



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona forward Ronaldinho (L) shoots from long range to score one of his two goals in the Primera Liga match against Racing Santander at the Nou Camp on Sunday.

Cannavaro delighted with Beckham

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid defender Fabio Cannavaro was delighted to see David Beckham's name back in the starting line-up for Saturday's Primera Liga match at Real Sociedad.

Beckham was recalled to the Madrid squad on Friday, having spent a month on the sidelines after being exiled by coach Fabio Capello since announcing his decision to join the Los Angeles Galaxy this summer.

Not only was Beckham named in a 20-man squad he was also selected in Capello's first XI for the match in San Sebastian and duly scored Madrid's equaliser in a 2-1 win.

That was the former England captain's first start for Madrid since the 3-0 home defeat to Recreativo Huelva on December 20, and for Cannavaro it was a welcome return.

"It was pleasing for everyone. We are always working together," he said.

"I don't like it when a team-mate is left out of the squad. We are all here to work well for Madrid."

Cannavaro also supported coach Capello for going back on his initial decision to ostracise Beckham.

"We can all make mistakes, that is normal. There isn't a problem, it is human to rectify your mistakes," the Italian World Cup winner said.

The victory over Sociedad was Madrid's eighth away triumph of the season, equalling a club record first set in 1960-61 and then matched in 1987-88.

Madrid went on to win the league on both of those occasions, and although they still have plenty of work to match that feat this season, Saturday's win has given the Spanish giants a major boost ahead of a daunting run of fixtures.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Deschamps under pressure

INTERNET, undated

Juventus Coach Didier Deschamps' position at the helm of the Turin club is in peril after the team's latest disappointing results.

The Bianconeri jointly lead the Serie B table with 40 points, alongside Napoli, but were once again held to a draw on Saturday after throwing away a commanding lead against Vicenza.

According to Turin-based newspaper Tuttosport, the club has no intention of changing tactician before the end of the season, but also needs to understand if the Frenchman is the right man to guide the side on their likely return to Serie A.

The dressing room has allegedly lost its trust in Deschamps and several players are against the Coach, including David Trezeguet, Mauro Camoranesi, Valeri Bojinov, Marcelo Zalayeta, Jonathan Zebina and Claudio Marchisio.

The Juve supporters are criticising the Coach too and would favour Marcello Lippi's sensational return to the bench, a rumour that has not been denied by the former World Cup-winning Azzurri boss.

Ronnie puts Barca clear

REUTERS, Madrid



Barcelona forward Ronaldinho recaptured his form on Sunday when he struck twice to lead his side to a 2-0 win at home to Racing Santander that put them three points clear at the top of the Primera Liga.

The Brazilian, who has been criticised for his poor showings in recent games, opened the scoring with a magnificent free-kick six minutes after halftime and took his tally for the season to 15 goals when he netted with a fine header 16 minutes later.

The biggest cheer of the night, though, was reserved for Argentine teenager Lionel Messi who came on as a second half substitute after over three months out with a broken bone in his left foot.

Barca lead the standings on 46 points from 22 games, three clear of Sevilla, who were held 0-0 by city rivals Real Betis on Saturday, and

five ahead of Real Madrid who won 2-1 at relegation-threatened Real Sociedad.

Despite missing their strike duo Pedro Munitis and Nikola Zigic, Racing held their own in the opening exchanges at the Nou Camp and were awarded a penalty after Julianio Belletti leant on Juanjo in the area in the 25th minute.

But Barca keeper Victor Valdes produced a great save to deny Argentine spot kick specialist Ezequiel Garay.

Barca stepped up a gear after the early scare, breaking the deadlock six minutes into the second half when Ronaldinho sent a 25-metre free-kick curling over the wall and then dipping low inside the post.

The Brazilian added a second

when he nodded in from close range after Deco had whipped another free kick into the area from wide on the left in the 67th minute.

Fourth-placed Valencia lost ground on the leaders when they fell victim to Bernd Schuster's Getafe who continued their impressive start to the year with a 3-0 win at the Coliseo.

