



Sevilla's Russian striker Alexander Kerzhacov (L) bamboozles the Celta Vigo defence to score in their Primera Liga match at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium in Seville on Saturday.

REAL GO THIRD

Sevilla on par with Barca

Sevilla kept in touch with league leaders Barcelona after a hard-fought 2-0 win over struggling Celta Vigo on Sunday, although they remain in second place in La Liga on goal difference.

The leading pair in the Spanish first division both have 53 points from 27 games after Barca thrashed Recreativo Huelva 4-0 on Saturday.

Second half goals from the Sevilla striker force of Fredi Kanoute and Aleksander Kerzhakov, the first from the penalty spot and the latter three minutes into injury time, secured three points for the 2006 UEFA Cup winners.

Kanoute got his 19th goal of the season, and consolidated his position as the Spanish first division's leading scorer, after Gustavo Lopez had handled the ball in the area.

Kerzhakov then connected with an Enzo Maresca in the dying seconds to ensure there was no last gasp

shocks by Celta.

Celta, who are just one place and one point above the relegation zone, were down to 10 men for the final 17 minutes after Nestor Canobbio had kicked Jesus Navas in the face with a wild and very high challenge.

Real Madrid moved up to third with a 2-0 win over Gimnastic Tarragona but are five points behind the leading pair.

Gimnastic were down to 10 men after just seven minutes when defender Cesar Navas was harshly sent off after having been adjudged to have fouled Ruud van Nistelrooy.

However, Real's wastefulness in front of goal meant that they had to wait until 11 minutes after the break before Robinho broke the deadlock.

David Garcia unluckily headed into his own goal nine minutes before the end gave Real a comfortable advantage in the end although it was a far from convincing display from the 29th-place Spanish champions.

"In the second half we were playing against 10 men and after running a lot during the first half they (Gimnastic) paid for it," said Real coach Fabio Capello.

"Many times against teams with 10 men you can't play the way you want. We were too slow and not playing well (in the first half) but the second half was completely different. I was satisfied at the end," added Capello.

Valencia slip back a place to fourth after the 2002 and 2004 champions were surprisingly beaten 2-0 at home by Racing Sanatnder on Saturday.

Real Zaragoza remain fifth but maintained their hopes of playing in the Champions League for the first time by battling their way to a 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid earlier on Sunday.

"We worked hard, our play wasn't inspired or particularly pretty but we did beat a good side," acknowledged Zaragoza coach Victor Fernandez.

Diego Milito got the only goal of the game, his 17th of the season, after 20 minutes to give Zaragoza the perfect birthday present as the club was celebrating its 75th anniversary.

At the other end of the table, bottom club Real Sociedad's got a valuable point with a 1-1 draw at Villarreal but still face playing in the Spanish second division next season for the first time in 40 years.

Savio put Sociedad ahead after 40

Home sour home

Once upon a time playing in their own legendary Santiago Bernabeu stadium was a huge advantage for Real Madrid but coach Fabio Capello admitted here on Sunday that times have changed.

Real's stuttering form in the Spanish capital, which has seen them win less than half their home league games this season, has provoked continual brick-bats from their ever-critical fans.

Sections of the 75,000 capacity crowd in the Bernabeu started jeering their own team mid-way through the first half as Real struggled to a 2-0 win over a Gimnastic Tarragona side that was down to 10 men after just seven minutes.

Some never stopped.

"To play in the Bernabeu is a bit of an uphill battle. We are not playing with the same speed and calm that we do away from home," admitted Capello at the post-match press conference on Sunday.

"The Real Madrid fans are the Real Madrid fans. We can't change them. That's the way it is. We love them and they love us but this is their manner," added the Italian with barely disguised sarcasm.

Part of the problem appears to be Capello himself.

After being hailed as the hero who would end Real's barren streak which stretches back to 2003, the majority of Real fans would happily see the back of him.

Real are out of both the Champions League and the Spanish Cup, and although they are third in the Spanish first division after Sunday's win they remain five points adrift of league leaders and bitter rivals Barcelona.

Capello's tactics and team choices seem to have baffled not only his own squad, as several players have publicly admitted, but Real's fans.

"After the first half I didn't believe we can still win the league but after the second half I saw another team with another dream. This was two different teams but we can't play for just 45 minutes," reflected Capello.

"In the second half we were playing against 10 men and after running a lot during the first half they (Gimnastic) paid for it.



