

# A nail-biting finale

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc is confident his side have what it takes to claim their first French league crown in nine years at the expense of champions Lyon as both won their penultimate games on Saturday to ensure the title race will be decided on the final day of competition.

Blanc's side maintained their title push with a 2-0 win against Sochaux as Lyon, the six-time consecutive champions, emerged 1-0 winners from their home encounter with Nancy, who are fighting to retain third place.

However the display from Alain Perrin's champions, who needed a 62nd-minute own goal from Andre Luiz Silva to ensure victory, is likely to give Bordeaux renewed hope that Auxerre can cause an upset against Lyon in Burgundy next week.

Fernando Menegazzo opened for Bordeaux on the stroke of half-time before Marouane Chamakh added the second in the 59th minute.

Bordeaux, just two points behind the leaders, make the trip to

relegation-threatened Lens next week.

And Blanc was delighted with his side's performance which leaves them within touching distance of their first league title since 1999.

"Congratulations to the players! We had to take the three points to be able to keep our dream alive ... we needed to be up to the job and we were," said Blanc.

But he admitted that it would be hard to wrest the title from Lyon.

"It's still in Lyon's hands to be French champions. They remain ahead and even if they aren't as dominant they have a strength in depth which will help them be French champions for the seventh time.

"At least we will have pushed the champions of the last few years who have gotten used to celebrating their titles 3, 4 or 5 weeks before

the end. This year they won't be champions before the final day. Whatever happens we've achieved a wonderful exploit."

Lyon coach Alain Perrin said: "We did what we needed to do at home. We just had to be patient and we eventually got the winning goal."

"It was good preparation for the final match and the French Cup final."

But he warned: "At Auxerre we can't just play for a point, we have to be positive and go after the title. A draw would be enough mathematically but we can't settle for that."

"Our results have been tight for some time and efficiency isn't really our strong point at the moment."

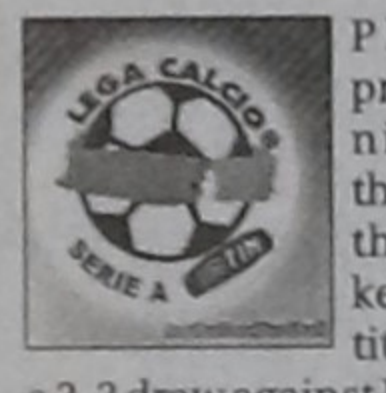
Elsewhere, Paris Saint Germain moved out of the drop zone after a 1-1 draw with Saint Etienne and thanks to 2-1 defeats for Lens and Toulouse by Lille and Rennes respectively.

Strasbourg, however, were relegated, along with Metz whose fate was decided previously, following their 4-1 home defeat to Caen. After what was star striker Pauleta's final home game for PSG, the Parisians' top flight fate, and that of Lens and Toulouse, will be decided in next week's finale when the third and final relegation spot will be known.

TOP SIX						
French league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):						
Lyon	37	23	7	7	36	76
Bordeaux	37	22	8	7	63	74
Nancy	37	15	15	7	42	60
Marseille	37	16	11	10	54	59
Lille	37	13	17	7	44	51
Saint-Etienne	37	15	10	12	43	55

# Roma close gap on Inter

AFP, Rome



Plucky Siena produced a stunning back-to-the-wall display at the San Siro to keep the Serie A title race alive with a 2-2 draw against Inter Milan.

AS Roma edged out Atalanta 2-1 at home to cut the champions' lead at the top to just one point meaning the championship race will go down to the wire with next weekend's final matches of the season.

Inter twice held the lead against opponents who had nothing to play for but on each occasion sloppy defending cost them.

Marco Materazzi, who scored twice in a 2-1 victory at Siena last season to seal the title for Inter, also missed a late penalty as the Tuscans frustrated their more illustrious opponents.

It means everything is riding on next weekend's matches with both Inter and Roma playing sides fighting for their Serie A survival.

Inter will travel to Parma, who have to win to have any chance of avoiding the drop. Roma will travel to Catania, who are two points above Parma and in the last position of safety.

Inter were quickly out of the traps and centre-back Materazzi

saw a header thunder back off the bar in the first few minutes.

The champions did not have to wait long to break the deadlock, though, as France captain Patrick Vieira rose highest to head home Mario Balotelli's corner - although the marking left a lot to be desired.

