



PICTURE IMPERFECT: Real Madrid winger Arjen Robben (L) and Barcelona forward Thierry Henry show their frustration and disappointment after their teams fell victim to Deportivo and Numancia respectively. While Real continued their wretched run at the Riazor in Coruna, newly-promoted Numancia scalped Barcelona at their tiny 10,000 capacity Pajaritos stadium.

# Barca, Real both flop

**AFP, Madrid**

Real Madrid and Barcelona both slipped to opening day defeats on Sunday as underdogs Deportivo La Coruna and Numancia took the headlines.

Champions Real sorely missed Brazilian Robinho, excluded from the squad due to his insistence on a move to Chelsea, as they fell to a 2-1 defeat against bogey side Depor.

Depor continue to hold the Indian sign over the capital giants who have not won at their Riazor stadium since the 1991/92 season.

"I am not interested in talking about Robinho," said glum Real coach Bernd Schuster. "Depor won and congratulations to them but we should have defended better for both of our goals."

Rivals Barca fared little better with Pep Guardiola's first league match in charge ending in an embarrassing 1-0 loss to promoted Numancia.

Guardiola, a member of Barca's 1992 European Cup winning team, has the job of wresting the title from Real but the odds are not looking good after an insipid display.

"It was a big slip-up," admitted Guardiola. "We were poor going forward and know we have to improve."

Real also have some room for improvement if their display against Depor is anything to go by. With Wesley Sneijder injured and new signing Rafael van der Vaart suspended Schuster drafted in Argentine Gonzalo Higuain.

Robinho, pining for a move to Chelsea, had been left out of the squad so Arjen Robben provided the width.

After just 90 seconds Depor gave Real a shock when Mista, who failed to cut the grade at Real Madrid as a youngster, hit the crossbar.

Mista then scored heading home on 26 minutes after some shocking Real defending.

Ruud van Nistelrooy equalised two minutes after the interval but Alberto Lopo restored Depor's lead four minutes later with a glancing header.

Barca were poor travellers last season under Frank Rijkaard and the new manager and season has failed to bring a change in fortune.

Barcelona handed a league debut to Dani Alves - a 29.5 million euro signing from Sevilla in the summer - with Lionel Messi starting in attack after inspiring Argentina to Olympic gold.

Numancia took the lead with Mario rifling home on 12 minutes after Barca's defence failed to deal with a cross from the left.

Barca twice hit the woodwork through Samuel Eto'o and Messi but Numancia held on for a historic win.

After just one game the league now goes on international break until September 13/14 giving Guardiola and Schuster time to ponder their team's shortcomings.

Atletico Madrid top the table after they followed up their impressive midweek qualification for the Champions League with a crushing 4-0 victory over promoted Malaga on Sunday.

Dutch international Johnny Heitinga scored 26 minutes into his league debut and Diego Forlan grabbed a quick fire brace before the interval to leave Malaga down and out. Florent-Sinama Pongolle completed the rout with a debut goal.

"We showed we are a great team today," said Pongolle. "With the quality we have in the team we are going to score goals."

"On a personal note it was a double boost as I made my debut and got a goal."

For the first time in their history Atletico fielded a starting XI without any Spanish players - although Argentine Mariano Pernia has dual nationality - but the fans will not care as long as they continue winning.

Last season's runners-up Villarreal were left frustrated as they were pegged back to a 1-1 draw by Osasuna.

Marcos Senna, a revelation for Spain in their Euro 2008 success, netted on 54 minutes to put Villarreal ahead but Osasuna levelled 15 minutes later.

## Benzema keeps Lyon ticking

**AFP, Paris**

Lyon joined Marseille at the top of the French first division on Sunday after a Karim Benzema special earned the champions a 1-0 win in the derby tie at Saint Etienne.

The fast rising star of French football struck in the 55th minute with a low right-footed curving shot that eluded the diving Jody Viviani to slip in by the far post.

