

Barca hit their stride

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona registered their first league win of the season and they did it in style with a 6-1 demolition of ten-man Sporting Gijon on Sunday.

Barcelona started the match in the unusual position of third from bottom after struggling to convert chances but they let off steam by running riot in Gijon.

Two goals inside five minutes from Xavi and Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o put Barca in control and an own goal made it 3-0.

Andres Iniesta then capped a brilliant move with a delicate finish and Argentine Lionel Messi scored twice in the final five minutes to push the Catalans up to ninth.

"We said that we were playing quite well and the goals would come eventually and they have done tonight," said goalscorer Eto'o.

It was Pep Guardiola's first league victory since replacing Frank Rijkaard in the summer and Barca

are now just three points behind the leaders.

"It was three vital points and I am sure we will get better," explained Guardiola. "Scoring first really helped us and apart from the result what really pleased me was how we retrieved the ball quickly and were very active when we had it."

Real Madrid moved to within a point of the leading quartet with a 2-0 triumph at Racing Santander.

Midfielder Ruben de la Red, back at Real after a successful season's loan at Getafe, scored his first league goal for the club and Ruud van Nistelrooy produced a deadly finish as the champions rose to sixth in the table.

The clean sheet will also please coach Bernd Schuster who criticised his team for conceding five goals in their opening two league fixtures.

"At the beginning of the season there are always problems that emerge that you need to work on," said Schuster.

"We are working day by day and the most important thing is that the attitude is right. I thought we were much better tonight."

Four teams share top spot in

Spain including title dark horses Villarreal and Valencia who recorded victories over Numancia and Osasuna respectively.

Villarreal, who earned a creditable 0-0 Champions League draw at Manchester United on Wednesday, came from a goal down to defeat Numancia 2-1 with Jose Llorente scoring the winner with his first goal for the club.

"It is no surprise that Barcelona lost here and it was a difficult game," said Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini. "Patience was the key."

Valencia lead the standings on goal difference after a late Juan Mata goal destined ten-man Osasuna at the Mestalla.

Mata struck seven minutes from time for the breakthrough after Osasuna had been reduced to ten men with Cesar Azpilicueta received his marching orders just after the hour for a second booking.

"Being top is not that significant as there are various teams with seven points," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

"The most important thing for us is that we are improving and collecting points from difficult games like

this one. We knew it was a test of patience because Osasuna are hard to open up."

Four teams are locked on seven points at the summit with Almeria continuing their great start to the season with a 1-0 home victory over Malaga.

Alvaro Negredo struck on 74 minutes with the decisive goal and undefeated Almeria join Espanyol, Villarreal and Valencia at the top.

Honours were shared in the hotly-contested derby match between Real Betis and Sevilla at the Manuel Ruiz de Lopera which ended 0-0.

"We didn't lose but perhaps we should have been more ambitious like we were in the final 25 minutes," said Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez.

Sevilla completed a league double over Betis last season and the hosts set up with a 4-5-1 to make life difficult for the visitors.

It worked as Sevilla, 2-0 winners over Salzburg in the UEFA Cup, failed to find a way through the bottleneck.

Elsewhere, Deportivo La Coruna failed to get their UEFA Cup night-mare - they lost 2-0 to Norwegians Brann - out of their system in a frustrating 0-0 draw with Real Mallorca.

CARLING CUP

Spurs seek to be spurred

Football

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham Hotspur will be hoping the Carling Cup can bring them a change in fortunes when they begin the defence of the trophy this week. The London side, bottom of the table after a shocking start to the season, won the trophy in brilliant style last season.

But the loss of their strike duo, Dimitar Berbatov and Robbie Keane, has left them just two points from the top of the table after a shocking start to the season, won the trophy in brilliant style last season.

A UEFA Cup win last week gave them some respite and they will be hoping for another lift when they travel to managerless Newcastle in the third round on Wednesday.

Newcastle are a club in turmoil, managerless after the departure of Kevin Keegan over problems with the way they are run, while owner Mike Ashley last week put them up for sale after constant criticism from the fans.

Spurs' assistant manager Gus Poyet said the club needed time to find their form.

"Some players came in only just before the close of the transfer window and there have been big

changes," he said on Sunday.

