



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (L) tries to run past a tackle from Zaragoza's Diogo during their Primera Liga at the Romareda Stadium in Zaragoza on Saturday.

Barca falter at wrong hour

AFP, Madrid



game from the very first minute," added Milito.

Milito's 19th goal of the season makes him the joint top scorer in the Spanish first division, and was a just reward for Zaragoza being the best side up to that point.

First half chances fell to D'Alessandro, Carlos Diogo and Sergio Garcia but Barca grimly held on until the break.

Barca almost equalised within seconds of Milito's goal but Zaragoza goalkeeper Cesar Perez came out on top a one-on-one situation with Deco and the visitors never had a better chance in the remaining half hour.

Zaragoza are now unbeaten in seven games and are in contention to qualify for the Champions League for the first time.

"Overall this was our best 90 minutes of the season. They way that Barca play means that this was always going to be an open game and so we had the chance to surprise them. We beat them by playing football," reflected Zaragoza coach Victor Fernandez.

Barcelona were without their three-time African Player of the Year Samuel Eto'o, who sustained a muscle strain at the top of his right leg in training earlier this week.

Media speculation in Spain suggested Eto'o had actually been left out to prevent more racist taunting of the Cameroonian striker, but it was a suggestion strongly refuted by Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard.

"His absence is because he's not fit to play. For us, it's always better if he's with the team," said Rijkaard on Friday.

Eto'o threatened to walk off the pitch during last season's match at Zaragoza after receiving racist abuse from the home crowd.

Zaragoza move up to fourth place, ahead of Valencia on goal difference, after the 2002 and 2004 Spanish champions went down 1-0 at struggling Athletic Bilbao later on Saturday.

Athletic's Igor Gabilondo got the only goal of the game with a cheeky right foot back-heal after 27 minutes, following a pass from Joseba Etxeberria.

Valencia piled on the pressure in the second half in a bid to get an equaliser but just came up short.

David Villa hit the cross bar after 78 minutes and then, six minutes from time, Valencia's Spanish international striker sent a free kick from 30 metres just inches past the post.

The victory means Athletic climb out of the relegation zone and improves their chances of keeping their historic status of being ever-present in the Spanish first division although every other team in the bottom half of the table plays on Sunday.

Real Madrid are three points behind Sevilla in third and face Osasuna looming on Sunday.

Both sides have been hit by suspensions, with Real losing midfielder Fernando Gago and Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez while Osasuna will be without their own midfield pair of Hector Font and Juanfran Torres.

Osasuna will also be without top scorer Roberto Soldado who is on loan from Madrid and cannot play against his old club because of a clause in the deal.

Former England captain David Beckham will miss his fourth straight league game for Real Madrid following a knee injury last month.

However, Roberto Carlos and Jose Antonio Reyes have recovered from their injuries and coach Fabio Capello included both men in the Real squad to face the Pamplona-based side.

Schalke in cruise control

AFP, Berlin



equaliser after 52 minutes and Bastian Schweinsteiger the winner after 70.

Bayern captain Oliver Kahn said: "The aim is to finish in a qualifying spot for the Champions League, but in football anything is possible, particularly when your rivals are having problems."

VfB Stuttgart proved their title credentials when they raced to a 3-0 lead after just 27 minutes at Hamburg thanks to goals from Brazilian striker Cacau (10), Sami Khedira (13) and Roberto Hilbert.

(27). Fernando Meira scored the fourth six minutes after the break before Hamburg hit back with goals from Czech midfielder David Jarolim (67) and Croatia striker Ivica Olic (76).

At the other end of the table the frantic scramble to avoid the drop now includes 12 teams, with just five points separating seventh-placed VfL Wolfsburg and the team they beat 3-2 Saturday, Mainz 05, who are in 17th position.

After last summer's World Cup Ronaldo was heavily criticised for the part he played in getting United teammate Wayne Rooney sent off during England's quarterfinal defeat against Portugal.

But Beckham, who received similar treatment after his sending-off at the 1998 World Cup, believes Ronaldo should stay at Old Trafford under the guidance of Sir Alex Ferguson.

"He is at the right club. He is being looked after by a manager who knows how to look after someone who has been through what he has," the former United midfielder told the Sunday Express.

"I may not have got through the things I did without the United manager, the players and the fans. I owe them everything."

