

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca stay focused



AFP, Madrid

Barcelona responded to the pressure placed on them by Real Madrid and Ronaldo by beating Albacete 2-0.

The victory maintained their six point lead over Real, who beat Real Sociedad 2-0 on Saturday, at the top of the Spanish first division with four games to go.

Barca were making hard work of overcoming their visitors but one moment of brilliance from Samuel Eto'o turned the tide for Barcelona.

The African Player of the Year, and Spanish first division's top scorer, broke the deadlock after 66 minutes when he picked up a loose ball on the edge of the area and fired home an inch-perfect curling right footshot.

"The victory was entirely due to Eto'o. His great goal got us going," said Barca coach Frank Rijkaard.

With their noses in front, Barca never looked back. The Catalan club's highly-rated

18-year-old midfielder Lionel Messi got their second goal just a few seconds before the final whistle.

Messi, who had only been on the field three minutes, got his first goal in Barca's senior ranks when he sent a delicate chip from the side of the box over the outstretched arms of Albacete goalkeeper Raul Valbuena.

Barcelona left the field to the inspiring sound of 91,000 fans chanting, "campeones, campeones," but Rijkaard refused to take anything for granted.

"I hope we can make everyone happy and there are many people enjoying this moment but let's not get ahead of ourselves. There are still some games to be played," said the coach.

Two late goals from Ronaldo saw Real Madrid win 2-0 at Real Sociedad on Saturday, to notch up their sixth consecutive victory and ensure Rijkaard can't claim the championship for at least another week.

Sevilla stayed in third after their 2-0 win over Deportivo La Coruna,

two outstanding early goals from Adriano and another teenage prodigy Jesus Navas clinching the victory.

Manchester United flop Diego Forlan scored twice to spark Villarreal to a 4-0 thrashing of Getafe on Sunday, which meant they moved up to fourth place.

The Uruguayan striker continued to put behind him the dismal memories of his stint at Old Trafford with two goals to take his tally for the Spanish League season to 20.

TOP SIX												
Spanish League standings after Sunday's matches, (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):												
Barcelona	34	24	6	4	67	25	78					
Real	34	23	3	8	61	29	72					
Sevilla	34	17	7	10	42	36	58					
Villarreal	34	15	10	9	59	33	55					
Valencia	34	13	14	7	51	35	53					
Espanyol	34	15	8	11	46	43	53					

Bayern wrap up Bundesliga

AP, Munich

Bayern Munich captured a record 18th Bundesliga championship Saturday, with Roy Makaay scoring three goals in a 4-0 victory over FC Kaiserslautern.

Schalke was eliminated from the title race with a 3-3 tie against Bayer Leverkusen. Schalke, in second place, fell 11 points behind Bayern with three games to play.

The Bayern players waited to see if Schalke scored a late goal, then ran onto Kaiserslautern's field.

From nowhere, huge two-litre glasses were produced and the Bayern players spent the next hour alternately gulping down Bavarian wheat beer and pouring it over themselves, coach Felix Magath and even the presenter of the TV coverage.

The league title comes in Magath's first season in charge at Bayern and represents his first major honour as a coach.

"It's a real relief, a real joy to finally win a title," said Magath.

Bayern coasted to its sixth straight win after Michael Ballack scored on a low shot in the 19th minute off Makaay's backheel pass. Makaay added goals in the 35th, 48th and 68th minutes.

This was Bayern's 19th German title. It won in 1932 before the Bundesliga was formed for the 1963-64 season.

DAVIS CUP BD promoted to Group-3

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh moved into the Davis Cup Group-3 when they emerged unbeaten champions in the Asia-Oceania Zone Group-4 qualifiers in Yangon.

In their last match on Sunday, Bangladesh blanked Kyrgyzstan 3-0 to finish atop Group-A with maximum four points.

On the final day, Shibu Lal gave the side a fine start beating Anton Litvinov 6-3, 6-4 while Amal Roy sealed the victory with a 6-1, 6-3 rout of Sergei Ni.

In the doubles, Shibu and Amal defeated the Litvinov-Sergey pair 6-3, 6-7, 6-4 for a clean sweep.

