

# 9 on the trot for Barca

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona opened up a three-point lead at the top of the Spanish first division with Lionel Messi's seventh goal of the season and a late goal from substitute Seydou Keita sealing a 2-0 win over Recreativo Huelva on Sunday.

A cunning training ground free-kick provided the breakthrough with Argentine Messi peeling off the wall to fire a fierce shot home on 51 minutes before Keita scored minutes after coming on.

It was a ninth successive league win for Barca who had a great weekend with all their title rivals dropping points.

"It is not as if we are the champions," said Barca coach Pep Guardiola. "We are just top at the moment and of course we want to stay there."

"We have a tough game against Getafe next weekend and we want to win that match too. Recreativo were an awkward opponent and we had to be patient but a game lasts 90 minutes so it is fine."

Villarreal drew 2-2 with Malaga on

Sunday and now sit three points behind Barcelona while Real Madrid and Valencia are five points back after tasting defeats on Saturday.

Real lost 1-0 at Valladolid while Sporting Gijon overcame Valencia 3-2 at the Mestalla. Barca wanted to take advantage of the slips but found Huelva a tough nut to crack.

Samuel Eto'o had bagged four goals in his last match but endured a frustrating first half with a vital late block and a brilliant save from Recre goalkeeper Asier Riesgo denying him his 14th goal of the campaign.

"Riesgo" means "risk" but Asier Riesgo was anything but with some fine stops to thwart Eto'o and Thierry Henry who missed a sitter.

A great 51st minute set-piece from the training ground opened the hosts up with Xavi Hernandez lining up a shot before passing to Messi, who had spun off the wall, and the Argentine hammered a shot into the roof of the net.

On 85 minutes Keita, who had only been on the pitch eight minutes, added a second from close range after Eto'o screwed his shot.

Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini was understandably disappointed at dropping

two points in the title race as Malaga scored a 90th minute equaliser to snatch a 2-2 draw on Sunday.

Villarreal looked set for victory holding a 2-1 lead going into the dying moments of the match but Portuguese defender Helder equalised in the final minute.

After exiting the Spanish Cup to minnows Polideportivo Ejido in midweek, Villarreal wanted to respond and looked set to do just that.

Giuseppe Rossi struck on seven minutes and Jose Llorente restored their lead four minutes after the break after Sergio Duda had replied for Malaga.

But Helder levelled for Malaga and while Villarreal stretch their unbeaten league run to 17 games - with their last league defeat coming back in April - the two points dropped are a blow.

The woes of Real will delight Atletico Madrid fans and their team also gave them something to shout about with a convincing 4-1 win over Deportivo La Coruna on Sunday.

Diego Forlan scored twice to help Atletico up to sixth although they are still five points behind Sevilla who also won.

Sevilla defeated Getafe 2-0 to move level on 23 points with Real and Valencia.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona midfielder Seydou Keita stabs home his side's second goal during their Primera Liga match against Recreativo Huelva at the Nuevo Colombinos Stadium on Sunday.

## Lyon surge clear

AFP, Paris



Lyon defeated title contenders Bordeaux 2-1 on Sunday to surge seven points clear at the top of the French league table in what may very well turn out to be the pivotal weekend of the 2007/08 season.

First half goals from Karim Benzema and Kim Kallstrom gave Claude Le Puel's side an enormous fillip in their pursuit of an eighth consecutive French title.

Regardless of the result at the Stade Gerland the champions were already feeling on good terms with themselves after second-placed Marseille's spectacular implosion at the Velodrome 24 hours earlier.

Eric Gerets' men had victory there for the taking, leading 2-0 with less than a quarter of an hour remaining only for Lorient to conjure up a stirring

recovery to win 3-2.

That left Marseille on 26 points as Lyon moved up to 33 after seeing off last season's runners-up Bordeaux to retain their unbeaten record at home.

Puel said afterwards: "It was a good result and not only because Bordeaux are one of our rivals for the title. We were playing at home and hoped to get the three points in view of our very busy forthcoming fixture list. We now have a little cushion of points in the bank."

Against the run of play Lyon's Sidney Govou produced one of the best early opportunities only for Bordeaux keeper Matthieu Valverde, knocked out cold last week against Auxerre, to save his angled header with an outstretched hand.

Down at the other end Bordeaux stopper Hugo Lloris had to look lively to tip Yoann Gourcuff's determined 25m shot over the bar.

One of the subplots to the match was the battle between Gourcuff and the other jewel in France's forward line, Benzema.

And it was the Lyon striker who struck first blood when slotting home from close range after a neat 1-2 with Brazilian Fred in the 33rd minute.

Bordeaux's woes deepened five minutes later after a fine piece of individual skill from Kim Kallstrom.

