

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca back at their best

Football

AFP, Madrid

League leaders Barcelona gave their emphatic response to the pressure put upon them by second-place Real Madrid with a 4-0 rout at Malaga on Sunday.

The victory maintains Barca's six point advantage at the top of the Spanish first division, with five games to go, after Real ensured that their eternal rivals didn't sleep easily by beating Villarreal 2-1 24 hours earlier.

"This win was tribute to my players' concentration. The only time Malaga was in this game was during the first 15 minutes," analysed Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard.

"Malaga gave us some opportunities at the back, and my players were in a position to take advantage of them," reflected Rijkaard on the reasons why Barca had triumphed so easily.

The Catalans opened the scoring with their first serious attack on 21 minutes.

Malaga's defence was caught on the hop with a quick counter-attack and central defender Oleguer Presas was in the unusual position of being in the front line rather than at the back.

Oleguer took his rare chance in an opponent's penalty area and sent a rasping shot past Malaga goalkeeper Francesc Arnau, a fellow product of the Barcelona youth system, to get his first goal on Barca senior duty.

It took Barca just another 12 minutes before French winger Ludovic Giuly added to the tally, heading home a centre from Ronaldinho.

Giuly then put the game beyond Malaga's reach when he waltzed through the hosts' defence unmolested to get Barca's third goal after 67 minutes.

Gerard Lopez headed Barca's fourth in the dying seconds of the game to add to the embarrassment of Malaga who played the last 14 minutes with just 10 men after Amoroso was sent off for a crass challenge on Carlos Puyol.

There were celebrations on both sides of Barcelona on Sunday.

Barcelona's often overshadowed neighbours Espanyol continued their challenge for a place in next season's Champions League and moved up to fourth after their 3-1 win over Real Zaragoza.

Sevilla stay in third, but a huge 14 points behind Real Madrid, after their impressive 3-1 victory at Athletic Bilbao.

Julio Baptista opened the scoring with a vicious free kick after six minutes.

Jesus Navas then put Sevilla in control 14 minutes later with one of the best goals of the season, going past three Bilbao players before lashing the ball home with a left foot shot from the edge of the area.

Baptista then headed Sevilla's third goal of the night, and his 17th of the season, 14 minutes from the whistle before Julen Guerrero got a late consolation for Athletic.

Sevilla's local rivals Real Betis slipped to seventh after losing 3-2 at home to Real Sociedad.

Second half goals from Mista Ferrer and Miguel Angel Angulo were sufficient for reigning Spanish champions Valencia to beat relegation-threatened Albacete 2-0 and move up to fifth.

Valencia's late goal secured their position in the top half of the table, while Villarreal moved up to eighth after a 1-0 win over Espanyol.

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TOP SIX

Spanish football league table after Sunday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Barcelona 33 23 6 4 65 25 75
Real 33 22 3 8 59 29 69
Sevilla 33 16 7 10 40 36 55
Espanyol 33 15 8 10 44 40 53
Valencia 33 13 13 7 50 34 52
Villarreal 32 14 10 8 53 30 52



Barcelona's French international Ludovic Giuly celebrates one of his two goals against Malaga at the La Rosaleda Stadium in Malaga on Sunday.

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the Spanish league after this weekend's matches:

- 21 - Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)
- 18 - Diego Forlan (Villarreal), Ricardo Oliveira (Real Betis)
- 17 - Julio Baptista (Sevilla)
- 16 - Fernando Torres (Atletico Madrid), Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
- 14 - Juan Roman Riquelme (Villarreal)
- 13 - Maxi Rodriguez (Espanyol), Nihat Kahveci (Real Sociedad), David Villa (Real Zaragoza)
- 12 - Santiago Ezquerro (Athletic Bilbao)
- 11 - Marco Di Vaio (Valencia), Edu (Real Betis)
- Luis Garcia (Real Mallorca), Albert Luque (Deportivo La Coruna), Michael Owen (Real Madrid)
- 10 - Antonio Pacheco (Albacete), Raul Tamudo (Espanyol)
- Ismael Urzaiz (Athletic Bilbao)
- 9 - Ludovic Giuly (Barcelona), Chengue Morales (Osasuna), Diego Tristan (Deportivo La Coruna)

PREMIERSHIP

Rooney rocks

AFP, Manchester

Wayne Rooney was hailed as 'phenomenal' by Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson after defying injury to score the wonder goal that inspired United to a crucial 2-1 win against Newcastle at Old Trafford on Sunday.

England forward Rooney, who suffered a first-half leg injury, was set to be substituted by Ferguson just seconds before beating Newcastle goalkeeper Shay Given with a fierce 25-yard volley on 57 minutes.

But the 19-year-old's strike cancelled out Darren Ambrose's 27th minute opener and levelled for United before Wes Brown headed in his first-ever Premiership goal to seal victory and move Ferguson's men to within one point of Arsenal in the race for second place.

Ferguson said: "It was a fantastic goal by Wayne Rooney, absolutely phenomenal. The ironic thing is that I was ready to take him off just before the goal because he had got himself injured in the first-half."