Getafe, who also beat Valencia in the Cup last month, took the lead 30 seconds after the break when skipper Mario Coto rifled home at the near post.

In-form striker Daniel Guiza notched up his seventh goal of the season soon after and midfielder Nacho lashed home late on to complete an emphatic win that pushed Getafe up into seventh spot, four points behind Valencia.

Atletico Madrid joined Valencia on 39 points after a classy individual goal from Argentine teenager Sergio Aguero earned them a 1-0 win at home to struggling Athletic Bilbao.

At the other end of the table, Celta Vigo coach Fernando Vazquez could find his job on the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

TOP SIX							
Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Barcelona	22	13	7	2	45	18	46
Sevilla	22	13	4	5	41	21	43
Real Madrid	22	13	2	7	30	19	41
Valencia	22	12	3	7	32	21	39
Atletico	22	11	6	5	28	17	39
Zaragoza	22	10	5	7	34	24	35

Ronaldo enjoys Milan bow

AFP, Rome



Ronaldo was delighted with his AC Milan debut after coming on as a second-half substitute in

Sunday's 2-1 home win against Livorno.

The 30-year-old Brazil international started on the bench as he is still short of match fitness, but he managed three shots on goal in the 27 minutes he spent on the pitch, two of them on target.

"It went very well," said the 30-year-old striker who joined AC Milan from Spanish giants Real Madrid at the end of January.

"It's not easy coming in and trying to get with the team straight away, but I was happy with how it went.

"But it's only my first appearance and it's going to take time to understand each other's movements."

"I have to learn a lot about the team, and my teammates need to get to know me. It's going to take time."

Ronaldo, who has already played in Serie A having spent five years with AC Milan's city rivals Inter, was delighted to hear the home fans singing his name when he came on for fellow Brazilian Ricardo Oliveira.

"I got a great reception, from the fans and my teammates," he said. "There's a wonderful atmosphere at this club."

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said Ronaldo, a three-time FIFA World Player of the Year, was still a long way from reaching his peak.

"His fitness has to improve, but I believe he will be a very important player for us," Ancelotti said.

"He is an incredible talent, but he needs to get some games under his belt.

"Everything is still there, his pace,

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

EL GORDO RETURNS: Brazilian forward and new Milan recruit Ronaldo controls the ball during his debut for Milan in their Serie A encounter against Livorno at the San Siro on Sunday.

Romario alive and scoring

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian World Cup winner Romario shrugged off his 41 years to hit a hat-trick as Vasco de Gama beat Volta Redonda 6-1 in a league match here on Sunday.

Romario, whose goals helped Brazil to the 1994 World Cup crown, came on as a 67th-minute substitute in the Carioca championship game and then scored in the 69th, 76th and 79th minutes as he edged closer to his objective of finishing his career with 1,000 goals.

According to unofficial figures, the veteran attacker is now 10 away from that target.

Romario needed special permission from FIFA to play for Vasco after having already appeared for Miami, in the USA, and Adelaide United, in Australia, this season.

Schuster fancies Bayern

INTERNET, undated

Getafe coach Bernd Schuster has refused to rule out a return to the Bundesliga after being linked with a move to Bayern Munich.

The German is currently enjoying success in the Spanish Primera Liga and has been touted as a future coach of Real Madrid or Barcelona.

However, Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer has named him as a possible candidate if the club decides not to extend Ottmar Hitzfeld's contract beyond the end of the season.

And Schuster told the Bild newspaper on Monday that an offer from Bayern would be hard to turn down.

"Why not Bayern?" he said. "I am keen on the Bundesliga and was close to landing in Wolfsburg or Stuttgart."

"But I don't know if Bayern would take such a step.

"I am no big-name coach like (Arsene) Wenger, (Jose) Mourinho or (Fabio) Capello."

The 47-year-old has led Getafe into contention for a place in Europe next season and many voices in Spain are linking him with a move to Real, where coach Capello has been feeling the heat in recent weeks.