Inter Milan moved a step closer to retaining their Serie A title after they won 2-1 at struggling Ascoli and second-placed Roma were held to a goalless draw at Fiorentina on Sunday.

The results saw Inter stretch their lead at the top of the table to 18 points with just 10 games left to play.

Ascoli held the champions for 65 minutes before Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice -- both of them set up by second-half substitute Adriano -- to take his tally for the season to 15 goals.

The deadlock was broken when Adriano crossed from the right and Ibrahimovic buried a right-footed volley into the bottom corner.

Ibrahimovic doubled Inter's lead in the 73rd minute with a low, left-footed shot after Adriano's robust run.

Massimo Bonanni scored a late consolation goal for Ascoli, slotting home a penalty in the third of four minutes added on after Walter Samuel had fouled Sasa Bjelanovic.

Inter's Portuguese winger Luis Figo, who had to wear a bandage around his head in the second half



An ecstatic Zlatan Ibrahimovic (L) is congratulated by teammate Luis Figo after the former scored for Inter Milan in their Serie A clash at Ascoli on Sunday.

New faces in Italy squad

AFP, Rome

Roma full-back Max Tonetto and Sampdoria midfielder Fabio Quagliarella were called up for the first time when Roberto Donadoni named his 25-man Italy squad on Sunday for the world champions' crucial Euro 2008 Group B qualifier against Scotland in Bari on March 28.

Tonetto comes into the international set-up late in his career having turned 32 last November. He has established himself as a Roma regular and has helped them reach the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

"It doesn't matter what age you are, it's always an honour to be called up for the national team," said Tonetto who joined Roma from Sampdoria last summer.

"It's reward for years of work, above all for my performances this season with Roma with whom I've been able to fully express my qualities."

Quagliarella, 23, has been in superb form for his club this season, scoring an impressive 11 goals from midfield.

AC Milan defender Daniele Bonera, who can play on the right or in the centre, is recalled in the absence of Alessandro Nesta and Fabio Grosso who are both injured.

There is also no place for Roma star Francesco Totti who recently announced he will come back to the international fold, but only from September.

The squad will get together at their Coverciano base in Florence on Monday.

Scotland play Georgia next Saturday before taking on the Italians, who have no game this weekend.

France and Scotland are currently tied for top spot in Group B on nine points, followed by Italy on seven points.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Cristian Abbati (Torino), Marco Amelia (Livorno)

Defenders: Andrea Barzagli (Palermo), Daniele Bonera (AC Milan), Massimo Oddo (AC Milan), Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid/ESP), Marco Materazzi (Inter Milan), Manuel Pasqual (Fiorentina), Max Tonetto (Roma), Gianluca Zambrotta (Barcelona/ESP)

Midfielders: Massimo Ambrosini (AC Milan), Rino Gattuso (AC Milan), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Simone Perrotta (Roma), Stefano Mauri (Lazio), Franco Semioli (Chievo), Fabio Quagliarella (Sampdoria) Forwards: Alberto Gilardino (AC Milan), Alessandro Del Piero (Juventus), Antonio Di Natale (Udinese), Luca Toni (Fiorentina), Tommaso Rocchi (Lazio)

Bremen hot on Schalke's heels

AFP, Berlin

Midfielders Jurica Vranjes and Diego helped second-placed Werder Bremen close the gap behind Bundesliga leader's Schalke 04 with a 2-0 win over Mainz 05 on Sunday.

After Schalke poached a 1-0 win against the run of play at home to Stuttgart to open up a six-point gap on Saturday, Bremen kept on the pressure with a convincing win over Mainz at the Weserstadion.

Having missed the last two weeks with a back-injury, Bremen welcomed back their top-scorer and German international Miroslav Klose, but it was the midfielders behind him who did the damage after a scoreless first-half.

Centre half Vranjes gave Bremen the lead on the hour mark when he took a slick pass on the edge of the area and smashed his shot past Mainz's diving goalkeeper Dito Wache.

Mainz's Egyptian striker Mohamed Zidan, who has been a revelation since his Christmas switch from Bremen, managed to shake off the effects of an upset stomach to take on his former teammates, but had precious few opportunities.

And Bremen made sure of the points when Brazilian international Diego broke clear of the defence after a quick counter-attack and chipped into an empty net in injury time as Mainz were exposed for chasing an equalising goal.

In the day's other game, bottom-side Borussia Moenchengladbach travelled to sixth-placed Bayer Leverkusen's BayArena and looked to have picked up a valuable point until dealt a cruel blow in injury time.