Siena stuck to their guns and equalised just after the hour mark when Houssine Kharja threaded a neat ball through to former Middlesbrough forward Massimo Maccarone, who slid home a shot under the body of goalkeeper Julio Cesar.

The visitors were not simply there to make up the numbers but their defence let them down again on the stroke of half-time as Vieira returned the favour to Balotelli, flicking on a header for the teenage striker to nod home from a yard out, with Siena players nowhere to be found.

Inter piled on the pressure after the break looking to make the game safe but incredibly Siena came back once again.

The hosts failed to cut out a deep cross from the right and Moroccan midfielder Kharja arrived on the edge of the area to beat Julio Cesar with a precise finish.

With 15 minutes remaining Inter were gifted a penalty from the referee when Daniele Fagnola was equalised just after dragging down

Materazzi in the box.

It was a clear case of six of one and half a dozen of the other but justice was done when former Arsenal goalkeeper Alex Manninger plunged to his left to beat out Materazzi's penalty.

That was the closest Inter came as Siena threw bodies and everything they could in the way of their goal.

In Rome, Christian Panucci gave Roma a first half lead with a header and Daniele De Rossi doubled their advantage in the second half before Gianpaolo Bellini's late consolation gave the hosts sweet palms for the last few minutes.

Livorno were relegated after losing 1-0 at home to Torino, who are now safe. Reggina, who beat Empoli 2-0, are also safe but two from Catania, who drew 1-1 at Juventus, Parma, who lost 3-1 at Fiorentina, and Empoli will join Livorno in Serie B next season.

In the race for fourth place and Champions League football in the next campaign, Fiorentina leapfrogged back above AC Milan due to their victory.

Milan were beaten 3-1 at Napoli and need to win their final game at home to Udinese to have any chance of playing in Europe's premier competition next season.

But if Fiorentina, two points above Milan, win at Torino they will be sure of fourth spot.



Strasbourg forward Eric Mouloungui (R) goes airborne to score a goal against Caen during their League One match at the Meinau Stadium in Strasbourg on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Djokovic Rome Master

Tennis

AFP, Rome

Third seed Novak Djokovic pounced on a series of unforced errors from final opponent Stanislas Wawrinka to win the Rome Masters here on Sunday.

Djokovic claimed a 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 win over his Swiss opponent, who ended the most remarkable week of his career with a breakout performance that will take him up among the top ten when the ATP

rankings are announced Monday.

Wawrinka looked like dealing Djokovic a disheartening defeat on the clay of the Foro Italico, where both finalists made it through the day before due to the withdrawal of opponents.

Wawrinka spent only about 20 minutes on court in his semifinal before American sixth seed Andy Roddick succumbed to a back problem with the score at 3-0 in the first set.

Djokovic played for a bit longer but he was 6-0, 1-0 up on Radek Stepanek, who the previous day had

eliminated world number one Roger Federer, when the Czech decided he was too weak to continue.

But Djokovic gathered up his game to break once on the second set on his way to restoring order, then began the third with another break after a 20-shot exchange before concluding with one more after the Swiss saved a match point.

Wawrinka, who began the tournament at 24th in the world, will stand ninth on Monday, guaranteeing the 22-year-old from Lausanne a seed at Roland Garros starting in less than a fortnight.

# Minnows relegated

AFP, Berlin



Duisburg and Hansa Rostock were relegated from the Bundesliga on Saturday while champions Bayern are on the verge of the record for the least amount of league goals conceded in a season.

After they both spent just one season in Germany's top flight, Duisburg were condemned to the second division after they lost 3-2 at home to champions Bayern, while Hansa Rostock's 2-1 defeat by Bayer Leverkusen sent them down.

Nuremberg - German Cup winners in 2007 - have one game left to save themselves following their 1-0 defeat at Hertha Berlin.

Either Nuremberg or Arminia Bielefeld will be the third side to be relegated next weekend.

Energie Cottbus made sure they will stay in the Bundesliga with a shock 2-0 win at home to Hamburg.

Having been confirmed as Bundesliga champions last weekend, Bayern raced into a 3-0 lead only to concede two second half goals and had to cling on to their slender lead for a 3-2 win.

"We made life hard for ourselves

by making too many errors and conceding the early goal," said Duisburg coach Rudi Bommer.

