



A TALE OF TWO CONTRASTING HALVES: Barcelona's Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o (R) tries to outwit Real Betis's Juanito (L) during their Primera Liga clash at the Ruiz de Lopera Stadium in Seville on Saturday. Eto'o scored one in Barcelona's 2-0 first-half lead. But a 14-minute goal rush in the second half saw Betis pull off a stunning 3-2 win over the Spanish giants.

## Barcelona self-destruct

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard said he was embarrassed by his team's woeful second half showing in Saturday's 3-2 defeat by Real Betis that could have ended their title hopes.

Barca looked to be in control at 2-0 up but Betis scored three times in 14 second half minutes and the defeat leaves Barcelona four points behind Real Madrid, who have a game in hand, at the top of the Spanish first division.

"We saw two different Barcelona sides and I feel embarrassed about the result," said Rijkaard.

"We dominated the first half and it is difficult to comprehend how

the match changed so much in the second half. We talked at the interval and said we would have to go out motivated and keep up the pressure.

"All we needed to do was carry on like the first half but it didn't happen and is inexplicable."

To rub salt into the wounds Villarreal then moved a point ahead of Barca in second courtesy of a 3-0 victory over Atletico Madrid and they are now Real's nearest title rivals.

Rijkaard had seen his team race into a two-goal lead with goals from Bojan Krkic and Samuel Eto'o inside the first quarter hour.

Betis looked set to be buried with Barca producing a mesmerising first half display but after the interval Rijkaard's team fell apart.

Edu scored on 63 minutes and Barcelona started to wobble.

Victor Valdes saved a penalty from Edu, after Eric Abidal brought down David Odonkor, but 60 seconds later Juanito (75min) equalised with a brilliant volley.

Edu then more than made amends with his winning goal rocketing past Valdes to leave Rijkaard shaking his head in despair in the dug-out.

For Betis, it was three vital points as they moved six points clear of the relegation zone.

Real can now turn the screw when they host Sevilla on Sunday looking to bounce back after successive defeats to Deportivo La Coruna and Valencia.

Villarreal have collected 24 points from a possible 33 in 2008 and are now three points behind Real after their 3-0 drubbing of fourth-placed Atletico.

A mistake by Colombian Luis Perea after 38 minutes allowed

Santiago Cazorla to open the scoring and four minutes later Nihat bagged another.

"I heard Barcelona lost so we are second which is great," said Nihat. "There is a long way to go and we will just see what happens. We have Sevilla in our next match and that will be tough."

Nihat scored again for his 14th goal of the campaign as Villarreal ensured an unhappy return for Diego Forlan who spent three years at the club before joining Atletico for 21 million euros in the summer.

Forlan plundered 54 goals in 106 league matches but Villarreal clearly have found another source of goals.

Atletico will now hope neighbours Real can do them a favour by beating Champions League rivals Sevilla, five points behind in sixth, on Sunday.

## Podolski saves Bayern blushes

AFP, Berlin

Supersub Lukas Podolski capped a memorable week on Saturday by saving Bayern Munich with a late equaliser at strugglers Nuremberg on a crazy day in the Bundesliga where none of the top five sides won.

The 22-year-old Podolski scored after coming off the bench in Germany's 4-0 Euro 2008 warm-up win against Switzerland on Wednesday.

On Saturday, he was at it again as he hit Bayern's equaliser in the 81st minute in a 1-1 draw having made a second-half appearance.

"We have to be happy with the point and if you look at the table it was a good day for us, but otherwise it was a tired performance," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"We missed our rhythm and movement, quite simply we played badly, because a lot of our players

returned tired from Wednesday's international matches."

Bayern captain Oliver Kahn played his 552nd Bundesliga game to claim joint third in the table for the most German league appearances, but for all his experience he was well beaten when Nuremberg took the lead.

A spectacular shot from Bosnia midfielder Zvezdan Misimovic, just before half-time, flew into the top corner from 20 metres out and put the home side ahead before Podolski saved the day to keep Bayern seven points clear.

"The important thing was to score the goal," said Podolski after a report in German tabloid Bild last week saying he is tired of sitting on Bayern's bench and wants a transfer.

"I don't comment on the trainer's decision, I just accept them."

The biggest shock came at Werder Bremen when the home side were humbled 2-1 by relegation-candidates Duisburg who moved out of the bottom three

following their win.

Bremen have now dropped to fifth with defeats at Wolfsburg and their 6-3 hammering at defending champions VfB Stuttgart and they have failed to pick up a win in their last four games.

The home side hit back when Brazilian midfielder Diego scored his 12th goal of the season early in the second-half, but it was not enough.

"No ifs or buts: that was a bad result for us," said Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf.

"We deserved to lose this game, we have some big problems to sort out."