"We must still all work together and change the situation but it is a big pressure on the players at the moment."

Newcastle's caretaker manager Chris Hughton admitted the game held added significance for the club after the goings-on at St James' Park in recent weeks.

"It is important for a big club like ours to stay in the cup competitions for as long as is possible," he said, and win is the best way to lift morale.

"The sooner (the manager's job) all gets sorted out the better. That has been the case from day one. All we can do in the meantime is our best."

Chelsea, beaten by Spurs in the final in March, are also involved in all-Premier League clash when they travel to Portsmouth.

For the likes of Chelsea, Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal, the Carling Cup has become a competition in which they blood some of their younger players.

All four teams are likely to use more of their fringe players this week, with Arsenal at home to Sheffield United, Liverpool entertaining Crewe and United, who have made a faltering start to the season, at home to Middlesbrough.

Blackburn Rovers against Everton

is the only other all-Premier League clash, while two League One sides, Leeds United and Hartlepool United, clash at Elland Road.

Arguably the most interesting match of the night, though, could come at Rotherham, where Southampton are the visitors.

Having begun the season with a 17-point deficit after exiting administration, Rotherham have made an impressive start, moving to just minus three.

And they will fancy their chances against a Southampton side languishing in the bottom three in Championship, albeit two divisions above them.

Rotherham beat Wolves and Sheffield Wednesday to reach the third round and victory over Southampton would also help improve their financial situation.

In Tuesday's other third-round ties, Fulham travel to Burnley, Stoke City welcome Reading, Sunderland face Northampton, Swansea meet bitter rivals Cardiff and Watford host West Ham United.

On Wednesday, Aston Villa play Queens Park Rangers, big-spending Manchester City are away to Brighton and Wigan Athletic make the journey to Ipswich.

'Jose showing his class'

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan owner Massimo Moratti claims that new coach Jose Mourinho is already showing he's the best in the business.

"Mourinho drew his first competitive match in charge 1-1 at Sampdoria but has since won three games in a row, including a 2-0 success at Panathinaikos in the Champions League."

It means Inter head into Sunday's much-anticipated Milan derby in fine fettle and Moratti puts that down to the boss.

"When I brought him in I thought I was bringing in the best. He's showing that and I'm delighted," said Moratti.

At the beginning of the weekend Lazio were top from Atalanta as the only two teams with 100 percent records.

But by the end of the weekend the Serie A table had taken on a more familiar look with Inter top from Juventus in second.

"Are Juve the biggest rivals? Milan scare me and AS Roma are getting back to form. We're only at the beginning and we need to show our own strengths," added Moratti.

"It (the league table) is interesting most of all for the journalists because it gives them something to write about."

"And it's nice also because these are traditionally the two best supported teams in Italy and hence more people are interested in us than any other two teams."

Top coaches at debriefing

AFP, Vienna

Coaches from 53 European Union countries are to meet here Monday for a Euro 2008 debriefing, according to the organising body UEFA.

The conference, called "The UEFA Euro 2008 Experience", will look back at tournament issues such as refereeing, coaching techniques, quality of play and injuries, as well as paying tribute to winning nations Spain.

The review of June's competition in the city that hosted the final is the eighth such post-tournament conference, normally held by UEFA after a major event such as the World Cup or the European championships.

Luis Aragones, who led Spain to glory after a 1-0 victory against Germany in the final, will be present, as will World Cup-winning Italy boss Marcello Lippi and former Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

German boss Joachim Low was expected to attend but has pulled out due to an injury to his right knee.