Group-B winners Singapore and Bangladesh, who had earlier beat Syria, United Arab Emirates and Turkmenistan, will take part in next year's Group-3 qualifiers.

SERIE A Big two going neck to neck



AFP, Rome

Juventus beat Bologna 2-1 on Sunday to draw level with AC Milan at the top of Serie A, seven days before the two title-chasers meet in a crunch Scudetto showdown at the San Siro.

Milan threw down the gauntlet to Juventus by winning by the same score at Fiorentina on Saturday, opening up a three point advantage on their championship rivals.

But Juventus responded with an equally narrow victory in Turin that would have been far easier had their strikers been more clinical in front of goal and Bologna keeper Gianluca Pagliuca not been in such irresistible form.

Juventus and Milan both have 76 points from their 34 matches played with four games of the season left.

Juve defender Fabio Cannavaro opened the scoring in the 18th minute, leaping high at the back post to head home Mauro Camoranesi's right-wing cross.

Juventus increased their lead six minutes later with an almost identical goal, but this time it was Marcelo Zalayeta's head that supplied the finish to Camoranesi's delivery.

Inter Milan strengthened their position in third place with a 2-0 home win over struggling Siena at the San Siro where an early Julio Cruz penalty and a Christian Vieri header secured the points.

Udinese reclaimed fourth spot after a 2-1 home win over bottom club Atalanta, while Sampdoria fell one place to fifth following their 2-2 draw at

Messina.

Vincenzo Montella missed a late penalty as Roma failed to ease their relegation fears with a 2-2 home draw against fellow strugglers Brescia.

UEFA Cup semi-finalists Parma won a 10-goal thriller at home to Livorno that moved them out of the drop zone.

TOP SIX												
Italian football league table before Sunday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):												
Milan	34	23	7	4	57	21	76					
Juventus	34	23	7	4	58	23	76					
Inter	34	15	17	2	60	37	62					
Udinese	34	16	8	10	52	37	56					
Sampdoria	34	16	8	10	38	27	56					
Palermo	33	12	12	9	39	35	48					

No Shoaib,

FROM PAGE 12 Also staging a comeback was 24-year-old batsman Bazid Khan, son of former captain Majid Khan, dropped after he played two one-day matches last year.

SQUAD

Inzamamul Haq (captain), Younis Khan (vice-captain), Salman Butt, Shahid Afridi, Yasir Hameed, Bazid Khan, Yousuf Youhana, Asim Kamal, Shoaib Malik, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razzaq, Navedul Hasan, Shabbir Ahmed, Shahid Nazir, Rao Iftikhar, Arshad Khan, Danish Kaneria.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Bangladesh Davis Cup team members (L-R) Dipu Lal, Shibu Lal, Mohammad Selim, Sheikh Molinuddin Walliullah Jhelun, Amol Roy, Alamgir Hossain pose for photographers at the Ramna Tennis Complex on Sunday

PREMIERSHIP

Weekend's results & standings

AFP, London

English Premiership results on Sunday:

Charlton 0 Manchester United 4 (Scholes 34, Fletcher 44, Smith 62, Rooney 67)

Tottenham 5 (Kanoute 6, 27, King 19, Reid 67, Kelly 90) Aston Villa 1 (Barry 45-pen)

Saturday Birmingham 2 (Blake 61, Heskey 80) Blackburn 1 (Stead 13)

Bolton 0 Chelsea 2 (Lampard 60, 76)

Fulham 2 (John 15, McBride 39) Everton 0

Liverpool 1 (Gerrard 52) Middlesbrough 1 (Nemeth 4)

Manchester City 2 (Distin 4, Fowler 16) Portsmouth 0

Newcastle 0 Crystal Palace 0 Southampton 4 (Oakley 7, Crouch 20, Le Saux 39, Camara 88)

Norwich 3 (Bentley 3, Higginbotham 31-og, McKenzie 45)

Playing Monday

West Brom v Arsenal (1900GMT)

TOP SIX												
English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):												
Chelsea	35	27	7	1	67	13	88					
Arsenal	34	22	8	4	74	33	74					
Man Utd	35	21	10	4	54	21	73					
Everton	35	17	7	11	41	36	58					
Liverpool	36	16	7	13	49	37	55					
Bolton	36	15	9	12	45	41	54					

Rooney not a good role model!

