

Becks double delivers draw

AFP, Salt Lake City

David Beckham scored two first-half goals to deliver a 2-2 draw for the Los Angeles Galaxy against Real Salt Lake Saturday in a Major League Soccer contest.

With Los Angeles trailing by two goals early in the first half, Beckham went on the attack and posted his first two-goal outing since arriving in the MLS.

The English superstar scored twice in the space of four minutes, his solo shot in the 40th minute making it 2-2.

Fabian Espindola in the sixth minute and Kenny Deuchar in the 17th had given Real the early lead.

Aussies edge China in shoot-out

AFP, Darwin

Olympic champions Australia edged out China in a penalty stroke shootout to sweep the four-nations field hockey tournament series here on Sunday.

The Australians prevailed 9-8 in the shoot-out after the scores were locked 2-2 at fulltime.

Last weekend Australia downed South Korea 4-3 in the final of the first four-nations tournament in Perth, scheduled as a warm-up for this year's Beijing Olympics.

Although Australia remained undefeated throughout their eight games in the two tournaments, China took a lot of confidence out of Sunday's match in which they pushed the world's second-ranked side to the final whistle.

Australia led 2-0 shortly after half-time, but the determined Chinese fought back to level with 15 minutes left and force the final into extra time.

The stroke shootout began sensationally when the 2007 World Hockey Player of the year Jamie Dwyer missed the first attempt.

China converted their next two attempts but a brilliant save from keeper Stephen Mowlam and a disallowed Chinese goal gave the Australians a renewed chance.

The scores remained tied after both teams had taken five shots as the shoot-out moved into sudden death. Both teams traded goals on the first three combined attempts but China's fourth attempt hit the metal frame of the goal.

Luke Doerner converted his shot to hand the victory to the home team. South Korea claimed third place in the Darwin tournament with a 4-3 win over India.



Atletico Madrid starlet Kun Agüero points to the home fans after scoring the second goal against Recreativo de Huelva during their Primera Liga match at the Vicente Calderon Stadium in Madrid on Saturday.

Atletico boost UCL hope

AFP, Madrid



Atletico Madrid heaped the pressure on their Champions League rivals with a 3-0 home victory over Recreativo Huelva to move five points clear of fifth-placed Racing Santander.

Promising 18-year-old midfielder Ignacio Camacho scored a rare brace and Kun Agüero was also on target as Atletico won for only the second time in six games.

Agüero's goals have been a key factor behind Atletico's push for fourth and the Argentine now has 18 for the season.

Atletico coach Javier Aguirre was delighted and saluted the mature performance of teenager Camacho.

"We needed a victory like this and the three points," said Atletico coach Javier Aguirre.

"I don't like to single out individuals for praise but Ignacio deserves it as he is a young man who had a good all-round game. He continues to make the step up from the juniors."

Atletico have not graced the

Champions League since the 1996/97 season but they are firm favourites to secure the final berth with three games left.

Racing can close back to within two points with a win over Real Murcia on Sunday while Sevilla need to beat Valladolid to move three points behind the capital club.

For Recreativo it was a missed opportunity to enhance their chances of survival and they lie level on points with third from bottom Osasuna.

In Saturday's late match veteran Argentine centre-back Roberto Ayala scored a vital late winner as Real Zaragoza moved out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win over Deportivo La Coruna.

Depor had won their last five matches, including a triumph over Barcelona, but Ayala popped up in the fourth minute of stoppage time to push Zaragoza out of the bottom three one point from safety.

It was a setback for Depor's UEFA Cup hopes as they missed the chance to close in on sixth-placed Sevilla.

Real Madrid are expected to be crowned champions on Sunday and a win at Osasuna will secure a 31st championship.

Real must at least match

Villarreal's result against Getafe to take the crown otherwise they could wrap the title up on Wednesday in the mouth-watering home match against Barcelona.

"Our goal is to not lose any match from now to the end of the season," said Real coach Bernd Schuster.

Barcelona, who will have to applaud Real as champions in front of their own fans, are recovering from their Champions League semifinal heartbreak to Manchester United as they challenge Villarreal for second place.