Mineiro set to reinforce Blues

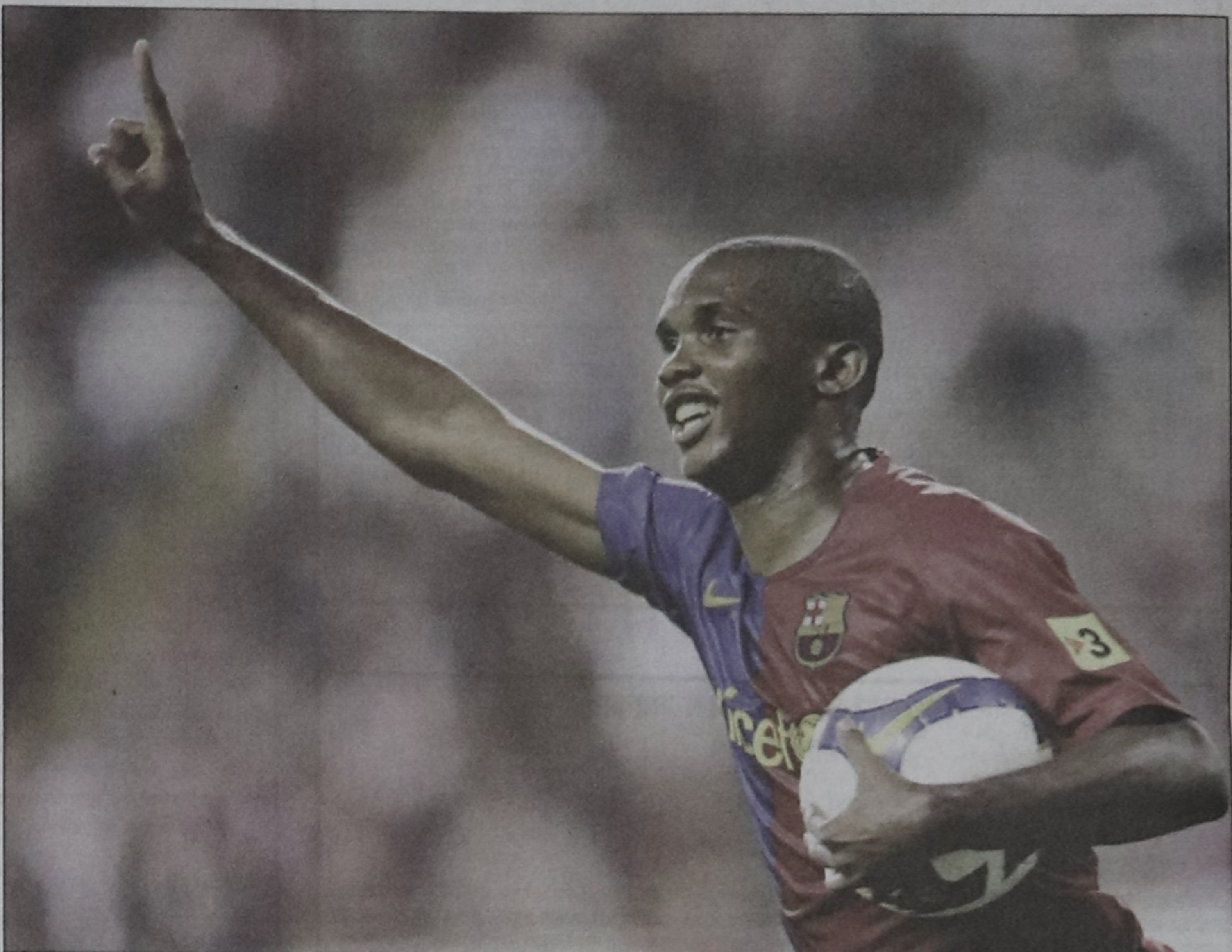
INTERNET, undated

Chelsea are bringing in Brazilian Mineiro to shore up their midfield following a long-term injury to Michael Essien, manager Luiz Felipe Scolari said on Sunday.

Speaking after the London side's 1-1 Premier League draw with Manchester United, Scolari said the 33-year-old Mineiro, who is out of contract at Hertha Berlin, would need a few weeks to get fit and would play with the reserves before making his first-team debut.

"We need him, Essien is out for six months," Scolari said. The Brazilian coach had two players fall by the wayside against the European and Premier League champions on Sunday, midfielder Deco apparently pulling a muscle during the warm up and defender Ricardo Carvalho leaving the pitch with an injured knee in the first 10 minutes of the game.

Essien, who injured knee ligaments playing for Ghana earlier this month, has been replaced in the holding midfielder role by John Obi Mikel, who earned praise from his boss for a busy performance on Sunday. "He was everywhere," Scolari said.



Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o cannot hide his delight after scoring a goal during their 6-1 rout of Sporting Gijon in their Primera Liga match at the Molinon Stadium on Sunday.