"I appealed to the players sense of honour at half-time as we were 3-0 down and we did well in the second half.

"But we are being relegated not based on today's (Saturday's) performance, but based on what we have done over the last season."

Bayern have conceded 20 goals this season and are one game away from breaking Werder Bremen's record of 22 for the lowest number of goals leaked in a season.

Munich took an early lead at Duisburg when midfielder Andreas Ottl unleashed a right-footed shot from 21 metres after just three minutes.

"I couldn't believe we were 3-0 up after 20 minutes. I don't think anyone could," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"Duisburg under-performed in the first half, but responded by pushing us hard and were on the verge of beating us by the final whistle."

"Even though we have won the league, it is important we win our games, right up until the end of the season - we have a responsibility to our fans."

Germany striker Lukas Podolski netted twice in two minutes to put the champions out to a 3-0 lead

after just 20 minutes.

But Duisburg fought back with two second half goals to put the champions under pressure at 3-2 with more than half an hour remaining.

Werder Bremen remain second in the league behind Bayern after their 6-1 hammering of Hannover 96.

Portuguese striker Hugo Almeida opened the scoring with a 14th minute goal, but the second half turned into a goal feast in Bremen before Hanover grabbed a consolation goal on the final whistle.

And third-placed Schalke - just two points behind - kept up the pressure on Bremen with a hard-fought 1-0 win at home to Eintracht Frankfurt.

Dark horses VfL Wolfsburg are on the verge of a UEFA Cup berth after their 4-0 humbling of VfB Stuttgart.

The hosts took the lead when Brazilian Marcelinho netted after 16 minutes and things quickly went bad to worse when Stuttgart were reduced to 10-men after Fernando Meira was sent off after 18 minutes.

With four sides - Wolfsburg, Stuttgart, Bayer Leverkusen and Hamburg - all locked on 51 points and just two UEFA Cup places available, it will all be decided on the last day of the season next Saturday.

# Mourinho to return soon

AFP, Lisbon

Former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho said Sunday that he will return to coaching shortly, but refused to reveal for which club or in what country.

The 45-year-old, who left Chelsea last September, recently denied reports he had held talks with Serie A leaders Inter Milan.

"I'm going to start coaching again, in principle shortly. It's a thing that I like doing and I'm going to do," he told the press.

"I don't miss the training sessions. I've never liked running much, that's why I was never a player. I prefer making others run!"

Mourinho, who lifted the Champions League with Porto before guiding Chelsea to two Premiership titles and an FA Cup, is the most sought after coach following his abrupt departure from Chelsea.

# Turkey name Euro squad

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish coach Fatih Terim unveiled Sunday his 26-man squad for the Euro 2008 finals.

Goalkeepers: Volkan Demirel (Fenerbahce), Rustu Recber (Besiktas), Tolga Zengin (Trabzonspor)

Defenders: Gokhan Gonul, Ugur Boral (Fenerbahce), Sabri Sarioglu, Servet Cetin, Hakan Kadir Balta (Galatasaray), Gokhan Zan, Ibrahim Kas (Besiktas), Emre Asik (Ankaraspor)

Midfielders: Mehmet Aurelio, Kazim Kazim (Fenerbahce), Mehmet Topal, Ayhan Akman, Arda Turan (Galatasaray), Emre Belozoglu (Newcastle United/ENG), Tamer Metin (Larissa/GRE), Yildirim Basturk (VfB Stuttgart/GER), Hamit Altintop (Bayern Munich/GER), Tuncay Sanli (Middlesbrough/ENG)

Forwards: Gokdeniz Karadeniz (Rubin Kazan/RUS), Nihat Kahveci (Villareal/ESP), Halil Altintop (Schalke 04/GER), Semih Senturk (Fenerbahce), Mevlut Erdinc (Sochaux/FRA)

# Austria train in Sardinia

AFP, Vienna

The Austrian national football team flew Sunday to Sardinia for a six-day training camp, ahead of the European football championship at home in June.

The 20 players who made the trip will be fighting for a place in Josef Hickersberger's final 23-men squad.

But they still face competition from the so-called "legionnaire" players, who are finishing their seasons with foreign football clubs.

Hickersberger said he would not make any final squad decisions in Sardinia.

Austria and Switzerland co-host the European championships from June 7-29.

