

Serie A

Super Shevchenko

Football

AFP, Rome

Two goals in four minutes from Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko gave AC Milan a 2-1 win away to Lazio and kick-started the Italian champions' title defence here on Sunday.

Portuguese defender Fernando Couto's powerful close-range header gave Lazio a half-time lead and the home side's hopes of upsetting the title-holders improved six minutes into the restart when Milan midfielder Massimo Ambrosini was dismissed for elbowing Massimo Oddo in the face.

Despite being a man down, Milan went for broke and their positive response was rewarded with two clinical strikes by Shevchenko.

The former Dynamo Kiev marksman equalised in the 70th minute with an overhead hooked shot and four minutes later he finished a mazy dribble into the penalty box with an unstoppable cross-shot that brushed Angelo Peruzzi's fingertips on the way to the top corner.

Lazio almost pegged Milan back 10 minutes from time, but Simone Inzaghi's diving header came back off the underside of the crossbar.

Milan's second win of the season lifted them up to fourth on seven points, above fifth-placed Lazio on goals scored.

Their narrow victory also maintained their impressive run at the Olympic stadium where they haven't lost a league match to Lazio for six-and-a-half years.

Shevchenko's double took his career tally against Lazio to 10, one less than against his favourite opponents Inter Milan.

"The Olympic stadium is superb because it has an uplifting atmo-

sphere and the fans are great. And, above all, it brings me luck," said the Ukrainian.

Shevchenko, who has now scored three league goals, said his team always felt they had a chance of taking something from the match, despite being a goal down and a man short.

"We never stopped believing we could win," he said. "In the first half something wasn't right, but we always believed in our capabilities and kept reminding ourselves that we are a great team."

Asked if he thought it was strange that Lecce and Messina, two teams assembled on a shoe-string budget, were above AC Milan in the table, he replied: "It really is a strange championship, any team can be beaten and that makes it more interesting."

Earlier Sunday, Inter Milan twice came from behind to salvage a 2-2 draw at home to Parma.

Nineteen-year-old striker Obafemi Martins was Inter's hero, coming off the bench to replace Christian Vieri in the 58th minute and scoring both goals for Roberto Mancini's inconsistent side.

Vieri was roundly booed by the home supporters after another sluggish display which left him still searching for his first league goal of the season.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini said it was understandable that Vieri's confidence was low given his barren spell, but refused to pile more pressure on his misfiring forward.

"A striker can get depressed when he is struggling to score and when that happens it could be down to a number of things," he said.

"I hope Vieri quickly rediscovers his eye for goal. I told him to continue to work hard without worrying about it and to keep calm."

Inter's draw left them in sixth place on six points.

Puglian side Lecce climbed to second place behind leaders Juventus after coming from a goal down to win 3-1 at home to Cagliari.

Sampdoria gained their first points of the season with a 2-0 victory at Fiorentina, where Fabio Bazzani and Stefano Sacchetti were on target for the Genoans.

Brescia also got off the mark with a 2-1 win at Udinese.

Elsewhere, Livorno were held to a 1-1 draw at home to fellow new boys Atalanta, while the games between Messina and Chievo and Siena and Reggina ended goalless.

On Saturday, Roma coach Rudi Voller resigned after the club's 3-1 defeat away to Bologna which left them languishing in midtable with just four points.

According to Italian media reports, former FC Porto coach Luigi Del Neri is favourite to take Voller's place.

In Saturday's other match, Juventus dropped their first points of the season in a 1-1 draw at home to promoted Sicilian club Palermo.

Christian Zaccardo's close-range header put the visitors ahead in the 17th minute, only for Swedish international Zlatan Ibrahimovic to bundle in an equaliser shortly after the break.

Juve still lead the table with 10 points from their four matches, two ahead of Lecce and Messina.

TOP SIX									
Italian league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Juventus	4	3	1	0	9	1	10		
Lecce	4	2	2	0	11	6	8		
Messina	4	2	2	0	6	4	8		
Milan	4	2	1	1	7	5	7		
Lazio	4	2	1	1	5	3	7		
Inter	4	1	3	0	8	7	6		



AC Milan hot-shot Andriy Shevchenko (L) fires one towards the goal evading the interception of Portuguese midfielder Fernando Couto of Lazio at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on September 26.