Bayern and Real face each other in the knockout stages of the Champions League next week, and Schuster would find it difficult to decide between the two if they also went head-to-head for his services.

He said: "I wouldn't know who to choose, although I have been in Spain a long time.

"It would depend on the timing. I like Madrid, but I really got to know Munich during the World Cup and it is a dream city."

Schuster also admitted he is free to choose from any "big club" due to a clause in his contract which would allow him to leave Getafe immediately.

Jewell furious at referee

INTERNET, undated

Furious Paul Jewell says ref Phil Dowd may have hit Wigan with a 50 million pound relegation hammer blow.

Latics manager Jewell claimed ref Dowd made two horrendous blunders to rob the Latics of a famous Emirates win.

And Jewell rapped: "Those decisions cost us three points and 50 million Dowd by name, Dowd by nature."

"A leading Premiership manager told me he was the worst ref in the league.

"I'm not saying who but that's what he said. I have to be careful but I thought it was there for all to see today."

First, with Wigan leading 1-0, Dowd denied the Latics a penalty when Mathieu Flamini made contact with Emile Heskey.

Then he failed to spot that Flamini was offside during the move that led to the Gunners' leveller.

Jewell said: "We've had Mr Dowd three times since we've been in the Premiership and he's consistent. I'll give him that."

"I am not one of those managers who blames referees but three times I have had a go at refs and it has been him each time."

Seven Wigan players also claimed that the official told them to "f**k off."

Jewell added: "It's a man's game but he is telling our players to 'f off and things like that."

"I don't mind that but he is telling me I am in the stands because I am having a go at him because he has cost us the game no doubt about that."

"He told me I was in the stands and if I carried on he would take it even further."

"If he wants to take it even further I'll take his language to my players even further."

"We should have had a penalty and we had two stonewall penalties at Arsenal last year that he didn't give. He must have something in his contract that he can't give penalties."

"I am sat here absolutely gutted."

Arsenal steal it late

AFP, London



Tomas Rosicky maintained Arsenal's push towards the Barclays Champions League qualification by sealing a controversial 2-1 victory over Wigan on Sunday.

The Czech midfielder capped a stirring comeback at the Emirates Stadium by heading in Julio Baptista's cross with five minutes remaining, just moments after the luckless Fitz Hall had put the ball into his own net.

Wigan had been primed to end Arsenal's unbeaten record at the Emirates stadium when Denny Landzaat fired them ahead with a spectacular drive and the visitors' smouldering sense of injustice was exacerbated when they were denied a clear penalty with the score still 1-0.

Paul Jewell, Wigan's manager, had to be dragged away from Phil Dowd, the referee, after the final whistle and his annoyance was understandable. His team's dogged, energetic display was worthy of a point at least, but defeat leaves them dangling precariously over the relegation zone.

Jewell told Sky Sports: "We should have had a penalty at 1-0, then one of our players was getting treatment and they wouldn't let him back on before Arsenal scored. The first goal looked offside as well."

"The trouble with some officials is they don't understand the game. They've cost our team points and it could cost us 50 million pounds if we get relegated."

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger added: "I felt we deserved it

because we fought until the last second and showed fantastic spirit.

"It was the kind of game that is always difficult after international week. We were sloppy at the start, but I was impressed by the way we came back."

Arsenal's spirit in overturning a deficit for the 12th time this season delighted Wenger, but for long spells his side were decidedly uninspired.

Their odd moments of threat in the first half were created by Theo Walcott.

In the 10th minute he skipped clear of his marker and zipped a ball fractionally in front of the onrushing Baptista, while a similar break moments later ended with Henry somehow scooping his shot over from eight yards.

Yet for all Walcott's probings, Wigan subdued Arsenal's threat with relative ease, and the strength and energy of Emile Heskey and Julius Aghahowa ensured they could never be entirely discounted as an attacking force.

In the 35th minute, Johan Djourou's failure to handle Aghahowa's forceful run proved fatal. The Nigerian's cut back was deflected out of the area but the loose ball fell to Landzaat, who took one touch before belting a 30-yard

drive high into the top corner.

