Karanka (Murcia), Patrick Kluivert (Barcelona)

Beckham picks Zidane

AFP, Madrid

David Beckham has described Zinedine Zidane as the greatest player in the world and nominated the French playmaker as the Real Madrid teammate with whom he links best.

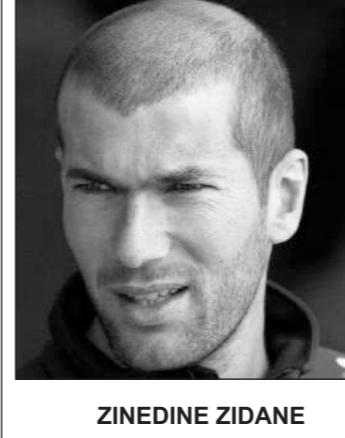
Beckham told Cope radio station on Tuesday that he loved playing alongside Zidane, who in December was voted World Footballer of the Year for the third time.

"Zidane is the greatest player in the world," said Beckham. "I get on well with him and he is the one who understands me best."

"He is the sort of player who makes special things happen on the field."

"Ronaldo is also special because every time he has the ball you know that he could score."

The England captain also fuelled the rumours that Real will



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

re-enter the transfer market at the end of the season to add one of the world's top strikers - his former Manchester United teammate Ruud van Nistelrooy, Thierry Henry, Michael Owen or Francesco Totti - to their formidable squad.

"For me, van Nistelrooy is one of the best strikers in the world," Beckham said. "I'd say Henry comes narrowly behind Ruud and Ronaldo."

"I've played with Owen for England and he is an extraordinary player and Totti is also very good. But it's not me who does the recruiting."

David Beckham has described Zinedine Zidane as the greatest player in the world and nominated the French playmaker as the Real Madrid teammate with whom he links best.

The centreback's instinctive

reaction took the form of a passable impersonation of Jonny Wilkinson, leaving referee Dermot Gallagher with no choice about brandishing the 54th red card of Arsene Wenger's reign at Arsenal.

Having enjoyed the better

chances when competing on level

terms, Boro appeared curiously

shy of exploiting their numerical

advantage and Arsenal twice

English League Cup

Boro show Gunners the door

Football

AFP, Middlesbrough

Jose Antonio Reyes's first start in an Arsenal shirt ended in tears as the 17-million-pound forward's own goal helped Middlesbrough complete a League Cup semi-final double over the ten-man Gunners.

Minutes later Schwarzer was

unfortunate not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to marked his first start for his new employers by winning a penalty after he beat Mark Schwarzer to Edu's pass into the box and was sent sprawling by the Australian goalkeeper.

First Reyes was unfortunate

not to