# SPORT

of letting players like Makelele and

Campo leave the club.

avon

matches.

Far East.

quarterfinals.

defenders Aitor Karanka and Ivan

heralded players Perez made much

of his policy of 'Zidanes and

Pavones' -- signing the world's

biggest stars and filling the rest of

the squad with former youth team

players like centre-back Francisco

many of the youngsters are not

ready to carry the team while the

'galacticos', all of whom are nearing

or over 30, cannot cope with the

relentless cycle of domestic,

European and international

Roberto Carlos have looked jaded

in the run-in, a situation many play-

ers privately blame on an exhaust-

ing pre-season marketing tour of the

The hardest thing for many Real

Former striker Fernando

Morientes, who sat on the sidelines

last season and was shipped out on

loan to Monaco in August, was the

architect of the French side's victory

over Real in the Champions League

former members of the youth team,

Valdo, has had an outstanding

season at Osasuna and scored the

Navarrans' opener in their 3-0 rout

Samuel Eto'o, was sold to Mallorca

after barely being given a chance to

make his mark at Real. He scored

two brilliant individual goals as he

led the islanders to their 3-2 victory

but they never gave me a chance,'

"I'm only 23 and I want to play."

failings of this season is to reach for

the cheque book again and look for

more high-profile reinforcements,

with Ruud van Nistelrooy and

Francesco Totti being touted as

Many Real fans would be hap-

pier if the club looked to strengthen

the squad with less glamorous

possible new recruits.

Real's apparent answer to the

"I was worth a place at this club

African-player-of-the-year,

of Real at the Bernabeu.

at the weekend.

ne said

One of the most promising

fans to swallow has been watching

players the club decided to offload

wreak havoc on their old team.

Zidane, Beckham, Raul and

This season has proved that

Instead of relying on less-

## Primera Liga **Bravo Valencia**

### Football

#### AFP, Madrid

Valencia were crowned Spanish champions for the second time in three years, and the sixth time in their 75-year history, when they beat Sevilla 2-0.

With two games to go, Valencia have an unassailable lead with 77 points from 36 games.

"It has been a difficult month and (in February) when we were eight points behind Real Madrid I thought we were finished but this team has got a lot of heart, never gave up, and hung on to end," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez.

Real Madrid, last year's champions, are in second with 70 points following their 3-2 home loss to Real Mallorca on Saturday, and will end the season without a trophy for the first time since 1999.

The demise of last year's Spanish champions brought almost as much glee from Valencia captain David Albelda as the title itself. "Money isn't everything in this

life. We are just winners. This is a squad full of fine guys and we have been working hard all year to achieve this," said the Spanish international midfielder.

His remarks were a clear dig at Real Madrid's highly paid squad, who have the three highest earning plavers in the world, a list topped by England captain David Beckham. Benitez also found time to wallow

in the discomfort of Real, where he started his coaching career.

"Two titles in three years isn't easy, and especially when you consider the difference in budgets, he said.

With the championship at stake, Valencia nerves showed but an early piece of individual brilliance from Vicente Rodriguez and a late goal from fellow Spanish international Ruben Baraja were enough to give them the vital win

"We had to suffer but in the end

Aiax Amsterdam clinched their 29th

Dutch title after beating NAC Breda

2-0 on Sunday to leave last sea-

son's champions PSV Eindhoven

six points adrift with only one match

Ajax have 77 points and PSV 71

following their 3-2 victory over ADO

Den Haag. Feyenoord, 4-1 winners

at RBC Roosendaal are third on 65

be traced back to December when

they were eliminated from the

Champions League, leaving them with

Aiax's success this season can

Ajax Dutch

masters

remaining.

points.

**REUTERS**, Amsterdam

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS! Valencia fans celebrate after watching their side defeat Sevilla 2-0 on May 9 to clinch the Primera Liga title.

it's a night to enjoy. I hope we can keeper Esteban Andres from a repeat occasions like this for many narrow angle.

cracking a rare smile. Vicente showed the speed which makes him one of the Spanish first division's quickest men, by dashing down the left wing after 12 minutes before putting the ball past Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

championship crown.

PHOTO: AFF

years to come," added Benitez Sevilla came out after the break a different side to the lacklustre one in

the first half and put Valencia under tremendous pressure in a bid to get an equaliser and spoil Valencia's night. Dario Silva and Antonito Ramiro

both went close but Valencia hung on, despite their nerves.

Valencia were finally able to crack open the champagne after Baraja got a second goal for the visitors seconds before the whistle, after dancing past several Sevilla defenders.

"It was a fantastic way to end the game. Now we have got one trophy to our name, we can think about winning the UEFA Cup. that would be historic. commented Baraia.

