



Atletico Madrid's Jose Jurado (L) makes an acrobatic side-volley during their Primera Liga match against Osasuna in Vicente Calderon Stadium in Madrid on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

SERIE A Atalanta on the climb

REUTERS, Rome

Palermo's pursuit of second place suffered a setback after a 0-0 draw at Reggina in Serie A on Saturday.

The Sicilian side are third on 39 points, 12 behind leaders Inter Milan and three adrift of AS Roma.

Third from bottom Reggina, handed an 11-point penalty after a match-fixing scandal in the close season, kept Palermo quiet for most of the game.

The nearest the visitors came to scoring was in the 66th minute when a corner dropped kindly for defender Christian Zaccardo, who blasted a shot narrowly over the bar.

Atalanta climbed to fourth on 27 points after two late goals earned a 3-1 win at bottom club Ascoli.

The match seemed poised for a draw after Riccardo Zampagna's goal for Atalanta was cancelled out by home striker Michele Paolucci.

But Brazilian defender Adriano, who provided the cross for Zampagna's goal, headed Atalanta back into the lead on 85 minutes before Cristiano Doni grabbed the third goal on the break.

Bradley makes winning debut

AFP, Los Angeles

The United States, with goals from Landon Donovan, Jonathan Bornstein and Kenny Cooper, defeated Denmark 3-1 in an international friendly Saturday that marked Bob Bradley's debut as head coach.

Bradley was put in charge of the squad last month after talks broke down with German World Cup coach Juergen Klinsmann, giving the 48-year-old American a chance to audition for the job, likely to be filled by the end of May.

Donovan's penalty in the 44th minute saw the Americans level at the interval after Dennis Sorensen had put Denmark ahead in the 37th minute.

Bornstein added a second goal in the 57th minute, and Cooper made it 3-1 in the 80th.

Although the United States created more quality opportunities in the first half, Danish keeper Matt Reiss was able to keep them at bay and give them the chance to go ahead when Sorensen blasted home a pass from Simon Busk Poulsen.

When US youngster Ricardo Clark was brought down just inside the penalty area in the 43rd minute, Donovan took the opportunity to equalize from the penalty spot.

Another young American, Justin Mapp, came on after halftime for Nate Jaqua and quickly made an impact, using his speed to get past the Danish defence and delivering the ball to Bornstein, who scored his first goal for the national team in his first appearance.

Cooper, a second-half substitute, also scored in his USA debut.

FEDERER EXPRESS MARCHES ON Roddick sets up 'friendly' clash



AFP, Melbourne

Roger Federer sent a shiver through his Australian Open rivals with another straight sets demolition job to join Andy Roddick, Tommy Robredo and Mardy Fish in the quarterfinals Sunday.

The sublime world number one whipped rising Serbian youngster Novak Djokovic 6-2, 7-5, 6-3 to storm in the last eight against Spaniard Robredo without dropping a set.

Sixth seed Roddick set up an all-American quarterfinal against Fish after putting away net-charging Croatian Mario Ancic, 6-3, 3-6, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4 in just over three hours.

Robredo, seeded seventh, claimed his first Australian quarterfinal in seven attempts after a 6-4, 6-2, 3-6, 6-4 win over Frenchman Richard Gasquet.

Fish, who grew up with Roddick during high school and shared a

house during their junior tennis days, also continued in winning style as the tournament enters its second week.

The unseeded American, who is fighting back after two operations on a career-threatening injured left wrist a year ago, got past Spanish 16th seed David Ferrer 6-1, 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 7-5.

Federer was in irresistible touch as he reeled off victory in 1hr 50min over the 19-year-old Djokovic, hailed as one of the future stars of men's tennis.

The Swiss star controlled the points and had the 15th-ranked Djokovic screaming out in exasperation as he produced some sublime tennis.

The win extended his unbeaten streak to 33 matches as he closes in on his personal record unconquered run of 35 matches set in 2005.

"I feel good physically. It's straight sets every time, so plus a day off I couldn't be better," Federer said.

It is Roddick's fourth quarterfinal appearance at the Australian Open and places him

just a match away from a potential semi-final with his great nemesis Federer.

His greater consistency and patience was the key to beating the aggressive Ancic.

He broke the Croat's serve five times and dropped his own three times. Ancic out-hit Roddick 60 winners to 52, but Roddick's committed far less errors, 19 to Ancic's 33.

