



WHEN NOTHING GOES YOUR WAY: (L) A downcast Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo after straining his thigh against Osasuna during their match at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on April 11. (R) Fellow ace Zinedine Zidane leaving the field dejected after Osasuna won 3-0.

Primera Liga

A Real-ly bad week

Football

AFP, Madrid

David Beckham's worst week of his professional and personal life plunged to new depths on Sunday when his Real Madrid team lost 3-0 at home to Osasuna and surrendered the lead of the Spanish championship.

The England skipper, who woke up on Sunday to more lurid allegations concerning his private life splashed across the British tabloids, found no hiding place as Real Madrid suffered only their third home league defeat in four seasons to follow their Champions League exit at Monaco.

Goals from Valmiro Valdo, ironically on loan at Osasuna from Real, Pablo Garcia and Mohamed El

Yaagoubi Moha were enough to strip Real of pole position after title rivals Valencia had earlier defeated Real Zaragoza 1-0 to go top by two points.

"I am sad and very disappointed," said coach Carlos Queiroz who now looks certain for the axe.

"Losing the first home game this season is a bad moment. Our morale wasn't the best after losing to Monaco and the Spanish Cup final, but the players are professional and they will recover.

"I haven't talked to the officials (about his future). My priority is with the players."

Beckham's first touch came in the first minute of the game and that was to kick the ball back into his own net in frustration after Valdo had opened the scoring making the most of a defensive mix-up.

Beckham, watched by wife

Victoria and son Brooklyn in the Bernabeu stands, endured a lacklustre start before almost pulling his side level in the 19th minute.

He unleashed a lob from the halfway line which floated over the head of a backtracking Osasuna goalkeeper Ricardo Sanzol only for the ball to land on top of the goal.

The England skipper then came in for some rough treatment getting caught on the side of the head by Garcia before taking a nasty knock to the calf.

Things got worse for Real when, first, Ronaldo was forced to limp off with a thigh injury and they fell further behind when goalkeeper Iker Casillas dropped a cross at the feet of Garcia who lobbed the ball in from the edge of the box for 2-0 just before the break.

On the hour mark, it was 3-0 when a long clearance from Sanzol

allowed Valdo to sprint away from Roberto Carlos and his cross was headed in by Moha.

Zinedine Zidane then had a goal disallowed before Beckham was convinced he should have been awarded a penalty after clashing with Antonio Lopez.

By the final whistle, there were huge swathes of empty seats inside the Bernabeu as fans showed their displeasure, although Mrs Beckham was still there waiting to confront her husband over allegations that he has had two affairs.

Miguel Angel Angulo scored the only goal of the game as Valencia won 1-0 at Real Zaragoza.

Angulo headed in a free-kick from Jorge Lopez in the 71st minute but the win was overshadowed by a knee injury suffered by striker Mohamed Sissoko which could rule him out of Wednesday's UEFA Cup



PHOTOS: AFP

clash against Bordeaux.

In two weeks' time, Real Madrid face bitter rivals Barcelona who kept up their push for a Champions League spot next season when they defeated Valladolid 3-1 on Saturday.

Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho scored one of the goals which set Barca on their way but then put his good work to waste by getting sent off.

Ronaldinho had already been booked for refusing to retreat the full ten metres from a free-kick and then received his second yellow card in the 55th minute when he tried to kick the ball out of the hands of Valladolid goalkeeper Albano Bizzarri.

Barca were cruising at the time having gone 2-0 ahead through Javier Saviola and Ronaldinho who found the net for the 20th time this season.

After the Brazilian's dismissal, Valladolid took full advantage with Oscar pulling a goal back in the 66th minute but Andres Iniesta then scored his first goal in the top flight to make sure of the three points in the 85th minute.

TOP SIX

Spanish league standings after Sunday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Valencia	32	21	6	5	63	21	69
Real	32	20	7	5	65	40	67
Deportivo	32	18	6	8	52	30	60
Barcelona	31	17	8	6	51	33	59
Osasuna	32	11	15	6	35	27	48
Bilbao	32	13	9	10	42	40	48

Premiership

Stalemate suit Gunners

Football

AFP, Newcastle

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger marveled at his side's inner strength after the Gunners' inched another step closer to the Premiership title with a 0-0 draw against Newcastle at St James' Park on Sunday.

Wenger's champions-in-waiting extended their unbeaten run in the league to 32 games this season and their advantage over second-placed Chelsea to seven points with six matches to go.

The result left Newcastle level on points with Liverpool, their main obstacle to reserving a place in the Champions League next season.

After a gruelling week which saw Arsenal crash out of the Champions League, Wenger hailed his team's performance.

"My players responded marvelously - they showed great mental strength.

"We're in a good position but we are not big enough to say we feel comfortable - we want to extend our lead and now have six games left."

He added: "We had three good chances to score but the difficult pitch played its part."

His Newcastle counterpart Bobby Robson laughed when it was put to him that Wenger thought Arsenal may have just deserved to take the three points.

"Arsene always thinks that!" he said before acclaiming the Gunners' spotless Premiership run.

"It's an amazing achievement to be unbeaten," he said, adding that he felt his young side were not a million miles away from standing shoulder to shoulder with Arsenal.

