



Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo (C) goes airborne to score the all-important goal against Derby County during their Premiership encounter at Pride Park on Saturday.

## MU Go Top Boro hold Gunners

Manchester United's grip on the English Premier League trophy tightened on Saturday as rivals Arsenal were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Middlesbrough.

That left defending champions United, who claimed a hard-fought 1-0 win over bottom side Derby earlier in the day, at the top of the table on goal difference with a game in hand over their rivals. It was the Gunners' fourth successive draw in the league but it could have been worse but for Kolo Toure's 86th-minute header, which cancelled out a first-half strike by Gunners old boy Jeremie Aladiere. Chelsea were also 1-0 winners, at relegation-threatened Sunderland, and are now as well-placed as Arsenal to challenge United in the title run-in. Avram Grant's side will move level on points with the Gunners if they can beat Tottenham on Wednesday, four days before Arsenal visit Stamford Bridge. Derby are on track to finish the

season with the lowest points total of any side since the launch of the Premiership in 1992/93. But Paul Jewell's side nevertheless defied the champions for over an hour before the good fortune that had seen Cristiano Ronaldo spurn a handful of chances finally deserted them.

Wayne Rooney, from what seemed to be an offside position, rolled the ball across goal for his prolific teammate to notch his 31st goal of the season with a side-footed finish. It was a cruel blow for Derby, who would have established a first-half lead but for a superb display by England goalkeeper Ben Foster, who marked his United debut with two superb stops from Scotland forward Kenny Miller. "Derby made a real battle of it," Ferguson acknowledged. "But the name of the game is to win, and we have to thank Ronaldo again." Arsenal went behind as a result of sloppy defending, Turkish striker Tuncay Sanli allowed to run unchecked on to Mark Schwarzer's forward punt before crossing for Aladiere to finish. But just as it seemed that Boro,

the only team to have beaten Wenger's men in the league this season, would complete a memorable double, Toure popped up in the box to power a Cesc Fabregas corner goalwards, the ball ricocheting off Schwartzler and Andrew Taylor on its way to the back of the net.

Toure denied that the title was slipping away from Arsenal. "I'm really confident," the Ivory Coast defender. "It was important not too lose and again we have come back and scored a late goal to make a draw. It shows we are strong and we keep going." John Terry's first goal since the opening game of last season, a tenth-minute header from a Frank Lampard corner, was enough to give Chelsea the points at the Stadium of Light. Grant said the win was testimony to the grit of his side. "We passed the ball well at the start but Sunderland made it a real battle and I'm glad we are good at this." Liverpool kept the pressure on Merseyside rivals Everton, who are at struggling Fulham on Sunday, in the battle for fourth place by coming from behind to end Reading's

recent mini-revival with the help of Fernando Torres's 27th goal of the season. Marek Matejovsky volleyed the visitors into a shock 5th minute lead but his strike was quickly cancelled out by Javier Mascherano, who went past Stephen Hunt and found the net from 20 yards to claim his first goal for the club.

Torres then sealed the points with a textbook downward header from Steven Gerrard's free-kick three minutes after the break. Portsmouth leapfrogged Aston Villa to move into sixth place in the table with a 2-0 win at Fratton Park, thanks to Jermain Defoe's sixth strike in as many games and a Nigel Reo Coker own goal. Youth team striker Fred Sears marked his West Ham debut with the winner as Alan Curtisley's side stopped the rot after three successive 4-0 defeats by beating Blackburn 2-1 draw at Upton Park. Rogue Santa Cruz headed Blackburn into a 19th-minute lead but Dean Ashton equalised before half-time and then set up Sears for his fairytale winner.

## Torres fills Fowler boots

AFP, Liverpool

Fernando Torres became the first Liverpool striker since Robbie Fowler to hit 20 league goals in a season as Rafa Benitez's team overturned Marek Matejovsky's early opener to clinch a 2-1 win over Reading at Anfield on Saturday.

Torres, Liverpool's 26-million-pound record signing, strengthened the club's grip on fourth spot in the Premiership by heading in the winner early in the second-half to break the 20 league goal barrier - the first Liverpool man to do so for 12 years.

Having eliminated Italian champions Inter Milan from the Champions League in midweek, Liverpool's reward in Friday's draw for the quarterfinals was a daunting double-header against English rivals Arsenal next month.

So the visit of Reading to Anfield was pretty much the calm before the storm, despite it being a game that Rafa Benitez's team simply had to win to remain ahead of Everton in the race for fourth spot in the Premiership.

Bigger matches lie ahead, but it is in games like these that Liverpool's season will be decided. If they fail to secure a top four spot, their hopes of playing in the Champions League again next season rely on them winning this year's competition. That is a real possibility, but putting all their eggs in that particular basket would be a risky strategy on Liverpool's part.

