

LEAGUE ONE Marseille keep up pressure

AFP, Paris

Marseille, the only unbeaten team in the French league, swept to a 3-1 win at Valenciennes on Sunday to close the gap on champions Lyon to just one point.

Baky Kone gave Marseille the lead after just 12 minutes, nodding in from close range after Mathieu Valbuena had seen a drive come back off the crossbar.

Highly-rated international Hatem Ben Arfa made it 2-0 in the 72nd minute after dancing past his markers but Valenciennes, who had never previously lost to Marseille at home, pulled one back eight minutes later through Gregory Pujol.

Charles Kabore, however, settled Marseille nerves with a decisive third goal in the fourth minute of injury time as Eric Gerets' side, who tackle PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League on Wednesday, moved to 19 points from nine matches.

On Saturday, seven-time champions Lyon needed right back Fabio Grosso to save them from a second successive league defeat by scoring the equaliser in a 2-2 draw against Lille.

The Italian, who returned after six weeks out with a rib injury, fired home left-footed and unmarked at the far post from a Juninho corner. Lyon, who lost to Rennes 3-0 two weeks ago, never really imposed themselves during the match, paying for the luxury of not fielding top striker Karim Benzema for an hour.

Adil Rami opened the scoring for Lille in the 14th minute before Aurelien Chedjou scored an own goal to equalise nine minutes later. Michel Bastos put Lille ahead once more in the 62nd minute before Grosso got the winner with a quarter-hour to go.

Unfashionable Le Mans are third on goal difference, but three points behind Lyon, after a 2-0 win over Nancy on Sunday.

They have 17 points as do Bordeaux who beat fifth-placed Toulouse 2-1 on Saturday with Yoann Gourcuff, on loan from AC Milan, netting the opener in the 29th minute.

Bordeaux, unbeaten at home this season, were 2-0 in front thanks to David Bellion 10 minutes from half-time with Etienne Capoue grabbing a consolation in injury time for Toulouse.

Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc refused to go too overboard over the good performance of Gourcuff however.

"Yoann Gourcuff?" Blanc said. "He played well, like the others. Let's hope he continues like that. Every player did well in the role they were given."

Liverpool interested in Zaki

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez has confirmed he is interested in Wigan striker Amr Zaki after the Egyptian hit a memorable double at Anfield.

Zaki has taken the Premier League by storm this season with seven goals in his first eight games making him the top-scorer in England's top flight.

He scored twice in Wigan's 3-2 defeat against Liverpool, including a stunning acrobatic volley in front of The Kop.

"Everybody will be checking his situation now," Benitez said.

Wigan signed the forward on loan from Zamalek in the summer and claim they have first refusal on a permanent deal.

However Zamalek president Mamdouh Abbas has disputed this claim, alerting several clubs including Manchester City and Everton.

"We will have the right to sell Zaki to any club," said Abbas recently.

