

## BARCELONA ALONE ATOP Eto'o proves his worth

AFP, Madrid



Samuel Eto'o made a goal-scoring return as Barcelona put daylight between themselves and their Spanish title rivals by thrashing Athletic Bilbao 3-0.

The reigning Spanish champions got all their goals in the first half before easing off, which saved the hapless Basque side from further humiliation, and now have a two-point lead over Sevilla at the top of the Spanish first division.

A bizarre own goal by Fernando Amorebieta, the Athletic defender kicking a Ludovic Giuly cross twice en-route to putting the ball in his own net after 22 minutes, was followed up by strikes from Xavi Hernandez and Eto'o.

Cameroun international striker Eto'o, last season's top scorer in the Spanish first division, was starting his first game for five months after a sustaining a serious knee injury in the Champions League against Werder Bremen in September.

In the second half, Barca toyed with Athletic but did not add to their tally although Ronaldinho hit the crossbar twice.

The result will give Barca coach Frank Rijkaard some respite after a week of criticism in the wake of losses to Valencia and Liverpool.

However, he may not have much time to breathe easily as Barca have to travel to Sevilla next Saturday for a top of the table clash for supremacy in Spain.

### TOP SIX

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Barcelona	24	14	7	3	49	20	49
Sevilla	24	14	5	5	44	22	47
Valencia	24	13	4	7	35	23	43
Real Madrid	24	13	4	7	31	20	43
Atletico	24	11	7	6	30	21	40
Zaragoza	24	11	6	7	35	24	39



Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o scores one between the legs of a diving Athletic Bilbao keeper Daniel Aranzubia during their Primera Liga match at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on Saturday.

### Derby ref admits mistake

AFP, Madrid

A Spanish referee admitted on Monday he blundered in disallowing an Atletico Madrid goal in Saturday's local derby with rivals Real Madrid which ended in a 1-1 draw.

Atletico had taken the lead after 11 minutes through Spanish international Fernando Torres and three minutes later their Colombian defender Luis Perea added a second, but it was ruled offside by referee Arturo Dauden Ibanez.

He later admitted his mistake to Spanish sports daily Marca.

"When you see the television images and the goal, we simply got it wrong," said Dauden Ibanez.

"Now we have to go back and analyse what happened to make sure it doesn't occur in another game. On the field, things look different to the way they do on television," added the 42-year-old, a biology teacher.

If the goal had been allowed, it could have had a crucial influence on the game, and the Spanish league standings. Real lie in fourth place and Atletico fifth in La Liga but now three points apart.

Real equalised after 61 minutes when new signing Gonzalo Higuain got his first goal since moving from Argentine side River Plate in December, to maintain the streak of not having lost to Atletico for seven years.

## AMBROSINI SAVES MILAN Inter demolish Catania

REUTERS, Rome



Inter Milan notched their 17th successive Serie A victory with a 5-2 win at Catania on Sunday.

Catania resisted stubbornly until just before the interval, when Walter Samuel headed in from a corner.

Second-half goals by Santiago Solaro, Fabio Grosso, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Julio Cruz sealed the win to give Inter 66 points from 24 matches, 14 points ahead of second-placed AS Roma, who beat Reggina 3-0.

The ban on Catania's Massimino stadium was rewarded in the 55th minute, when Francesco Totti put Francesco Tavano through alone on goal to score his first Serie A goal for the club since joining from

After Samuel's goal, however, Inter took control.

Solari grabbed their second goal four minutes after the restart, angling a shot in off the base of the post, and Fabio Grosso made it 3-0 with a perfect lob over Catania keeper Armando Panatelli.

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Inter Milan	24	21	3	0	54	19	66
Roma	24	16	4	4	49	18	52
Palermo	25	13	5	7	41	30	44
Lazio	24	11	7	6	37	18	37
AC Milan	24	12	8	4	33	21	36
Empoli	24	9	8	7	21	21	35

## Bookies hit hard

AFP, London

being held to a shock 1-1 draw at bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona.

Gimnastic's Ruben Castro equalised with a header two minutes into injury time to deservedly grab a point for Tarragona, although they remain on the foot of the table.

The 2002 and 2004 Spanish champions were surprisingly muted in the wake of their Champions League exploits in the 2-2 draw at Inter Milan on Wednesday.

Joaquin Sanchez put Valencia ahead after 62 minutes picking up the rebound after Gimnastic keeper Alvaro Bizarri could only bat away a shot from Fernando Morientes.

Celta Vigo threw away a two-goal lead but still edged out of the relegation zone after a 2-2 draw with Racing Santander.

The Galician hosts went in front after 27 minutes from a Fernando Baiano penalty, after Racing's Gonzalo Coloma had brought down Boria Oubina.

New French signing Habib Bamogo added Celta's second eight minutes later but Celta then moved onto the defensive, often with five men or more at the back, but the tactic backfired.

Racing's Pedro Munitis reduced the deficit just before the hour and then Christian Alvarez equalised from the penalty spot 11 minutes from time after Celta's Brazilian midfielder Iriney had brought down Juanjo Exposito.

"The truth is things didn't go well when we tried to shut the game down when we were ahead. We committed too many errors," admitted Celta coach Fernando Vasquez.

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PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba languishes in celebration after his double-strike secured a second Carling Cup for his club beating Arsenal 2-1 in the final at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff on Sunday.