"I felt pretty odd out there. I felt that I was hitting the ball through the court pretty good and he was stepping in," he said.

"I think we were both trying to play the same sort of game and it went in momentum shifts."

In third round matches carried over from Saturday's rain suspensions, Czech 13th seed Tomas Berdych overcame Russian Dmitry Tursunov 6-2, 6-1, 6-1 and will face third seed Nikolay Davydenko on Monday.

German Tommy Haas, a two-time semi-finalist here, knocked out compatriot Florian Mayer 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-3 to set up a fourth round match with Argentina's eighth seed David Nalbandian.

Sharapova to get back top spot

REUTERS, Melbourne

Russia's Maria Sharapova will regain the world number one ranking after Amelie Mauresmo and Svetlana Kuznetsova suffered surprise defeats in the Australian Open fourth round on Sunday.

After current top-spot holder Justine Henin-Hardenne withdrew from the Melbourne Park event for personal reasons, Sharapova ensured there would be a new No. 1 by reaching the last 16 at the year's first grand slam.

Sharapova and Frenchwoman Mauresmo were set to vie for the elite ranking but with the defending champion's defeat in Melbourne and the Russian having fewer points to defend, most of the permutations were made redundant.

Only third seed Kuznetsova could have deprived her fellow Russian of top spot if she had won the tournament and U.S. Open champion Sharapova lost her fourth-round match to Vera Zvonareva on Monday. That equation was also scratched on Sunday after Kuznetsova fell to Israel's Shahar Peer.

Mauresmo has spent 39 weeks as the world number one in her career, while Sharapova, who last

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Sevilla stop the rot

AFP, Madrid



three points.

Villarreal are not the side which reached the Champions League semi-finals last year but with Diego Forlan prompting them forward they gave Sevilla a tough examination and the visitors were pleased to escape with a point after successive losses, at Zaragoza and at home to Mallorca last weekend.

Those results prompted Sevilla coach Juande Ramos to forecast that "infernal battles lie ahead."

And a blood-and-thunder match of eleven yellow cards -- five for the hosts and six for the visitors -- proved him right in a match of few clear cut chances which left Sevilla on 38 points from 19 games, three ahead of Barcelona -- who have

played two matches fewer, Real Madrid, and Atletico Madrid.

Atletico earlier beat Osasuna with a Ze Castro goal after Fernando Torres missed a penalty and Osasuna had four men sent off in the closing stages.

Sevilla's league top scorer Freddy Kanoute had a quiet night, save for setting up Renato on the stroke of half-time but home keeper Sebastian Viera was alert to the danger.

As the leaders stemmed their recent loss of form Atletico Madrid were celebrating after they boosted their hopes of bagging a Champions League berth by seeing off indisciplined Osasuna who had four players sent off.

The three points moved the "rojiblanco" into the top three but they needed a goal seven minutes from time by Portuguese star Ze Castro to settle the affair with a thumping finish after Torres' missed spotkick five minutes beforehand.

Carlos Cuellar had hauled the Spain international forward down in the box and paid with a red card.

Referee Lizondo Cortes had a field day as he had banished

Atletico's Mexican coach Javier Aguirre to the stands just before the interval when the latter became over-heated in the technical area against his former club.

After Hector Font had gone close for the visitors, denied by keeper Ivan Cuellar, standing in for injured Argentine Leo Franco, Atletico began to find their feet as Sergio Agüero twice brought good saves out of Osasuna shot-stopper Ricardo.

Cuellar's exit and Castro's goal brought the red mist down for Osasuna and former Real Madrid striker Roberto Soldado was next to go for an elbow on Ze Castro on 86 minutes before Cortes dismissed keeper Ricardo for timewasting after dishing out an earlier booking in similar circumstances.

In injury time Raul Garcia completed Osasuna's miserable night when he was red-carded for a foul on Georgios Seitaridis.

Atletico joined Real and Barca on 35 points but Real will seek to go joint top with a win Sunday at Real Mallorca, who beat them last season and who are now on a high after the win a week ago in Sevilla.

Champion gone



AP, Melbourne

Defending champion Amelie Mauresmo and No. 3 Svetlana Kuznetsova are gone.

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams, who missed most of last season with a knee injury, showed glimpses of her peak form in a 6-3, 6-2 win over 11th-seeded Jelena Jankovic on Sunday.