# Platini looks for glory

AFP, Paris



For the most gifted footballer of his generation UEFA president Michel Platini probably didn't accrue the titles his talents deserved.

But he will be hoping that Euro 2008 proves that as an administrator he can add to the one international crown he won with France at the European championships in 1984.

The 52-year-old former French playmaker experienced many heartbreaks in his stellar career not least the Heysel Stadium tragedy when at the 1985 European Cup final between his side Juventus and Liverpool 39 died and over 600 were injured.

However, showing the resilience that has marked his career - which also saw one of the most talented French sides in history lose out to the then West Germany in two World Cup semifinals in 1982 and 1986 - he has climbed the political ladder to add his mesmerising on pitch skills to the president's chair.

However, Platini, who enjoyed a rollercoaster ride as France coach when he took what looked like a modestly talented side to the 1992 Euro finals and saw them exit in the first round, admits that had he not accepted the role of vice-president of the organising committee of the 1998 World Cup finals, which hosts France won, he might never have accepted to the role he has now.

"It was the request of (Sepp) Blatter in 1998 (now president of FIFA) but then secretary-general of football's global governing body

that I come on board for the organising committee of the finals and also help him out," Platini told L'Equipe magazine.

"It is thanks to Blatter's request that I am where I am today."

Platini, scorer of 41 goals in 72 internationals for France, admits that getting to become UEFA president was no easy ride, though, evidently he showed the same silky skills lobbying that he did on the pitch hiding an iron will behind the seemingly laid back attitude.

"I didn't really know what to expect (of the vote)," he admitted.

"There had been so much lobbying against me and all the UEFA organisation was against me."

"The secretary-general (Lars-Christer Olsson, who was subsequently relieved of his duties), certain vice-presidents, the sponsors and the Germans wanted none of me."

"Internally at UEFA I had no-one working for me ... except myself."

For once, though, Platini had the measure of the Germans and a fresher and younger face became head of European football, though, at a cost to himself as he freely admits.

"It does not come free this job," confessed Platini, who first made his name at the unfashionable club of Nancy before moving on to St Etienne and then to Juventus.

"It has sent my family and socialising habits completely into a spin."

"I and Christele had been living in Paris for 15 years and we had got into a real rhythm."

"People always talk about the Platini of Nancy, St Etienne and

Juventus but in reality I have lived more of my life in Paris.

"The good thing about the job is that I have the power and the power to act."

Platini, who was part of the magical midfield which featured throughout one should say France's glorious failures Jean Tigana and Alain Giresse with Luis Fernandez as the fourth 'muskeeter', denies that such a rapid rise has gone to his head.

"I have always had the chance to exercise power, because my name is Platini," said Platini, who came from humble roots with his father Aldo being a former professional footballer turned coach.

"However, I have always been vaccinated against being bigheaded or letting it go to my head."

"The difference is that before I had the power to say something, now I have the power to do something."

For Platini, though, nostalgia is never very far away as he remembers the 1982 World Cup semifinal against West Germany when the French led a 3-1 lead slip to a penalty shootout defeat.

"It was a beautiful moment, a great moment, the strongest emotion I have experienced, even without winning the match."

"However, football is like national service, one remains only the good moments even in a time of great distress."

Platini will be hoping that there will be plenty of good moments and little distress as his showpiece event come June - the master of the unpredictable on the pitch will want none of that off the pitch to spoil his party.

# FORMULA ONE Massa wins Turkish GP

AFP, Istanbul

Brazilian driver Felipe Massa won the Turkish Grand Prix here on Sunday for the third successive year and his seventh career victory.

The Ferrari pilot beat home Briton Lewis Hamilton while reigning champion Kimi Raikkonen was third.

Fast rising Polish driver Robert Kubica took fourth while BMW Sauber stable-mate Nick Heidfeld was fifth, two-time world champion Fernando Alonso was sixth. Australian Mark Webber and German Nico Rosberg filled the other points scoring places.

Raikkonen retained his lead in the overall standings.

# Safina clinches German Open

AFP, Berlin

Dinara Safina battled back from a set down to beat Elena Dementieva in an all-Russian final at the German Open here on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Safina had never lost to her compatriot in their previous two meetings on clay and overcame losing the first set to claim a 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 win in front of 5,800 spectators.

