



Juventus' fans take down their banner after the announcement of the cancellation of their Serie A match against Parma at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Sunday.

Tragedy strikes Italy again

AFP, Rome

Italian football suffered another tragic blow on Sunday as a Parma fan died after being run over by a bus on a weekend that saw AC Milan's Champions League hopes take another costly dent.

Matteo Bagnaresi was run over at a service station by a bus carrying Juventus fans after skirmishes broke out between rival sets of supporters.

It was the second time this season that a fan died at a service station, with Rome DJ Gabriele Sandri accidentally shot by a policeman back in November after clashes broke out between Juve and Lazio fans at a motorway rest stop.

That incident sparked violent protests around several grounds with two matches being subsequently postponed.

Authorities decided to postpone the Juventus-Parma clash on Sunday in a bid to help avoid a repeat of November's ugly scenes.

On the pitch Milan crashed dismally 2-1 at home to Atalanta, leaving their hopes of snatching fourth place from Fiorentina, who lost 3-1 at Udinese, looking decidedly shaky.

"We have to move on this week and get ready for the next match. Hopefully Kaka will be back. We're got to keep working in training but we need to defend better," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"We have to be careful. We lost to Sampdoria at home, and now this makes two (home) losses in a row. It makes things very complicated for us."

The result was no less than the visitors to Milan's San Siro stadium deserved as they completed a league double over the reigning European champions.

Sergio Floccari opened the scoring at the second attempt after Ferreira Pinto skipped down the right and crossed to the near post.

Floccari shook off his marker, veteran Paolo Maldini, and saw his first effort saved by Australian goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac but he was alert enough to flick home the rebound from a tight angle on 32 minutes.

Ten minutes later and Atalanta doubled their lead as a brilliant piece of control from Floccari, who then fed Antonio Langella.

He kept his cool to flick the ball over the onrushing Massimo Oddo's lunging challenge and then calmly side-footed home.

Milan had the ball in the net early in the second half but veteran Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf's effort was rightly ruled out for offside.

Atalanta should have made the game safe midway through the half but after a fine break from Ferreira Pinto, Cristian Doni woefully skied his shot with the goal at his mercy.

Massimo Ambrosini then had another Milan strike harshly ruled out for a foul on goalkeeper Ferdinando Coppola.

Maldini scored with a header five minutes from time and Andrea Pirlo had the chance to snatch a point for the hosts in the last minute after Ambrosini was felled in the box but he saw his penalty saved by Coppola.

Milan remain four points behind Fiorentina in the race for the crucial last Champions League

qualifying position but they have lost their last two home matches and only the Viola's own stuttering form is keeping them in with a faint hope.

Udinese's victory actually moved them up to fifth, a point ahead of Milan while Sampdoria, seventh after a 2-0 win at Empoli, are behind Milan only on goal difference - making it a four-way battle for the last Champions League spot.

"It's a very, very delicate situation," said Fiorentina coach Cesare Prandelli. "It's a very difficult position to be in but all our work is going towards finishing fourth."

On Saturday leaders Inter Milan and second-placed AS Roma were both held to 1-1 draws.

Roma came back from the disappointment of conceding an early own goal through Matteo Ferrari to level matters at Cagliari with a Francesco Totti free-kick.

Their cross-city rivals Lazio then did them a favour by hitting back through Tommaso Rocchi after Hernan Crespo had given Inter the lead at Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

Lyon all but champions

REUTERS, Paris

Olympique Lyon stayed on course for a seventh consecutive Ligue 1 title by winning 2-1 at mid-table Valenciennes on Sunday.

Lyon's sixth successive league win put them on 67 points from 31 games, nine ahead of second-placed Girondins Bordeaux with seven matches left.

Ivory Coast forward Kader Keita was the key to Lyon's victory, opening the scoring on eight minutes before setting up France striker Sidney Govou for the winner in the 64th minute.

Defender Eric Chelle had brought Valenciennes level with a header from a corner in the 27th minute.

Bordeaux, fighting to hold on to second place for automatic qualification for the Champions League, beat third-placed Nancy 2-1 on Saturday.

Olympique Marseille kept alive their hopes of a top-three finish by winning 2-1 at Lorient in Sunday's late match.

The former European champions, who had picked just one point from their last two league outings, recaptured their winning ways and stayed fourth but closed the gap on Nancy to three points. Lorient moved in front shortly before halftime with a penalty from Algeria midfielder Rafik Saifi but the visitors responded after the break with goals from Ivory Coast midfielder Kanga Akale and Senegal striker Mamadou Niang.