After taking on the Bordeaux defence down the left, the Swedish international unleashed a high left-footed shot which dipped just under Valverde's crossbar.

Bordeaux deservedly, given their contribution to the night's entertainment, reduced the deficit in the 80th minute when unmarked substitute Fernando Cavenaghi got a toe to Wendel's freekick at the far post.

This win was the perfect pick-me-up for Lyon after their midweek loss to second division Metz in the League Cup.

## Lucio out of Brazil squad

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Injured Bayern Munich defender Lucio has pulled out of Brazil's squad to face Portugal in a friendly international on Wednesday, the Brazilian football federation (CBF) said.

However the CBF did not mention any replacement for the match in Brasilia.

The original squad, named earlier this month, was virtually the same as for World Cup qualifiers except for the absence of AC Milan's Ronaldinho, whom coach Dunga said needed "more training and rhythm."

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Julio Cesar (Inter Milan/ITA), Doni (AS Roma/ITA)

**Defenders:** Maicon (Inter Milan/ITA), Daniel Alves (Barcelona/ESP), Miranda (Sao Paulo), Thiago Silva (Fluminense), Luizao (Benfica/POR), Kleber (Santos), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP)

**Midfielders:** Gilberto Silva (Panathinaikos/GRE), Josue (VfL Wolfsburg/GER), Anderson (Manchester United/ENG), Elano (Manchester City/ENG), Kaka (AC Milan/ITA), Mancini (Inter Milan/ITA), Diego (Werder Bremen/GER), Alex (Internacional)

**Strikers:** Luis Fabiano (Sevilla/ESP), Alexandre Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Adriano (Inter Milan/ITA), Robinho (Manchester City/ENG)

## Llorente out for a month

AFP, Madrid

Villarreal striker Joseba Llorente will be out for a month after suffering a leg injury in Sunday's draw against Malaga, the club said Monday.

"He will be out for a month," the title-chasers said on their website.

Llorente, a hattrick hero in the recent Champions League win over Aalborg, suffered the injury shortly after scoring his side's second goal as second in the table Villarreal stretched their unbeaten league run to 17 games.

## Gerrard, Lamps both out

AFP, London

England midfield duo Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard were both ruled out Monday from Wednesday's friendly international away to Germany in Berlin because of injuries they both suffered last weekend.

Gerrard, who had been ruled out by his club following a leg muscle injury sustained in Liverpool's victory over Bolton, reported to England's training camp on Sunday.

Meanwhile scans on Chelsea star Lampard revealed he would not be fit to play at the Olympic Stadium after suffering a rib injury in the win over West Brom.

England manager Fabio Capello called up Fulham's Jimmy Bullard and West Ham's Scott Parker as replacements for his frontline midfielders.

## Players back Schuster

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid captain Raul Gonzalez insists all the club's players are 100 per cent behind under-fire manager Bernd Schuster amid media reports that the German coach has lost the respect of the dressing room.

Schuster watched on as double champions Real lost 1-0 at Valladolid on Saturday night to increase the pressure on his job but he still has the backing of the players.

"It is a lie to say that we are not behind the coach," said Raul. "Of course we are all with him. There is no problem there."

It was only Real's second league defeat of the season - hardly reason to press the panic button - but they trail foes Barcelona by five points after Pep Guardiola's team beat Recreativo Huelva 2-0 on Sunday.

The Valladolid reverse followed two Champions League losses to Juventus and the Kings Cup exit to unknowns Real Union prompted the initial calls for Schuster's head.

"This is a bad run of results but we have the quality. We have to be united," insisted Raul. "We have to stay together and dig in. We realise we have a problem and we are all working hard to solve it."

Schuster, who has a frosty relationship with the press, had to deal with a barrage of questions after the Valladolid game but insisted he was not overly concerned by the hype surrounding his future.

"I am calm. We are working towards what we want to do and I am focused on my job," said Schuster. "It is a difficult time at the moment but we had a similar situation last season."

Last season the last 16 Champions League defeat to AS Roma in March saw Schuster come in for criticism but he shrugged it off and guided Real to the title in his maiden season with Barcelona having to do the guard of honour to salute the champions.

It was a poor campaign from Barcelona and their improvement this season has heaped pressure on Schuster and Real. The double champions' main problem is the amount of goals they are conceding with seven leaked in their last three matches.

With Pepe out injured and Sergio Ramos, who has openly criticised Schuster this season for his tactics, looking out of sorts, the backline has looked fragile.

At the other end Real are faring better but injuries to Ruud van Nistelrooy and Arjen Robben have left Real short in attack and the club are reportedly keen to sign Russia's Euro 2008 star Andrei Arshavin from Zenit St. Petersburg to bolster the forward line.

