

# Racing derail Real

AFP, Madrid



Two late penalties from Racing Santander's Ezequiel Garay, the winner coming just seconds before the end of regulation time, handed nine-man Real Madrid a demoralising 2-1 defeat on Saturday.

It was a bad night for Real in every respect.

Not only did Real's eight game unbeaten streak come to an end, the 29-time Spanish champions squandered the chance to overtake league leaders and bitter rivals Barcelona and go top of La Liga for the first time in 18 months.

Real also ended the game with just nine men after defenders Ivan Helguera and Alvaro Mejia were sent off in the final minutes of the game.

"We came to a difficult ground and played a good game, one of our best of the year. We dominated the first half and Racing only did well at corners and with the two penalties," grumbled Real coach Capello.

The second penalty came when our players were talking to the referee about a free kick," added the indignant Italian coach.

Real remain in third place, two points behind Barca and one in arrears of second-placed Sevilla, but the leading pair now both have a game in hand and play on Sunday.

Garay, who is reported to be courted by several English Premiership clubs, started out as the game's villain before redeeming himself by scoring twice from the spot.

The Argentine made an uncharacteristic mistake after 33 minutes and his weak clearance was easily blocked on the edge of the area by

his compatriot Gonzalo Higuain. Higuain then found Raul Gonzalez unmarked in the area and the Real captain's low left foot shot from 10 yards slipped under the body of Racing goalkeeper Tono Rodriguez.

Things started to go wrong for Real 18 minutes from the end when Mahamadou Diarra's late challenge on Lionel Scaloni in the area gave Garay the chance to make amends for his earlier error and he equalised with a right foot shot.

Helguera was sent off for his second yellow card four minutes before the end and Fabio Cannavaro then gave Racing, and Garay, their second penalty with a foul on Nicola Zigic before Mejia was also dismissed in injury time.

"We are very angry with the referee. We don't think the two penalties were fair," said Cannavaro.

"Diarra got to the ball and I didn't foul Zigic. It's very difficult to bring down someone who is 2.02m and I'm not that tall," added the World Player of the Year in reference to Racing's giant Serbian striker.

Freddie Kanoute stayed in

London after Sevilla drew 2-2 with Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, qualifying for the UEFA Cup semi-finals, to get specialist treatment on his persistent groin problem.

At the other end of the table, relegation-threatened Real Sociedad gave themselves a lifeline to safety with a 1-0 win at Real Betis later on Saturday.

Sociedad defender Javier Garrido got his first goal in four years of playing at the top flight of Spanish soccer with a swerving left foot free kick from 25 yards after 33 minutes.



PHOTO AFP  
Racing Santander's Ezequiel Marcelo (L), Pedro Munitis (C) and Nicola Zigic celebrate after scoring against Real Madrid during their Primera match at the El Sardinero Stadium in Santander on Saturday.

# Cesc cements fourth spot

AFP, London



Arsenal took control of the race for the final Champions League place as Cesc Fabregas sealed a 2-1 win against Bolton on Saturday.

Arsene Wenger's fourth-placed side are now five points clear of Bolton with a game in hand and are on course to earn a spot in Europe's top club competition next season.

They needed a stirring fightback to overcome 10-man Bolton who took the lead through former Gunners forward Nicolas Anelka before going down to goals from Tomas Rosicky and Fabregas. Ivan Campo was sent off late in the second half for two bookings to complete a disappointing day for the visitors.

Anelka broke the deadlock in the 11th minute when Kevin Nolan headed across goal and Jens Lehmann could only palm the ball out to the French international, who volleyed past William Gallas on the line.

But Arsenal have grown used to coming from behind at the Emirates Stadium this season and they were level in the 31st minute. Emmanuel Adebayor chipped to the far post, where Rosicky got in front of Nicky

Hunt to stab past Jussi Jaskelainen.

Arsenal were without a win in their previous four matches but they went in front a minute into the second half. Gilberto Silva's pass split the Bolton defence and Cesc Fabregas strode through to slot home his first Premiership goal of the season.

Wenger warned his players not to think they have sealed fourth place and he said: "We were tested mentally at 1-0 down against a good side and overall I am very happy because we didn't panic."

"Fourth place is not secure. It is an important result because it is a big step forward, but it is not enough. We have to take advantage of our game in hand on Tuesday against Manchester City."

Sheffield United moved out of the relegation zone with a crucial 3-0 win over fellow strugglers West Ham at Bramall Lane.

Neil Warnock's team climbed above Charlton and sit one place above the bottom three thanks to goals from Michael Tonge, Phil Jagielka and Jon Stead.

They took the lead when Anton Ferdinand fouled Christian Nade on the edge of the area in the 39th minute and Tonge stepped up to smash the free-kick past Robert Green.

West Ham dominated the early stages of the second half but Carlos Sanchez is convinced Fulham will stay up and he said "We were a

bit unfortunate to lose a game we dominated. We had a perfectly good goal disallowed as often happens when you are at the bottom of the table."