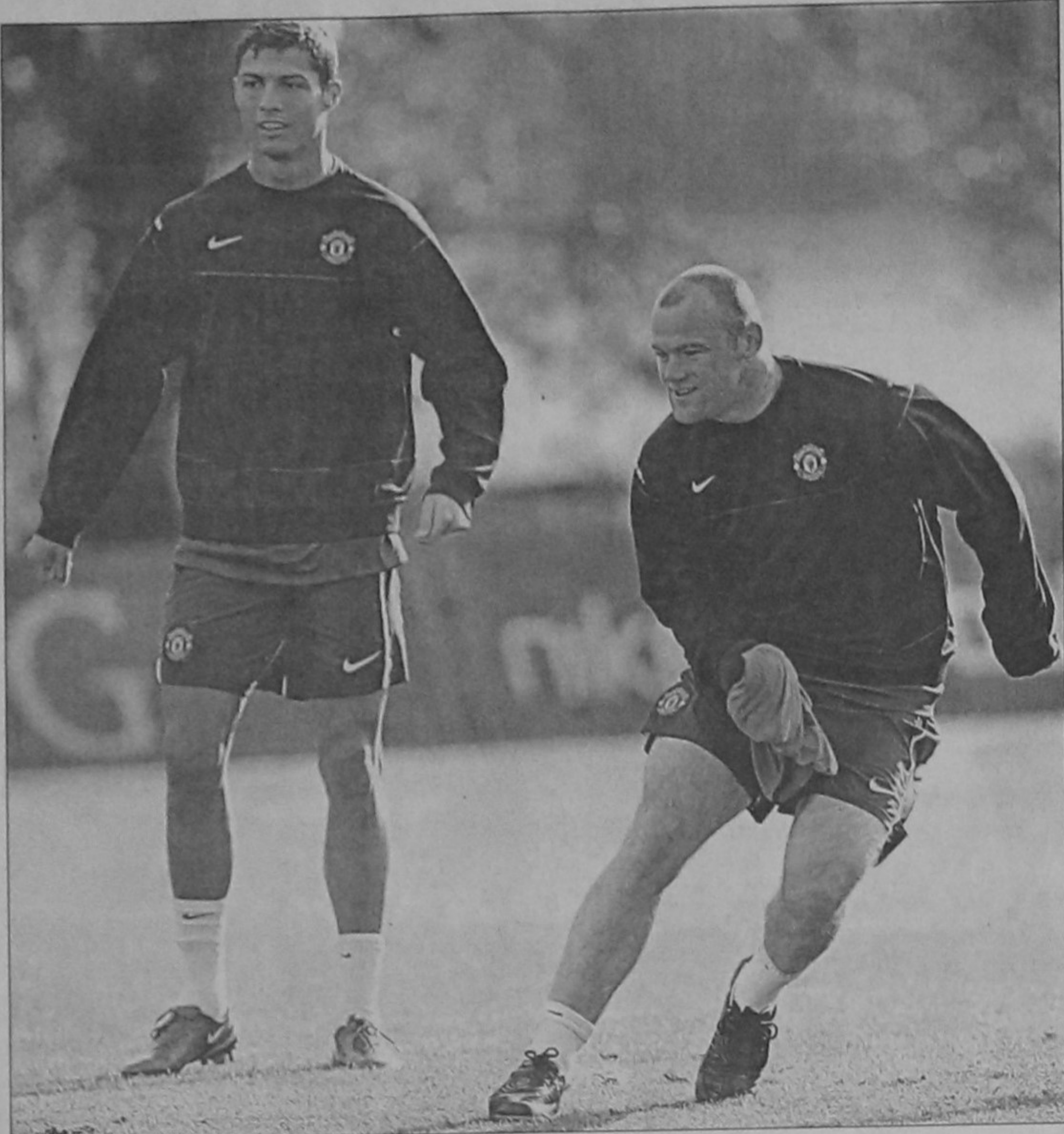
Benitez also said he had no regrets over not signing Argentinian forward Sergio Aguero in 2006.

The 20-year-old Aguero, now of Atletico Madrid, has become one of the most sought-after players in the world with an asking price around £30 million.

Liverpool turned down the chance to sign him from Independiente in 2006, buying Craig Bellamy instead.

Benitez told The Times: "Two years ago the agents were talking with us about players and he was one of those but he was too young and (Atletico) paid big money for him, around 18 million euros (£14m) for a player who was a risk."

"In the Premier League it's different and sometimes players will need more time here to improve."



Manchester United stars Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Wayne Rooney take part in a training session at Carrington, Manchester on Monday. United take on Celtic in a Champions League match at Old Trafford tonight.

Eto'o fires Barcelona

AFP, Madrid



leaders Valencia.

After demolishing Atletico Madrid 6-1 last time out Barca were hungry for more but the goals weren't as forthcoming and it was left to Eto'o to provide the breakthrough on 63 minutes with his sixth goal of the campaign.

The 27-year-old controlled a lofted ball majestically before unleashing an unstoppable left-footed volley worthy to win any match.

Barcelona's next test is a Champions League trip to FC Basel on Wednesday.

"I am really happy. You cannot afford to relax on this ground at 1-0 because they always launch balls into the area and even at 2-0 you are not safe," explained Guardiola.

Lionel Messi and Xavi were given

a rest as Guardiola showed he is not afraid of making big decisions.

"If we had lost people would have said that we are dependent on Xavi and Messi but it's not like that. We are a squad," added Guardiola.

"Messi could have played but he is coming off ten days on a different time schedule and I preferred not to start him and then not to use him."

Valencia lead the standings after maintaining their flawless home record with a 4-0 thrashing of Numancia.

Last season Valencia were a soft touch at their Mestalla stadium losing nine times, but the 2004 champions have made it a fortress once again with four home wins from four in the league.

Sevilla are second, two points behind the table toppers, after defeating Almeria 1-0 late on Sunday.

While former coach Juande Ramos struggles at Tottenham Hotspur his successor Manolo Jimenez is enjoying a good run and Adriano's 52nd minute goal powered his side up to second.

A solid defence has been the secret to Sevilla's success and goalkeeper Andres Palop has kept seven consecutive clean sheets - five in the league and two in the UEFA Cup.

Valencia have also looked assured

at the back and have David Villa, who scored the winner in Spain's 2010 World Cup qualifying win over Belgium in midweek, firing in the goals.

