

# A Real escape

AFP, Madrid



Gonzalo Higuain got a winner for Real Madrid barely a minute from the whistle for a 4-3 win over Espanyol on Saturday, which sent the Spanish giants to the top of the table, at least overnight.

Real now lead their bitter rivals and reigning champions Barcelona by one point, although the Catalan club have a game in hand and play Real Betis on Sunday.

To use the famous cliché of football being a game of two halves, Espanyol dominated the first period with Walter Pandiani getting a hat-trick, all scored with his lethal left foot, to give the visitors a 3-1 lead at the break.

However, Real showed their fighting spirit to bounce back with three second-half goals and grabbed three points with the last-gasp strike from the Argentine striker, who scored for the first time in front of his home fans.

"We performed heroics," said Real coach Fabio Capello reflecting on their three second-half goals.

"I'm happy because I liked the character that my team showed, having the motivation to recover and win. Each game is a final, we can't afford to drop points because Barcelona are still on top.

"We made some bad defensive mistakes but I still think their first and third goals were offside," added the Italian.

The triumph kept Real in the Spanish title race but for Espanyol the defeat was a bitter blow ahead of Wednesday's all-Spanish UEFA Cup final against Sevilla.

"We had the game and then let it go," lamented Espanyol coach Ernesto Valverde.

"We intended to win in order to build our confidence ahead of Wednesday but if Real continue to play like they did in the second half then they will be champions," added Valverde.

Pandiani opened the scoring and silenced the capacity 75,000 crowd in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium from just outside the six-yard box after 15 minutes, after Francisco Rufete had outpaced his markers down the right wing.

The same combination worked to perfection again just 11 minutes later before Ruud Van Nistelrooy, the Spanish first division's top scorer, got one back from close range four minutes later to notch up his 22nd goal of the season.

Pandiani then got a spectacular third goal after 34 minutes to again leave Real facing an uphill battle.

Some terrible marking from Real left Pandiani the time to lob the ball past Real's stunned goalkeeper Iker Casillas from almost exactly the penalty spot thanks to a perfect pass from Moha El Yaagoubi.

Real's fightback started four minutes into the second half after captain Raul Gonzalez sent the ball through the legs of Espanyol goalkeeper Carlos Kameni.

Kameni's night went from bad to worse after 57 minutes when he

collided with his own defender Francisco Chica, leaving the pair on the ground and an open net for Jose Antonio Reyes to score.

If Kameni was to blame for Real's third goal then the culprit for giving away the winner was definitely Chica, who was robbed by Higuain out on the left flank.

Higuain then played a neat one-two with Van Nistelrooy before finding the net with his right foot.

"I think it is the most important goal of my life. This game will go into the history of Real Madrid because of the way we played," said Higuain.

Sevilla stay in third place, one point behind Barca and two behind Real, after beating local rivals Recreativo Huelva 2-1 later on Saturday.

Enzo Maresca opened the scoring after 14 minutes, chesting down a Luis Fabiano header before blasting it into the net with his right foot from the edge of the area.

Luis Fabiano added Sevilla's second from the penalty spot nine minutes before the whistle after he had been brought down by Recreativo midfielder Jesus Vazquez.

Vazquez then scored from the spot himself one minute from time after Julian Escude had pushed Recreativo's Ikechuckwu Uche but there was too little time left for Huelva to salvage a point.

Barcelona will try to reclaim the top spot in La Liga and put behind them their dismal 4-0 loss in the Spanish Cup at Getafe on Thursday when they face struggling Real Betis on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain is ecstatic after scoring a late goal to seal a thrilling victory over Espanyol in their Spanish Primera Liga tie at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

# Sochaux win French Cup

**Football**

AFP, Paris

Sochaux beat Marseille 5-4 on penalties to win the French Cup at the Stade de France here Saturday after a thrilling match that saw two goals in extra-time after regulation time had finished 1-1.

Sochaux goalkeeper Teddy Richert was the hero for the unfashionable club from eastern France which was founded in 1928 as a works team for the Peugeot car factory and whose previous solitary Cup triumph was back in 1937.

Richert palmed away penalty efforts from Toifilou Maoulida and Ronald Zubar while Marseille counterpart Cedric Carrasso could only block Jeremy Brechet.

Marseille thought they had victory in the bag after Djibril Cisse headed an injury-time goal to hand the 10-time Cup champions a 2-1

lead.

Cisse rose at the left post on 97 minutes to head home an inch-perfect cross from Maoulida past a stranded Richert in the Sochaux goal.

But with just five minutes of injury time remaining, replacement Anthony Le Tallec rose unmarked in the Marseille box to head home a Stephane Pichot cross.

Regulation time had ended 1-1, Marseille taking a fifth minute lead through Cisse, who converted a brilliant move down the left.

Cisse found space inside the six-yard box to head home Samir Nasri's flick after good work from Taye Taiwo who got to the byline before feeding Nasri.