Benzema was replaced by Frederic Piquionne in the 73rd minute and the substitute almost struck gold with his first kick of the game, Viviani doing well to edge his shot from the right over the crossbar.

Benzema's goal had the twin effect of lifting Lyon up to ten points and on level pegging with Marseille, 2-1 winners over Sochaux 24 hours earlier, and of maintaining their unbeaten record at the Geoffroy Guichard stadium stretching back to the 1993/94 season.

This hardly unexpected defeat against a team going for an unprecedented eighth consecutive title left Saint Etienne third from bottom.

Earlier Sunday Bordeaux, touted as serious contenders to Lyon this season, lost ground on the leaders with a 2-1 loss at Lille for their second away defeat of the campaign.

Sunday's other early match resulted in a goalless draw between Toulouse and Rennes.

## Berlusconi ended war in Georgia!

**AFP, Rome**

AC Milan's Georgia defender Kakha Kaladze on Monday publicly thanked his club president Silvio Berlusconi, also Italy's Prime Minister, for ending the August war in his homeland.

Georgia was invaded by Russia during the Olympic Games last month and waged a war over the independence claims of Georgian territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russia eventually pulled out but not before causing much damage to Georgian territory.

And now Kaladze has told Italian news agency Ansa that Russia's retreat was due to Berlusconi's personal relationship with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, rather than any mediation efforts on the part of the EU or US.

"The world doesn't know this but it was Silvio Berlusconi who ended the war in Georgia, for this I want to thank him," said Kaladze.

"Berlusconi has always been very close to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. They're great friends."

"It was Berlusconi's own intervention that ended the war between Georgia and Russia."

"I know that the Italian leader spent five hours on the phone with Putin in trying to find a solution to this delicate situation."

"Once again president Berlusconi proved himself to be sensitive and capable in diplomacy, a veritable ambassador of peace who I will never stop thanking."

## More misery for Milan

**AGENCIES, Rome**

Inter Milan's disappointment at dropping two points in their Serie A opener on Saturday will have been tempered by draws for last season's nearest challengers Roma and Juventus and a shock home defeat for city rivals AC Milan on Sunday.

Champions Inter began their quest for a fourth straight Scudetto with a 1-1 draw at Sampdoria on Saturday and would probably have expected to lose ground to both Roma and Milan on the first round of fixtures.

But Roma and Juventus could only manage 1-1 draws against 10 men - at home to Napoli and at Fiorentina respectively - while Milan's miserable form at the San Siro continued with a 2-1 loss to Bologna.

Not even Ronaldinho and Andriy Shevchenko were able to reverse a trend of bad results at home which effectively condemned Milan to finishing only fifth last season.

Marco di Vaio put Bologna ahead in the 18th minute and although Massimo Ambrosini got the Rossoneri back on level terms at the break, a wonder goal from Francesco Valiani sealed the win for Bologna 10 minutes from time.

"It was quite a strange game, a surprise of the early part of the season, when some teams are not yet fully ready," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"I don't think we made big mistakes. We attacked for 90 minutes and were punished in two circumstances when Bologna had their best chances. We could have been more solid in the final minutes, now we must find the time to adjust the team with its new elements."

In the evening kickoff, Pavel Nedved gave Juve a deserved first-half lead but Alberto Gilardino levelled the scores late on despite the Viola having one man fewer following Felipe Melo's dismissal.

Roma, meanwhile, went ahead in the 29th minute through Alberto Aquilani as they dominated the first half against Napoli.

But it was a different story in the second period with Marek Hamsik netting a deserved equalizer in the 55th minute - shortly after Fabio Santacroce was sent off for the visitors.

Roma's Eternal City rivals Lazio enjoyed a much more productive first afternoon, coming from behind to record a thumping 4-1 win at Cagliari.

Joaquin Larrivey put the hosts in the ascendancy but they were reduced to 10 men just after the hour mark when Diego Lopez was given his marching orders.

And Delio Rossi's men took full advantage of their numerical superiority with a brace from new signing Mauro Zarate (one penalty) and further strikes from substitute Pasquale Foggia and Goran Pandev.