Del Neri, Roma talking

AFP, Rome

Luigi Del Neri is the favourite to become Roma's new coach after admitting he has been in talks with the troubled Serie A club.

Rudi Voller quit as coach after Saturday's 3-1 defeat at Bologna that left Roma in 13th place with just four points from a possible 12.

"I have been contacted by the club, but they also approached me before Voller arrived," Del Neri told state broadcaster RAI on Monday.

"His resignation was a noble and courageous decision and showed him to be an honourable man and not just a coach.

"With regards to my position, I can't wait to start work again and like all coaches I want to be in charge of a big club and that's what Roma is.

"I'm at their disposal and I would bring with me the will to work hard and my enthusiasm."

According to Italian media reports, Del Neri met Roma's sporting director Franco Baldini at the city's Fiumicino airport on Sunday night and will be installed as coach on Wednesday.

Del Neri was sacked by Champions League winners Porto last month before taking charge of a competitive match.

The 54-year-old was named as Jose Mourinho's replacement in June, but allegedly upset the president of the Portuguese club with his poor time-keeping.

Del Neri built his reputation at Chievo having led the unfashionable Verona-based club from the second division to a credible force in Serie A.

Ezio Sella, Voller's assistant coach, will take charge of Roma on Tuesday when they face Real Madrid in the Champions League.

Crisis clubs face to face

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, London

Two clubs seemingly vying to make Europe's most miserable start to a season, Real Madrid and AS Roma, will meet this week on their return to Champions League duty.

Tuesday's game at the Bernabeu is one of the highlights of matchday two, along with a classic German-Dutch battle between Bayern Munich and Ajax Amsterdam, and the trip by holders Porto to face their former boss Jose Mourinho at Chelsea.

Manchester United, who are set to give a debut to teenage striker Wayne Rooney, have a score to settle with Fenerbahce, while 2003 winners AC Milan host Celtic at the San Siro and Juventus meet Israel's Maccabi Tel-Aviv.

Few teams will be in such desperate need of a good result, though, as Real or Roma, whose performances have triggered the early departure of both their managers.

Real's Jose Antonio Camacho quit last week in the wake of a humiliating 3-0 drubbing by Bayer Leverkusen and an appalling display in their Primera Liga 1-0 defeat at Espanyol.

Though Camacho's deputy Mariano Garcia Remon watched them beat Osasuna 1-0 in another disappointing display, lightened only by David Beckham's match-winning free kick, it was back to the bad times in Saturday 2-1 defeat by Athletic Bilbao.

England captain Beckham though, is doubtful for against Roma after suffering from a high temperature on Sunday.

"He's got some kind of virus and a fever. We will have to see how he goes over the next 48 hours," said Real medical officials here Sunday.

Beckham missed Sunday's training session but he was already suffering from aches and pains acquired in Real's 2-1 defeat at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday night.

"He (Beckham) has some little niggles," said Real coach Mariano Garcia Remon after the game.

The fever and minor injuries may save Garcia Remon from having to drop Beckham after another pitiful performance, in which he was substituted after 58 minutes of Real's latest loss.

Superstar Ronaldo was in some sort of thigh related discomfort in the same match but played the full 90 minutes. He also trained on Sunday and should be available. Real need the world's greatest striker in full flow if they are to come out of the hole they are in at the moment.

Roma's Rudi Voller has fared no better, resigning after less than a month in charge following Saturday's hugely embarrassing 3-1 defeat by nine-man Bologna.

His deputy, Ezio Sella, was placed in interim charge after Italy's 2001 champions managed only four points in as many games under their former German coach.

In Europe, Roma have been shamed by a missile from their home crowd which struck Swedish referee Anders Frisk and led to their Champions League opener with Dynamo Kiev being abandoned.



Superstar Ronaldo feels the side of his left thigh during a training session of Real Madrid on September 26.

UEFA later awarded Kiev a 3-0 victory and ordered Roma to play their next two home European games at the Olympic Stadium behind closed doors.

Decades of intense rivalry between their national teams will provide the backdrop for Bayern's game with Ajax in Munich.