In the game's dying stages and the match cruising towards a 0-0 draw, Bayer's Ukrainian striker Andrey Voronin saw his powerful shot deflected off a defender and past 'Gladback's keeper Kasey Keller to seal the 1-0 win.

Nadal ends title drought



AFP, Indian Wells

The long wait is over for Rafael Nadal. The swashbuckling left-handed Spaniard needed one hour and 33 minutes to dismantle Novak Djokovic of Serbia 6-2, 7-5 in the final of the ATP Pacific Life Open here Sunday.

Nadal hadn't had much to cheer about lately, failing to win a title in the dozen tournaments since defending his Roland Garros crown in June.

The world's second-ranked player put the sceptics at ease on Sunday by capturing his first tournament of 2007 after winning five events last year.

"When you are not winning you are thinking, 'I need to win one title,'" Nadal said. "It wasn't a disaster these eight (actually nine) months."

"But after I played the US Open quarter-finals I was always in the quarter-finals and semifinals.

"I wasn't winning, that's true. But I always in the quarterfinals and semifinals. I was always there.

"Sometimes you are a little bit luckier or you have a little more confidence."

Nadal got a break in Indian Wells with the early knockout of top seed and three-time defending champion Roger Federer, the Swiss world number one.

Seizing the moment, Nadal did not drop a set in the tournament. He won all his service games in the final against Djokovic.

Nadal put on an impressive display of running and shotmaking by winning the first set against Djokovic in a blazing 29 minutes.

"I arrived here for this tournament with good confidence because I was playing very good tennis in Dubai," said Nadal. "When I started

this tournament I kept telling myself I was feeling great and am in one of my best moments."

Nadal said as his game evolves and his strength improves with age he would continue to work on the finer points of his game.

"I am 20 years old. I need to improve on a lot of things," he said.

"I need to play more aggressively with my forehand, serve a little better, go to the volley sometimes, improve a little bit of a slice and improve my backhand."

He's looking forward to the Miami tournament next week and then most likely Davis Cup play later this year. Spain will face the United States in a quarterfinal.

"Right now my focus is on Miami," Nadal said. "I don't know nothing of the Davis Cup. I don't know if I am on the team."

Gunners in doldrums

AFP, Liverpool



Andy Johnson struck a dramatic injury-time winner to send Arsenal crashing to a 1-0 defeat against Everton at Goodison Park on Sunday.

England hitman Johnson, named in Steve McClaren's squad to face Israel in Tel Aviv next Saturday, took his goals tally for the season to 11 in the Premiership with his left-foot strike from Mikel Arteta's 90th minute corner.

A draw seemed the only likely outcome after the home side had twice struck the woodwork, but Johnson's goal ensured that Everton climbed to within one point of fifth-placed Bolton in the race for a UEFA Cup spot.

Everton boss David Moyes praised Johnson and his young strike partner James Vaughan and said: "I thought we deserved to win because our performance was excellent. I couldn't have faulted them even if we had lost because we were playing against a quality team."

Andy (Johnson) and James (Vaughan) were always a threat and the boys at the back were very solid. We really went about our jobs in the right way."

Liverpool's failure to claim all three points at Aston Villa earlier in the day had given Arsenal the

opportunity to consolidate third place and move four points clear of Rafa Benitez's team with victory on Merseyside.

But without the injured Thierry Henry and suspended duo Emmanuel Adebayor and Emmanuel Eboue, Wenger's men lacked the potency they usually carry and Everton were the brighter side in the first-half.

Chances may have been limited, but Johnson's pace was a worry for the Arsenal defence and the England forward was unlucky not to win a 10th minute penalty when he roughly bounded to the ground by goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.

The first real effort on goal did not come until the 26th minute, but it was a fantastic strike by Everton's Lee Carsley that left Lehmann completely helpless.

Republic of Ireland midfielder Carsley struck a powerful volley goalwards from 25 yards, but his effort crashed against the post to let Arsenal off the hook.

Arsenal's exit from the FA Cup and Champions League in the space of seven days earlier this month has clearly taken the edge off their play as they head towards another trophyless season and their lack of urgency dragged the game down into a tedious scrap.

They seemed happy to settle for a point, so it was left to David Moyes's team to make all the running until midfielder Cesc Fabreages brought a fine save from

Tim Howard with a close range strike from Julio Baptista's lay-off two minutes before half-time.