The top two from Ligue 1 make the Champions League with the third-placed team entering the showcase competition's qualifying round.

Totti aiming for United second-leg

AFP, Rome

AS Roma talisman Francesco Totti is hoping to be fit for his team's Champions League quarterfinal, second leg against Manchester United at Old Trafford, his personal trainer said Monday.

Totti injured a thigh muscle in Saturday's 1-1 Serie A draw at Cagliari and is due to miss Tuesday's first leg at Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

It's a big blow to Roma, who were dismantled 8-3 on aggregate by United at the same stage last season, but Vito Scala says Totti is already working towards his return to action.

And he defended the Roma captain for not coming off when he was hurt against Cagliari.

"These things happen. Francesco hurt himself in the match against Cagliari. He didn't leave the field because it was a manageable pain but it wouldn't have changed anything if he had come off," Scala told Italian radio.

"He's disappointed not to be playing (Tuesday) but he is determined to try to be ready for the return leg."

"It's difficult to take Francesco off. Many times he says he feels pain before a match, then he plays, shoots, scores two goals."

"He has a much higher pain threshold than the others, many times he amazes us when he manages to play."

Stuttgart fail to capitalise

REUTERS, Berlin

VfB Stuttgart failed to take advantage of a series of mishaps above them when they were held to a goalless draw away to Hannover 96 on Sunday.

Stuttgart, last season's champions, had the chance to move within a point of the Champions League places after the top five had all failed to win on Saturday but Armin Veh's side succumbed to the same bout of vertigo.

Mario Gomez missed their best chance, putting a free header from a few metres out far too close to goalkeeper Robert Enke when he seemed certain to score at the end of the first half.

A draw kept Stuttgart sixth on 42 points, three behind Schalke in the third and final Champions League spot.

With eight games left, Bayern Munich lead the standings with 54 points following a 1-1 derby draw at Nuremberg on Saturday. Hamburg SV, held 1-1 by Arminia Bielefeld, are second on 47.

Schalke, who drew 0-0 at Karlsruhe on Saturday, are third on 45, one ahead of Bayer Leverkusen and Werder Bremen following their defeats by Eintracht Frankfurt and Duisburg.

Schalke sniff a chance

REUTERS, Berlin



Schalke 04 have reached the Champions League quarterfinals by the skin of their teeth but after Barcelona's 'shameful' weekend defeat they will feel anything is possible when they host the Catalans on Tuesday.

The Arena AufSchalke is an intimidating place to play at the best of times, so how Barca will react in Gelsenkirchen after their performance against Real Betis on Saturday, when they led 2-0 but ended up losing 3-2, is anyone's guess.

Schalke, UEFA Cup winners in 1997 but appearing in the last eight of the European Cup for the first time, are third in the Bundesliga after three wins and a draw in their last four games.

Barcelona, twice European champions, are also in third place in their league, yet scarcely will they have had such self-doubt before a first leg against second-tier opposition like Schalke.

"It is difficult to explain what happened," said coach Frank Rijkaard after his team shipped

three goals in 15 second-half minutes. "All I can do is apologise to our fans. As a coach I feel ashamed at this result."

Rijkaard's room for manoeuvre is limited given that Ronaldinho is unlikely to take part because of leg muscle pain, while Deco, Rafael Marquez and Lionel Messi are all out injured.

Rijkaard may be tempted to recall Silvinho on the left side of defence after yet another shoddy display at the back, while Argentine centre-back Gabriel Milito could return after missing out on the Betis defeat because of groin pain.

Good defence will be important for Barcelona, who beat Celtic in the last 16, because Schalke know their best chance of an upset will be to attack with everything they've got.

During the group phase they played defensively at home to Valencia and Chelsea and got just a point from the two matches.

They squeaked through with just eight points from their six games and they responded by playing much more adventurously in the opening leg of their tie with Porto, winning it 1-0 and coming through on penalties after losing 1-0 in Portugal.

The Schalke forwards were frustrated in a goalless draw away to Karlsruhe on Saturday but the team did create nine clear chances and that has pointed the way for Tuesday.

"We have to get forward faster, to open up more opportunities," striker Kevin Kuranyi told reporters. "We need to create more chances."

Coach Mirko Slomka experimented on Saturday by playing full-back Christian Pander in an unfamiliar position on the left of midfield, with the in-form Heiko Westermann behind him.