Valencia face French side Marseille in the UEFA Cup final in Gothenburg on May 19.

At the other end of the table, Espanyol beat Deportivo La Coruna 2-0 earlier on Sunday to continue their great escape with their third win in four matches to move out of the bottom three.

It was the first time since early October that Espanyol have been out of the relegation zone.

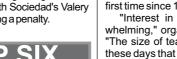
Ivan De La Pena provided the service for Maurizio Pochettino to put Espanyol ahead after just eight minutes and then De La Pena found the net himself 16 minutes from time, connecting with a Mustapha Hadji cross.

Espanyol are far from safe though and lie just one point ahead of Celta Vigo in 18th place, with Valladolid slipping back to penultimate position after their 2-2 draw with Real Sociedad.

Valladolid rode their luck to get a point though, ending the game with eight men and with Sociedad's Valery Karpin also missing a penalty.

### ΓΟΡ SIX

Spanish league table after all of Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn lost, goals for, goals against, points): 36 23 8 5 70 24 77 Valencia Real Madrid 36 21 7 8 70 48 70 Barcelona 36 20 9 7 61 37 69 Deportivo 36 19 8 9 56 34 65 Bilbao 36 14 11 11 50 43 53 36 14 10 12 46 48 52 Atletico



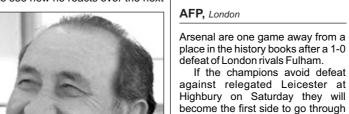
nothing. Christian Medical Service.

## Atletico's Gil suffers stroke

Atletico Madrid owner and former suffering a stroke on Sunday.

but his situation is serious," hospital spokesman Mariano Malillos of the Clinica Cemtro told radio station Onda Cero.

"He is 40 per cent conscious and is unable to move the right side to see how he reacts over the next



not modern enough in his coaching

AFP. Madrid Less glamour please!

Football

still has a lot to learn about football.

With David Beckham, Ronaldo,

Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo in

their ranks, Real are the most glam-

orous team in the world and clearly

With a host of hard-working,

high-quality professionals and a

meticulous coach who puts the

interests of his team ahead of that of

any individual, Valencia have swept

Real aside in the run-in to the end of

and in the UEFA Cup final. Real are

a distant second in the league and

Valencia are league champions

REUTERS, Madrid

second best in Spain.

the season

methods. They chose to replace the club servant who had steered Real to two European Cups and two league titles with the media-friendly former Real Madrid president Florentino Manchester United assistant. Perez is an expert businessman. He

Queiroz was quick to warn that his squad was dangerously unbalanced and the club should look to strengthen its defence.

His advice was ignored and instead he found himself without one of the linchpins of the club's recent success, defensive midfielder Claude Makelele, who was allowed to join Chelsea after he asked for a pay rise.

Real's only recruit was Beckham who started the season well enough as he raced around in the centre of midfield and proved there was a fine footballer behind the marketing

PHOTO : STAR FILE

THE 'GALACTICOS': (Clockwise from top L) David Beckham, Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Raul, Roberto Carlos and Luis Figo.

phenomenon. Coach Carlos Queiroz is likely to

However, his form began to wane as the season progressed, prompting fellow midfielder Ivan Helguera to say: "Beckham works very hard and is clearly a good player, but he's not Makelele and can't do the same job for the team that he did."

Helguera was then fined for comments questioning the wisdom figures at the back.

## Premiership

## Gunners a step closer

captain Alan Shearer having a late

Football

become the scapegoat for this

disappointing season but much of

the blame has to be laid at the door

It was their decision to discard

penalty saved by Wolves goalkeeper Paul Jones. Since clinching the title with four

games to spare, Arsenal have failed to reproduce the kind of form that has made them so difficult to beat. But they have kept grinding out empty net.

the results with the help of some good fortune and it was a similar story at Loftus Road on Sunday

"Fulham really wanted to beat us

backpass, the Dutch international inexplicably attempted to dribble the ball past Jose Antonio Reyes right in front of his own goal.

The execution failed to match the ambition and Reves easily took the ball off him before tapping into an

Fulham expended plenty of energy in pursuit of a draw in their

final home match before they return to their own Craven Cottage ground, but neither side carved out any real

## Benitez a survivour

Football Marseille

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez, who guided his team to their second Spanish title in three years on Sunday, cracked a rare smile after names Valencia beat Sevilla to clinch the

married with two children, may not

Perhaps some of the pleasure came from the fact that he had defied his critics who had predicted he would be out of a job this summer, rather than celebrating the first of possibly two titles. "An under-achieving season

could await," wrote the respected magazine World Soccer in

Gothenburg on May 19 to see their team play French side Olympique

> Last season, the Valencia faithful were crying out for Benitez's sacking, after Valencia could only finish fifth in the league, but in recent matches have been chanting his

The dour 44 year-old, who is



nearly 50 years.

there, even though the legs of 39 year-old veteran left back Amadeo Carboni are slower

new dimension.