That near miss fired Arsenal up and Baptista missed a golden chance to score in first-half stoppage time when he headed over from six yards from Fabregas's corner.

Prior to this clash, Arsenal had gone a staggering 46 Premiership games without a 0-0 draw, but that result looked increasingly likely as both teams again struggled to find the breakthrough after the interval.

Everton defender Joseph Yobo went close with a back-header from Carsley's ball into the area which bounced narrowly over Lehmann's crossbar.

But Arsenal youngster Jeremie Aliadiere summed up his team's luck in front of goal when he sent Tomas Rosicky's pass high over the bar from the edge of the six yard box.

As the game plunged deeper and deeper into a non-event, Everton midfielder Leon Osman came agonisingly close to breaking the deadlock on 73 minutes when he poked the ball against the post from 12 yards.

Yet again, the woodwork came to Arsenal's rescue, but their luck finally ran out when Johnson fired his powerful strike past Lehmann one minute into stoppage time.



Everton's England international Andrew Johnson (2R) runs in joy as he scores against Arsenal during their Premiership match at Goodison Park on Sunday.

Dribbling a sin in Brazil!



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

One of the most abiding moments of the 2002 World Cup was Brazilian winger Denilson taking the ball into the corner and dribbling around in a circle chased by half the Turkey team.

Brazil were leading 1-0 in the semifinal with seconds left and commentators and fans went wild with delight, hailing Denilson's irreverence and cheeky skills as a classic piece of Brazilian play.

Yet when Brazilian players are on the wrong end of similar trickery, they fail to see the funny side.

Had Denilson tried a similar trick in his homeland, there is a good chance his antics would have provoked a brawl and it is even possible the game would not have finished.

Incredibly, for a country that produced players such as Garrincha and Pele, dribbling is often considered a provocative humiliation of an opponent, a breach of fair play and even an insult to the victim's manhood.

Ten days ago, Corinthians players bitterly criticised Palmeiras midfielder Jorge Valdivia for dribbling too much during a derby against them.

Valdivia, a Chilean international, inspired Palmeiras to a 3-0 win and afterwards received a thinly-veiled warning from Corinthians coach Emerson Leao.

"I'm worried about what might happen to him in the future because he has technique but he exaggerates," said Leao after his team had

taken it in turns to kick the Chilean.

"I worried that something more serious might happen to him in the future."

Corinthians and Palmeiras share a bitter rivalry -- it can only take a few "Oles" from the crowd to spark trouble -- and have already provided an extreme example of what can happen.

Back in 1999, the sides met to decide the Paulista championship in a two-leg final.

With Corinthians enjoying a three-goal aggregate lead and only a few minutes to play, forward Edison decided it was time for some famed Brazilian trickery and nonchalantly began playing keepy-uppy in midfield.

The gesture incensed the Palmeiras players, who chased him off the field. A vicious brawl ensued, with players exchanging punches and karate kicks, and the referee abandoned the match.

Edison did nothing outside the laws of the game, yet he was punished rather than the brawlers.

The following day, Vanderlei Luxemburgo, then Brazil coach, dropped him from the squad for the Copa America.

Since then, the dividing line between what is considered a legitimate dribble and an attempt to belittle the opposition has become ever thinner.

Another startling incident happened in 2002 when Coritiba striker Jaba performed a couple of cheeky stepovers against Santos -- and in doing so gave away a free kick.

"The rule says that a player cannot endanger an opponent or him-

self," said referee Leonardo Gaciba.

"He wasn't being objective so I awarded a free kick to protect him. If somebody had broken his leg, they will say that I was not clamping down on violence."

The same year, the second division match between Sport Recife and Botafogo-Ribeirao Preto was abandoned in the last minute when a Sport player was chased off the pitch by opponents for more ball-juggling.

That was the year in which Robinho, now with Real Madrid, burst on to the scene and he also had to cope with threats and bullying.

"Players get angry when they get dribbled all the time," said Gremio goalkeeper Dandrei after his side lost 3-0 to a Robinho-inspired performance. "He could end up having his leg broken."

Former winger Edu, who could send the crowd into raptures when he played for Santos in the 1970s, is baffled by current attitudes.

"The dribble is a tool which makes the team more offensive," he told the Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper.

"The intelligent dribble...is the essence of football. And now, even this they want to take away," he said.

NOTICE
Due to an unavoidable reason, we could not print the CROSSWORD today. We regret any inconvenience. --
Sports Editor