

## PRIMERA LIGA

## Barca back to earth

## Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona will have given some hope to their rivals that they can still grab the Spanish title after the league leaders crashed 2-0 at home to Atletico Madrid, with both goals coming from Fernando Torres.

The defeat was Barcelona's first in their Nou Camp stadium for nearly 13 months.

Torres' opener came after just 37 seconds when Ariel Ibagaza had cheekily volleyed a ball forward off the back of his heel towards the Spanish international striker.

Barcelona then controlled the ball with his head before out-sprinting Carles Puyol down the right side of the box, although his final touch was miscued and the ball trickled into the goal.

Barcelona flung everything at Atletico for the rest of the game, although the visitors were equally dangerous on the counter-attack and they added to their tally four minutes into injury time.

Torres scored from the penalty spot after the rampaging forward

had been brought down by Barca keeper Victor Valdes.

The scoreline was a little unfair to the hosts as they had two decent claims for penalties turned down, and the often-erratic Atletico defence was a model of solidity.

Barca have 51 points from their 22 games but their lead at the top of the Spanish first division was reduced to four points after their second-placed bitter rivals romped to a 4-0 victory over Espanyol on Saturday.

Reigning Spanish champions Valencia stay third but only on goal difference after they drew 3-3 at Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Sevilla bounced back from their 4-0 mauling at home to Barcelona a week ago to beat Levante 3-0 and move up to fourth.

"From the first minute we went out there to win this game," said Sevilla coach Joaquin Caparros.

"It was just a question of time before the goals started to arrive. I threw in a number of players who were not used to playing regularly because I wanted to shake things up and show everyone that I had confidence in them."

"I took some risks but then you always have to take risks."

Antonito Ramiro opened the scoring for Sevilla after 32 minutes, chesting down a long ball and then blasting it past Levante keeper Juan Luis Mora on the half-volley.

Ariza Makukula then added Sevilla's second 10 minutes after the break when his vicious shot from just outside the area took a deflection off the Levante defender Inaki Descargue to completely fool the unfortunate Mora.

Real Betis improved their own chances of European football next season, and move up one place to sixth, after their 3-1 win over Osasuna with goals from Assuncao, David Rivas and Ricardo Oliveira.

Villarreal extended their unbeaten streak to nine games after beating Racing Santander 2-1, a result which moved the home side up to fifth and sent Racing spiralling into the relegation zone.

Mario Regueiro unleashed a thunderbolt from 35 yards to put Racing in front after 23 minutes.

However, Racing were reduced to 10 men after 33 minutes when Walid Regragui picked up his second yellow card and Villarreal got back on top in the second half.

## UEFA planning betting ban

AFP, Frankfurt

The ongoing match-fixing scandal in Germany has prompted European football's governing body UEFA to draw up plans for legislation to stop all players, management and referees in Europe from betting on games.

Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, president of the German Football Federation (DFB), confirmed UEFA were looking at bringing in a new law to ensure that the manipulation of matches does not become more widespread.

"UEFA want to introduce a code of honour so that players, coaches, management and referees in Europe can not bet on matches," explained Mayer-Vorfelder.

"It is not just a German problem. Italy, Romania and the Czech Republic have also experienced problems with manipulation."

On January 27 of this year referee Robert Hoyzer admitted to fixing four matches for financial gain.

Since then the DFB have confirmed they are investigating 25 people, including three other officials, in connection with match rigging.

## TOP SIX

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

	22	16	3	3	43	16	51
Real	22	15	2	5	41	16	47
Valencia	22	10	8	4	35	21	38
Sevilla	22	11	5	6	26	23	38
Villarreal	22	10	7	5	37	18	37
Betis	22	10	7	5	33	24	37

## Del Piero gets Azzurri axe

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Marcello Lippi has dropped misfiring Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero from his squad to face Russia in Wednesday's friendly international.

Del Piero has scored 40 goals in 95 internationals for the Azzurri, but is currently out of favour at Serie A leaders Juve where he is failing to hold down a regular place in the team.

Receiving call-ups for the first time will Udinese goalkeeper Morgan De Sanctis and Palermo defender Andrea Barzaghi.

Roma striker Antonio Cassano was originally included in a 22-man line-up, but later pulled out due to a right knee injury sustained in Sunday's 1-1 draw at home to Bologna.

Wednesday's match is being played at Cagliari's Sant'Elia stadium in honour of Italian legend Gigi Riva, whose 21 goals helped the Sardinian club to their one and only league title in the 1969/70 season.

## SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Morgan De Sanctis (Udinese)

Defenders: Giorgio Chiellini (Fiorentina), Fabio Cannavaro (Inter Milan), Marco Materazzi (Inter Milan), Alessandro Nesta (AC Milan), Giuseppe Pancaro (AC Milan), Andrea Barzaghi (Palermo), Cristian Zaccardo (Palermo), Daniele Bonera (Parma)

Midfielders: Mauro Esposito (Cagliari), Manuele Blasi (Juventus), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Simone Barone (Palermo), Daniele De Rossi (AS Roma), Aimo Diana (Sampdoria)

Forwards: Christian Vieri (Inter Milan), Alberto Gilardino (Parma), Vincenzo Montella (Roma), Francesco Totti (Roma)

## Gerrard worth more than 50m pounds

## Football

AFP, London

Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry has revealed they would turn down a 50 million pound bid for Steven Gerrard who is seen as top of big-spending Chelsea's summer priorities.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho fuelled speculation about a summer bid by saying last week he would sign one of the world's greatest players.

