

Primera Liga

Owen opens account

Cricket

AFP, Madrid

Michael Owen emphatically confirmed that his barren spell in the Spanish capital is over with his first league goal for Real Madrid in their 1-0 win over Valencia.

It took the England striker, and occasional captain, just seven minutes to find the net at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday, making no mistake with a right foot lob after being put through by Raul Gonzalez.

Owen's goal followed hard on the heels of his winner in Real's 1-0 over Dynamo Kiev in the Champions League, his first goal for Madrid since his summer signing from Liverpool.

The game was an entertaining affair despite the lack of further goals but Real, buoyed by the success on the European stage, got their first league win in four games.

Both sides had other chances to get further goals but Real's Ronaldo and Valencia's Marco Di Vaio, the main target men for their respective sides, were woefully off form.

Valencia, the reigning Spanish champions, looked much better in the second half after the introduction of their Argentine playmaker Pablo Aimar but Real just held their nerve and rode their luck.

Real's best other chance came with 15 minutes left when Valencia were caught on the break but Santiago Solari, who came on for Owen after 58 minutes, dwelled too long on the ball when in front of goal.

Valencia's Curro Torres had a late chance to level the scores but

blasted the ball over the bar five minutes from the whistle.

The win means Real now have 13 points from their eight games and rise to seventh place, ahead of Sunday's games.

Valencia stay in second overnight but will almost certainly drop several places after the rest of the weekend's action.

Deportivo La Coruna earlier salvaged a point at Malaga thanks to a goal from Diego Tristán five minutes before the end which gave the Galician visitors a 1-1 draw

Malaga had taken an early lead when Paulo Wanchope had unleashed a thunderbolt shot from the edge of the area after six minutes, the former Manchester City striker leaving Deportivo keeper Francisco Molina motionless on his line.

League leaders Barcelona play host to Osasuna on Sunday.

The Catalan club is the only unbeaten team in the Spanish first division and has a five-point lead over the chasing pack, headed on Saturday by Valencia, and a game in hand.

TOP SIX							
Spanish league standings after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)							
Barcelona	7	6	1	0	14	3	19
Valencia	8	4	2	2	16	9	14
Sevilla	7	4	2	1	8	4	14
Atletico Madrid	7	4	1	2	7	3	13
Levante	7	4	1	2	13	10	13
Osasuna	7	4	1	2	12	10	13



REAL GOAL: Real Madrid's Michael Owen (L) scores his first goal in Spanish football during the Primera Liga match against Valencia at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on October 23.

Premiership

Eidur's terrific treble

Football

AFP, London

Eidur Gudjohnsen's first hat-trick in English football put the smile back on the face of Jose Mourinho and fired Chelsea to 4-0 win over struggling Blackburn on Saturday.

Damien Duff completed a highly satisfactory performance that proved Mourinho's men are capable of displaying attacking flair to match their defensive virtues.

The win moved Chelsea back to within two points of Arsenal at the top of the Premiership table ahead of the champions' showdown with Manchester United at Old Trafford

ahead of Manchester. A draw would mean both sides drop points.

For Blackburn, the defeat left them second from bottom and, on this evidence, Mark Hughes's side face a tough battle to get out of trouble.

"The goals against column doesn't lie -- it is quite obvious where our problems lie," the former

and Marcus Bent's first half goals.

But former Scotland striker Duncan Ferguson came off the bench to head the winner and make it seven victories out of 10 for Everton so far this season.

It was also a good day for their Merseyside rivals Liverpool, who climbed to fifth place after a 2-0 home win over Charlton.

John Arne Riise's strike from the edge of the area, seven minutes after half-time, was followed up by Luis Garcia's 30-yard strike a quarter of an hour from the end.

Despite the win, Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez found himself having to defend misfiring strikers Milan Baros and Djibril Cisse who again failed to find a breakthrough.

"They can play together," insisted Benitez.

Elsewhere, it was a day to remember for Crystal Palace, who leapt off the bottom of the table and right out of the relegation zone with a convincing 3-0 victory over fellow strugglers West Brom, whose manager Gary Megson branded his side's defending as "pathetic."