AFP, London

Manchester United star Wayne Rooney has been axed from a children's soccer tournament because organisers felt he was not a suitable role model.

The 19-year-old England star, who has been the centre of lurid news stories about his private life, was to have taken coaching sessions at an under-13 event this week.

Rooney has launched a libel action after denying reports he slapped his girlfriend Coleen McLoughlin in a night club. Last year he faced allegations he slept with prostitutes.

Rooney, who earns 50,000 pounds a week, has also been under fire for his behaviour on the pitch. In February he was ordered to have anger management counselling after swearing more than 100 times at the referee during United's match with Arsenal.

Warne doesn't know about it

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne has played down suggestions by his brother that he may retire from Test cricket after the Ashes in 2006-07.

Jason Warne, also the star's manager, told Sydney's Sun Herald: "He's still really enjoying Test match cricket but that is a date he's talked about."

Warne told BBC Five Live: "Sometimes the media are the first ones to let me know -- I haven't heard that one."

Asked if he would play in the 2006-07 Ashes he said: "I don't know."

He added: "I know I'm here for this one and hopefully this one's a good one."

"It's all about enjoyment -- at the moment I'm enjoying playing and when the enjoyment stops I'll stop."

Jason Warne said the amount of time his brother was away from his family was taking its toll.

"If he didn't have kids, he might play forever, but he misses them a lot these days when Test tours take him away," he explained.

"One of the big reasons he stopped playing one-day cricket for Australia was to cut down on the amount of travel he had to do, not so much cut down on his workload."

Independence Day soccer from May 5

UNB, Rajshahi

Independence Day football tournament, first of its kind in this North Bengal headquarters, kicks off on May 5 at the Rajshahi Stadium with top clubs of the country taking part.

A total of eight reputed teams from Dhaka and Rajshahi are expected to participate in the meet jointly organised by the Rajshahi City Corporation and Dalia Binsan Group.

Six teams from Dhaka are Mohammedan, Abahani, Muktijoddha, Sheikh Russel, Arambagh and Farashganj while Bangladesh Army and Rajshahi Mayor Eleven complete the fray.

Dhaka Premier League runners-up Sheikh Russel will play Bangladesh Army in the opening match.

A colourful rally from the old City Corporation of Rajshahi to the Rajshahi Stadium was brought out yesterday to drum up the soccer extravaganza.

PREVIEW: LIVERPOOL V CHELSEA (SEMI-FINAL SECOND LEG)

Feel the Blues' buzz?



AFP, London

Frank Lampard has insisted Chelsea will head into Tuesday's Champions League semi-final second leg away to English rivals Liverpool with the "confidence of champions".

The England midfielder made the claim after the Blues had added the Premier League title to the League Cup when they won earlier in the season after beating Rafael Benitez's men.

Meanwhile the man often ranked alongside Lampard as the best midfielder in England, his international team-mate and Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard, has labelled the match the "biggest game of my life".

The tie is evenly poised after a goalless draw at Stamford Bridge but Lampard, who scored both goals as Chelsea wrapped up the Premier-ship in a 2-0 win away to Bolton on Saturday, said the London club's first top-flight title in 50 years was the ideal way to prepare for a visit to Anfield.

"If going there as champions doesn't fill you with confidence, then nothing will," said the England midfielder. "So we'll have to save our energy now, relax a bit and look forward to that game."

Chelsea have injury concerns over Damien Duff and Arjen Robben but Lampard, who has played 54 games so far this season just keeps going.

With the equally impressive Chelsea captain John Terry, the heart of the Blues defence, Lampard has given Jose Mourinho's expensively-assembled multi-national side a solid English core.

"He could play 100 games in a season," said Bolton manager Sam Allardyce of Lampard. "At the moment, he has to be one of the best players in the world."

Chelsea's Portuguese boss Jose Mourinho is looking to win the Champions League in successive seasons with different clubs after guiding Porto to European club football's biggest prize.

The Londoners have won just two major European trophies in their 100-year history - the 1971 and 1998 Cup Winners' Cup.

Liverpool, by contrast, have cabinets full of silverware from the continent with four European Cups alone while as recently as 2000-01 they lifted their third UEFA Cup.