The Spanish international netted the opener on four minutes and the final goal of the game on 89 minutes - his eighth goal of the campaign - to complete the 4-0 rout of Numancia.

Villarreal, also unbeaten, sit two points behind Valencia in third with the two powerhouses of Spanish football, Barca and Real Madrid, fourth and fifth on 16 points.

Real, sitting below Barca due to goal difference, defeated rivals Atletico 2-1 in a heated derby match on Saturday.

Neighbours Real Betis finally got their first win of the season climbing out of the bottom three with a 3-0 triumph over Real Mallorca.

That means Osasuna are the only team yet to win in the new season and new coach Jose Antonio Camacho, former Spain national manager, had a difficult start losing 2-1 at promoted Sporting Gijon.

At 1-1 the game could have gone either way but Osasuna had Roversio Rodriguez sent off for bringing down Mate Bilic in the penalty area. Bilic converted the penalty and Osasuna drop into the relegation zone.



Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o (R) takes a shot during their Primera Liga match against Athletic Bilbao at the San Mames Stadium in Bilbao on Sunday.

Hull soar to third

AFP, Hull



Hull manager Phil Brown insists he won't get carried away by his side's dream start to life in the Premier League after they rose to third place with a 1-0 win over West Ham.

Michael Turner gave Hull their third successive victory - and their fifth in eight games - when he headed home in the 51st minute at the KC Stadium.

It is a remarkable achievement for a team playing in the top flight for the first time in their 104-year history and widely tipped for relegation.

But Brown believes Hull's ability to rattle opponents with set pieces needs to be augmented by more incisive play in the final third if they are to continue their fine form.

"I think we've got to provide a little bit more quality on the ball

because we can't survive on set-pieces alone," he said.

"But my biggest problem before the game was maintaining the success. People were talking about bubbles bursting but my simple answer to a bubble bursting is to blow another bubble!"

"There's people dancing in the dressing room so we don't have to do a warm-down any more. It's a good atmosphere at the moment and long may it continue."

Brown, whose side have now beaten four London teams this season after previous victories over Arsenal, Tottenham and Fulham, was full of praise for Turner.

But he described calls in some quarters for the 24-year-old to get an England call as unrealistic.

"He's not a Premier League player yet," Brown said. "Michael's attracting a lot of attention for his performances with clean sheets and winning goals. But he couldn't do that

without his partnership in defence and the midfield in front of him."

Hull's stunning form has taken them above Arsenal, Manchester United and Aston Villa into the Champions League places and, while they may not stay there, there is now no doubt the Tigers can hold their own.

In contrast, disappointed Hammers boss Gianfranco Zola admitted his strikers needed to start making the most of their chances to avoid slipping down the table.

Carlton Cole and Matthew Etherington were both guilty of missing good chances and Zola said: "When we create chances and play the way we're playing we need to score and we didn't do that."

"Right now that's the missing part of this team and we need to work on finishing because we're creating a lot. It's down to the players but I totally trust their ability and I'm sure we'll get it right soon."

Forwards under spotlight



AFP, Paris

Attacking players Wayne Rooney, Dimitar Berbatov, Luca Toni and Robin van Persie are the talking points as Manchester United, Bayern Munich and Arsenal return to Champions League action on Tuesday.

United host Celtic at Old Trafford and Berbatov, Manchester's summer recruit from Tottenham, has claimed his partnership with Rooney can only get better and better.

Rooney is putting in some great performances, reminiscent of the way he imposed himself at Euro 2004 as an 18-year-old, and Gordon Strachan's Celtic are probably aware his talent could spell the end of their chances of getting through from Group E.

Rooney's last six outings for club and country have yielded eight goals and many pundits have ascribed his new-found efficiency in front of goal to the fact that he has been playing alongside a couple of traditional centre forwards -- Berbatov at United and Emile Heskey for England.

"Our partnership is progressing well," Bulgarian international Berbatov said after Saturday's 4-0 win over West Brom, in which both strikers scored.

"You can see it on the pitch. We have been working in training to

try and understand each other and it is working."

Rooney, meanwhile, is hoping that his current run will not dry up in the way his previous scoring bursts have.

"I don't know why I go on these scoring runs but I will just carry on playing the best I can, hopefully the goals will keep coming and I can help the team win," he said.

Italy striker Luca Toni however faces a race against time to be fit for Bayern's home match against his previous club Fiorentina.

The 31-year-old bruised his ribs in the first-half of Saturday's 1-0 win at Karlsruhe -- the defending Bundesliga champions first win in four league games -- and sat out training on Sunday.