Scolari pleased at spirit

AFP, London



Luiz Felipe Scolari believes the spirit Chelsea displayed to claim a point in their showdown with Manchester United augurs well for his new club's bid to wrest the Premier League title away from Sir Alex Ferguson's men.

The afternoon left Scolari sweating over how long he will have to do without centreback Ricardo Carvalho, who limped off after ten minutes, and playmaker Deco, who played no part on Sunday after injuring himself in the warm-up.

"Losing Deco was hard for us," Scolari admitted. "Our transition from midfield to attack was not ready for 15 to 20 minutes and they put us under a lot of pressure during that period and made a goal."

Although he admitted United

had created as many goalscoring chances, Scolari believed his side had the better opportunities with Joe Cole squandering two good shooting opportunities and Nicolas Anelka fluffing an inviting Jose Bosingwa cross right at the death.

"I am happy with my players because they put their heart on the field," Scolari said. "They tried, sometimes not very well, but they tried."

"If we had had more quality in the final shot, we would have won this game. But they showed they have a fantastic spirit."

"We said before the game that (Michael) Ballack could only play maybe 45 minutes but he played for 70 minutes with a great spirit, trying to win the game."

"John Obi Mikel too, was fantastic. He was on the right, on the left, trying to win all the time. This is the spirit I want and it is the spirit Chelsea have so I am happy."

Kalou's header extended Chelsea's unbeaten home run in the league to 85 matches, but Scolari insisted such statistics meant nothing to him.

"I'm happy for the fans but for me the record is nothing. For me the only record that matters is if we win the championship."

Kalou's equaliser came after Scolari had thrown Didier Drogba, who has yet to start a match this season because of a knee injury, into the fray alongside Nicolas Anelka.

The two strikers are regarded by many as being too similar to be able to form an effective partnership but Scolari indicated he would keep trying to mould them together.

"We need to work more on it in training, they have only had two or three games together, then we will see if it is possible for them to play together."

Foul-happy Man Utd to be fined

AFP, London

Manchester United are set to be fined 25,000 pounds (46,000 dollars) after receiving seven yellow cards in their 1-1 draw away to Chelsea on Sunday.

Sir Alex Ferguson, the champions' manager, insisted there hadn't been a bad tackle in the match against their perennial Premier League rivals although, come the final whistle there was a clash between United's Rio Ferdinand and Chelsea's Didier Drogba which left the forward needing attention.

"It was a competitive game but I did not think there was one bad tackle in it," said Ferguson of the 1-1 draw.

Referee Mike Riley's performance may have left Ferguson fuming in a match where United took the lead through Park Ji-Sung before Salomon Kalou equalised 10 minutes from time.

But Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari was more sympathetic.

"If players do not respect him, it should be yellow and red cards. It doesn't matter who you are - Liverpool or Manchester United, whoever."

Nevertheless the Blues boss was bemused by Riley blowing for full-time when Drogba was about to receive treatment.

"It was strange that he finished the game at that time but we need to accept this decision."

Berlusconi's rallying cry

AFP, Milan

AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi issued a rallying cry to his team after they returned to form in style with a 4-1 thrashing of previous Serie A leaders Lazio.

Milan had lost their first two league matches and there was talk of a crisis at the club but goals from Clarence Seedorf, Gianluca Zambrotta, Pato and Kaka helped ease the pressure on coach Carlo Ancelotti.

And now Berlusconi is feeling confident again and has tried to fire his team up to go on and challenge for honours at home and in Europe, while not forgetting the all-important Milan derby at the weekend.

"For sure there's never been a year when I haven't told the team that their objective is to win every competition they play in," he said.

"This year the mandate is to win the championship and the UEFA Cup. I've done what I had to do. Now it's up to them."

Next up is a midweek trip to Reggina but then on Sunday the Milan derby, and Berlusconi is expecting nothing less than three points for his 72nd birthday on September 29, a day after the derby.

"A victory. My team must give me a birthday present," he said.

Vice-president Adriano Galliani was delighted to see the team not only win but play well.

"We're very happy because we haven't only won but we were convincing," he said. "That was a very organised Milan, which is the tactical objective. I believe that's the way we should play."