## DROGBA DOES IT AGAIN

## Chelsea win fiery final

### Football

AFP, Cardiff

Didier Drogba fired Chelsea to League Cup final glory as his late winner clinched a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Sunday.

Drogba has been Chelsea's talisman all season as his goals have kept them in contention for four trophies and the Ivory Coast striker was the hero once again at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

He had already brought Chelsea back into the match with a fine strike to cancel out Theo Walcott's early goal and he clinched the fourth trophy of Jose Mourinho's Chelsea reign with a superb header seven minutes from full-time.

The match, already soured by the sight of Chelsea captain John Terry being carried off on a stretcher, finished controversially as Arsenal's Kolo Toure and Emmanuel Adebayor and Chelsea's John Obi Mikel were sent off in stoppage time following an ugly brawl.

"I think we showed character," said Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho.

"I don't think we played a great game but it was difficult."

"Arsenal played a very good game. They beat Liverpool, Everton and Tottenham with this team," Mourinho said in praise of the Gunners' youngsters.

"The pity was what happened in the final (moments). I don't know what happened but it was not nice, especially for them (Arsenal)."

"They have a great coach and great players but football is about winning and the Cup goes to us."

Arsenal manager Arsene

Wenger said: "It was an outstanding performance by my team but we are all disappointed."

However, the Frenchman admitted Arsenal's inexperience had proved costly.

"We lacked a bit of maturity and didn't keep the ball at the right time. It was a very tight game and the first to score the second goal wins."

"Unfortunately, Drogba made the difference."

Wenger, who stressed he'd "no regrets" regarding his team selection, said of the ugly climax: "You must always keep calm, no matter what happens. I regret the incident. That's not what we want, we want to play football."

"There was a brawl, a few players were involved and I'm not sure the referee (Howard Webb) picked the right ones out."

Chelsea's triumph was a personal vindication for Mourinho, involved in a bitter dispute with Blues owner Roman Abramovich for much of the year, who saw his side complete the first leg of a potential 'quadrepole' also featuring the Champions League, FA Cup and Premiership.

White Wenger could find no room for the likes of Thierry Henry, Tomas Rosicky or Gilberto Silva, Mourinho named a full-strength side, Terry involved after making a quicker than expected recovery from the ankle injury he suffered against the Gunners' youngsters.

Arsenal's youngsters showed no signs of stage-fright in the opening minutes and it was no surprise when Walcott put them ahead from a corner.

When Cesc Fabregas's delivery was only half-cleared by Drogba, Abou Diaby slipped a pass through to Walcott and the teenager kept his

composure to lift a curling shot over Petr Cech from 12 yards for his first ever Arsenal goal.

But Chelsea were level within eight minutes.

Michael Ballack's pass picked out Drogba on the edge of Arsenal's penalty area and the Ivory Coast striker, given the benefit of a tight offside call, ran through to beat Manuel Almunia for his 27th goal of the season.

Fabregas, struck by an object thrown from the Chelsea end of the stadium just before half-time, recovered to surge into the area and fired a shot inches wide of Cech's far post.

Terry then took a nasty kick in the face from Diaby as he tried to head goalwards 15 minutes into the second half.

The England defender was stretchered off with his neck in a brace and replaced by Mikel.

Chelsea shrugged off that blow to take the attack to Arsenal with Frank Lampard rattling Almunia's crossbar in the 76th minute.

Arsenal's youngsters looked increasingly weary in the closing minutes and Chelsea pushed forward.

The goal they had been threatening arrived in the 83rd minute when Arjen Robben swung in a cross and Drogba got in front of Philippe Senderos to bury a glancing header past Almunia.

With just moments left, Mikel and Toure were involved in a shoving match that sparked the mass brawl.

Mourinho and Wenger both ran onto the pitch to try and restrain their players, but Mikel, Toure and his Arsenal teammate Adebayor were all sent-off.

## Ronaldinho keen to prove critics wrong

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona forward Ronaldinho has admitted he was keen to prove wrong critics who said he was overweight, after his side's 3-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Photos of the 26-year-old showing a roll of fat around his waistband after he had taken off his shirt at the end of Wednesday's 2-1 Champions League defeat to Liverpool, have sparked a heated debate about the Brazilian's weight and form.

Newspapers in both Madrid and Barcelona made comparisons about Ronaldinho's apparent loss of fitness by publishing photos of the forward taken in 2003 and 2004 in which he appeared to be leaner and more muscular.

But having put on a scintillating display in the Nou Camp on Sunday, the Brazilian stripped to the waist at the end of the match and jokingly challenged pitchside photographers to snap him.

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## Spalletti keeps faith with Totti

AFP, Rome

Roma captain Francesco Totti will continue to take penalties for the Serie A club despite missing his sixth spot-kick of the season.

On Sunday Totti saw his penalty saved by Reggina keeper Andrea Campagnolo, but the Italy international's blushes were saved as Roma ran out 3-0 winners to remain second in the table.

It was the 30-year-old striker's sixth penalty miss in 10 attempts, but Roma coach Luciano Spalletti

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PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan midfielder Massimo Ambrosini (R) is congratulated by teammate Marek Jankulovski after the former scored a last-gasp winner against Sampdoria in their serie A match at San Siro on Sunday.