"We are monitoring him on a day-to-day basis and we are hoping, of course, he will be fit to face his old club," said Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

Should Toni fail to be fit, Germany striker Lukas Podolski is likely to deputise.

Robin van Persie believes Arsenal can use their trip to Fenerbahce to prove they have the mental strength needed to end their trophy drought.

The intimidating Sukru Saracoglu stadium has seen many famous names fall in the past and, although Luis Aragones' side aren't in top form, this is exactly the kind of game Arsenal have often slipped up in.

Dutch international van Persie

insists Wenger's squad can cope with any environment.

"At this time in football, the mental aspect is really important, maybe more than 30 or 40 per cent," he said. "If you look at the games we have played, like against Bolton and Blackburn, the mental aspect is more important than the way we want to play."

"I do not think it is a real big problem for us, but every single time we have to prove it again. Last season we played fantastic for three-quarters of the season and then suddenly everything fell down."

"I do not know if the reason is mentally, maybe it was a bit of everything, but we learned a lot from last year as well."

"The season is long, we lost some points, but we won some as well so we just have to stay posi-

FIXTURES	
European Champions League fixtures on Tuesday (1845GMT unless stated):	
Group E	Villarreal (ESP) v Aalborg (DEN)
	Manchester United (ENG) v Celtic (SCO)
Group F	Bayern Munich (GER) v Fiorentina (ITA)
	Steaua Bucharest (ROM) v Lyon (FRA)
Group G	Fenerbahce (TUR) v Arsenal (ENG)
	FC Porto (POR) v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)
Group H	Zenit St Petersburg (RUS) v BATE Borisov (BLR) (1645GMT)
	Juventus (ITA) v Real Madrid (ESP)

MU quartet in Ballon d'Or shortlist

AFP, Paris

Manchester United's impressive Champions League and Premier League triumph last season has earned four players nominations for the European Footballer of the Year award, organisers announced Sunday.

Wayne Rooney, Nemanja Vidic, Cristiano Ronaldo and keeper Edwin Van Der Sar all made the shortlist for the Ballon d'Or, with United's Champions League final rivals Chelsea earning three nominations in Frank Lampard, Michael Ballack and Didier Drogba.

The Ballon d'Or shortlist is compiled by France Football magazine and is based on nominations from football writers around the globe.

Spain, who won Euro 2008, is the best represented country with seven players, including Liverpool striker Fernando Torres.

Torres, who scored Spain's winner in the final against Germany, told sports daily L'Equipe: "Winning the Ballon d'Or would be like scaling Mount Everest."

France's top league goalscorer Karim Benzema and German player of the year Franck Ribery made the final list, but there was no place for Thierry Henry - the first time he has been omitted since 2000.

Last year's winner Brazilian Kaka also made the list, with this year's winner to be announced on December 2.

Shortlist (country, club)

Emmanuel Adebayor (Togo, Arsenal), Sergio Aguero (Argentina, Atletico Madrid), Andrey Arshavin (Russia, Zenit St Petersburg), Michael Ballack (Germany, Chelsea), Karim Benzema (France, Lyon), Gianluigi Buffon (Italy, Juventus), Iker Casillas (Spain, Real Madrid), Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal, Manchester United), Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast, Chelsea), Samuel Eto'o (Cameroon, Barcelona), Cesc Fabregas (Spain, Arsenal), Steven Gerrard (England, Liverpool), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Sweden, Inter Milan), Kaka (Brazil, AC Milan), Frank Lampard (England, Chelsea), Lionel Messi (Argentina, Barcelona), Pepe (Portugal, Real Madrid), Sergio Ramos (Spain, Real Madrid), Franck Ribery (France, Bayern Munich), Wayne Rooney (England, Manchester United), Marcos Senna (Spain, Villarreal), Luca Toni (Italy, Bayern Munich), Fernando Torres (Spain, Liverpool), Edwin van Der Sar (Netherlands, Manchester United), Rafael Van Der Vaart (Netherlands, Real Madrid), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Netherlands, Real Madrid), Nemanja Vidic (Serbia, Manchester United), David Villa (Spain, Valencia), Xavi (Spain, Barcelona), Yuri Zhirkov (Russia, CSKA Moscow)

Inter's win gave the scudetto table a more familiar feel after the success of some of the league's minnows that briefly saw Udinese, Catania and Napoli heading the standings earlier in the day.

Udinese are second after coming back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 at Lecce while Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho scored twice to maintain AC Milan's revival in a 3-0 win over 10-man Sampdoria.

Catania triumphed 2-0 in the Sicilian derby against Palermo, to go level with Udinese on points alongside Napoli, who beat Juventus 2-1 on Saturday.