Schalke 04, who play Barcelona in the Champions League quarterfinals in Gelsenkirchen on Tuesday, were held 0-0 at Karlsruhe and the valuable point moves them into third.

Bayern Leverkusen were beaten 2-0 when Germany striker Stefan Kiessling scored an own goal to give Eintracht Frankfurt three points before the visitors added a late second.

Things got very strange at second-placed Hamburg who drew 1-1 with Arminia Bielefeld.

Hamburg midfielder David Jarolim was sent off after hitting defender Markus Schuler in the genitals following an altercation.

Bielefeld had swift revenge when they went 1-0 up as defender Markus Bollmann scored on 72 minutes with a header.

But Hamburg hit back when Peru striker Jose Paolo Guerrero equalised after 81 minutes just before Bielefeld's Joerg Boehme was sent off shortly after for a dangerous tackle.

There was a goal feast at VfL Bochum as they drew 3-3 with fellow mid-table side Borussia Dortmund.

On Friday, an injury-time strike by Wolfsburg's Polish midfielder Jacek Krzynowek gave his side three points in a 1-0 win at strugglers Hansa Rostock.

Defending champions VfB Stuttgart take on mid-table Hanover on Sunday while bottom side Energie Cottbus take on Hertha Berlin.

## Carlo insists Milan stay

AFP, Rome

Carlo Ancelotti insisted on Saturday that he would not be leaving the AC Milan hotseat, even to take over as Italy coach.

Speculation has been rife this season in Italy that national team coach Roberto Donadoni will be replaced following Euro 2008 with Ancelotti taking over.

And with AC Milan struggling to qualify for next season's Champions League - they are fifth, four points off fourth-placed Fiorentina in the final qualification position - and already out of this season's competition, rumours abound that Ancelotti will be fired at the end of the season.

A host of names have been touted as possible replacements for Ancelotti, such as AS Roma's Luciano Spalletti and Fiorentina's Cesare Prandelli.

"I don't feel any pressure from the Roma bench, nor Fiorentina's bench, nor Juventus'," said Ancelotti.



SCARY NIGHT FOR GIANTS: Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (R) tries to evade a desperate challenge from Nuremberg's Tomas Galasek during their Bundesliga match at the Easy-Credit Stadium in Nuremberg on Saturday. Leaders Bayern escaped with a 1-1 draw against their struggling Bavarian rivals.

## Totti out of MU clash

AFP, Rome

AS Roma suffered a crucial blow to their Champions League hopes as captain and talisman Francesco Totti was on Sunday ruled out of Tuesday's clash against Manchester United.

Roma host the English champions at the Stadio Olimpico in the quarterfinals first leg but will have to do without their star player.

United are already overwhelming favourites to progress in the tie and Totti's thigh injury picked up during Saturday's 1-1 draw against Cagliari will not have helped Roma's cause.

"He has to undergo a period of rest and his situation will be monitored over the next few days," said a club statement.

United also have injury problems, though, with four players who started in Saturday's stunning 4-0 thrashing of Aston Villa doubtful for Tuesday.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson substituted Michael Carrick, Rio Ferdinand and Patrice Evra in the second half and afterwards revealed that Ryan Giggs had also suffered an injury.

"They all had injuries and then Ryan Giggs got injured towards the end and that was a bit of a problem," Ferguson said.

Ferguson also admitted he was unsure if his first-choice goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, who missed Saturday's match, would be fit enough to play in Rome.

"Edwin may be a doubt for Tuesday," the Scot added. "He has a problem with his groin again."

## Fan death disrupts Juve match

AFP, Rome

Juventus's Serie A clash at home to Parma on Sunday has been called off following the death of a visiting fan at a service station.

The 28-year-old man, later named as Matteo Bagnaresi, was run over by a bus apparently carrying Juve fans to the match.

"With the approval of the relevant authorities, Juventus and Parma have decided to postpone the match as a sign of mourning for the incident involving the Parma fan who was on his way to the Olympic stadium in Turin," said Juventus in a statement. "In the case of such a fatal tragedy the two teams felt they were not in the right condition to take to the field."

The postponement was also confirmed by an Italian Federation statement.

The incident happened on the same round of matches as the death of Lazio fan Gabriele Sandri back in November.

He was accidentally shot by a policeman after violence broke out between travelling Juventus and Lazio fans at another service station.

Ansa reported that there were skirmishes between rival fans at the rest stop on the A21 motorway between Turin and Piacenza while the Gazzetta dello Sport website claimed that some reports said the bus which killed Bagnaresi had come under attack from rival fans.

The death of Sandri back in November sparked violent protests in several grounds around the country leading to some matches being postponed.

The Italian Federation announced that a minute's silence would be observed at the other grounds around the country as a mark of respect for the fan.