Confidence is low but Brazilian defender Marcelo is convinced this is just a phase Real will come out of.

"We have always put a lot of heart and soul into our matches, but against Valladolid we weren't able to win," explained Marcelo. "Real Madrid has more titles than any other club for a reason. This situation is just temporary."

Italy coach Marcello Lippi named one new face to his 22-man squad for Wednesday's friendly in Greece by calling up Udinese midfielder Gaetano D'Agostino.

Lippi kept faith with a relatively young squad so D'Agostino's club team-mate Simone Pepe and Villarreal forward Giuseppe Rossi both kept their places.

But despite the likes of Andrea Pirlo, Gianluigi Buffon, Antonio Di Natale and Alberto Aquilani there was still no place for either Alessandro Del Piero or Antonio Cassano.

Del Piero's omission was no surprise as Lippi had said earlier in the month that he would use the match to have a look at some new blood.

"He will stay at home because he's someone I already know a lot about," he had said. "I want to freshen up the team and have a look at some new players, discover some new people."

World champions Italy have made a good start under Lippi's second stint in charge of the national team, winning three and drawing one of their first four World Cup qualifiers putting them top of Group Eight.

Greece are also top of Group Two after three wins and a defeat from their first four qualifiers.

## Lippi pulls a surprise

AFP, Rome

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PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City midfielder Stephen Ireland (2nd from R) celebrates scoring his second goal during their Premier League clash against Hull City at The Kingston Communications Stadium on Sunday.

## Geovanni salvages draw

AFP, Hull



Hull midfielder Geovanni returned to haunt Manchester City as the Brazilian salvaged a 2-2 draw at the KC Stadium on Sunday.

Mark Hughes's side were on course to end a dismal three-match losing run when Stephen Ireland replied to Daniel Cousin's early opener with a double-strike to put the visitors in control.

But Geovanni, who was released by City in the close-season, left his ex-team frustrated when he slammed home a deflected free-kick in the second half.

Hughes insists City's Abu Dhabi-based owners will give him time to turn the club's fortunes around but the longer his team remain within touching distance of the relegation zone, the more precarious his position continues to look.

After three successive defeats, it was no surprise that City looked wracked with nerves in the early stages.

Hull tore into them and threatened to take an early lead when Sam Ricketts whipped in a cross to Dean Marney. The midfielder cushioned a pass to Ian Ashbee and the Hull captain scuffed his shot wide.

City were creaking already but the manner of Hull's opening goal in the 14th minute was a new low for Hughes's team.

Micah Richards played the ball to his defensive partner Tal Ben Haim, who had time to clear down-field but inexplicably rolled a lazy backpass to Cousin.

The Hull striker couldn't believe his luck as he slotted into the empty net.

To make matters worse for City, England keeper Joe Hart was left injured on the turf and limped off after several minutes of treatment to be replaced by Kasper Schmeichel.

Cousin should have increased Hull's lead when he met Ricketts' cross with a glancing header but his effort slipped just wide.

That let-off galvanised City and they began to pressure Hull for the first time. Even so it was still took another defensive howler for the visitors to level in the 37th minute.

This time Kamil Zayatte was the culprit. Robinho's through-ball missed every blue shirt and was collected with ease by the Hull defender but carelessly played the ball back across his own goal and into the path of Ireland, who tapped into an open net.

Suddenly City had all the momentum and Ireland put them in front on the stroke of half time when he collected Javier Garrido's pass and curled a superb strike past Boaz Myhill.

But as quickly as they had the upper hand, City lost it again in the second half. It took just two minutes for Geovanni to threaten with a bicycle kick from King's cross.

Brown's team got their equaliser on the hour in slightly fortunate fashion. Geovanni's free-kick took a deflection off Vincent Kompany in the wall and left Schmeichel wrong-footed as it flashed into the net for the Brazilian's sixth league goal of the season.

Hull had the scent of victory now and almost took the lead seconds later as Cousin's diving header forced Schmeichel to save.

Geovanni had three successive free-kicks from 20 yards in the closing stages but none managed to clear the wall.

With 90 minutes up, Vassell broke clear and hooked a shot goalwards only to see Myhill beat the ball away at his near post.

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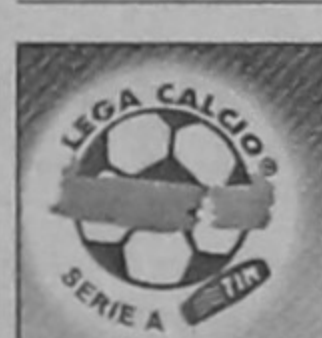
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## Derby lifeline for Roma

AFP, Rome



Brazilian forward Julio Baptista scored the winner five minutes after the break as AS Roma gave their season a welcome boost with a crucial 1-0 derby victory over 10-man Lazio on Sunday.