The cerebral Benitez, one of the few winners of the Spanish first division ever to possess a university degree as well as the obligatory coaching license, readily acknowledges he owes a debt of gratitude to

## rivals Real Madrid.

champions at finding the net for This season, the defence is still

However, Mista Ferrer and Vicente Rodriguez have come of age to terrorise opponents' defences and new discoveries such as French-born Malian international Mohammed Sissoko have added a

2001: Real Madrid 2000: Deportivo La Coruna 1999: Barcelona 1998: Barcelona 1997: Real Madrid 1996: Atletico Madrid 1995: Real Madrid

onship on Sunday:

2003: Real Madrid

2004: Valencia

2002: Valencia

A list of the last 10 winners of the

Spanish league after Valencia

clinched the 2003-2004 champi

## AC Milan to play in HK

AFP, Hong Kong Italian champions AC Milan will head to Asia later this month for an exhibition match in Hong Kong, organisers announced Monday.

Milan, who clinched back-toback Serie A titles on May 2, will field a strong side in a May 30 match against Hong Kong outfit Kitchee.

Organisers said legendary former international and captain Paolo Maldini would lead the Italian giants along with prolific striker Andrei Shevchenko.

Milan will be missing their contingent of current Italian internationals, who will be absent preparing for Euro 2004.

But local officials said they expected a large crowd at the 40,000-seater Hong Kong Stadium as Milan play in Hong Kong for the

first time since 1996. "Interest in this event is over-

whelming," organiser Ken Ng said. 'The size of team squads is so big these days that the absence of a few players on international duty means

Part of the proceeds from the match will go towards building a hospital extension for the United looking more than a little foolish.

of Perez and his right-hand man Jorge Valdano. **REUTERS**, Madrid Queiroz's highly successful prede-

cessor Vicente del Bosque at the club president Jesus Gil was in a end of last season, claiming he was stable but serious condition after "I hope his life is not in danger

of his body, but we will have to wait

### Lique 1 **Giuly inspires** Monaco

only the domestic title to play for.

#### **REUTERS**, Monaco

Monaco captain Ludovic Giuly scored a last-gasp goal to hand Olympique Marseille a 1-0 defeat and keep the principality team's Ligue 1 title hopes alive on Sunday.

Giuly, his team's saviour countless times this season, pushed the ball home three minutes into injury time after Marseille goalkeeper Fabien Barthez failed to stop a powerful shot by Argentine Lucas Bernardi.

The somewhat fortuitous victory allowed the Champions League finalists to stav in second place on 71 points. two points behind champions and leaders Olympique Lyon with three games left.

The other two Ligue 1 title contenders won on Saturday, Lyon 2-1 at Metz and Paris St Germain, now third one point behind Monaco, beating Stade Rennes 1-0 at the Parc des Princes.

UEFA Cup finalists Marseille had been one-man down since the 86th minute after striker Didier Drogba was taken off the pitch on a stretcher with a groin injury.

Despite the tight scoring, the game was a lively, hardfought contest between two talented teams boosted by their fine showings at European level.

League final on Wednesday when they drew 2-2 at Chelsea while Marseille beat Newcastle United 2-0 on Thursday to ease into the UEFACup final.

Monaco's main chances came from Giuly, but the French international striker was denied by the impeccable Barthez until his very last opportunity.

At the other end of the pitch, Monaco's goalkeeper Flavio Roma also shone, twice making vital saves from Marseille's young Spanish striker Koke.

did not concede any goal. We never gave up," Monaco defender Gael Givet said

"We knew we were going to have tough matches until the end of the season. Tonight, we saw two brilliant teams," said Giuly

"The end of the league is going to be an exciting one. It's great for the fans and it's great for us as well," he added.

. They were not the only ones to

have got it wrong. Among his achievements, Benitez has repaired relations with club president Jaime Orti, whose parsimony with the purse last summer had annoyed Benitez.

The pair are now the best of friends and Orti has been seen clapping Benitez firmly on the back in recent weeks.

He also quelled dressing room discontent which stemmed at the start of the season mostly from Argentine pair of Roberto Ayala and Kily Gonzalez. The latter is now at Inter Milan In addition, his undemonstrative

but self-assured style has won over the fans, many of whom will make their way to the UEFA Cup final in



#### **RAFA BENITEZ**

have too many friends outside his own close circle but his professionalism has won the respect of everyone in the game.