Roma welcomed back club captain and talisman Francesco Totti and Brazil defender Juan to their combined presence did nothing to improve Roma's miserable season.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho was delighted with what he witnessed.

Corluka given all-clear

AFP, Stoke

Tottenham's Croatian defender Vedran Corluka was given the all-clear on Sunday after suffering a blow to the head during his team's 2-1 Premier League defeat at Stoke.

Corluka had X-rays in hospital, but it appeared he had suffered no serious injury.

A Tottenham spokesman said: "He has regained consciousness and has had head and neck X-rays and everything appears to be okay."

Spurs hit rock bottom

AFP, Stoke



Juande Ramos admitted he is starting to feel the pressure after Tottenham's miserable season hit a new low with a 2-1 defeat at Stoke.

Spurs boss Ramos cut a dispirited figure at the Britannia Stadium in the aftermath of another horror show, which condemned his club to their worst ever start to a season.

With six defeats from eight matches, Spurs are rooted to the bottom of the Premier League and are already in danger of being cast aside.

It is a stunning state of affairs for a team regarded as potential challengers for a Champions League place in pre-season.

Now Ramos faces a desperate fight to save his job and the Spanish coach accepted the responsibility for Tottenham's slump started with him.

"I'm worried about the situation but last season we won the League Cup and everyone was very happy," Ramos said.

"At this moment everyone is very sad and I am worried about it as I don't like this situation."

"We need to work very hard to change this situation and only hard work can change it."

"This is my job and I am working very hard each day to finish this situation."

Ramos's day started badly when Gareth Bale conceded a penalty and was red-carded 17 minutes into the game.

Danny Higginbotham scored from the spot and although Darren Bent equalised, Rory Delap grabbed the winner before Michael Dawson was given a straight red card for a foot-up challenge.

Ramos added: "Sometimes football is difficult to explain. We had two penalties against us, two players sent off, some players injured."

"It was very difficult for us after the sending off in the first half but the attitude of the players was very good."

Spurs face Bolton, Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City as their next four league opponents but Ramos said he was not concerned at

them a penalty and a man advantage early in the second period.

Slovakian full-back Marek Jankulovski smashed a shot from point blank range into Stefano Lucchini, striking the defender on the forehead.

But the referee awarded a penalty and gave the helpless Lucchini a second yellow card.

Ronaldinho converted the penalty and added the second with a crisp finish before veteran forward Filippo Inzaghi added a third on the stroke of full time.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted the red card had changed the course of the match.

"The 3-0 was a result of Sampdoria having a man less which allowed us more space on the pitch once they had been reduced to 10 men," he said.

It was AC Milan's fifth match without defeat, including four wins, and leaves them amongst a posse of five teams on 13 points, just three behind Inter.

Another of those is Lazio who lost the Serie A lead after a dreadful 3-1 defeat at lowly Bologna.

At the bottom Cagliari won for the first time this season as Robert Acquafredda's late goal secured a 1-0 win at Torino.

Inter thrash Roma

AFP, Rome



Zlatan Ibrahimovic fired champions Inter Milan to the top of Serie A with a brace in a 4-0 thrashing of AS Roma in the capital's Olympic stadium on Sunday.

Inter's win gave the scudetto table a more familiar feel after the success of some of the league's minnows that briefly saw Udinese, Catania and Napoli heading the standings earlier in the day.

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Roma welcomed back club captain and talisman Francesco Totti and Brazil defender Juan to their combined presence did nothing to improve Roma's miserable season.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho was delighted with what he witnessed.

"Was that the best we've played this season? Yes!" he enthused. "Like we played in the Supercup but this time for the whole match, or rather 80 minutes because the last 10 minutes wasn't really a match any more."

Ibrahimovic put the visitors ahead on five minutes as he latched onto a long ball from Maicon and lobbed Roma's Brazilian goalkeeper Doni, who had charged from his line and was out of position.

Two minutes after the restart he doubled the champions advantage as he beat Simone Loria and then fired low past Doni despite Juan's desperate lunge.

The game was over within another 10 minutes as Serbian Dejan Stankovic and Victor Obinna of Nigeria both added stunning strikes from distance.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti complained that the result bore no reflection on the match.

"The result is misleading. We lost concentration a couple of times and they managed to capitalise on them, whereas we didn't," he said. "Inter are a team right now that fight, that run, that play modern football."

Milan cruised to victory at home to winless Sampdoria, but only after a terrible refereeing decision handed

them a penalty and a man advantage early in the second period.

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Inter Milan's Victor Obinna (C) does a somersault to celebrate his goal against AS Roma during their Serie A encounter at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.