Arsenal were shocked and Wigan came agonisingly close to capitalising on more groggy defending seconds before half-time when Heskey was put clear by Ryan Taylor's slide-rule pass.

The former England striker nudged a shot low to Jens Lehmann's left, but the German's feather-light touch was enough to divert the ball onto the post.

Heskey had the perfect opportunity to atone for that miss early in the second half when another Taylor through-ball sprung Arsenal's flimsy offside trap. Heskey, clear again, opted for power rather than placement and heaved a shot over the crossbar. Ordinarily, Arsenal would be ruthless in penalising such generosity, but they continued to labour. Emmanuel Adebayor was dispatched from the bench after Djourou withdrew with a suspected broken nose, but even the he struggled to spark his side.

Adebayor did see a goal incorrectly chalked off for offside but the game's key moment was a decision which went their way. In the 78th minute Mathieu Flamini appeared to haul down Heskey just inside the area but Dowd waved away Wigan's protests.

His decision proved pivotal. Moments later, Adebayor set Flamini clear down the right and the Frenchman's fizzing low cross was diverted into his own net by Hall.

That was tough enough on Wigan, but the injustice was compounded four minutes later when a neat move involving Rosicky, Adebayor and Baptista ended with the Czech nodding in from six yards.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's wily midfielder Tomas Rosicky (C) heads the ball into the net past a despairing Chris Kirkland (L) to score a last minute winner in their Premiership clash against Wigan at The Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Mancini points to history

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini said Sunday Italy should have dealt with football hooliganism

years ago having had enough warnings in the past.

Mancini spoke after his team's behind-closed doors match at Chievo as Serie A resumed following the suspension imposed after last week's riot in Sicily.

Policeman Filippo Raciti was killed at the derby match between Catania and Palermo. As a result of the violence the Italian government ordered clubs whose stadium security is not adequate to play games without spectators.

Raciti became the 12th victim of football-related violence in Italy and Mancini believes the country has been too slow to react to a problem that has plagued their best-loved sport for years.

"It's absurd that a wife finds herself without a husband and two children find themselves without a father because of a few stupid people," Mancini told Sky Italia.

"But we always act too late in

Italy. These things had already happened in the past.

"We already had a death in 1995 when Vincenzo Spagnolo was killed in Geona, and then two years ago somebody was injured by a firework at Ascoli. But the measures always come afterwards."

Mancini slammed the decision to play matches behind closed doors. "To play like this without the public makes no sense," he said.

"It would be better to stop (the championship) altogether and restart in September when everything has been sorted out."

A minute's silence preceded all of Sunday's Serie A matches in memory of Raciti, but some fans at Roma and Torino whistled during the tribute.

"I'm very sorry, particularly as it was our fans," said Torino coach Alberto Zaccheroni.

Ascoli keeper Gianluca Pagliuca said he would have preferred it if his team's match at Sampdoria had been played behind closed doors.

The former Italy international, who spent eight seasons at Sampdoria before spells at Bologna and Inter, was continually abused by the home fans.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Henry's little joke

INTERNET, undated

Thierry Henry played down his row with Wigan keeper Chris Kirkland.

The Gunners striker enraged TV viewers by appearing to take the mickey out of the stopper.

Henry went face to face with Kirkland following Fitz Hall's 81st-minute own goal.

Sky pundit David Platt, a former Arsenal star, said: "That's disrespectful to an opponent and I hope he makes a public apology for his behaviour."

"Thierry Henry is one of the best players in the world but there's no need for that."

But Henry insisted: "Kirkland started to waste time from the first minute."

"This is one of the games when I have run the most because I was trying to get the ball off him."

"When we scored I asked him if he wanted to waste any more time. It was just a joke but it was a bit annoying."

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger said: "People do not come and pay money to see people waste time."

"What Thierry did was right. He shouldn't have done it but it wasn't the worst insult you will see."

It's frustrating for Wigan but many decisions have gone against us."

Henry and Kirkland looked to have made up as they left the field.