"But he is always a threat when he is on the pitch and that's why I kept him on. You have to say that the goal was even better considering that he was injured when he scored it."

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Chelsea 34 26 7 1 65 13 85
Arsenal 33 21 8 4 73 33 71
Man Utd 34 20 10 4 50 21 70
Everton 34 17 10 4 34 58
Liverpool 35 16 6 13 48 36 54
Bolton 35 15 9 11 45 39 54

STANCHART CRICKET

Rajdhani Model crush St Joseph

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajdhani Model High staged a 185-run defeat on St Joseph Higher Secondary School in the Standard Chartered Under-15 Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the Residential Model College Ground yesterday.

Batting first, the winners piled up 299 and then wrapped up St. Joseph for 114.

In the day's other matches, Sheikh Abdullah Mollah High (126) managed five-run victory over Khilgona Government High (121), Adarsha Bidyapith (155) defeated Shourav Smriti High (151) by six wickets, Iqra Model (176) thumped University Laboratory (175) by seven wickets, Scholars School (179) earned an exciting eight-run victory over Titas Gas (171), Ideal School (85) outplayed Maniknagar Model (82) by nine wickets, Barnamala Adarsha High (102) defeated Sunnydale (100) by eight wickets, Jinzira PM Pilot High (179) beat Residential Model (177) by three wickets.

In the under-13 competition, North Zone suffered a 53-run defeat against East Zone in the second round match at the Jagannath Hall ground of Dhaka University.

North Zone were bundled out for 151 in reply to East Zone's 204.

SERIE A

Juve hail Nedved

AFP, Rome

Juventus rejoined AC Milan at the top of Italy's Serie A after defeating Lazio 1-0 at the Olympic stadium here on Sunday.

A poor game appeared to be heading for a draw until five minutes from time when Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved grabbed a dramatic winner for the Turin club.

The former European Footballer of the Year ran onto Marcelo Zalayeta's flicked header, evaded two challenges and fired home left-footed from an acute angle.

Gianluigi Buffon kept Juve's lead intact with a superb one-handed save to keep out Massimo Oddo's curling free-kick three minutes later.

SPORTS REPORTER

Non-stars shine

SPORTS REPORTER

The just concluded Sixth National Cricket League should be remembered as the competition where local batsmen got rid of their inhibition of not being able to reach three-figure scores.

No less than a record 39 hundreds were scored in the lone first-class competition of the country this season. Significantly, the best performances came from cricketers who were not even on the fringes of national selection. Although Sylhet finished bottom, opener Golam Rahman hogged the spotlight. The left-handed batsman amassed 825 runs from 10 matches at an average of 51.56 with three hundreds. His merry run however, did not accompany him in the League's one-day competition where he could muster just 154 in nine outings.

Chittagong's Nazimuddin hit the only double century (204) in the League.

Young Rajshahi batter Forhad

Asia, Middle East bridge in Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

The South East Bank 13th Asia and Middle East Zonal Bridge Championships will be held in Dhaka from April 28.

Men's and women's teams from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Palestine, Syria and hosts Bangladesh will take part in the 9-day meet.

Wright points

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Zealand, where cricket has only a few takers." But commentary was out of the question: "Oh, I wouldn't do that just for the sake of money. I already have a lot of money. I just don't like it."

Milan had opened up a three-point lead on Saturday after beating struggling Parma at the San Siro.

Milan and Juve both have 73 points with five games of the season left. Goal difference cannot decide the championship and should the teams finish level on points on the final day there will be a two-legged play-off in June.

The two title-chasing teams meet in Milan on May 8.

Lazio drop to ninth after seeing their three-match unbeaten ended by Fabio Capello's men.

The importance of three crucial points in the title race was not lost on Nedved, especially with several key players missing through injury and suspension and their captain Alessandro Del Piero hobbling off in the first-half.

Earlier Sunday, Sampdoria

maintained their push for a Champions League place with a 2-1 home victory over Roma.

Max Tonetto gave Sampdoria a 33rd minute lead with a crisp close-range finish before Francesco Flachi coolly slotted a second-half penalty.

Vincenzo Montella ensured a nail-biting finale by scoring a stoppage-time penalty, but the hosts held on for three precious points.

Sampdoria's victory saw them reclaim fourth spot from Udinese, 3-2 winners at Siena on Saturday.

Palermo, the other team in contention for the final Champions League spot, lost 1-0 away to bottom club Atalanta.

Inter Milan went down to a shock 2-1 defeat at Messina, only their second loss of the season.

Julio Cruz put Inter ahead soon

after the restart, but goals from Arturo Di Napoli, a former Inter youth team player, and Brazilian Rafael secured victory for the battling Sicilians.

Inter remain in third place, four points clear of Sampdoria.

On Saturday, title-holders AC Milan thrashed Parma 3-0.

TOP SIX

Italian football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Milan 33 22 7 4 55 20 73
Juventus 33 22 7 4 56 22 73
Inter 33 14 17 2 58 37 59
Sampdoria 33 16 7 10 36 25 55
Udinese 33 15 8 10 50 36 53
Palermo 33 12 12 9 39 35 48

Beckham could sue nanny!