It was a frenetic opening and Cisse could have doubled the lead had he kept his head when presented with a run on goal three minutes later.

However, Cisse no longer has the blistering pace of his Auxerre

days - having suffered two horrific leg breaks - and instead of taking on his man, he blazed high and wide from a difficult angle.

That miss could have proved costly as within a minute, Swiss international Sebastian Grax broke free at the other end and after some fine work his brilliant lob over the onrushing Cedric Carrasso agonisingly bounced back off the bar.

Still the action did not abate as Nasri tested Richert with a low shot on 11 minutes that the goalkeeper did well to hold down to his left.

Nasri and Cisse combined well 10 minutes from the break but Cisse's ball into the box was a little too high and Nasri, dubbed the new Zinedine Zidane by sections of the French media - tried to overlay the ball and his eventual shot was weak.

Jerome Leroy had a great chance just after the break to level the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

VfB Stuttgart players congregate around striker Cacau (2nd L) after the Brazilian scored the winning goal in their Bundesliga match against Bochum on Saturday.

# Stuttgart steal pole

AFP, Berlin



Stuttgart went top of the Bundesliga on Saturday, with just one week left of the season, as their dramatic 3-2 win at VfL Bochum knocked

Schalke 04 off first place.

Schalke's 2-0 defeat at neighbours Borussia Dortmund, after Swiss striker Alexander Frei slotted home on 44 minutes before Polish striker Euzebiusz Smolarek scored five minutes from time, put Stuttgart top.

But Stuttgart's 3-2 win at VfL Bochum was hard fought as they fell behind to an early goal when Bochum midfielder Oliver Schroeder took a neat pass from Bundesliga top-scorer Theofanis

Gekas to put the home side 1-0 up.

German international midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger got Stuttgart level after 20 minutes but Bochum defender Marcel Maltritz put the hosts 2-1 up three minutes before the break.

Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez, back after a knee injury, pulled off a spectacular diving header to make it 2-2 before Brazilian striker Cacau crashed in a left-footed shot on 73 minutes.

Stuttgart have goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand to thank for a stunning save from point-blank range in the dying seconds to protect the lead which puts them two points clear of second-placed Schalke with one game left.

Werder Bremen are now out of the title race after they went down 2-1 at home to Eintracht Frankfurt, which leaves them an unreachable four points behind Stuttgart.

Frankfurt's Greek international

defender Ioannis Amanatidis gave Eintracht a 13th minute lead.

Bremen's striker Aaron Hunt equalised for the hosts on 34 minutes, only for Brazilian defender Naldo to turn the ball into his own net on 69 minutes.

Although they are just playing for pride this season having missed out on a Champions League spot next season, fourth-placed Bayern Munich took a 3-0 win at Energie Cottbus thanks to two goals in three minutes.

Dutch striker Roy Makaay coolly slotted his goal past Cottbus's Bosnian keeper Tomislav Piplica for the opening goal after 32 minutes before Belgian defender Daniel van Buyten thundered in his shot from 20 metres out.

And Bayern striker Roque Santa

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

## The best goal ever scored?

INTERNET, undated

Football fans in Sweden reckon they have seen the best goal ever scored.

IFK Gothenburg midfielder Andres Vasquez produced the stunning strike in his side's 4-0 win over Orebro on Monday night.

Winning the ball on the right wing, the Peruvian advanced to the corner of the box before chipping the ball into the far top corner.

So far so pretty good. Except Vasquez scored with his left foot - after swinging it around behind his right leg.

The cross-kick trick, known as a 'Rabona', has been around for decades and is a favourite of Premiership players like Joe Cole and Cristiano Ronaldo. But they normally use it to pass the ball ten yards - not to chip the goalkeeper from 30.

And just to prove it wasn't a fluke, 19-year-old Vasquez then recreated the strike for Swedish television.

What made the goal even more impressive is that it was the player's first for IFK. Although he is unlikely to ever forget it, it might not be his last.

## MU not for sale: Glazers

AFP, Manchester

The Glazer family on Sunday insisted that Manchester United was not for sale amid reports of an 850 million pound (£1.7 billion dollar) bid from a Chinese consortium.

It has been claimed that contact was made with United by an English-based finance expert on behalf of the consortium.

But sources close to the Glazer family have rejected the story, claiming no-one has approached them over any potential buy-out.

And the Americans, who will be strongly represented at Old Trafford Sunday when Sir Alex Ferguson's side will be presented with the Premiership trophy, are adamant they have no intention of selling.

"There has been no approach from any consortium, there has been no offer and, even if there had, it would not have been considered," said a family spokesman.

"The family are absolutely and totally committed to Manchester United over the long term.

"They are determined to make United more successful, both on and off the pitch and are unequivocal in their stance that the club is not for sale."

There is a certain irony in the words given the 'Not For Sale' slogan was used by the fans' groups vehemently opposed to the takeover by Malcolm Glazer, owner of NFL team Tampa Bay Buccaneers, two years ago.