Mascherano laments Hammers move

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool's Javier Mascherano admitted that looking back now, he wonders how he ever agreed to a move to West Ham.

"God knows when I would have played football again had I stayed there [at West Ham]. Mascherano told the News of the World.

"It has been very tough because I knew I wasn't going to play any more games at West Ham and I thank Liverpool for coming in for me."

"I wondered what would happen to my career - at my age I need to be playing. I asked myself 1,000 times why did I agree to go to West Ham."

"Now I owe it to myself and the world to show that I am good enough to play in the Premier League."



Bayern Munich midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger hurls at the corner flag as in rage after scoring Hanover at the AWD-Arena on Saturday.

Barca legend Gonzalvo dies

AFP, Barcelona

Mariano Gonzalvo, one of the stars of Spanish giants Barcelona in the 1940s and 50s, has died at the age of 84, the club said on Sunday.

Gonzalvo, an old style inside right and former Barcelona captain, played for the club for 14 seasons between 1942 and 1956. He won five La Liga titles, three Spanish Cups and played for Spain in 16 occasions.

Gonzalvo III, as he was usually known in Spain because two older brothers were also professional football players, played in five of Spain's six matches at the 1950 World Cup, including their famous 1-0 win over England.

In the final round, the only time the World Cup has been decided by a league system, he played in the 2-2 draw against eventual winners Uruguay and Spain's 6-1 loss to Brazil.

Spain finished fourth at the 1950 World Cup, their best ever placing.

1860's novel idea

AFP, Munich

German second division club 1860 Munich have come up with a novel way of raising funds to strengthen their playing squad.

The club that lives perpetually in the shadow of its neighbours Bayern Munich, is asking fans to buy club scarves for 50 euros so they will be able to afford new players in the close season.

"We desperately need some money," said general manager Stefan Ziffner, who hopes to raise a million euros. "We don't have a million other choice, we have to stick together."

In return for their 50 euros, fans will receive a scarf inscribed with the words: "For the future of the Lions."

Half the money raised will go to buying new players while the rest will be used to balance the books, the club said.

1860 were the major club in their city until the late 1960s and they were champions in 1966. Bayern helped out their neighbours last season by lending 1860 11 million euros.

Abidal in Valencia link

INTERNET, undated

France defender Eric Abidal has hinted he is unsettled at Lyon with Valencia among the clubs reportedly interested in his signature.

The 27-year-old starting left back for France's World Cup team last year did little to deny reports he wanted a move in a TV interview to TF1 channel on Sunday.

Asked if playing for Valencia would suit him, Abidal replied: "Yes, why not?"

He continued: "I have a little idea which I have submitted to president (Lyon president Jean-Michel) Aulas."

"He's the one who for now will decide on the two remaining years of my contract."

C'Ron should stay: Becks

INTERNET, undated

Former England captain David Beckham has advised Cristiano Ronaldo to stay at Manchester United for the good of his career.

The Portugal winger has been linked with both Real Madrid - Beckham's club until the end of the season when he will move to Major League Soccer with the Los Angeles Galaxy - and Barcelona in recent months.

After last summer's World Cup Ronaldo was heavily criticised for the part he played in getting United teammate Wayne Rooney sent off during England's quarterfinal defeat against Portugal.

But Beckham, who received similar treatment after his sending-off at the 1998 World Cup, believes Ronaldo should stay at Old Trafford under the guidance of Sir Alex Ferguson.

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Rafa ruthless on PSV

AFP, Reading

Rafa Benitez said he will not be resting any players in Liverpool's Champions League clash with PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Benitez believes the tie is still not dead despite Liverpool's 3-0 lead and he will not leave out Steven Gerrard to give his captain a much-needed break.

The Reds boss saw his side take a step towards securing a third-place finish in the Premiership with a 2-1 win at Reading on Saturday.

And Benitez is determined to keep the momentum going against the Dutch in the quarterfinal second leg at Anfield.

"If we get a few goals ahead I might make some changes to the team, but the tie is still not over and we still have a lot to do," he said.

"Players like Steven Gerrard and Steve Finnan have played a lot of games recently and it would be good to give them a rest, but if I do that people say Steven is not happy about being dropped."

"It is a very important part of the season and we need all of our best

players on the pitch for the important matches."

Benitez is thinking Spain midfielder Xavi Alonso will be fit in time to face PSV. "Xavi has a slight groin injury that needed a bit of rest and hopefully he will be okay for the game against Eindhoven," he said.