## Supporter dies in Argentina

AFP, Buenos Aires

A supporter in Argentina has died from gun shot wounds sustained in an attack which led to the match between Velez Sarsfield and San Lorenzo being abandoned on Saturday, Velez Sarsfield said.

The 21-year-old Emanuel Alvarez died in hospital, according to the Velez treasurer Osvaldo Soprani and the club's vice-president Julio Bianchi.

"One of the coaches carrying Velez supporters was attacked outside the stadium resulting in one injured person being taken to hospital," police had said earlier. Fans from Sarsfield destroyed fencing on the terraces separating them from other sections of supporters meaning the referee had to call off the match while the players were coming on to the pitch to warm up.

Alvarez was the 180 death linked to football violence in Argentina since 1939, newspapers reported.

## Becks did not feel stress

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham insisted he did not feel the pressure to perform in Los Angeles Galaxy's friendly with FC Dallas despite the presence of England general manager Franco Baldini at Pizza Hut Park.

Baldini was present at the charity to match on behalf of Fabio Capello to assess the 32-year-old's fitness ahead of England's friendly against France on March 26, a game that could see Beckham earn his 100th cap for his country (he is called up).

The former Manchester United midfielder put in a competent performance and played the full 90 minutes, a factor that can only boost his chances of being selected for his country.

"It was just like a Premiership game and games I've seen with Fabio Capello," said the midfielder after the goalless draw.

"(Baldini) came to see how my fitness is and my form is. Some people might think that adds a little added pressure, but from my side, there was no added pressure there. I just had to perform, play the balls I could play and work hard."

"That's just part and parcel for a player playing for his national team. You're always being watched by somebody."

It just comes with the territory. Beckham took eight corner kicks in the friendly and also just missed the left post with a 25-yard free-kick in the 15th minute.

His passing and through balls were accurate throughout as he showed no ill-effects from the ankle injury that plagued his initial season with Galaxy last year.

"David gave us some killer passes that, if we could have converted them, would have made it an easier game," Galaxy head coach Ruud Gullit said.

"He played an excellent 90 minutes and I think he is a good example for the younger players on the team. He's been playing all 90 minutes for us throughout the pre-season and his fitness level is excellent."

Beckham received yellow card with three minutes remaining from referee Abbey Okujale for dissent.

"It was a good game and I think we played some good football," Beckham added. "We created a lot of chances, but the problem is when we don't finish those chances, it's always going to be a close game. I think performed well, but I think we edged it with so many chances."

## Roma keep up pressure

AFP, Rome

An inspired double substitution from AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti propelled the Champions League quarterfinalists to a vital 2-1 victory over AC Milan at the Stadio Olimpico on Saturday.

Spalletti sent on Mirko Vucinic and Ludovic Giuly just past the hour mark with his team trailing 1-0 and both scored to seal three points for the hosts.

It means Roma closed the gap on leaders Inter Milan, who host Palermo on Sunday, to just three points while Milan remain in fifth spot.

Out-of-form Inter will now be feeling the pressure, particularly with their defensive injury problems.

Roma have not been this close to them since mid-December.

In a tepid first half Roma created the first real opportunity after 25 minutes but they ruined their own work by overcomplicating matters.

Daniele De Rossi crossed for Francesco Totti whose flicked header found Simone Perrotta but

he took too long to control the ball and was crowded out, feeding the ball instead back out to Totti whose back-post cross was met by a spectacular, but inaccurate, bicycle kick from Alessandro Mancini.

Milan were the better side in general and Clarence Seedorf skipped down the right to cross but Kaka couldn't get any power on his header.

Totti showed great control to bring down a cross from Max Tonetto but dragged his shot wide.

Up the other end Giuseppe Favalli beat Cincinno to the ball on Milan's left but Kaka headed his cross wide.

In stoppage time at the end of the first period Tonetto crossed invitingly to Totti who somehow missed his header.

Milan took total command at the start of the second period with Seedorf playing in Kaka only for Doni to save one-handed.

Doni was then down smartly to stop a Seedorf shot at the near post but Roma finally cracked on 56 minutes.

Andrea Pirlo released Massimo Oddo down the right and he clipped the ball into the box for Kaka to volley home left-footed.

Three minutes later and Seedorf

rounded Doni but Cincinno did brilliantly to get back and clear the Dutchman's shot off the line.

Roma couldn't stem the tide and Doni was forced into parrying a fierce Kaka volley from inside the box.

Spalletti responded by sending on Vucinic and Giuly to add some urgency to his team.