Frank Rijkaard's team host Valencia on Sunday trying to close the four-point gap on Villarreal and reclaim direct qualification for next season's Champions League.

"We have fought and done everything in our power but we've fallen short this season," admitted Rijkaard. "Now we have to finish the season in the best possible way."

Rijkaard's future remains unclear with Barca old boys Jose Mourinho, Pep Guardiola and Michael Laudrup being tipped to replace him.

Kings Cup victors Valencia are just four points clear of relegation so will be fired up at Camp Nou.

Win pleases Fergie

REUTERS, London



Manchester United took a huge step towards retaining their Premier League title on Saturday, beating West Ham United 4-1 despite playing more than half the match with 10 men.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice at Old Trafford and Carlos Tevez and Michael Carrick netted against their old club as Manchester United moved to 84 points with one match to play. If the leaders win at Wigan Athletic on May 11 they will be champions of England for the 17th time.

Second-placed Chelsea, who visit Newcastle United on Monday, have 81 points but a vastly inferior goal difference.

At the other end of the table Bolton Wanderers virtually guaranteed their safety while Fulham continued their revival to earn a

fighting chance of avoiding the drop.

Bolton beat Sunderland 2-0 at the Reebok Stadium, El Hadji Diouf's effort and an own goal by Daryl Murphy giving them 36 points ahead of their game at Chelsea next week.

Wanderers remain 16th, three points clear of Fulham after Roy Hodgson's men overcame relegation rivals Birmingham City 2-0 at Craven Cottage to rise from 19th to 17th.

Goals from Brian McBride and Erik Nevland helped Fulham climb above Birmingham and Reading, who dropped into the relegation zone after losing 1-0 at home to Tottenham Hotspur in their sixth successive match without a goal.

Robbie Keane sealed Spurs's win with his 23rd goal of the season after 16 minutes.

Reading have 33 points, one ahead of Birmingham. Reading's final match is at Derby next week while Birmingham are at home to

Blackburn Rovers.

"That was an important game today and I'm very pleased because there was a bit of tiredness in the second half," Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson told Sky Sports News.

"The plan in the second half was to kill the game off and get the fourth goal and we did that. It's been a great day for us, we have a big chance (of the title)."

If Chelsea are beaten on Monday, the title will be United's unless Ferguson's team lose at Wigan and Chelsea beat Bolton with a winning margin well into double figures.

Aston Villa's hopes of pipping Everton for fifth place and an automatic spot in next season's UEFA Cup were hit by a 2-0 defeat by Wigan, Antonio Valencia scoring twice.

Blackburn beat relegated Derby County 3-1 to extend the bottom team's run without a league victory to 31 matches.

Suicide attempt disrupts match

REUTERS, Rome

An Italian second division match between Treviso and Grosseto was suspended on Saturday after a policewoman shot herself outside the ground in an apparent suicide attempt, police said.

The policewoman was in hospital in a serious condition while another policewoman who tried to intervene was slightly hurt, they added.

The Serie B game was stopped after 20 minutes when spectators told the referee that something serious had happened behind a stand, the Ansa news agency said.

Grosseto were winning 1-0 at relegation-threatened Treviso when the match was stopped.

Magpies owner wins in roulette

AFP, London

Newcastle United manager Kevin Keegan's hopes of a summer transfer treasure chest may have risen after the club's billionaire owner Mike Ashley won a windfall on the roulette wheel, the Mail on Sunday reported.

According to the British weekly, sports goods retailer Ashley won 1.3 million pounds (2.5 million dollars) on a single spin of the wheel after a complex complete bet on black 17, the number favoured by James Bond.

Ashley reportedly placed the bet at a luxurious casino in St James Street, in the London high-rollers' haunt of Mayfair.

According to the Mail, Keegan, who replaced the sacked Sam Allardyce in January and has since lifted an under-performing side into midtable, believes even cash may not be enough for a title bid next season, however.

United, who will bid to prevent title contenders Chelsea going level with Manchester United on Monday, were runners up under Keegan 12 years ago and also came close to glory under Sir Bobby Robson.

"We'll be watching the Bordeaux game on Sunday, but I don't think it will be easy for them to win at Marseille."