"But I told the players if they carry on give that effort I have no doubt we will get the points to see us where we need to be."

Liverpool stayed third after playing out a 0-0 draw at Manchester City.

Rafa Benitez's men were unable to maintain the momentum of their previous four victories in a game of few chances.

Matt Taylor kept Portsmouth's European challenge alive with a stunning goal that ensured his side beat Newcastle 2-1 at Fratton Park.

Portsmouth got the perfect start in the seventh minute when Benjani Mwaruwari produced a clinical finish for his first goal since New Year's Day.

Taylor has earned a reputation for scoring from long-range and lived up to those expectations in the 59th minute with a 30-yard strike that gave Steve Harper no chance.

Emre gave Newcastle hope with a 69th minute penalty, but Harry Redknapp's team held on.

Aston Villa striker Luke Moore scored his first goal since September as his side won 3-1 at Middlesbrough.

Fulham remain in relegation danger after Hunt side-footed in Kevin Doyle's cross from close range in the 15th minute.

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# Ferguson's Cup mission

AFP, Birmingham



Alex Ferguson is on a mission to lift the sixth FA Cup of his glittering managerial career at Old Trafford after Wembley in May determined to ensure that the trophy cabinet at Old Trafford needs new hangers.

"It's been a good tournament for me," he said. "Obviously I've lost two finals but hopefully there won't be another one. There is a fantastic atmosphere in the dressing room and we are all looking forward to going back to Wembley."

"I've said to the foreign players like Ronaldo, Evra and Heinze that they will understand why everyone talks about Wembley because it is such a special occasion."

"The feeling you get when you approach the place is fantastic, so hopefully it's another good one for us."

Ferguson was adamant that United had produced the finest evening at Old Trafford in their illustrious history in the incredible defeat of Roma in the Champions League.

And they extended their scintillating week in the seventh minute with another spectacular goal. Rooney seized upon fatal hesitancy from the Watford defence to sidestep Adrian Mariappa and hammer an unstoppable shot into the top corner.

But Watford, whose Premiership existence will be confirmed as over within the next few weeks, seemed to be less anxious without the necessity

for league points at stake and were not as overawed as the neutrals had feared.

A sustained period of steady pressure resulted in a shock equaliser, with Hameur Bouazza hooking a spectacular volley in off the crossbar.

However, the equaliser inevitably acted as an irritant to Ferguson's men and they were head again barely two minutes later. Rooney broke clear down the right and presented Ronaldo with the simplest of tasks with a finish from two yards out.

Boothroyd is now left to focus on his seemingly futile task to keep his side in the Premiership, but was buoyed by their display.

"I told the players that I wanted Manchester United to come off the pitch knowing they had been in a game," he said, "and I think we've done that."

"The scoreline will say that they scored four goals, and of course they're capable of that because they've got fantastic players, but I don't think it's an accurate reflection."

"I wanted us to cause them problems at set pieces and we did that. We had a good spell at 2-1 down early in the second half and we should have taken our chances."

"But we didn't do that and obviously we're all disappointed to be out of the cup. But I can't have any complaints with our performance, whatever the result."

# Schalke open gap

AFP, Berlin



Schalke 04 coach Mirko Slomka said his side took an important step towards the Bundesliga title after they opened a four-point gap at the top following Saturday's 3-0 win at Mainz 05.

German striker Kevin Kuranyi fired his side into an early 1-0 lead, before his header saw Gerald Asamoah head home to make it 2-0 at half-time and Brazilian Lincoln sealed the win with a late strike from 30-metres out.

The win puts Schalke four points clear of Stuttgart - who moved up into second with a 2-1 win at Hanover - and with five games to go, Slomka says the leaders are on course to lift their first Bundesliga title.

Schalke Coach Mirko Slomka said: "The team played well and knew exactly what was expected of them. We had the right answers for any questions they threw at our defence and we played intelligently."

"We were patient in our build-up and deserved the goals, this was a landmark win for us."

With Werder Bremen taking on Borussia Dortmund on Sunday, VfB Stuttgart seized the chance to leapfrog their rivals into second, thanks to a second-half own goal.

Stuttgart coach Armin Veh was pleased his side ground out the win and said: "Hanover played very well, we hit them with a quick goal, but I could see early on that we were tired."

"We were always a step slower and were sluggish to react. Nevertheless, we have fought till the end and this was an important victory. If you want to keep the pressure on the teams above, you have to win these games."

Stuttgart got off to the best possible start at Hanover. Midfielder Roberto Hilbert struck after just two minutes before Hanover's USA defender Steven Cherundolo looked to have ruined the hosts party with his 61st minute goal.

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But Hanover's Polish defender Dariusz Zuraw scored with an own goal in the 76th minute which gave Stuttgart the lead before some late drama when defender Arthur Boka was sent off in the 84th minute for a heavy challenge.