Speaking to Sky TV ahead of the 3pm kick-off around the country injured AC Milan striker Ronaldo said he hoped this incident would not set off a repeat of the problems that tarnished the image of Italian football back in November.

## Inter, Roma both held

AFP, Rome

Lazio did cross-city rivals AS Roma a favour by holding leaders Inter Milan to a 1-1 draw at the capital's Stadio Olimpico on Saturday.

It meant second-placed Roma did not lose ground on the champions following their own 1-1 draw at lowly Cagliari earlier in the day.

The gap between the top two is pegged at four points with seven matches left but perhaps more significantly, Inter have failed to win in seven of their last nine games in all competitions.

They also twice had the woodwork to thank for escaping Rome with a valuable point.

Brazilian full-back Maicon said they were happy with the point, which maintained their gap to Roma.

"We worked hard for this all the way to the end, this draw is good for us," he said.

"You can't always pile the pressure on. We've got to work hard to win our last seven games."

Inter had the lead after only 10 minutes in simple fashion as Maicon skipped down the right and crossed to the near post where Hernan Crespo flicked the ball home.

Crespo could have scored another but Marco Ballotta saved from the Argentine striker.

Lazio had chances of their own in the first period with Inter's Brazilian goalkeeper Julio Cesar twice blocking long-range efforts from former Manchester City midfielder Ousmane Dabo.

After the break Lazio came storming back with Tommaso Rocchi beating the offside trap on 59 minutes before taking his time and side-footing the ball past Julio Cesar.

Minutes later the goalkeeper came to Inter's rescue as he tipped a deflected Valon Behrami shot onto the bar and over for a corner.

Nine minutes from time the unlucky Dabo finally beat Julio Cesar but saw his vicious strike crash back off the bar.

Cagliari goalkeeper Marco Storari was the star of the show in Sardinia as the hosts moved out of the relegation zone, capping a good week for them as on Wednesday the Italian federal court of justice overturned a three-point penalty imposed on them.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti rued his team's missed opportunity.

"The lads played a good match, they deserved more," he said.

Roma had a nightmare start as Matteo Ferrari scored an own goal on just three minutes.

Ferrari was unable to get out of the way of the ball from a corner after several players missed it, with the ball hitting his legs and trickling over the line.

Spalletti said that moment was crucial to the final outcome.

"The game started badly, we conceded a goal and that affected the rest of the match," he said. "Even so, we have to be pleased, it's a result we have to accept, we did everything we could."

Roma dominated the opening half with Ludovic Giuly forcing a good save from Storari before he and Brazilian winger Alessandro Mancini both missed volleys from good position.

On 24 minutes Mancini hit the post with a shot from outside the area and on the half hour mark Storari saved well again from Giuly.

Cagliari weren't always under the cosh and Michele Canini went close with a header from a corner. But on the stroke of half-time, Roma were level as Totti beat Storari with a well-placed free-kick.

Roma finally got behind the Sardinians' stubborn back line on 77 minutes but substitute Alberto Aquilani's flick from a Giuly centre was stopped by the excellent Storari.

Seven minutes from time Roma opened up Cagliari again with Brazilian full-back Cincinno playing a neat one-two with Totti but his right-foot finish was dreadful.

But the best chance came with five minutes remaining as Storari produced a stunning save with his foot on the line from Totti's close range header as he was falling backwards into his goal.



A DECISIVE FALL? AS Roma talisman Francesco Totti is in agony during his side's Serie A match against Cagliari on Saturday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw and more importantly Roma will miss an injured Totti in their Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal first-leg match against Manchester United.

## PSG clinch French Cup

AFP, Paris

PSG lie in the relegation zone of the French league and coach Paul Le Guen would have been relieved to hear the final whistle knowing the club's fanatical supporters, and demanding board, had a trophy plus UEFA Cup qualification to divert attention from their poor league form.

Le Guen said: "This victory is great for the club, for the whole squad and for our supporters by bringing us something to celebrate. It's great to win this at this stage of the season and I hope it's going to set us up for the run-in. The league still remains the priority."

In the 18th minute, PSG were ahead.

Portuguese striker Pauleta looked up to see Le Crom off his line and delivered a cheeky chip which found the net with the aid of the bottom of the keeper's left hand post.

To have scored in and won a cup final with PSG must have been a major plus for 34-year-old Pauleta, playing in his fifth and final season with the club.

He had been injured with a left thigh injury for two weeks but

he came back to score a superb goal which put PSG on their way.

Shortly after the break however, PSG's lead had gone.

A veteran, like Pauleta, 35-year-old Eric Carriere got on the score-sheet in the 52nd minute.