But Parry told BBC Sport: "Steve is above money. He is the future of Liverpool."

"It doesn't matter if it's 30 million, 40 million or 50 million, we will not accept offers. But we are also realistic enough to know we can't keep Steven against his

will."

Parry said Real Madrid asked for an option on the England midfield man during negotiations for striker Fernando Morientes.

But he expected Gerrard to be with Liverpool next season.

"We have re-affirmed recently to Steven that we are trying to build a team around him. We crave success as much as he does. We know he's ambitious and nobody can argue with that.

"I think Steven would dearly love to win things with Liverpool more than he'd like to do anything else."

"You are not going to keep a player like Steven against his will. That just doesn't work, but any idea we are going to accept offers for Steven and then tell him 'by the way we've decided to sell you' is not on the agenda. You can forget that."

## SERIE A

## Milan owe Crespo one

## Football

REUTERS, Rome

Champions AC Milan cut Juventus' lead at the top of Serie A to two points on Sunday when a stoppage-time goal by Hernan

Crespo earned them a 2-1 win over Lazio.

The result gave Milan 48 points from 23 matches. Juventus are on 50 after losing 1-0 at Palermo on Saturday.

Milan appeared to be on the verge of their third defeat in four matches when Massimo Oddo

put Lazio ahead from the penalty spot in the 56th minute following Jaap Stam's foul on Tommaso Rocchi.

With 18 minutes remaining, however, a superb 30-metre free kick by European Footballer of the Year Andriy Shevchenko put the hosts level.

In the final minutes, Milan besieged the Lazio goal. Cafu and Stam blazed shots narrowly over the bar and Lazio keeper Marco Materazzi stuck out a hand to prevent a Bresciano shot crossing the line, earning himself a red card.

The ensuing Parma penalty was converted by Fabio Simplicio.

Inter's hopes of salvaging anything from the encounter looked even slimmer when Italy international Alberto Gilardino beat keeper Hector Carini with a superb overhead kick on the hour.

However, Inter refused to buckle and were rewarded in the 76th minute when defender Ivan Cordoba nodded a Sinisa Mihajlovic free kick past Frey.

Cordoba was at the centre of the action again five minutes later when he was pushed to the ground by Parma defender Daniele Bonera.

Referee Pierluigi Collina pointed to the penalty spot and Christian Vieri's conversion, his 100th Serie A goal for Inter, consolidated their reputation as Serie A's comeback kings.

Earlier in the day, 10-man Inter Milan preserved their unbeaten Serie A record in dramatic fashion, fighting back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Parma.

The result lifted Inter to 39 points from 23 matches, but could not save them from surrendering third place in the division to Udinese, who climbed to 40 points after a 1-0 victory over lowly Brescia.

Brescia barely broke out of their half but resisted stubbornly until the 85th minute, when Vincenzo Iaquinta struck the winner.

Though Inter have made up ground on Juventus and AC Milan, they came up against a Parma side that had won three of their previous five games to give themselves a good chance of escaping the relegation zone.

Inter began aggressively with Juan Sebastian Veron twice firing narrowly wide in the opening minutes.

The balance of the match in the 14th minute, when a Parma counter-attack ended with striker Mark Bresciano crashing the ball off the bar.

That signalled the start of a

period of pressure by the home side culminating 20 minutes later when Inter defender Marco Materazzi stuck out a hand to prevent a Bresciano shot crossing the line, earning himself a red card.

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PHOTO: AFP

THAT'S THE SPIRIT! The North Korean football team receiving a bouquet upon their arrival at the Narita International airport, east of Tokyo yesterday.

## North on a mission

AFP, Tokyo



North Korea's football team flew in here Monday for a World Cup qualifier against Japan, where hostility is simmering toward over its abductions of Japanese.

About 100 ethnic Koreans, some waving the communist nation's flag, cheered the team as the players arrived at Narita airport, with schoolgirls offering the players flowers amid a swarm of reporters.

"The players are in good health. We are satisfied with our training in China," 43-year-old coach Yun Jong-Su, a former star striker, told Japanese reporters in Beijing before taking a flight after four weeks training in China.

Questioned whether the team was confident of beating Asian champions Japan, midfielder Pak Nam-Chol said, "Yes, we do."

Unusually tight security mea-

sures will be enforced for the match on Wednesday in Saitama, a satellite city north of Tokyo, although Japanese football fans are not known to act violently.

The team have kept themselves under wraps in training camps in China before coming here for the opening match for the two countries in a final Asian qualifying group which includes powerhouse Iran and fast-improving Bahrain.

North Korea, who stunned the world in 1966 by upsetting Italy 1-0 in their only World Cup finals appearance, want to return to the premier stage of football after a break of 40 years.

The 18-strong North Korean team is mostly made up of the April 25 football club run by the Korean People's Army and includes two Japan-born ethnic Korean midfielders who play for J-League clubs.

Tokyo has threatened to impose economic sanctions against the impoverished communist neighbour for refusing to come clean on the fate of kidnap

victims while challenging the rest of the world with its nuclear arms ambitions.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi called on Japanese fans to behave during the football show down, recalling the anti-Japanese violence in Beijing which followed Japan's win over China in the Asian Cup final last August.

The 44,000-seat Saitama Stadium will be guarded by some 2,000 policemen, as it was during World Cup matches in 2002, joined by 1,400 private security hands hired by the Japanese Football Association. Metal detectors will be in place.