Safina's sixth WTA tour title was one that most observers here feel she has deserved, having beat world number one Justine Henin and ended Serena Williams' 17-match unbeaten run on the way to the final.

With her brother Marat Safin also winning his qualifier at the Hamburg Masters Series on Sunday, it was a good day for the family.

"I am really pleased for him, as well as myself," beamed the Russian.

"Before we left to come to Germany we had a bit of a fight because he said I was doing everything wrong."

"But look, brother, I am on the right path," she said in a personal message to her sibling.

And with her mother and coach Raulza Islanova watching, Safina said she will treat her mother to whatever she wants to buy from the shops of Berlin as it was Mother's Day in Germany on Sunday.

This was only the fourth time in the event's 28 year-history as a WTA tour event none of the top six seeds have reached the final.

Dementieva had carved her path to the final with a near-flawless service game and had beaten Serbia's top two starlets - Ana Ivanovic and Jelena Jankovic - on route to the final.

With a reputation for letting her fiery temper show on court, Safina was broken three times in the first set and her tennis racquet was the victim as she unleashed her temper in frustration at 4-2 down.

She replaced the racquet and recovered her composure, but she went on to lose the first set 3-6 as Dementieva produced the kind of commanding game that had defending champion Ivanovic beaten in Saturday's semifinal.

But Safina showed the same determined streak which saw her see off Henin and Williams to break her opponent three times, taking the second 6-2 with a stunning ace as she improved her game dramatically.

And she showed no mercy in the third to claim a 6-2 win which moves her up to 14th in the WTA rankings, while Dementieva rises to seventh.

# The surprising co-hosts

AFP, Vienna



This year's European football championship will be hosted by two countries - Austria and Switzerland - better known for their mountains and their prowess on skis rather than with the round ball.

The co-hosts, selected in 2002, have built an international reputation on their diplomatic, financial, artistic and sporting skills.

Geneva is home to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Red Cross and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), while Vienna plays host to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The two cities, which will both host matches in June, are also seats of the United Nations.

Swiss cheese, chocolate, watches and banks are known around the world and tourists flock to Austria every year to visit the birthplace of Mozart and Strauss, experience The Sound of Music and enjoy concerts in renowned venues.

But neither country has in recent years organised an event on the scale of the Euro, one of the

main sporting events in the world, with hordes of passionate and potentially violent fans descending on the eight quiet, if not provincial, host cities.

Switzerland, the home of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Football Federation FIFA and its European sister UEFA, only hosted the World Cup in 1954. Austria, meanwhile, has never organised a major summer sporting event.

Known for their majestic mountain ranges and snowy slopes, the two alpine countries have preferred to host winter events, from annual ski world cup championships to the Olympics in St. Moritz in 1928 and 1948 and Innsbruck in 1964 and 1976.

Meanwhile, the two once great footballing nations have had little recent success on the pitch, despite ranking in medals in other disciplines, from skiing to sailing, tennis and figure skating.

In FIFA's April 2008 ranking, Switzerland came in 48th, ahead of Austria in ... 101st place.

Once one of the best in the world, Austria's national football team is taking part in this year's European championship, its first, thanks to its automatic qualification as host.

Switzerland meanwhile went out in the preliminary round in 1996 and 2004, the only two times it made the finals.

Still, if Swiss clocks - even if the

Swiss were damned for just producing the cuckoo clock after several centuries of peace by the villain Harry Lime in Graham Greene's 'The Third Man' - and Viennese balls are anything to go by, Euro 2008 will be a well-run machine.

And with the whole world watching, the two small neutral countries will no doubt use this opportunity to shine.

# Galatasaray claim title

AFP, Istanbul

Galatasaray claimed their 17th championship title Saturday as the Turkish league drew to a close.

The Istanbul giants beat Genclerbirlik Ofltaspor 2-0, finishing the season with 79 points, six points ahead of arch-rivals and last year's champions Fenerbahce, who lost 0-2 against Trabzonspor.

Galatasaray and Fenerbahce will now represent Turkey in the Champions League next season.

The third place was clinched by the third major Istanbul club, Besiktas, who defeated Vestel Manisaspor 5-1 and became the second Turkish team to go to the UEFA Cup.

The first was Kayserispor, who won the berth when they claimed the Turkey Cup on Wednesday.