Benitez has consistantly shown that he knows exactly what makes his squads' strengths and weaknesses.

Two years ago, he won the Spanish title on the back of a supersolid back four but the lack of goals meant they were one of the worst

and 1957), Danny Blanchflower

Benitez went through the Real youth system as a player before a brief career with other clubs in the Spanish third and fourth divisions.

He also cut his teeth on the sidelines with the Real junior teams before moving onto his first senior iob with second division Extramadura in 1997, who he then guided to promotion into the topflight of Spanish soccer.

"If it had not have been for Real would not have been here today, Benitez has said in the past.

It probably is not lost on Benitez though, that if it had not also been for Real losing their last three games at home, including a 3-2 reverse to Real Mallorca on Saturday, he would not have been where he was on Sunday.



JESUS GIL

24 hours

"Given his history of heart problems we just hope that he evolves favourably.

The flamboyant and outspoken property magnate was admitted to hospital in the Spanish city of Talavera de la Reina at 1pm local time and was later transferred to the Clinica Cemtro in Madrid.

Gil, 71, resigned as Atletico president in May 2003 after 16 vears at the helm. citing his health as one of the reasons that had

prompted his decision.

an entire league campaign unbeaten since Preston North End's 'Invincibles' achieved the feat in a 12-team top flight in 1888-89.

If the champions avoid defeat

While Arsenal were clearing the decks for a massive end-of-season party, Newcastle's hopes of ending the campaign with something to celebrate took a massive knock when they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves.

The significance of the result is simple: Newcastle must beat Southampton on Wednesday and Liverpool at Anfield on Saturday to claim fourth place and the final qualifying spot for next season's Champions League.

"It's a disappointing result, but we've got two games left and we have to think we can still do it," said Newcastle manager Sir Bobby Robson.

Newcastle's misery was compounded by the manner in which they dropped two crucial points,

and on a difficult pitch we had problems keeping the ball well and to be chances in an encounter that had a dangerous," Arsenal boss Arsene distinctly listless air. Wenger admitted after the match. Things could not have been "But I feel that the players at the

more different at St James' Park where Newcastle must have moment refuse to lose without really thought the three points were in the being at their top. We are just doing what is needed and not more and of bag when a Paul Ince push on Gary couse some heads are directed Speed gave them an 83rd-minute towards the European championpenalty.

Wenger said he did not believe his players fully realised what a momentous achievement it would be to finish the season unbeaten. But he was confident they would not stumble at the final hurdle

ships.'

"We are 90 minutes away from it. We will prepare well and we will give everything at Highbury. We have a very good chance."

Fulham were by far the livelier of the two sides but they paid a heavy price for a moment of madness from . their goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar. After receiving a ninth-minute OP SI

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points): 
 Arsenal
 37
 25
 12
 0
 71
 25
 87

 Chelsea
 37
 23
 7
 7
 66
 30
 76
Man Utd 37 22 6 9 62 35 72 Liverpool 37 16 11 10 54 36 59 Aston Villa 37 15 11 11 48 42 56 Newcastle 36 13 15 8 48 36 54

## Henry again hits England midfielder Frank Lampard

Association.

## Football

REUTERS, London

Thierry Henry has become the first player to win the footballer-of-theyear award in successive seasons after he swept almost 90 per cent of the votes cast in the annual poll. Arsenal's French international

striker finished clear of Chelsea's

Monaco qualified for the Champions

"The key to the game was that we

THIERRY HENRY

(1958 and 1961), Kenny Dalglish 1979 and 1983), John Barnes 1988 and 1990), and Gary Lineker 1986 and 1992).

Henry joined that select band and made history of his own just two weeks after he was voted players'player-of-the-year for the second successive season by his peers.

twice -- Sir Stanley Matthews (1948 The striker has scored 37 goals this season, including 29 in the premier league, and has created and 1963), Sir Tom Finney (1954 countless others to inspire Arsenal to the title

Henry said: "It's a real honour to receive this award for the second year running, but as I always say it would not have been possible without my team mates and of course the manager.

"When I collected this award last season I would have swapped it for a team award, but thankfully this year we won the title so I can really enjoy it this time around.

FWA chairman Gerry Cox said on Monday: "Last year it was a close contest and a somewhat controversial outcome with Henry narrowly beating Ruud Van Nistelrooy, but this time he has been the runaway winner.

"His skill, athleticism, teamwork and goals have set new standards in the premier league, but above all that it is about the way he plays the game that has captivated people throughout the country.

Henry will be presented with the award at an FWA dinner on May 20.