'We can get even better'

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City manager Mark Hughes fired a warning to the rest of the Premier League that his side will get even better after watching them

thrash Portsmouth 6-0 at Eastlands.

Just minutes after the club announced that the formal takeover of the club by the Abu Dhabi United Group will be completed on Tuesday, City turned on the style with a stunning display which severely embarrassed last season's FA Cup winners.

Brazilian strikers Robinho and Jo got on the scoresheet while Richard Dunne, Shaun Wright-Phillips, Ched Evans and Gelson Fernandes also took advantage of some shocking defending by Portsmouth.

Hughes, the former Wales and Blackburn boss, described his team's performance as "fantastic" and said Sunday's victory was his most satisfying display as a manager.

But he insisted that his team was young enough to improve further and challenge for a place in the top four.

"It was the manner of the victory that impressed me the most," said Hughes, as his side moved into fifth spot in the table, three points behind early season leaders Arsenal.

"It's been a fantastic day for us with some exceptional personal performances in a great team display."

"But it's still a young team. They are only going to get better. We have set ourselves standards and the key is to build on today and strive to greater heights."

Robinho was outstanding. As early as the third minute he forced David James, who had a miserable return to his former club, into a save before setting fellow Brazilian Jo on his way, the former CSKA Moscow striker skipping past the advancing Portsmouth keeper before rolling the ball into the net.

Portsmouth were 2-0 down at half-time, Dunne tapping home his first Premier League goal since October 2006 after Elano's corner had hit the bottom of the post and rebounded into his path.

Robinho then made it two goals in as many Premier League appearances since his British record 32.5 million pounds move from Real Madrid before Wright-Phillips sparked joyous scenes with his first goal at Eastlands since re-signing from Chelsea.

Portsmouth were shell-shocked yet their troubles were far from over. Teenage substitute Evans made it 5-0 as he took advantage of more chaotic defending before James allowed Fernandes to complete City's biggest Premier League victory.

"At 4-0 the game was effectively over, but the level in performance did not drop," added Hughes. "In the end I was taking players off to allow them to get standing ovations."



Manchester City's record signing Robinho embarks on his trademark celebration after scoring in their Premiership match against Portsmouth on Sunday. Robinho put in a blistering performance as City thumped Pompey 6-0.

Milan ease woes

AFP, Rome



AC Milan returned to form with a thumping 4-1 victory over previously unbeaten Lazio at the San Siro on Sunday to ease the pressure on under-fire coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The former Milan and AS Roma midfielder had been feeling the strain after his team lost their first two Serie A encounters.

But a midweek UEFA Cup success against FC Zurich restored Milan's self-confidence and goals from Clarence Seedorf, Gianluca Zambrotta, Pato and Kaka earned them a much-needed first three league points of the season.

But despite the victory,

Ancelotti is not about to start relaxing.

"I'm not sure the crisis is over yet," he warned before praising his side's attacking endeavour.

"We're an attack-minded team and so we can be vulnerable at the back. Today, however, we were more careful. I don't know if the negative period is over. I'd say not because you have to be careful."

Milan went in front as Seedorf tried to play a pass to Marco Borriello on the edge of the box only to see the ball rebound to him off a defender's chest before finishing with aplomb.

Lazio's Argentine forward Mauro Zarate restored parity after running through a gaping hole in the Milan backline but fullback Zambrotta netted a howitzer from 30 yards to give Milan a 2-1 lead at

the break.

Pato converted a Marek Jankulovski cross soon after the restart with a diving header and then Kaka robbed former Milan player Christian Brocchi before curling home a sumptuous fourth.

Earlier in the day, Jose Mourinho continued his fine start to life at Inter Milan as his side won 3-1 at Torino to go top.

An own goal by Marco Pisano, a fierce drive from Brazilian fullback Maicon and a clever finish with the outside of his boot from Zlatan Ibrahimovic provided further proof that the marriage between Inter and Mourinho is quickly bearing fruit.

Inter were at their dominant best and there were clear signs that Mourinho's magic has already started to take effect.

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AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato puts in a diving header amongst a host of Lazio players to score during their Serie A match at the San Siro on Sunday. Milan picked up their first win of the season courtesy of a Kaka-inspired 4-1 scoreline.