Andy Johnson took his tally for the season to seven with a 12th minute penalty and a stunning second half strike after Fitz Hall had given Palace an early lead.

Aston Villa won for the first time in six league matches with a 2-0 home win over Fulham that leaves the Londoners only one place above the relegation zone.

Peru international Nolberto Solana and midfielder Lee Hendrie scored the goals that moved Villa up to seventh.

"We scored two individual goals to break the deadlock and that was the difference," manager David O'Leary admitted.

Tottenham's early-season momentum slipped further as Jacques Santini's side slumped to a second successive defeat, at home to Bolton.

Substitute Henrik Pedersen notched the winner for Bolton after Spurs striker Robbie Keane had cancelled out Tunisian defender Radhi Jaïdi's early header from a Gary Speed free-kick.



INCREDIBLE ICELANDIK: Chelsea's Eidur Gudjohnsen jumps into the air after scoring his second goal on way to a hat-trick against Blackburn Rovers in their Premiership encounter at Stamford Bridge on October 23.

The Icelandic striker, who went into the match with only two goals to his name this season, doubled his tally with a superbly taken brace in the space of two first-half minutes then converted a 51st-minute penalty to ensure he went home with the match ball.

A late strike from Ireland winger on Sunday. Mourinho claimed he would be watching that match with pleasure. "Whatever the result it will have a positive side for us," the Portuguese manager said.

Wales manager said. Everton remain in third place after a 3-2 victory over winless Premiership newcomers Norwich at Carrow Road. David Moyes's side allowed a two-goal lead to slip away when Leon McKenzie and Damien Francis cancelled out Kevin Kilbane

TOP SIX							
English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)							
Arsenal	9	8	1	0	29	8	25
Chelsea	10	7	2	1	12	2	23
Everton	10	7	1	2	13	9	22
Bolton	10	5	3	2	16	1	2
18							
Liverpool	9	5	1	3	16	8	16
Middlesbrough	9	4	2	3	16	12	1

Ligue 1

PSG revival continues

Football

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint Germain resumed domestic duties on Saturday and beat Ajaccio 1-0 at the Parc des Princes just 72 hours after their heroics against European champions FC Porto.

Vahid Halilhodzic's side built on that 2-0 win to eke out only their third league win of the season to add further proof that they had finally turned the corner after what has been their worst start in 20 years.

their newfound authority when Sylvain Armand's high floating cross from the left found Fabrice Pancrate whose bullet header shot into the top right corner of Stephane Porato's net with ten minutes on the clock.

PSG's Branko Boskovic, deputising for the injured Jerome Rothen, almost made it two but he fluffed a golden opportunity when failing to control the ball in front of an open goal deep into the first half.

Ajaccio began the second half in feisty fashion but the PSG defence stood firm. Pauleta, who scored PSG's second goal against Porto, pro-

duced a superb header on the hour mark, but the ball rebounded and his second effort was safely picked up by Porato.

It was not all one way traffic with Ajaccio's Waldir Lucas Pereira watching in frustration as his header edged over Lionel Letizi's crossbar.

The welcome three points lifted PSG into 13th.

Earlier the David and Goliath battle between three-time champions Lyon and newly promoted Istres ended in a goalless draw.

On paper Istres looked easy meat for Paul Le Guen's highflyers but it was the modest provincial side who emerged the moral winners

with a gutsy controlled display. Lyon's Gregory Coupet was by far the busier of the two keepers and not even the expulsion of defender Ibrahim Thiam after a dangerous tackle on Lyon's Brazilian striker Nilmar in the 76th minute could deny Istres their deserved point.

Le Guen though can take comfort from the fact that his side -- 3-1 winners over Turkish side Fenerbahce in the Champions League on Tuesday -- remain unbeaten after 11 games and take the lead by one point from Lille, who have a chance to reclaim top spot against Toulouse on Sunday.

An English 'killer' on the loose

Football

AFP, Madrid

England striker Michael Owen didn't have a nickname in Spain until Sunday but he may have now, with sports daily Marca dubbing him 'killer' after he got the only goal of Real Madrid's 1-0 win over Valencia.