Under Benitez they have shown a marked ability to raise their game come a European night, the frustrating downside for their fans being their repeated failure to win in the Premiership in the match immediately following a Champions League tie.

The pattern was maintained in a 1-1 draw with Middlesbrough on Saturday which came hot on the heels of their highly creditable display in west London.

That result left them three points behind Everton in the race for the fourth place which would seemingly guarantee them Champions League football next season.

However, UEFA president Lennart Johansson suggested Sunday that the Reds, were they to win the Champions League, might yet be able to defend the title next season regardless of their Premier-ship position.

And Gerrard, whose stunning strike helped salvage a point against Bolton, believes his side can prolong the administrators' collective headache for a while longer yet by upsetting the odds and going through to the May 25 final in Istanbul.

"This second leg is without doubt the biggest game of my life and I am sure it's the same for every other player here," he said.

"I think it has surprised everyone,

but we are not in it just to make the numbers up. We are in it to win it so we are going to keep fighting."

Liverpool will be without the suspended Xabi Alonso following his yellow card for a first leg foul on Eidur Gudjohnsen.

Liverpool given hope

AFP, London

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has given Liverpool hope of competing in next season's Champions League even if they finish outside the top four of the Premiership, saying "the door is open" if the Anfield club win the European Cup later this month.

Only four teams from any one country are allowed to compete in the tournament, and Liverpool, currently fifth in the Premiership, are battling fourth-placed Everton and Bolton, in sixth, to finish among the top four.

UEFA had previously insisted that the rules were rigid and that no more than four teams from any one country could play in Europe's premier club competition.

However Liverpool, if they fail to improve their league standing, have been told they could be handed a Champions League ticket if they make it to and win the final later this month.

"This is a very demanding case, but it doesn't mean it cannot be discussed," said Johansson of Liverpool's position on BBC Radio 5 Live's Sportsweek programme.

GP-PROTHOM ALO AWARDS

Mashud player of the year

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket team's vice-captain and wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud was named Grameen-Phone-Prothom Alo player of the year yesterday.

Batsman Mohammad Ashraful and SAF Games gold medalist swimmer Rubel Rana received runner-up awards, judged by a panel of five experts.

The prizes were distributed at a colourful programme at Hotel Sheraton last evening.

Hockey player Russel Mahmud Jimmy won the award for the emerging athlete while Sharmin Akhter, the young shooter who won a gold medal in the SAF Games last year, was adjudged best woman athlete.

Kazi Abdul Alim got the lifetime achievement award.

Mashud received Tk 1 lakh as prize money while the others got Tk 50,000 each.

Gayle, Sarwan

FROM PAGE 12

Left-arm spinner Nicky Boje bowled tidily to concede 42 runs in 18 overs.

The tourists had resumed on 525 for four and scored briskly to add 63 runs in 16 overs before declaring.

Kallis and Ashwell Prince took their record fifth-wicket stand to 267 before Kallis mistimed a pull shot off fast bowler Daren Powell and fell to a simple catch by Dwight Washington at mid-on. Kallis hit 147 off 287 balls with 14 fours and a six.

BRIEF SCORES

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 588 for 6 declared (Kallis 147, Prince 131, Smith 126, De Villiers 114; Powell 2-137)

WEST INDIES: First innings 299 for 1 (Gayle 184 not out, Sarwan 103 not out; Ntini 1-57)

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Showman

4 Lean-to

8 Close

12 Have a bug

13 Frat-party garb

14 Bullets

15 Meadow

16 "No more," in diner jargon

18 Moon-related

20 Main-lander's memento

21 Booty

24 Legislate

28 Direct paths

32 Neutral color

33 Wapiti

34 Doll

36 Kreskin's claim

37 A util.

39 Ocean event

41 Turkish bigwig

43 Micro-nesian island group

DOWN

1 Decline

2 Stead

3 "The Good Earth"

4 Man of morals?

50 Truck-engine fuel

55 "Hail, Caesar!"

56 "— She Sweet?"

57 Count counter-part

58 Bear hair

59 Tarry

60 Unravel a bit

61 Ostrich's cousin

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Solution time: 21 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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