"I did not want to risk him today as he was still feeling it a bit but he should be alright for the coming big games."

"If we can win these games and get into the top four and the Champions League final that would be great and that is what we are aiming for."

Goals from Alvaro Arbeloa and substitute Dirk Kuyt were enough to beat Reading, who have not won a game since February 10, a winless run of seven matches.

This was Liverpool's third victory in a row and they are looking in ominous form as they battle to reach a second Champions League final in three years.

Benitez made five changes from the PSV game, bringing in Mark Gonzalez, Craig Bellamy, Mo Sissoko, Arbeloa and Sami Hyypia.

Kuyt, suspended for next Wednesday's game, dropped to the bench to be replaced by Bellamy.

Left-back Arbeloa opened the scoring with a crisp 20-yard finish for

his first ever senior goal when he latched on to Peter Crouch's deft flick.

Reading equalised in the 46th minute through captain Ivar Ingemann who blasted home Stephen Hunt's cross.

Benitez made his first change on 50 minutes bringing on Kuyt for the ineffectual Bellamy, who petulantly stomped off the pitch.

That switch proved to be decisive as Kuyt, who had scored both of the goals in Liverpool's 2-0 victory over Reading in November, met Pennant's deft cross to score with a firm header from eight yards out.

Substitute John Arne Riise came close to adding a third, but Hahnemann made a fine block from his 20-yard shot and pushed it round the post in injury time.

Reading boss Steve Coppell thought his side deserved something out of the game: "I felt we competed well all over the pitch and if we had taken one or two opportunities we could have won this game."

"We are on a bad run, but we will keep working hard until we get out of it. That is the only thing we can do."

Inter go cold

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan's 11-match winning run away from home came to a halt at Reggina on Saturday when Roberto Mancini's Italian league leaders could only manage a 0-0 draw.

Unbeaten Inter's amazing record - 25 wins and five draws in the league this season - has meant a draw is seen as a failure but they no doubt found solace in their 18-point lead with eight matches to go.

Second-placed AS Roma gained some ground with their 2-0 victory against Catania and third-placed Lazio also claimed three points in a 1-0 home win against Messina but they are still 25 points behind Inter.

The last time Inter failed to win on an away ground was a 0-0 draw at Udinese at the end of October.

However with first-choice players Patrick Vieira, Brazilian Maxwell, Dejan Stankovic and

Philippe Mexes and midfielder David Pizarro, Francesco Totti, Brazilian Doni, Rodrigo Taddei and Christian Chivu did not play and Brazilian Mancini, Daniele De Rossi, and Christian Panucci came on as substitutes.

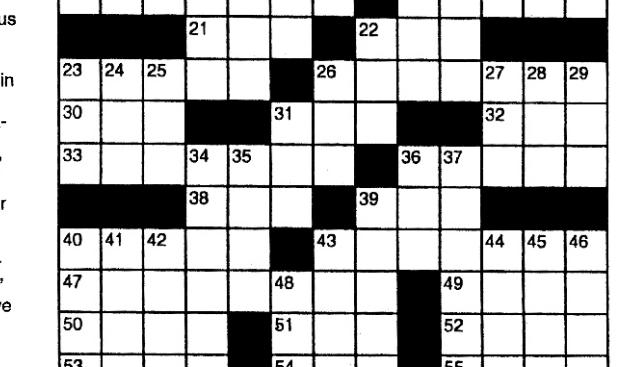
It was Roma's first away victory since beating Torino 2-1 13 matches ago.

AS Roma's city rivals Lazio managed to win their eighth consecutive match following Guglielmo Stendardo's strike on the stroke of half-time against Messina at the Olympic stadium. Lazio's late-season charge looks set to earn them Champions League football next season.

Early-season leaders Palermo, in fourth place with 48 points, lost 3-1 at home to Cagliari meaning they have not managed to win in their last nine matches.

Palermo's defeat spurred on AC Milan in their late match Saturday when they leapfrogged Empoli with a 3-1 win at the San Siro.

Milan's goals were scored by Ronaldo, Alberto Gilardino and Giuseppe Favalli while Luca Sardati getting one back for Empoli.



AS Roma players huddle to celebrate a goal against Catania during their Serie A match at the neutral venue of Lecce on Saturday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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