"There are some things you can only see in the Bernabeu, things like the goal of Owen which gave a deserved victory to Real," wrote Elias Israel, editor of Marca, Spain's biggest selling newspaper of any description.

Owen got the winner for his team for the third time in 10 days, following on from his strike for Real in their 1-0 victory over Dynamo Kiev in the Champions League on Tuesday.

He performed a similar feat as the England captain in his country's win by the same scoreline in Azerbaijan the previous week.

"This goal has given me more confidence. I haven't hit my best level yet but that can't be too far away," said Owen, after his first league goal for Real since his summer move from Liverpool.

"I have to give thanks to (Real coach) Mariano Garcia Remon, for having confidence in me," added the usually self-effacing Owen, for whom Marca's new moniker may be a little exaggerated.

Garcia Remon was rewarded for his faith in giving Owen back-to-back starts for the first time this season.

"You have to remember, I've

arrived in a strange city, and have to deal with a new language and new team. It's not easy to be on top form straight away," added Owen, admitting that he had suffered a rocky patch during his first two months in the Spanish capital since his August arrival.

"This is what we have been waiting for, he's saved us in the last two games. But you have to look at the work he has been doing off the ball, not just the goals," commented Garcia Remon, paying tribute to the new Bernabeu hero, who was cheered to the rafters as he left the pitch after 58 minutes.

If Owen's star is rising, then that of his Brazilian frontline partner Ronaldo appears to be on the wane, after just one goal this season.

The three-time world-player-of-the-year was well below-par once again on Saturday and visibly annoyed when Garcia Remon substituted him 10 minutes before the whistle.

"We talked in the dressing room after the game. It's normal that he's angry, and I accept that. But he was tired because he was putting in a lot of work," added Garcia Remon, excusing his petulant World Cup winner.

Garcia Remon may be considering what last season would have been unthinkable, when Ronaldo was the Spanish first division's leading scorer with 24 goals, and could leave him on the bench for next week's Madrid derby against newly-promoted Getafe.

Serie A

Vintage Del Piero

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero broke the deadlock in the 52nd minute, prodding home from close range after Zlatan Ibrahimovic's header had struck the legs of Siena keeper Marco Fortin.

He doubled his tally on the hour, chesting down Jonathan Zebina's cross before rifling a low drive through Fortin's legs.

Del Piero then turned provider, his crossed free-kick headed home by Argentina-born wingback Mauro Camoranesi.

Earlier Saturday, Cagliari escaped with a 2-2 draw away to struggling Atalanta despite playing the last 40 minutes with 10 men.

The visitors had Massimo Brambilla sent off for a second yellow card shortly after half time, but the Sardinians survived a second half onslaught to earn a share of the spoils in Lombardy.

A point for Cagliari saw them draw level with Inter Milan on 10 points, while Atalanta remain third from bottom and are still looking for their first win.

Giampaolo Pazzini gave Atalanta a second minute lead with a neat chip before Gianfranco Zola's superb diagonal pass set up Mauro Esposito for an easy equaliser.

Cagliari then went ahead in the 29th minute. Zola's free-kick to the back post was headed across the face of goal by Massimo Gobbi to give Simone Loria a simple tap-in.

Atalanta levelled the score five minutes from half time when Demetrio Albertini's shot was deflected into the path of Riccardo Montolivo, whose low drive found the bottom corner.

Capello was relieved to see his team survive the first half which was dominated by the home side, but ended goalless.

"We played well against difficult opponents, who caused us quite a few problems and could have scored several times," he added.

"But this squad has great personality and conviction and in the end we came out on top."

TOP SIX							
Italian league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)							
Juventus	7	6	1	0	15	2	19
AC Milan	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
Chievo	6	3	3	0	7	4	
12							
Lecco	6	3	2	1	14	11	
Messina	6	3	2	1	11	7	
Inter Milan	6	2	4	0	14	11	



IM BACK: Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero (C) is embraced by his teammates after a virtuoso performance against Siena in their Serie A match on October 23.