The emphatic triumph gives Lazio the early lead at the Serie A summit on goals scored. Torino, 3-0 winners at home to newly-promoted Lecce, are second.

Other teams to enjoy winning starts on Sunday were Atalanta, Catania and Chievo.

Simone Padoin's 15th-minute goal was enough for Atalanta to register a 1-0 victory over Siena, who were not helped by the dismissal of Massimo Maccaroni with four minutes remaining.

Walter Zenga's Catania edged past Genoa 1-0 thanks to a Giuseppe Mascara strike just after the hour.

Chievo made a triumphant return to the top flight with a late 2-1 home win over Reggina.



GOOD TO BE BACK: AC Milan's new star signing Ronaldinho (R) squirms his way past the attentions of two Bologna players during their opening day Serie A clash at the San Siro on Sunday. Despite turning in an impressive showing, Ronaldinho and Milan slumped to a loss.

## No striker on the bench

**AFP, Madrid**

Real Madrid's German coach Bernd Schuster admitted Monday that his side had lacked strike power after losing their season opener 2-1 to Deportivo La Coruna at the weekend.

"I didn't see any striker on the bench. I looked to my left and there was none, said Schuster, who has asked club management to bring in new forwards for the season. "We have no other choice but to attack the season with what we have," he added.

Real did not replace striker Roberto Soldado, who was sold to Getafe.

The club focused on their failed bid to sign Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United, and Spanish international striker David Villa from Valencia.

Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola by contrast is spoilt for choice in his forward line with Samuel Eto'o, Thierry Henry, Lionel Messi, Bojan Krkic and Eidur Gudjonson, but they also lost their season opener 1-0 to promoted Numancia.

"We didn't know how to attack," said Guardiola.

## Inter agree Quaresma transfer

**AFP, Lisbon**

FC Porto and Inter Milan have agreed terms on a transfer of Portugal's Ricardo Quaresma to the Italian club, the Portuguese champions confirmed late Sunday.

The agreement between the two clubs concerns a full transfer of Quaresma to Inter with Portugal's under-20 international Pele going in the other direction to join FC Porto.

Inter Milan will pay 18.6 million euros (27.2 million dollars) for the player with the sporting rights for the young midfielder established at six million euros (8.7 million dollars), FC Porto said in a statement.

Quaresma will be at Milan from Monday for a medical and to sort out final details of the contract.

The winger started his career at Sporting Lisbon before moving to Barcelona in 2003/04 and then on to FC Porto. He scored eight goals last season.

## Liverpool sign young Brazilian

**AFP, Liverpool**

Liverpool signed teenage Brazilian striker Vitor Flora on a free transfer on Monday.

Flora, 18, impressed Reds boss Rafa Benitez during his spell with Brazilian club Botafogo last season and joins compatriots Lucas and Fabio Aurelio at Anfield.

"Liverpool have confirmed the signing of Brazilian youngster Vitor Flora on a free transfer," a statement on the club's website read.

Flora holds an Italian passport and could feature in a reserve fixture against Middlesbrough on Tuesday if international clearance is received in time.

## Bayern finally click

**AGENCIES, Hamburg**

Bayern Munich gave coach Juergen Klinsmann a first Bundesliga victory of the season with a 4-1 drubbing of Hertha Berlin on Sunday.

Luca Toni was on target for the first time this term in the 12th minute, and Philipp Lahm and Bastian Schweinsteiger from the penalty spot struck twice in two minutes after the break.

But the biggest cheer of the afternoon was for Miroslav Klose who ended a lengthy goal drought by scoring from the penalty spot with 20 minutes remaining to complete Bayern's scoring.

The victory takes the pressure off Klinsmann after Bayern had begun the season with two draws.

It will also end for now the discussion over Klose's lost scoring touch after the striker went into the game with his one and only goal in 2008 stretching back to March 1 last season.