The move paid dividends as Giuly arrived in the right place at the right time on 78 minutes to volley home a chip from Perrotta after the Milan defence were all drawn to the ball, leaving the Frenchman in acres of space at the back post.

Three minutes later and Montenegro striker Vucinic latched onto a long ball from De Rossi to fire low past Australian goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac.

In the day's other match Italy international Antonio Di Natale scored four minutes from time to earn Udinese a 2-2 home draw with Lazio, a result that hasn't helped the northern outfit's hopes of qualifying for Europe next season.

Lazio twice took the lead through Tommaso Rocchi and Cristian Ledesma but Udinese hit back first through Damiano Ferronetti and then Di Natale.

## Cottbus stun Bayern

AFP, Berlin



Coach Ottmar Hitzfeld rued a "black day" for Bayern Munich and admitted his side's complacent streak had been exposed as the league leaders were humbled at struggling Energie Cottbus on Saturday.

Serbian striker Branko Jelic struck twice for the home side as Cottbus - bottom of the league going into the tie - pulled off the Bundesliga's shock of the season.

Cottbus picked up only their fourth win of the season as mighty Bayern suffered their second defeat in three days following their 2-1 UEFA Cup humbling by Anderlecht last Thursday.

Lacklustre leaders Bayern were left red-faced when Cottbus took a shock lead as Jelic drilled home his shot on 18 minutes.

And the home side extended

their lead just seven minutes before the half-time break when Jelic struck again to leave Bayern reeling and give Bayern an almighty wake-up call after dominating the league so far this season.

"That was a black day for my team, it is possible that players had believed the championship was a walk in the park," said Hitzfeld whose side's seven point lead has been trimmed back to five points.

"The victory was deserved by Cottbus. They played with a large heart, as you have to do if you are involved in a relegation battle. I am disappointed, particularly in the way we were beaten."

"We were asleep for the first 20 minutes and didn't win our battles. Nearly everything went wrong."

And Cottbus coach Bojan Prasnjar - who was true to his pre-match assertion Energie would attack their illustrious hosts - was delighted as his side moved out of the bottom three.

"We were under intense pressure," said Prasnjar. "But this win will give us a great deal of confi-

dence. We made few errors and played with big hearts."

"The first goal was a set move by us and we stayed tight at the back after we went ahead and made few mistakes in midfield."

The result leaves UEFA Cup quarterfinalists Bayern to dwell on only their second league defeat of the season while Cottbus lifted themselves out of the bottom three into 15th.

Hamburg moved up to second in the table, knocking Werder Bremen down into third, with a 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund thanks to a second-half strike by Peru forward Jose Paolo Guerrero.

Bremen have the chance to reclaim second spot when they face VfL Wolfsburg on Sunday, the same day fourth-placed Bayer Leverkusen are at home to Nuremberg.

There was a battle royal at Hanover as the home side fell behind to Arminia Bielefeld defender Andre Mijatovic's strike on 14 minutes, but equalised two minutes later through Netherlands midfielder Arnold Jan Bruggink.

But a header by striker Christian Eigler on 38 minutes put relegation-threatened Bielefeld, who drop into the bottom three, ahead before Czech striker Jiri Stajner equalised for Hanover on 56 minutes to make it 2-2.

After their 6-3 home win over Werder Bremen last weekend and their 1-0 win at Energie Cottbus on Tuesday, VfB Stuttgart had a 1-1 draw at strugglers VfL Bochum to stay sixth in the league.

Midfielder Christoph Dabrowski put the home side ahead on 20 minutes before Germany international Thomas Hitzlsperger levelled two minutes after the break.

Eintracht Frankfurt picked up their seventh win of the year to go seventh when midfielder Michael Fink sealed their 1-0 win at Karlsruhe with a first-half strike.

In the day's other result Hansa Rostock moved four points clear of the relegation zone as they were held 0-0 at home by Hertha Berlin.

On Friday night, Schalke 04 - who drew Barcelona in the Champions League quarterfinals - consolidated their place in the top five with a 2-1 win over Duisburg.

Germany defender Heiko Westermann hitting the winner on 74 minutes and the defeat means Duisburg are now bottom of the table.



Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn picks up the ball after conceding a goal during their Bundesliga match against Energie Cottbus at the Friendship Stadium on Saturday.

## LEAGUE ONE Lyon extend lead

AFP, Paris

An Abdul Kader Keita double score propelled Lyon to a 3-0 thrashing of Monaco on Saturday to leave them nine points ahead at the top of the French league.

Brazilian Fred got the second goal against Monaco, who were virtually non-existent in the opening 45 minutes.

Second-placed Bordeaux have the chance to close the gap on Lyon on Sunday when they host Strasbourg.