Bundesliga

Late Bayern show

Football

AFP, Berlin

An injury-ravaged Bayern Munich needed a brace of late goals to down Hansa Rostock 2-0 in a heated match that saw both sides reduced to ten men.

With 82 minutes played Bayern were locked 0-0 with relegation candidates Rostock but French international Willy Sagnol, who wanted to leave the club in the close season, broke the resistance with a header and substitute Mehmet Scholl added a second three minutes later.

Saturday's victory comes on the back of two straight defeats for Bayern who move up to third with the three points.

"The sense of relief is enormous," confessed Bayern chief Felix Magath.

"The team somehow managed to pull themselves together after the (Sammy) Kuffour sending off.

"I would not go as far as saying our victory was a fair result."

VfL Wolfsburg returned to the summit with a 3-0 triumph over VfL Bochum although VfB Stuttgart can replace them if they collect at least a point in Sunday's match at SC Freiburg.

At the bottom end of the Bundesliga ladder Thomas Doll enjoyed his first game in charge of SV Hamburg with his team recording a 2-1 triumph over Borussia Dortmund at the Westfalen Stadium.

"For myself and the team this was a new beginning," explained Doll.

"The team battled for their lives and had the slice of luck that they deserved."

Hamburg move off bottom spot and out of the relegation zone leapfrogging 2002 champions Dortmund who are now fifth from bottom.

After failing to score in their previous two matches against Schalke 04 and Juventus, Bayern hoped for a comfortable win against Hansa but their lack of firepower was undermined once again.

Deprived of injured trio Michael Ballack, Ze Roberto and Lucio the Bavarian titans lacked the killer instinct in front of goal with Torsten Frings and Roy Makaay both spurning good opportunities.

Bayern should have had a penalty in the 20th minute when David Rasmussen brought down Frings in the penalty area but their claims were turned down.

Rasmussen must have thought the gods were smiling down on him but that hope vanished when referee Lutz Wagner dismissed him in the 37th minute for a fierce tackle.

Bayern could not breach the ten-men of Rostock and in fact Hansa drew strength from playing with one man fewer testing Bayern custodian Oliver Kahn several times.

Munich's Ghana defender Sammy Kuffour was then dismissed in the 75th minute for an ugly foul to

even the numbers up and bizarrely it appeared to help Bayern who scored seven minutes later through Sagnol.

The French defender latched onto a Scholl cross to head home before the veteran midfielder capped a fine substitute appearance with a goal himself.

Dortmund's Westfalen Stadium was a fortress last season but the gate looks to have been left open for this campaign with Hamburg taking the spoils with a 2-0 victory.

Belgian international Emile Mpenza scored a ninth minute opener to the delight of new coach Doll and David Jarolim wrapped up the points in the 70th minute.

Dortmund have won just one league match in nine outings and their Dutch coach Bert van Marwijk is feeling the heat.

"You can sense how unsure the team are and only a win will get rid of that," added van Marwijk.

"We have to be realistic and acknowledge we are now in a relegation battle."

Elsewhere German champions Werder Bremen bounced back from successive league defeats to crush FC Nuremberg 4-1 at the Weserstadion.

Werder followed up their midweek Champions League victory over Anderlecht with another three points thanks to goals from Ivan Klasnic (13), Frenchman Johan Micoud (18), Christian Schulz (75) and Fabian Ernst (88).

The double winners lie fourth six points adrift of Wolfsburg.

TOP SIX							
German football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)							
Wolfsburg	9	7	0	2	16	9	21
Stuttgart	8	6	2	0	17	5	20
Bayern	9	5	2	2	14	10	17
Bremen	9	5	0	4	20	11	15
Mainz 05	8	4	3	1	13	10	15
Hannover	9	4	2	3	13	10	14

FIFA demands six-month ban on Mutu

INTERNET REPORT, London

Adrian Mutu faces a likely six-month ban from all football after FIFA declared their readiness to take action should they consider any Football Association punishment for the shamed striker to be too lenient.

The Romanian, who has tested positive for a banned drug -- said by the Professional Footballers Association to be cocaine -- is understood to have begun counselling for his drug abuse problem.