Ajax will need to keep an eye on Bayern's Dutch striker Roy Makaay, who scored one and made another in their 3-1 win over SC Freiburg at the weekend.

Ajax needed a winner two minutes from time to beat Roda JC Kerkrade 1-0 and stay second in their domestic league.

Chelsea also snatched a late 1-0 win, beating Middlesbrough on Saturday, and Mourinho made it clear there would be no mercy on the team he guided to consecutive UEFA Cup and Champions League successes.

Asked about his feelings before Wednesday's game, the Portuguese coach told Chelsea's website: "Not emotional. I am professional."

"If we have six points from the first two matches we are in a good state to qualify for the next stage. They are not friends in the 90 minutes of the game."

Rooney should play his much-awaited first game since England's Euro 2004 quarter-final exit to Portugal, following a broken bone in his foot.

The 18-year-old joined United in a 27 million pound (\$48.66 million) move from Everton last month and is set to make his debut alongside Ruud van Nistelrooy, most likely as a substitute.

Adding extra spice to the clash is the fact that Fenerbahce became the first club ever to win a European tie at

Old Trafford, back in October 1996.

FIXTURES

AFP, Paris

Champions League fixtures this week (kick-off 1845 GMT):

Tuesday
Group A
 Monaco v Deportivo La Corogne (SPA)
 Olympiakos (GRE) v Liverpool (ENG)

Group B
 Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Bayer Leverkusen (GER)
 Real Madrid (SPA) v AS Roma (ITA)

Group C
 Bayern Munich (GER) v Ajax (NED)
 Juventus (ITA) v Maccabi Tel-Aviv (ISR)

Group D
 Manchester United (ENG) v Fenerbahce (TUR)
 Sparta Prague (CZE) v Lyon (FRA)

Wednesday
Group E
 PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Panathinaikos (GRE)
 Rosenborg (NOR) v Arsenal (ENG)

Group F
 Barcelona (SPA) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)
 AC Milan (ITA) v Celtic (SCO)

Group G
 Anderlecht (BEL) v Inter Milan (ITA)

Group H
 Werder Bremen (GER) v Valencia (SPA)

Group I
 Chelsea (ENG) v FC Porto (POR)
 CSKA Moscow (RUS) v Paris Saint Germain (FRA)

Del Bosque again?

Football

AFP, Istanbul

Former Real Madrid coach Vicente Del Bosque, who has had a disastrous start this season with Istanbul's Besiktas, will be called to account Monday by the team's executive board, a club official said late Sunday.

Del Bosque, who was sacked from Real last year despite winning two national and two European titles in three years, was hailed as "the most qualified foreign coach ever to work in Turkey" on his arrival here.

He replaced Romanian Mircea Lucescu and was seen as the saviour of the country's oldest club.

But Besiktas have yet to win a game in their expensively refurbished historic Dolmabahce stadium this season and the final straw was a 3-2 home defeat Saturday to minnows BBAnkara.

The loss left fans baying for Del Bosque's resignation and booing the team as the defeat left the side languishing in 13th place, 13 points off co-leaders Fenerbahce and Trabzonspor, after only seven matches.

Besiktas hosts Norway's Bodo Glimt on Thursday in the return leg of a UEFA Cup first round tie that ended

1-1 away.

Club spokesman Kivanc Oktay said a decision was unlikely to be made public until after that game.

"We have a very important match on Thursday and we are concentrating on that," Oktay told the specialist football channel Lig TV late Sunday after the club's board held a full day's meeting.

"But we will call Del Bosque in on Monday and see what his views on the situation are."

Del Bosque was in tears Saturday night after the loss to BB Ankara - whose avowed aim for the season was to remain in the first division - as he admitted that "this is a very bad day for Besiktas."

The Spaniard has come under ceaseless fire from critics for everything from his insistence on a 4-4-2 formation, which has not worked, to leaving stars such as Romanian Daniel Panu and Norwegian John Carew on the bench.

Del Bosque's troubles came at a time when Jose Antonio Camacho, his successor at Real Madrid, has resigned after just as bad a start in the Spanish league.

Turkey's lively sports media have been insistently reporting the Del Bosque is a serious candidate for the job.