Roma began the match only goal difference above the Serie A drop zone after a dreadful start to their season which had seen them win only twice in 10 games.

To make matters worse, their bitter city rivals have been operating at the other end of the table this term and victory would have seen them go third.

The importance of this victory in terms of confidence and morale was not lost on Baptista.

"That was an important victory which means that this team can go forwards. We're feeling stronger," he said.

Lazio started brightly and Argentine forward Mauro Zarate hit the side-netting after a clever pass from Goran Pandev opened up the Roma defence on 18 minutes.

Moments later and Juan Pablo Carrizo made a sprawling save up the other end from a diving Mirko Vucinic header.

Those were isolated moments of action before the interval but five minutes after the restart the nominal hosts were in front as Baptista found the bottom corner with a header from Francesco Totti's cross.

Lazio hit back straight away and Brazilian goalkeeper Doni was forced into a brilliant recovery save from a Zarate header.

Lazio's cause was not helped as Cristian Ledesma was sent off for a second booking midway through the second half but Lazio kept pushing forwards.

Pandev sent one shot from distance just wide and then Doni denied him with a great save from close in, although the Macedonia forward shot too close to the keeper.

Roma also finished the game with 10 men as Simone Perrotta was sent off late on for

a second yellow card after which Stephan Lichtsteiner almost snatched a point with a header that went just over.

Meanwhile AC Milan closed the gap at the top to a single point behind city rivals Inter Milan following a 1-0 victory over lowly Chievo.

Brazilian playmaker Kaka scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot following a dubious decision by the referee.

Kaka tumbled in the area under minimal contact when chasing a flicked Ronaldinho pass but the referee gave a foul against Simone Bentivoglio, who appeared to be too far away from the world player of the year to actually have fouled him.

The midfielder made no mistake from the spot and although Milan went on to dominate the rest of the game, they failed to find a way through against the team that now props up the entire division.

It leaves the Serie A table

with a familiar feel to it as Milan are just one point behind Inter, 2-0 winners at Palermo on Saturday, with Juventus, who thrashed Genoa 4-1 on Thursday, third.

"The table is starting to take shape a little more as we expected and we're happy to be there, hanging onto Inter's coat-tails," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Things did not go so well for other potential title challengers though as Napoli, Udinese and Fiorentina all lost. Napoli finished the game with 10 men as they went down 3-1 at Atalanta.

Udinese's top four hopes took a big hit as they lost for the second match in a row, going down 1-0 at home to previous basement sitters Reggina as Franco Brienza scored the only goal of the game.

Italy under-21 hot-shot Robert Acquafresca scored the winner from the spot as Fiorentina lost 1-0 at Sardinians Cagliari.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Gianluca Curci (Siena), Morgan De Sanctis (Galatasaray/TUR)

**Defenders:** Daniele Bonera (AC Milan), Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid/ESP), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Andrea Dossena (Liverpool/ENG), Alessandro Gamberini (Fiorentina), Fabio Grosso (Lyon/FRA), Nicola Legrottaglie (Juventus)

**Midfielders:** Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Gaetano D'Agostino (Udinese), Daniele De Rossi (AC Milan), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Christian Maggio (Napoli), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Simone Perrotta (AS Roma)

**Forwards:** Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Vincenzo Iaquinta (Juventus), Simone Pepe (Udinese), Fabio Quagliarella (Udinese), Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal/ESP), Luca Toni (Bayern Munich/GER)

## End of the road for Pauleta

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain's all-time leading goalscorer Pauleta has announced his retirement at the age of 35.

The Portuguese striker has been out of contract since the end of last season in May and has since been occupied with developing a youth coaching school in his native Azores.

He told Le Parisien newspaper that he had received several interesting offers to continue playing in Europe, the Gulf and the United States but had decided it was time to call it a day.

"I think that within a month I could get back to an acceptable level of fitness, but it's no longer what I want to do," he said.

Pauleta, whose real name is Pedro Miguel Carneiro Resendes, was top scorer in France when he played for Bordeaux in 2002 and for Paris St Germain in 2006 and 2007. He scored 109 times for the Parc des Princes team.

He is also the all-time record scorer for the Portuguese national side with 47 goals in 88 games playing notably in the 2002 and 2006 World Cups and the 2000 and 2004 Euro finals.



PHOTO: AFP

Roma captain Francesco Totti (L) congratulates striker Julio Baptista after the Brazilian scored the only goal to decide their derby encounter against Lazio at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.