However, having paid 800 million pounds for the club in the first place and already negotiated massively-increased sponsorship deals, there would hardly seem to be any point in selling now, especially with a huge new television contract due to come into force next season.

**Football**

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson celebrates a ninth Premiership title on Sunday with a stark warning for his club's closest rivals.

As the debate over where this latest championship success rates in the Scot's impressive list of achievements, the veteran manager is confident that, with so many key United players at the start of their careers, his current squad can only get better.

"They are young enough," said Ferguson. "A lot of them are winning their first title and that must help them, give them confidence and a system of how to win the league.

"For us, we had to change it this year, starting well and staying with it, showing the resilience of 29 weeks at the top of the league with someone breathing down your neck.

"These are things that will help them and they are young enough to expect them to go only one way.

"They are helped by the experi-

ence of (Paul) Scholes, (Ryan) Giggs, (Gary) Neville, (Ole Gunnar) Solskjaer and I think those people will be there for a couple of years at least."

Seasoned Old Trafford watches reckon the team's form this season, and the precocious talent of Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo in particular, means Ferguson's current squad could eclipse the 1994 and 1999 United teams, considered among the greatest in the club's history.

"Without question," said Ferguson, 65, of that possibility. "There have been indications, in certain types of games this season when we have had to battle through. Last Saturday, in the Manchester derby, was like that.

"They found their energy to get through the game, win 1-0 and they defended with great courage in the last ten minutes of the match. That's a good guideline in terms of the best Manchester United teams.

"Ability-wise? Yes, there is some excellent ability in the team, at some good ages. If this team can stay together for a few years, by doing that you develop friendships and become a stronger unit, so I expect them to improve."

Giggs, Scholes, Neville and

Solskjaer may all be entering the final stages of their careers but Ferguson has no short-term fears about losing such legendary United names.

"Without a question, Ryan will play the next two years," said the manager. "He has looked after himself and has the type of physique that is good.

"Quite remarkably, he has retained most of his pace, maybe he is not as greased lightning as he was as a 17-year-old but he is still quick enough.

"Him and Paul Scholes, Gary Neville should be no problem for two more years at least, we have no immediate worries there.

"And of course, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is 34 but scored 11 goals this season. If he gives us another 11 next season, we will be dancing about it because that is another big contribution there."

Sunday's match against West Ham at Old Trafford may represent the end of United's league campaign but there is one more important date left in the domestic campaign with Ferguson's men facing title-rivals Chelsea at the new Wembley Stadium in Saturday's FA Cup Final.

"I think winning the FA Cup is a special event and, to me, the only way to enjoy Wembley is by winning," Ferguson explained.

"They talk about the improving English game, with three teams making the semifinals of the Champions' League, and I think the Premiership is probably the best in Europe.

"This is an opportunity for both teams to give a display that shows the right two teams are playing at the new Wembley.

"I see Chelsea as our main challengers next year. Arsenal are a young team, Liverpool will be adding to their squad, maybe Arsenal, too. But obviously Chelsea, with their resources, could rebuild another team."

The Cup final also gives Ferguson the chance to claim the fourth league and cup double of his United reign after achieving the feat in 1994, 1996 and 1999, when they also lifted the European Cup for the second time in their history.

"It has been harder for us this season with the injuries," said Ferguson. "Hopefully, next season we will have a stronger squad to cope with these things because it would be nice to get to another European final."

## Juve closer to Serie A

INTERNET, undated

Juventus snatched a controversial last-gasp win thanks to a debatable penalty, as Bologna ended the game with nine men. The Bianconeri had the opportunity to be mathematically promoted this week, although even a victory would've meant waiting until Tuesday's Brescia-Napoli match, while Bologna were in the running for a play-off spot. Legrottaglio pulled out during the warm-up, so Cicciolini was redirected to central defence with Balzaretti down the left.

Del Piero had several early efforts well saved and Zebina was booked for simulation as he tried to earn a penalty. Despite being forced into two substitutions in the opening 23 minutes, it was Bologna who took the lead. After Marazzina's header skimmed the upright, Bellucci sprang the offside trap to place an angled drive past the stranded Buffon. Juve also lost Giannichedda to injury and fought back with a weak Trezeguet header, while Terzi's fumbled defensive manoeuvre almost let the Frenchman past Antonioli.

The Bianconeri equalised just before half-time, as substitute Zanetti's long ball forward sent Del Piero clear for a right-foot finish that restored parity between the teams and the two joint top scorers in Serie B. Going into the break only a fantastic Antonioli save kept Bologna in it, prodding a Trezeguet stop and volley off the line with an outstretched foot and parrying Balzaretti's header from the resulting corner.

Didier Deschamps' men were more determined in the second half and Manfredini's challenge

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid defender Fabio Cannavaro holds up the Golden Ball trophy that he received for being voted European Player of the Year ahead of their Primera Liga clash against Espanyol at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.