After good work by Toifilou Maoulida on the right, Carriere fired home from an angle on the right with the side of his foot with the help of keeper Mickael Landreau's right hand post.

It was a cruel blow for Lens when the penalty decision was made in the third minute of injury time.

Substitute Peggy Luyindula was adjudged to have been brought down by Lens's Brazilian captain Hilton in the box and Mendy stepped up to make no mistake with the spotkick.

Le Guen added: "Bernard (Mendy) is a great penalty taker and he stays calm and keeps cool and manages to score them continually in training."

PSG thereby won a record third title after wins in both 1995 and 1998.

He was accidentally shot by a policeman after violence broke out between travelling Juventus and Lazio fans at another service station.

Ansa reported that there were skirmishes between rival fans at the rest stop on the A21 motorway between Turin and Piacenza while the Gazzetta dello Sport website claimed that some reports said the bus which killed Bagnaresi had come under attack from rival fans.

The death of Sandri back in November sparked violent protests in several grounds around the country leading to some matches being postponed.

The Italian Federation announced that a minute's silence would be observed at the other grounds around the country as a mark of respect for the fan.

Speaking to Sky TV ahead of the 3pm kick-off around the country injured AC Milan striker Ronaldo said he hoped this incident would not set off a repeat of the problems that tarnished the image of Italian football back in November.

## 'Arsenal still in the hunt'

AFP, Bolton

Arsene Wenger believes Arsenal are still in the hunt for the Premier League title after their stunning recovery to win 3-2 at Bolton.

Trailing 2-0 to two goals from Matt Taylor, Arsenal were also reduced to ten men following the dismissal of Abou Diaby and facing a sixth league game without victory on Saturday.

However, goals from William Gallas, a Robin van Persie penalty and, in the final minute, an own goal from Iljod Samuel turned the outcome on its head and kept Arsenal in contact with Manchester United and Chelsea.

"In all my time here I can't remember a better comeback than that - 2-0 down, with ten men, with half an hour to go," Wenger said. "But we knew at half-time that even 2-2 was not good enough for us."

"We had to really continue to believe, to show mental strength and play our game as much as we could. That wasn't easy."

"It was a mental test because it

looked like everything was going against us. We got a player sent off, they scored a second and that was all a big blow going into half-time."

"But great credit to the team. I am very proud today. It was a big blow losing to Chelsea last week and they responded well."

With Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal against Liverpool looming, Wenger would also have been encouraged by the performances of substitutes Theo Walcott and Emmanuel Adebayor who helped change the outcome of the game in such dramatic fashion.

But Wenger angered home supporters when he appeared to be arguing about the dismissal of Diaby, sent off just after the half hour for a high, studs-up challenge on Greta Steinsson and the veteran Arsenal manager later moved to clarify his reaction.

"I was not upset about the sending off because his foot was a bit high," insisted Wenger. "I felt it was more a protective tackle than an aggressive one but I didn't complain because it was too high. I just felt there was a foul on him before that."

Bolton opening the scoring with

their first meaningful foray into opposition territory. El Hadji Diouf took possession from a throw-in and slid the ball down the line for overlapping full-back Steinsson.

The Icelandic defender delivered the perfect cross for Taylor who sped in ahead of his marker and headed past Manuel Almunia from six yards.

Bolton doubled their lead two minutes before the interval.

Mathieu Flamini was caught in possession by Gavin McCann, allowing Diouf to square the ball to Taylor, on the edge of the Arsenal area, and the resulting shot took an unkind deflection off the back of Gallas before flying into the bottom left-hand corner.

In the 62nd minute, Gallas arrived unmarked at the far post to convert a Fabregas corner which had been missed the Bolton defenders in the six-yard box.

Then, just five minutes later, a superb back heel from Adebayor set up Flamini whose shot was brilliantly saved by Al Habsi only for Gary Cahill to concede a penalty for a trip on Hleb.

Robin van Persie, who had been guilty of a number of poor misses,

made no mistake with a clinically taken penalty before Cesc Fabregas's shot deflected off Samuel late on to clinch the points.

Results elsewhere did not fall kindly for the losing manager and a stunned Gary Megson wore the appearance of a man who knew his team's last chance of survival had been thrown away as he faced the media after the thrilling game.

"We're bitterly disappointed and angry with ourselves and we will be for quite a while," said Megson. "That result will take a long time to get out of the system and the fact we're now four points from safety won't be lost on anyone."

"You can't take any positives from a game when you have been 2-0 up against ten men, it would be churlish to suggest some of the things we did were okay. We have six games left now and they are all like cup ties, all that matters is the result."

"There will be a lot of criticism and moaning about the place but all we can do is circle the wagons and put our tin helmets on."

"There are two choices now, either the white flag goes up or sleeves go up, there is no other choice about it."