AFP, London

Lawyers for England captain and Real Madrid star David Beckham said they are considering legal action after a Sunday tabloid newspaper alleged that his marriage to pop star Victoria is on the rocks.

The News of the World, the best-selling newspaper in Britain, based its report on interviews with Abbie Gibson, who was nanny to the celebrity couple's children for two years.

"We are consulting our lawyers with a view to taking legal action," a spokesman for the Beckhams said Sunday.

Gibson, who quit her nanny job three weeks ago, was quoted as saying that she had seen Beckham screaming and swearing at Victoria last December when she was heavily pregnant with their third child.

She also claimed that Victoria told Beckham that "I want to split", and that the footballer, whose flings with two women were exposed in the News of the World last year, had other extra-marital affairs as well.

Lawyers for the Beckhams tried but failed Saturday to get a judge in London to block publication of the revelations, spread across seven pages of the tabloid newspaper.

In a statement, The News of the World said that after a 90-minute hearing, the judge had ruled in its favour on the grounds that its story was in the public interest.

Lyon march on

AFP, Paris

Lyon continued their relentless march towards a fourth straight French league title with a comprehensive 3-0 victory over Auxerre under the driving Burgundy rain on Sunday night.

Inspired by Brazilian international Juninho, Lyon now have an 11-point advantage on second-placed Lille, 2-1 winners at Strasbourg Saturday, with Monaco four points adrift after winning by the same scoreline against Toulouse.

Juninho put the champions ahead after 27 minutes with his 12th goal of the season, and the Brazilian set up their second with a corner which was headed in by Ghanaian international Mickaël Essien in first half injury time.

The visitors achieved their third ten minutes into the second half with a magnificent Florent Malouda free kick which Brazilian defender Cris headed in after finding himself alone on front of Auxerre goalkeeper Fabien Col.

Arsenal booter arrested

AFP, London

Arsenal striker Quincy Owusu-Abeyie was arrested Monday after a fight broke out following the Professional Footballers' Association Player Awards.

The 19-year-old Dutchman was arrested following a punch-up outside the Cafe Royal in central London.

One man was taken to hospital with head injuries.

A police spokeswoman said: "Police were called at around 3am to Shaftesbury Avenue to reports of a fight in progress."

"Officers arrived to discover a man, believed to be in his mid-20s, suffering from injuries to the head."

"He was taken to a central London hospital in a stable condition."

"It is understood the altercation involved the victim and up to four men outside the Cafe Royal. A short time later, three men aged 19, 28 and 35 were arrested in the vicinity."

"They are all currently in custody in a central London police station."

Terry players' choice

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry has been named Player of the Year by the Professional Footballers' Association.

Two of Terry's Stamford Bridge team-mates, Frank Lampard and goalkeeper Petr Cech, had also been shortlisted, along with 2004 winner Thierry Henry of Arsenal, Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard and Crystal Palace striker Andrew Johnson.

The 24-year-old England defender dedicated his award to his Chelsea team-mates and manager Jose Mourinho.

"It is unbelievable, and the ultimate accolade to be voted for by your fellow professionals whom you play against week-in and week-out," Terry said.

"You just go out there and try to give it your best, and for them to show their appreciation and vote for me is fantastic."

"For Petr, Lamps and myself to be voted in, it was important that one of us won it. It has been a real special season with Chelsea and this just adds to it."

"I want to thank all of my team-mates, because without them this would not have happened."

"It is my first year as captain and they have helped me a lot, on and off the pitch."

Terry was the first defender to win the award since Paul McGrath in 1993 and the first Englishman to do so since Teddy Sheringham in 2001.

Flintoff ahead

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part of a carefully supervised rehabilitation programme.

Flintoff's next appearance could be in Lancashire's Championship Division Two game at Worcester, which starts on Wednesday, providing England coach Duncan Fletcher gives the go ahead.

"We'll look at the situation on Tuesday and take it from there, but if we have orders from on high not to play him then obviously we won't," said Watkinson.

"We're monitoring him on a day-to-day basis and at the moment he's not bowling flat out."

"He's probably at 50 per cent and could push it beyond that, but there's no need to do that at this stage."

"We can accommodate him as a batter and when he starts bowling, he'll be a very useful asset."

It is unlikely England will pick Flintoff for the two Tests against Bangladesh which begin the summer's international programme.

They will be followed by the triangular NatWest Series and three-match NatWest Challenge before the first Ashes Test gets underway at Lord's on 21 July.

Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney won the Young Player of the Year award.

The 19-year-old, who joined United in a 27 million pound move from Everton, received the award on the same day he fired a stunning winner against Newcastle.

It was his 15th goal in all competi-



JOHN TERRY

tions so far this season.

Jermain Defoe, Arjen Robben, Cristiano Ronaldo, Stewart Downing and Shaun Wright-Phillips were also nominated.

"Obviously for any footballer to receive any award is a great achievement, and especially so when it is one voted for by all your fellow professionals," said Rooney.

"As a footballer, you are always looking to improve and learn from the people around you