Though the result in itself was not a surprise owing to Monaco's lacklustre season, it was Lyon's first victory at Monaco during their run of six consecutive league victories. During those years Lyon managed five defeats and a draw.

It was also the first time in their history that Lyon had scored more than two league goals at the Principality club.

Lyon coach Alain Perrin admitted a seventh title was looking more likely following this result. "We played a great match and the players showed real desire in an away match that is never easy," Perrin said.

"We really excelled in the first half in a match of two distinctly different 45 minutes of play. A point would have pleased me but three points have given us a major boost in our quest for the title."

He said they would be looking to consolidate on this victory in their next league match against Paris Saint Germain at home.

Struggling Paris Saint Germain are in action later Saturday against Valenciennes.

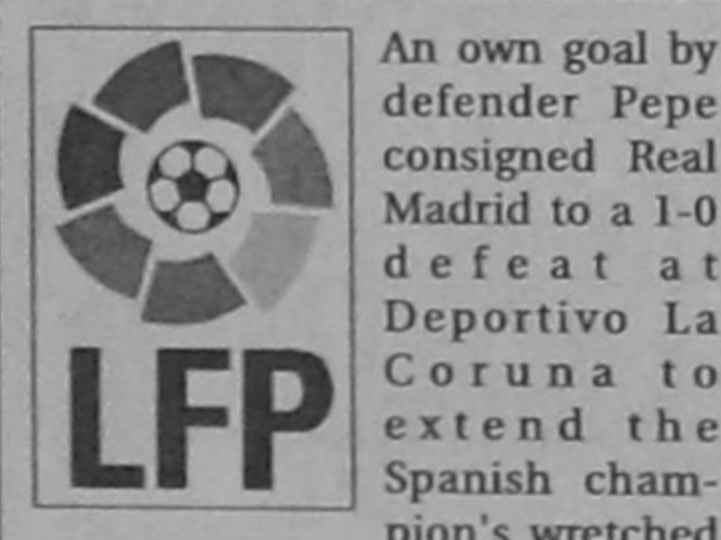
Monaco had packed their midfield with five players but could still not stop Lyon threatening on their goal early on.

Monaco keeper Stephane Ruffier had to deal with shots from Jeremy Toulalan and Kim Kallstrom but could not stop Lyon from going ahead in the 20th minute when Keita, who had got the better of defender Vincent Muratori, sent a half-volley into the net.

The goal sparked off a period of Lyon domination and Keita managed to hit the post after once more getting the better of Muratori. Fred then got the second goal in the 35th minute having got the better of Monaco's Bolivar.

## Real's Riazor jinx goes on

AFP, Madrid



record at the Riazor Stadium.

Real turned up on the north west coast seeking to end a winless run there stretching back to the 1991/92 season.

But the Madrid giants will have to wait another season to halt the run after an insipid encounter burst into life in the 58th minute when Deportivo's Felipe beat off Real defender Miguel Torres on the left.

The Brazilian's goal bound shot then took a deflection off fellow Brazilian Pepe's outstretched leg with that unscripted intervention wrong-footing keeper Iker

Casillas. Deportivo were well worth their three points against a Real Madrid side sorely missing Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy. Robinho's introduction late on failed to inspire the visitors.

Real, who mustered only one shot on target throughout the entire 90 minutes, could have their lead at the top cut to five points should Barcelona beat Almeria on Sunday.

For struggling Deportivo this win was a boost in their fight to avoid the drop. The Champions League semifinalists in 2004 are now three points above the relegation zone.

Saturday's game between Real Betis and Athletic Bilbao was cut short in the 72nd minute by the referee after Athletic's keeper Armando was struck by a bottle of water thrown from the stands.

He had to leave the pitch on a stretcher. Athletic were leading 2-1 at the time the encounter at the Manuel Ruiz ground was stopped.

"Armando suffered a blow to the right eye and has bruising and a cut in the same area. He has had stitches," read a statement on the club's official website.

Elsewhere Recreativo Huelva prevailed 4-2 over Real Murcia with Florent Sinama-Pongolle getting a double for Recreativo.

Saturday's late kick-off produced a 2-1 win for Sevilla, who have turned the corner after a poor start to the season to put themselves back in contention for Champions League football next term.

A Luis Fabiano first half double pushed the two time UEFA Cup winners up to fourth with Kings Cup semifinalists Valencia, whose Raul Albiol scored in the 90th minute, treading water in 10th. Sunday's action features Barcelona trip to Almeria, a club who have already beaten Real this season.

Third-placed Villarreal, who are now just four points behind Barca, host Real Zaragoza.



Deportivo Coruna winger Filipe Kasmirski (2nd from right) celebrates with teammates after their goal against Real Madrid during their Primera Liga tie at the Riazor Stadium on Saturday.