"They worked well together," said Slomka, who will have to decide whether to play the same risky formation on Tuesday.

Possible teams:
Schalke 04: 1-Manuel Neuer; 18-Rafinha; 5-Marcelo Bordon; 20-Mladen Krstajic; 2-Heiko Westermann; 14-Gerald Asamoah; 13-Jermaine Jones; 8-Fabian Ernst; 24-Christian Pander; 22-Kevin Kuranyi; 19-Halil Altintop.

Barcelona: 1-Victor Valdes; 11-Gianluca Zambrotta; 5-Carles Puyol; 3-Gabriel Milito; 16-Silvinho; 24-Yaya Toure; 6-Xavi; 8-Andres Iniesta; 27-Bojan Krkic; 9-Samuel Eto'o; 14-Thierry Henry or 7-Eidur Gudjohnsen.

Raul sets sights on di Stefano

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid captain Raul Gonzalez now stands joint second, along with Carlos A. Alonso, in the club's all-time scorer list after scoring his 290th goal for the club in their 3-1 win over Sevilla on Sunday.

It was Raul's 16th goal of a fantastic season and he is now just 17 goals from equalling legendary Alfredo di Stefano's record mark of 307.

Raul, 30, is also hunting di Stefano's record of 216 league goals which he netted between 1953 and 1964, needing 13 more to equal the great Argentine.

Raul's goal helped Real open a six-point lead over Villarreal, with Barcelona a point further back, at the top of the Spanish first division with Gonzalo Higuain and Gabriel Heinze also on target.

"Raul is a symbol of the club and an extraordinary player," said Real president Ramon Calderon. "I am thrilled for him and he deserves all the credit that comes his way."

Sporting director Pedrag Mijatovic used to play alongside Raul in attack and saluted the club captain for his achievements.

"Raul is having a great season," said Mijatovic. "He is a great captain and a real leader on and off the pitch."

"I know him from the time we played together at Real and he

deserves everything for his attitude and hard work."

Since making his Real debut back in October 1994 as a raw 17-year-old Raul has become a symbol of the club which in turn has handed him a bumper contract until 2011 that will be extended for a year each as long as he plays at least 30 official games.

The striker has every club medal to his name with three Champions League crowns (1998, 2000 and 2002) and five Spanish championships (1995, 1997, 2001, 2003 and 2007).

He was the league's top scorer in 1998/1999 with 25 goals and repeated that feat in 2000/01 with

24. Raul's worst season was in 2005/06 with just five league goals.

The clamour for Raul to return to the Spain squad continues but headline national coach Luis Aragonés has insisted on leaving the veteran out in the cold.

Raul won the last of his 102 caps in September 2006 when Spain suffered an embarrassing 3-2 loss in Northern Ireland.

The striker has said he would love to go to Euro 2008 this summer but has already admitted his chances are slim.

"I know that it is really very complicated and difficult for me (to take part), but I still have hope," Raul said.



Real Madrid's legend Raul celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Sevilla during their Primera Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Torres gives L'pool the edge

AFP, Liverpool



Fernando Torres put Liverpool in pole position to claim fourth spot in the Premiership and a place in next season's Champions League by scoring the only goal in the 207th Merseyside derby against Everton to seal a 1-0 win at Anfield on Sunday.

Liverpool, who face Arsenal in the first-leg of their Champions League quarterfinal at the Emirates on Wednesday, rarely looked in danger of conceding the points after Torres had put Rafa Benitez's team ahead on seven minutes.

Having slumped so miserably to defeat against Manchester United at Old Trafford last Sunday, Liverpool were in danger of being labelled a team that buckles under the pressure against the big boys in the Premiership.

But the crunch encounters come thick and fast for Benitez's team this month. United last week, Everton on Sunday and three huge games against Arsenal to come over the next ten days that will make or break Liverpool's season, so this was the perfect opportunity to prove their mettle when the going gets tough.

The home side were certainly helped by David Moyes's team selection. The Everton manager was without broken foot victim Tim Cahill and with strikers Andy Johnson, Victor Anichebe and James Vaughan all ruled out, his attacking options were limited to Nigerian forward Yakubu.

So Everton's ambitions were hampered by their lack of depth and Liverpool, with Steven Gerrard and Torres once again in tandem, proved too strong for their neighbours virtually from the first kick.

The game was only seven minutes old when Torres made the breakthrough for Liverpool following a piece of suicidal defending from Yakubu.

