

BARCELONA ALONE ATOP

# Eto'o proves his worth

AFP, Madrid



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 Armorebieta, 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.

Cameron 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.

By contrast, Athletic slip back into the relegation zone and are now third from bottom.

Sevilla, including the Spanish first division's leading scorer Fredi Kanoute, couldn't break down the solid defence of Getafe who have only conceded three goals at home this season and were held to a 0-0 draw to stay second.

"A draw is fair. Both sides tried to win but couldn't. Goals decide games but nobody got any here and you have to accept that," said Sevilla coach Juande Ramos.

There were few chances for either side, perhaps the best falling to Getafe midfielder Francisco Sousa whose shot after 15 minutes required an outstanding save from Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop.

At the other end it was Luis Garcia, Getafe's first choice last season but playing his first game in this campaign, rather than the suspended 'Pato' Abbonanzieri who was wearing the gloves for the hosts.

"He (Garcia) stopped some important shots at the start of the game and that put his in the right frame of mind for the rest of the game," said Getafe coach Bernd Schuster.

Valencia stay in third on goal difference from Real Madrid, but still four points adrift of Sevilla, after

| 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  |  |  |  |
| R Madrid  | 24 | 13 | 4 | 7 | 31 | 20 | 43  |  |  |  |
| Athletic  | 24 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 30 | 21 | 40  |  |  |  |
| Zaragoza  | 24 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 35 | 24 | 39  |  |  |  |

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 Albano 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 Colsa had brought down Borja 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.

## Bookies hit hard

AFP, London

Chelsea's 2-1 League Cup final victory over Arsenal at the Millennium Stadium on Sunday cost the British betting industry more than a million pounds, according to one leading firm.

Ladbroke's thought they would escape a big pay-out when teenage Arsenal striker Theo Walcott gave the Gunners an early lead.

But their hopes evaporated when two goals from Chelsea striker Didier Drogba rewarded all those who backed Jose Mourinho's side from 6/5, through 11/10 to even money.

Over three million pounds is thought to have been wagered on the game across the whole industry with punters pocketing up to half of that in winnings.

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## Cagliari, Torino sack coaches

AFP, Rome

Serie A strugglers Cagliari and Torino both sacked their coaches on Monday and replaced them with former bosses.

Franco Colomba was fired as Cagliari coach following Sunday's 2-0 home defeat to Lazio, which left the Sardinian club seventh from bottom, just three points clear of the relegation zone.

Colomba was hastily replaced by Marco Giampaolo, who was sacked as Cagliari coach on December 17.

Earlier on Monday, Torino fired Alberto Zaccheroni after the Turin

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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

## Ronaldinho keen to prove critics wrong

REUTERS, Madrid

### 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 'quadruple' also featuring the Champions League, FA Cup and Premiership.

While 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 Porto in midweek.

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 stretched 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.



PHOTO: AFP

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.

Athletic 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



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

Second-half goals by Santiago Solari, 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 following the death of a policeman in rioting at a Serie A match earlier this month meant the Sicilian side were forced to host Inter behind closed doors at the Manuzzi stadium in Cesena, 650 miles (1,046 km) to the north.

The empty stands seemed to affect the Italian champions more than their Sicilian rivals. The best early chance fell to Catania midfielder Fabio Caserta who fired in a swerving volley to force a fingertip save from Inter keeper Julio Cesar.

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 job over Catania keeper Armando Pantanelli.

Defensive errors allowed Catania strikers Gionatha Spinesi and Giorgio Corona to score, but Inter hit back quickly on both occasions through Ibrahimovic then Cruz, to lift the team's morale after their 2-2 draw with Champions League rivals Valencia midweek.

Roma were also made to work hard before finding a way past Reggina at the Olympic Stadium.

Their dominance of the game 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

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|-------------|----|----|---|---|----|----|-----|--|--|--|
| Team        | P  | W  | D | L | GF | GA | Pts |  |  |  |
| 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  |  |  |  |

Valencia in January.

Goals by Philippe Mexes and Christian Panucci rounded off the victory, which could have been even more convincing if Totti had not had a penalty saved six minutes from the end.

Palermo lie third on 44 points after a 1-1 draw at Atalanta on Saturday.

Lazio climbed to fourth on 37 points after first-half strikes by Sanchez Cribari and Tommaso Rocchi gave them a 2-0 win at Cagliari.

At the San Siro Massimo Ambrosini again came to the rescue of AC Milan with a 90th-minute header to give his side a 1-0 win over Sampdoria that lifted them to fifth on 36 points.

The midfielder also scored Milan's stoppage-time winner in a 4-3 victory over Siena last week.

Empoli slipped to sixth (35 points) after losing the Tuscan derby at Fiorentina.

Goals from Adrian Mutu and Luca Toni lifted Fiorentina to seventh on 31 points, despite the 15-point penalty handed to them after last year's match-fixing scandal, and the twice Italian champions are looking strong candidates for a European place.



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.