"Arsenal are where we want to be, but on the evidence of what we have already we're not far behind. What we

need is investment to get where they are."

The former England manager hailed "a stirring contest".

"There was hardly anything between the two sides. No one made any mistakes - there were no free presents here today.

"There was a big battle in midfield, and the defenders were on top of the attackers, nullifying any shots.

"We've shown resilience and character after a lot of football this week."

Robson picked an identical team to the one that drew 1-1 with PSV Eindhoven in the UEFA Cup on Thursday with one exception, Andy O'Brien coming on for Titus Bramble.

Wenger made three changes from the side that blew away Liverpool on Friday, with Freddie Ljungberg, Dennis Bergkamp and Robert Pires giving way to Sylvain Wiltord, Brazilian Edu and Jose Antonio

Reyes.

A largely scrappy first period offered up only the occasional chance - one coming early on for Newcastle when Alan Shearer crossed to Gary Speed whose back-heeled shot was only denied by Jens Lehmann's outstretched fingertips.

Reyes then set up Thierry Henry, who was playing after shrugging off a back problem, for a curling right-footed shot from 20 yards, the ball edging wide of the right post.

Despite dominating possession, Arsenal's opportunities were few and far between, with the best coming from Wiltord as half-time beckoned.

The France international, returning after a lengthy lay-off, pounced on Jermaine Jenas' attempt to get the ball back to keeper Shay Given but his dangerous left-footed shot from the penalty area going wide of the right post.

Laurent Robert' had a free kick fly past the Arsenal wall only to be saved by a diving Lehmann in the 50th minute.

In a one-on-one with Given, Henry deftly sidestepped the onrushing Newcastle keeper but despite an open goal his shot from the right hit the woodwork.

Shortly after the French ace crossed from the right but Reyes' header in front of goal was a lame effort directed straight at Given.

Both managers made late tactical changes in an attempt to break the deadlock with on Arsenal's side Pires coming on for Wiltord and Bergkamp replacing Reyes with less than quarter of an hour left.

But the tinkerings were to no avail and both teams will have been happy with a share of the points.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's French star Thierry Henry (L) goes round Newcastle United's keeper Shay Given at St James Park, Newcastle on April 11. But Henry's attempt went wide.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	32	23	9	0	62	22	78
Chelsea	32	22	5	5	58	24	71
Man Utd	31	20	5	6	58	31	65
Liverpool	32	13	10	9	48	35	49
Newcastle	32	12	13	7	45	33	49
Birmingham	32	12	10	10	38	38	46



PHOTO: AFP/INTERNET SOURCE

LADIES' IN FOCUS! (L) Victoria Beckham smiles as she watches her husband David in action for Real Madrid against Osasuna from the special enclosure at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on April 11. (R) Malaysian-born Australian model Sarah Marbeck, who claims that she had a two-year affair with Beckham.

Beckhams in conference!

Football

AFP, London

David and Victoria Beckham were back in Britain on Monday, plotting their next move in the face of a tabloid frenzy over the England captain's alleged infidelities.

They arrived at their sprawling Hertfordshire home, dubbed "Beckingham Palace," in the early hours of the morning, and Beckham was expected to make a statement after huddling with his advisers.

Speculation was rife that he might consider legal action, after a week-long series of allegations that soccer star Beckham, 28, was unfaithful to his pop star wife Victoria, who turns 30 next weekend.

In a public show of support, Victoria was seen in the stands at

Bernabeu stadium on Sunday as Beckham took to the field for Real Madrid for a league match against Osasuna, which they lost 3-0.

Beckham has dismissed as "ludicrous" claims by his erstwhile personal assistant Rebecca Loos, 26, that they had sex together after he moved from Manchester United to Real Madrid while Victoria stayed in Britain.

The furore intensified Sunday when Malaysian-born Australian model Sarah Marbeck, 29, told the News of the World newspaper that she had a two-year affair with Beckham that started during a Man U tour in Singapore in July 2001.

Meanwhile, the father of Marbeck said yesterday that he was devastated over reports involving his daughter.

Marbeck, 29, told the tabloid how the former Manchester United player had sent her hundreds of erotic text messages during their

relationship.

Her father, Terrance Marbeck, told reporters outside his home in the Perth suburb of Karrinyup that he had not seen Sarah recently and was unaware of the claims until he read them on the newspaper's website.

"I just came over from Malaysia, and I am just totally devastated by this," Marbeck a barrister said. "I just want to send a message to Sarah, she's not here, ... wherever you are -- Mum and Dad love you very much. And call us."

Mr. Marbeck, accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, said he had not heard from his daughter since the claims were published and did not know where she was.

"If you had a daughter would you like all these revelations coming out in the press, would you?" he asked. "I'm feeling pretty rotten about it."

He said he had not seen his

daughter for a couple of months and she had not confided in him prior to telling her story to the News of the World.

But he wanted to "touch base" with his daughter, who has not visited the family's Perth home since Christmas.

"I hope you will now leave us all alone to enjoy the rest of Easter," he told reporters.

They left on Monday after Mr. Marbeck made it clear his daughter was not in Perth.

The journalist who wrote the article confirmed Sarah Marbeck had been paid for the story -- how much, he would not say -- but said it did not make her comments less true.