"It was absolutely sensational ... I just play some of my best tennis here," said Williams, who had 31 winners and dropped serve only once. "I'm on the right track -- I like being a dangerous floatie."

Second-seeded Mauresmo floated right out of the tournament, falling 6-4, 6-3 to 70th-ranked Lucie Safarova. Kuznetsova lost 6-4, 6-2 to Shahar Peer of Israel in the women's fourth round.

Peer made the quarterfinals at a major for the first time. Williams covered the court with ease against Jankovic, despite question marks over her fitness and the fact that Jankovic was in form, coming to Melbourne with a title at Auckland and a run to the final at last week's Sydney International.

Mauresmo was up a service break early before slumping against Safarova, a 19-year-old Czech player who had only won one match in six previous Grand Slam tournaments.

"It's amazing. I still can't believe it," Safarova said. "I'm so happy. It's incredible."

It was Safarova's first time on center court at the Australian Open and her first match against Mauresmo.

"I came out this morning and said, 'Wow this is a big court.' But I felt really comfortable here," Safarova said.

She next plays fellow Czech Nicole Pietrangeli, who beat seventh-seeded Elena Dementieva 6-3, 6-3.

In post-match comments,



PHOTO: AFP

Defending champion Amelie Mauresmo of France vents her frustration during her match against Lucie Safarova of the Czech Republic in the fourth round of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Sunday.

Mourinho curses his fate

REUTERS, London



situation at injury-hit Chelsea.

"I'm never allowed to do what I want because I'm the manager," he told British newspapers after a 2-0 Premier League defeat at Liverpool. "I'm not the owner, I'm not the chief executive, I'm not the chairman, I'm just a manager."

"I give my opinion to the club and the club try, if they want, to give me what I think is good for the team."

Mourinho was without injured defenders John Terry, Khalid Boulahrouz and Wayne Bridge plus Ricardo Carvalho, who was ill, suspended midfielder Claude Makelele and long-term absentee forward Joe Cole at Liverpool.

He said he had told the Chelsea hierarchy last month he needed two new players.

"At the end of December I gave my opinion. I said we needed a central defender and an attacking player," said the Portuguese coach.

"I gave my opinion and sometimes the club tries to do the best they can."

Mourinho said it was unlikely the champions would sign anyone before the transfer window closes at the end of the month.

"The market is open for another 10 days but it has been open for 20 days and if we didn't already get a player then I don't see why we should get one now," he said.

However, Mourinho added that his squad was ready to battle.

"My group is very, very short but mentally strong, we are together ready to fight for the rest of the season," he said.

"If we end the (weekend) fixtures with six points difference to Manchester United I'll be very, very happy."

United hope to capitalise on Chelsea's defeat by winning at Arsenal on Sunday and opening a nine-point lead over the champions.

Mourinho has been at the centre of media reports over the past fortnight of tension between him and Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

Striker Andriy Shevchenko's poor form fuelled the rumours and the 57-million-dollar Ukrainian striker did little to help lift the tension with an ineffectual 17 minutes as a substitute at Anfield, one of several below-par Chelsea performances.

'Black Widow' controversy

AFP, Melbourne

Martina Hingis' fiancé has disputed the five-time Grand Slam champion's reputation as a "Black Widow" who acts as a jinx on the careers of the men in her life.

The US magazine Tennis saddled Hingis with the unflattering nickname last year after her boyfriend, Czech tennis pro Radek Stepanek, was forced out of the game for six months with a back injury.

The magazine pointed out that Hingis dated US doubles specialist Justin Gimelstob in 1997, shortly before he suffered a chronic back problem, and injuries finished Spaniard Julian Alonso after he began going out with the Swiss Miss.

It said Swede Magnus Norman was flying high as world number two in 2000 but developed a career-ending hip problem the following season after forging a relationship with Hingis.

Stepanek, who is now Hingis' fiancé after proposing to the world number seven in Prague last November, dismissed suggestions he was tempting fate by marrying Hingis.

After finishing in the top 20 for the first time last year, Stepanek said he was playing the best tennis of his career.

"I'm not paying much attention to those comments because everybody is different," Stepanek told reporters at the Australian Open.

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PHOTO: AFP

World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland hits a forehand return against Novak Djokovic of Serbia during their fourth round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Sunday.