Bremen delay Bayern party

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen beat Energie Cottbus 2-0 on Saturday to strengthen their grip on second place in the Bundesliga and leave Bayern Munich on the brink of their 21st league title.

Werder's victory leaves them nine points behind leaders Bayern with three games left to play.

Bayern have a big advantage in goal difference but to be mathematically sure of the title they need a point from their final four matches, starting away to VfL Wolfsburg on Sunday.

If they claim at least a draw from that game, they will be celebrating their 20th title since the Bundesliga era began in 1963 and their 21st of all time, including their first German championship success in

1932.

It would also be a third domestic double in four seasons, after their Cup final victory over Borussia Dortmund last month.

Third-placed Schalke 04 saw their hopes of claiming second fade when they were held 1-1 at home to Hannover 96.

Arnold Bruggink's free kick put Hannover ahead in the eighth minute and Schalke needed a fine equaliser from Hailil Altintop, who burst past three defenders and chipped the keeper at the end of the first half, to claim a point.

Bayern lead the standings with 66 points, followed by Werder on 57 and Schalke on 55.

Hamburg SV and VfB Stuttgart stayed in the hunt for the third and final Champions League place after commanding wins.

Hamburg won 3-1 away to Hansa Rostock with two goals from Ivica Olic and one from Rafael van der Vaart, while outgoing champions Stuttgart strolled to a 4-1 vic-

tory at home to Eintracht Frankfurt.

They now have 51 points apiece in fourth and fifth, respectively. Bayer Leverkusen can join them on that mark if they win away to Duisburg on Sunday.

Werder long since gave up on the title, and coach Thomas Schaaf was simply pleased to put two points worth of daylight between his own team and Schalke in third.

Schaaf's side were in charge from the beginning but it was only in the second half that they created clear chances.

Markus Rosenberg's 67th minute opener finally meant they could relax and Hugo Almeida got the second with 11 minutes to go, tapping in at the far post after a brilliant move involving Tim Borowski and Rosenberg.

"We looked good but for some reason couldn't get anything tangible," Schaaf said at a news conference. "In the end our patience paid off."

Nice hand Bordeaux lifeline

AFP, Paris



French league minnows Nice held Lyon to a scoreless draw on Saturday to boost Bordeaux's hopes of causing a late championship upset.

Lyon's latest setback, after their 2-2 draw with Caen last week, leaves them on 73 points, only five ahead of second-placed Bordeaux ahead of their trip to Marseille Sunday.

Results elsewhere meanwhile meant that for four teams - Paris St Germain, Toulouse, Lens and Strasbourg - the relegation battle is still a major concern.

Paris St Germain's bid to pull clear of the dreaded drop zone took another knock when they let slip a 1-0 lead late in their away tussle with Toulouse, which finished 1-1.

Lens' scoreless draw with Monaco later Saturday meant PSG

dropped back among the bottom three, with only Strasbourg and already relegated Metz below them.

Nancy were one of the biggest winners Saturday, their 3-0 demolition of Strasbourg pushing them up to third.

PSG's possible relegation has provided the biggest footballing story in France in recent weeks, and their latest setback bodes ill for the future.

"It's infuriating," raged Paul Le Guen, whose side were on the verge of a precious win thanks to Bernard Mendy's strike, only for Mohamed Fofana to bundle in an equaliser for Toulouse in the 89th minute.

PSG keeper Mickael Landreau did well to keep out a late strike from Toulouse's Paolo Cesar.

He admits the next two matches would show PSG whether they have the mettle to emerge victorious from the relegation battle.

"We were unlucky to concede what I thought was a lucky goal by

Toulouse at the end," said Landreau.

"Now it's clear. This is going to go all the way to the final two matches. It will be tough, but the teams who are the strongest mentally are the ones who will beat relegation."

Toulouse coach Elie Baup, who led Bordeaux to their last league title nearly a decade ago, said his side are primed for the remainder of the relegation battle.

"To come back into the match like we did is encouraging for our next two matches. We're all suffering from the relegation battle but the players showed tonight they've got something left to give," said Baup.

Lyon meanwhile know they have it all to do after Nice repelled a string of goalscoring chances from the six-time champions to force a scoreless draw, which reinforced their mid-table position.