The 11.25million pounds forward failed to clear the ball on the edge of his own penalty area and he was dismissed by Xabi Alonso, with Dirk Kuyt picking up the loose ball 20 yards out.

Kuyt cleverly picked out Torres lurking on the edge of the box and the Spanish forward was never going to waste his opportunity and

he beat goalkeeper Tim Howard with a right-foot strike into the far corner to claim his 28th goal of the season.

With so few options up-front, Everton now had an even bigger mountain to climb and Liverpool were in no mood to make life easy for Moyes's team and the red tide continued to flow forward.



Liverpool's Spanish forward Fernando Torres celebrates after scoring the all-important goal against Everton during their Premier League match at Anfield on Sunday.

Chelsea stalk United

AFP, London



Ricardo Carvalho kept Chelsea hot on Manchester United's heels as his first goal of the season clinched a 1-0 win over Middlesbrough on Sunday.

Avram Grant's side closed the gap on Premier League leaders United to five points as they moved back above Arsenal into second place thanks to Carvalho's first half header at Stamford Bridge.

While United show no signs of stumbling as the title race enters the final furlong, Chelsea are at least ensured Sir Alex Ferguson's champions have to go the distance to reclaim the crown.

The Blues still have to host United on April 26 but they nearly blew this chance to maintain the pressure as their early dominance gave way to a nervous finale in which Middlesbrough hit the woodwork three times.

"I cannot say that it was our best game, but it was important for us to win rather than have quality in the game," Grant said. "They were unlucky but we also created some good chances from open play."

"We started very well and, maybe because of that, we thought it would be easy. But by not making it 2-0, it became a good chance for the other team."

"I think we deserved the win. At this stage of the season, it's about winning. We have to keep winning and hope that when United come here it'll be important."

Middlesbrough Gareth Southgate said: "In the first half I thought we'd come to admire Chelsea and swap shirts at the end of the game."

"But we said at half-time that we had to leave here with no regrets. Once we started to create openings, Chelsea got edgy."

"They're going for the title, but their confidence suffered as well. We could have walked away with a point."

Grant was without Frank Lampard as the England midfielder recovered from an illness, which had kept him out of the friendly against France in midweek.

But beating Arsenal last weekend has given Chelsea renewed belief they can catch United and that confidence was apparent at the start.

Didier Drogba set the tone as he tested Mark Schwarzer with a long-range effort that the Australian fumbled nervously.

Grant's side took the lead in the sixth minute. Wayne Bridge curled over a free-kick from wide on the left and Portugal defender Carvalho rose to power a perfectly-placed header into the far corner.

Chelsea threatened again when Drogba headed wide from Salomon Kalou's corner.

Kalou could have increased the lead after Michael Essien, bulldozing in from the right, picked him out with a low cross. Instead Kalou took one touch too many and allowed Luke Young to block his shot.

The killer touch eluded Drogba as well when Joe Cole's cross gave the striker a free header six yards out and he flicked his effort tamely over.

The subdued atmosphere suggested Chelsea's fans had less

belief in their team's title chances than the players. But Grant's side were on top again at the start of the second half, with Schwarzer blocking at Cole's feet.

Essien was next to try his luck as the Ghana midfielder flashed a volley over from the edge of the area.

When Grant sent on Shaun Wright-Phillips for Michael Ballack midway through the half, the decision prompted jeers from a section of the home crowd.

It was the second week in a row Grant had to deal with dissent from the Chelsea faithful. His changes had inspired the win over Arsenal though and Wright-Phillips should have made an immediate impact.

The England winger dragged a shot wide with his first touch and blazed wastefully over moments later.

Those misses increased Chelsea's nerves and Middlesbrough striker Afonso Alves, on as a substitute,

should have punished them. The Brazilian found space to reach Stewart Downing's cross, only to glance his header wide.

Alves was guilty of a worse miss in the 73rd minute. Chelsea keeper Carlo Cudicini gifted the chance when he missed his clearance after sprinting out of his area. Alves had an open goal to aim at but his shot hit the post and rebounded back to Cudicini.

Schwarzer made a brilliant save to turn Kalou's diving header over the bar. But Chelsea were wobbling and they had to survive another incredible near-miss 10 minutes from full-time.

Alves headed against the bar from no more than two yards then, after Essien tried to clear, David Wheater also hit the bar with another header.

Middlesbrough appealed in vain for handball when Belletti misjudged a cross but somehow Chelsea held on.



Chelsea defender Ricardo Carvalho (R) runs for joy after scoring against Middlesbrough, his first Premier League goal, at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.