Abramovich invests in future

AFP, London

Roman Abramovich is set to splash out another 20 million pounds but this time it's not on a single player but an investment in the future with a brand new training ground and youth academy.

Plans for the centre, at Cobham, west of London, revealed Monday include 15 football pitches and the latest player rehabilitation equipment.

The facility was scheduled to open in July 2006.

It is a major move for Chelsea, who are bidding to catch up with Manchester United and Arsenal both in terms of youth development and training facilities.

United and Arsenal have both opened multi-million-pound training bases in the last five years, while Chelsea players have complained about their own outdated base.

Manager Jose Mourinho said: "One of the reasons I joined was the commitment that Mr Abramovich and the board showed about investing in youth."

MU profits take a dive

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United on Monday reported lower annual profits of 27.9 million pounds from 39.3 million last time and warned future results would be affected by a drop in media revenues.

Its weaker performance on the pitch - they finished third in the English Premiership last season - as well as three major transfers - including that of Wayne Rooney - dented the bottom line.

But United said its operating profits rose 6 per cent on the year to 58.3 million pounds.

The figure, which does not take into account the depreciating value of players, was up on last year's 55.1 million.

Turnover for the year was down by 4 million pounds at 169 million, a performance helped

Primera Liga

Top two cruise

Football

AFP, Madrid

Valencia and Barcelona maintained their unbeaten records this season, and remain neck-and-neck at the top of the Spanish first division, after convincing wins on Sunday.

Goals from Vicente Rodriguez and Stefano Fiore gave Valencia a 2-0 win over Racing Santander.

They were enough for the reigning Spanish champions to retain their lead, having scored more goals than Barcelona who beat Real Mallorca 3-1.

Rodriguez got Valencia's first from a free kick, which took a deflection off the post after 25 minutes.

The Spanish international winger then sprinted down the left flank just seconds after the break to provide the service that Fiore needed to get his first goal for his new club.

Fiore joined Valencia from Lazio during the summer, one of three Italian internationals to move across the Mediterranean, enticed by the new regime of their compatriot and former Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri.

"And being Italian it's always a pleasure not to concede a goal," joked Ranieri.

Barcelona cruised past Real Mallorca 3-1, with two strikes late in the first half from African Player of the Year Samuel Eto'o adding to an earlier effort from fellow summer arrival Henrik Larsson.

But a late goal 13 minutes from time by Mallorca's Andrija Delibasic meant Barca stay in second.

Coach Frank Rijkaard admitted that Barca should have capitalised on their early lead but came up with one of the more unusual excuses for his team's failure to add more goals in the second half.

"The grass was very long and that affected the way we played. It slowed our game down," said the Dutchman

whose side, nonetheless, had few problems with the surface in the first half when they raced into a 3-0 lead.

The victory also came at a price with Rafael Marquez and Edmilson getting injured and the pair are doubtful for Barca's Champions League game against Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk.

Both Valencia and Barcelona have 13 points from their five games.

By contrast, Real Madrid fans will be looking enviously at the form of their two great rivals after their team went down 2-1 at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

The second league loss in eight days meant that Real slip to eighth.

Espanyol kept up their surprisingly strong start to the season with a 1-0 win over Malaga to stay third, Ivan De La Pena cementing his bid for a Spanish international call-up with the only goal of the game after 49 minutes.

Osasuna and Sevilla also stay in the upper reaches of the table with hard fought 2-1 home wins, over Getafe and Real Sociedad respectively.

Sevilla had to come from behind to get all three points, with goals from Sergio Ramos and Dario Silva neutralising the first goal in the top flight of Spanish football by Sociedad's Brazilian midfielder Rossato.

Real Sociedad remain without a win after five games and are equal bottom, along with Albacete who got a share of the points with a four 0-0 draw at Numancia.

TOP SIX									
Spanish league standings after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Valencia	5	4	1	0	14	5	13		
Barcelona	5	4	1	0	12	3	13		
Espanyol	5	3	1	1	7	3	10		
Athletico	5	3	1	1	6	2	10		
Osasuna	5	3	1	1	9	6	10		
Sevilla	5	3	1	1	6	3	10		



Barcelona players converge to celebrate one of Samuel Eto'o's two goals against Mallorca at the Son Moix stadium in Palma de Mallorca on September 26.