Klinsmann said that after a difficult pre-season preparation the team "is slowly starting to roll."

"We did what we wanted to do which was put them under pressure with five men in midfield and compete for the ball," he said.

Bayern were in control from the start and opened the scoring when Italy striker Toni, the Bundesliga's top scorer last season, took a pass from Schweinsteiger and turned defender Steve von Bergen before slotting the ball past Jaroslav Drobný in goal.

Lahm curled in a second after a one-two with Ze Roberto in the 54th and Schweinsteiger converted from the spot in the 56th after he had been fouled by von Bergen.

It looked like another goalless game for Klose who had gone into the match 605 minutes without a goal.

But when Ze Roberto was fouled in the area - von Bergen again the culprit - Schweinsteiger, after discussion with Toni, handed the ball to Klose who stepped up to take the penalty and calmly slot the ball into the left-hand corner.

"Schweini (Schweinsteiger) was down to take the penalties and scored the first one with assurance, so I threw him the ball," Klose said. "He then gave it back to me which was a great gesture."

The penalty proved to be Klose's last action of the game, with Klinsmann replacing him with Lukas Podolski who again had to start a game sitting on the subs' bench.

Klose had been without a chance in the first half but was fouled by keeper Drobný 10 minutes after the break and then struck the inside of the post from close range minutes later.

With captain Mark van Bommel suspended, Lucio wore the captain's armband, and Martin Demichelis was back from injury to partner the Brazilian in central defence.

But Bayern were rarely troubled at the back by a tame Hertha side who were fortunate not to have Brazilian striker Rafael sent off after 30 minutes for striking Andreas Ottl in the back.

Bayern came close to adding a fifth but ended up conceding a goal six minutes from time when a sloppy pass from substitute Tim Borowski led to Marko Pantelic beating the offside to slot the ball past Michael Rensing in goal.

The win moves Bayern to seventh in the table with five points from three games.

Stuttgart meanwhile overcame Hanover 2-0 with first-half goals from Mario Gomez and Pavel Pardo from the penalty spot. The defeat leaves Hanover propping up the table, while Stuttgart are fifth on six points.



Bayern Munich striker Luca Toni (C) tries to force his way between two Hertha Berlin players during their Bundesliga match at the Allianz Arena on Sunday. Toni opened his account for the season, as Bayern picked up their first win with a 4-1 win over Hertha.

## City sold to Arab group

**Football**

**THE GUARDIAN**

Manchester City's new Arab owners have demonstrated their huge financial muscle by making an astonishing bid to hijack Manchester United's move for Dimitar Berbatov and smash the British transfer record.

City informed Tottenham Hotspur on Monday that they are willing to pay 34m pounds for the Bulgarian international striker, eclipsing United's take-it-or-leave-it 25m pound offer.

The bid demonstrates City's new financial power on the day that Thaksin Shinawatra sold the club to the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment (Adug), a company backed by the United Arab Emirates royal family and Dr Sulaiman Al-Fahim, a multi-billionaire who has been described as 'the Donald Trump of Abu Dhabi.'

The 200m pound takeover has left City in the ownership of an organisation that has even greater resources than Roman Abramovich at Chelsea, and it has quickly become apparent that huge sums will be made available for Mark Hughes to strengthen the team.

Al-Fahim, the 16th richest Arab in the world, confirmed that the club would try to recruit the former Brazil international Ronaldo and explore the possibility of signing Thierry Henry from Barcelona in the next transfer window. However, the move for Berbatov is unlikely to result in anything other than complicating United's summer-long pursuit of the player.

Thaksin, who will remain at the club as honorary president without any administrative responsibilities, agreed the takeover on Sunday night after three weeks of negotiations with a company that has previously shown an interest in buying both Arsenal and Newcastle.

"We will release details later, but this is a great event for both the club and Abu Dhabi," said Al-Fahim, the chief executive of Hydra Properties. "Our goal is very simple: to make Manchester City the biggest club in the Premier League, and to begin with to finish in the top four this season."