A victory for Bordeaux against Marseille on Sunday would give Laurent Blanc's side 71 points and

help close the gap on Lyon to just two points ahead of next week's penultimate round of games when Bordeaux host Sochaux and Lyon host Nancy.

On the final match day of the season, both Lyon and Bordeaux are away from home - at Auxerre and Lens respectively.

Lyon coach Alain Perrin, who it has been reported is already on his way out of the club, said: "Whatever the result of Marseille and Bordeaux, we are masters of our own destiny."

Lyon and France midfielder Karim Benzema, at least for Sunday, will be Marseille's biggest supporter.

"We still got a point but we would have preferred to take three to keep Bordeaux at bay," Benzema told Canal Plus, admitting they would be watching Sunday's encounter closely.

"We'll be watching the Bordeaux game on Sunday, but I don't think it will be easy for them to win at Marseille."

Keegan eyes Chelsea scalp

AFP, Newcastle



Kevin Keegan will forever be associated with a televised rant against Sir Alex Ferguson more than a decade ago.

But that has not prevented the Newcastle boss from suggesting he would 'love it' if his side were to beat Chelsea here on Monday -- a result which would hand Ferguson the tenth Premier League title of his 22-year reign at Old Trafford.

Although Newcastle have only pride left to play for this season, Keegan has pledged to field a full-strength side with Australian striker Mark Viduka notably delaying treatment for an Achilles problem to ensure he can line up against Chelsea.

Keegan believes the recent form of Michael Owen will be of particular concern for his Chelsea counterpart Avram Grant while midfielder Nicky Butt, a former United star, makes no secret of his desire to help his old boss Ferguson clinch another trophy.

"I'm a great believer in playing football the right way," said the former England international. "I'm not saying Chelsea don't but it's more attractive to the eye watching United games."

"Football's about not losing and Chelsea have become masters at that. Obviously I'd love United to win it and it would be more of a highlight for the football purist if they did."

United's 4-1 demolition of West Ham on Saturday has left Chelsea with no room for error and even if they beat Newcastle and Bolton in their remaining games, Ferguson's men will top the table on goal difference if they win their final match at Wigan.

"United are more experienced than anyone in the Premier League and I can't see them slipping up," added Butt.

"They're definitely going to win the league and they have a great chance of the Champions League. With the players they've got they're capable of beating any team."

But is revelling in the recent upturn in Newcastle's form after a

difficult start to Keegan's second spell at the club.

"Kevin's brought a smile to the club, he keeps it simple, tells you what he expects and it's a nice way to play football," he said.

Newcastle go into Monday's match on a seven-game unbeaten run in which Owen, who has scored six goals in his last 11 games, has been a crucial factor, operating in a withdrawn role behind Viduka and Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins.

"I think he's different to the Michael Owen of old and he's suited to a different role," Keegan said. "He's been asked different questions and the answers he's coming up with are world class."

"In the position he's playing in for us, nobody in the world could do a better job. He's playing in two positions. He's linking us up and scoring goals. Instead of having one player up front we've got two. We're playing with 12 men sometimes -- that's how I feel. It's because of his fitness and his awareness."

Newcastle are likely to make only once change, with Abdoulaye Faye returning from injury to take over from David Edgar at the heart of their defence.

Chelsea will have enjoyed five days rest since their Champions League success over Liverpool, reducing the pressure on Grant to rest any of his stars.

But, with the Newcastle defence vulnerable to pace, there could be a place for Shaun Wright-Phillips, who has been frozen out in recent weeks.

Wright-Phillips is reported to be dismayed at his lack of action, but Grant said: "If Shaun is not happy, given my relationship with the player, he can come and tell me. He didn't tell me that."

"I don't think there's a problem. We are in historic moments in Chelsea, so this is a moment to say 'thank you' to all the players at Chelsea."

"Shaun was our best player in December. This is a time to respect everybody at the club. It has not been an easy season, but it will also belong to these kind of players."



Spanish star Rafael Nadal makes a forehand return against German opponent Dennis Gremelmayr during their Barcelona Open semifinal on Saturday.