

## INTER TOPPLE NAPOLI Milan crash at Palermo

AFP, Rome

AC Milan crashed 3-1 at Palermo on Sunday to hand city rivals and reigning champions Inter Milan a six-point lead at the top of the Serie A table following their 2-1 success over

Napoli. Milan remain third on goal difference behind Juventus who beat Reggina 4-0 on Saturday in a match which saw veteran Italian striker Alessandro Del Piero hit his 250th goal for the club.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti tried to look on the bright side despite the defeat.

"After three months of good results I wouldn't say this defeat is welcome but it is useful," he said.

"For a while we've lacked attention and intensity. Tonight we didn't play with rhythm. Our players were subdued all over the pitch, we played to Palermo's rhythm and failed to play our own game."

Palermo dominated for an hour but Milan had the better chances of the first half.

Home goalkeeper Marco Amelia saved a Ronaldinho penalty on 27 minutes after he had clattered into Patò.

Ronaldinho also hit the bar in first half stoppage time direct from a free-kick but Palermo had enjoyed more pressure.

Five minutes into the second period Fabrizio Miccoli faked to shoot on the edge of the box, made space and then curled a right-footer around Christian Abbiati.

Just before the hour mark Fabio Liverani chipped the ball into the area and Brazilian forward Edison Cavani rose above Paolo Maldini to head home.

Brazilian Simplicio was left completely unmarked in the box to head in the third 10 minutes from time from a Federico Balzaretti cross.

Ronaldinho scored a consolation goal for the spot seven minutes from time after he was brought down by Cesare Bovo.

At the San Siro, Inter coach Jose Mourinho blasted the club's fans for jeering Brazilian full-back Maicon.

"We need the support of our fans. I don't like it when a section of our fans in a match such as this start whistling a player for a misplaced pass," he moaned.

"Maicon played despite an injury and despite both myself and the medical staff advising him not to. He said: 'there's no-one who can

stop me playing'."

Looking at Inter's lead at the top, Mourinho said he wanted a bigger gap.

"We need to earn as many points as possible ahead of the Christmas break and then see what the distance is to Juventus, Milan and Roma," he added.

On paper, Napoli looked to be a tough test for Inter but the champions seemed to be strolling away with the game midway through the first period as they opened up a 2-0 lead.

Napoli gifted their hosts a 16th-minute advantage with poor defending at a short corner which was played to Sulley Muntari who crossed for Colombian centre-back Ivan Cordoba to volley home on the turn.

Inter's second was pure class, though, as Julio Cruz's backheel presented Maicon with space to shoot inside the box.

He scuffed his effort but it arrived at Muntari's feet on the edge of the six-yard box and the Ghana midfielder reacted quickly to flick the ball between his legs and past the helpless Gennaro Iezzo on 25 minutes.

Nine minutes before the break the visitors fashioned a brilliant goal of their own.

Ezequiel Lavezzi cut in from the right flank and played the ball into Uruguayan Marcelo Zalayeta who, with his back to goal, back-heeled the ball past a line of blue and black shirts.

Argentina forward Lavezzi had continued his run and found himself clean through before cleverly dinking the ball over Julio Cesar as the Brazilian goalkeeper dived at his feet.

It was a fifth straight league win for Inter, who responded well to the midweek Champions League defeat at home to Panathinaikos.

Napoli remain fourth as a host of teams failed to capitalise on their slip up.

One of those was Fiorentina who went down 1-0 to resurgent AS Roma through a goal from captain Francesco Totti just before the hour mark.

A third straight win for the capital-based club still leaves them down in 14th place but they are only seven points behind Napoli and a Champions League qualification finish is looking a real possibility despite their early season troubles.

As well as Fiorentina missing out on moving into the top four, Lazio lost 2-0 at Atalanta, Genoa drew 1-1 at home to Bologna and 10-man Udinese fell 1-0 at home to rock bottom Chievo.



Inter Milan defender Ivan Cordoba performs a somersault after scoring the opening goal against Napoli during their Serie A clash at San Siro on Sunday.

## Scolari demands apology

AFP, London



Luiz Felipe Scolari has demanded that blundering Premier League officials say sorry for their mistakes.

The Chelsea manager urged the Football Association (FA) to listen to his plea and take action, saying players and managers apologized for their errors and it was high time officials did the same.

Scolari slammed referee Mike Dean and his assistants John Stokes and Simon Beck for their performance in Chelsea's 2-1 defeat to visitors Arsenal in the London derby at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Chelsea were 1-0 ahead thanks to a 30th-minute own goal from Switzerland defender Johan Djourou when Arsenal's Netherlands striker Robin van Persie equalised from an offside position in the 59th minute before scoring the winner three minutes later.

The equaliser left Scolari fuming and demanding an apology.

"Do you hear me speak about the referees any time? Never. For 15 games in the Premier League, five games in the Champions League and more in the Carling Cup I didn't say anything. But now it's different," the Portuguese boss said.

"I want only that the referee watches the television, see that it is wrong -- the referee and the linesman -- and they say sorry."

"Only this. Nothing more. They are not God. They make a mistake and I understand. I don't want three points, I only want for them, one time, to say 'sorry -- mistake'."

However, Scolari feared his plea would go ignored.

"What will happen? Nothing," he said.

"I want the FA to listen and the referee to look and say 'OK, I am wrong'."

"I am wrong when I pick certain players, the players when they make mistakes and cause a goal or are not covering, all are wrong -- but the referee is never wrong."

"I am not a coach who says things about the referees. But in the Premier League, many coaches are saying there are big problems with the referees."

The former Brazil manager said Van Persie's first goal had completely thrown his team's game plan.

"He was one metre in front, maybe it was more than a metre in front and it was not offside. What do you think I should think?" he said.

"It was a big mistake against us. It was difficult to play and after this, my team lost their concentration and we did not play well."

"I want them to listen to my words and look at this offside. This offside killed my team."

"If we won, Arsenal would have been 13 points behind us and the Premier League would have been finished for them."

Chelsea have won just two of their last seven matches and Scolari knows he has much work to do to revive the Blues' flagging fortunes.

## Ghana win a thriller

AFP, Johannesburg

Ghana came from two goals behind to edge Nigeria 3-2 in an African Nations Championship final qualifying round thriller at the weekend.

The outlook was distinctly gloomy for the 'Black Stars' in a competition restricted to local-based footballers when Musa Kabiru struck twice for the 'Super Eagles' during the first half in Accra.

But Francis Coffie reduced arrears on the stroke of half-time and leveled on the hour mark before Samuel Inkoom snatched a 74th-minute winner to set up an intriguing mid-December return encounter between the great rivals in Abuja.

Morocco, Guinea and Tanzania also triumphed at home while the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe won away as the challenge intensified for places at the inaugural finals in Ivory Coast next February.

## Spanish player alleges bribe

AFP, Madrid

A player at Spanish second division side Tenerife has alleged he was paid to lose a match on the last day of last season that allowed opponents Malaga to win promotion to the first division, a Spanish newspaper said Monday.

The player, Jesuli, told the president of another club, Real Sociedad, that he received around 6,000 euros (7,600 dollars) to ensure Tenerife lost the game and that Malaga was promoted.

Jesuli did not play in the June 15 match, which Tenerife lost 2-1, due to injury, but received the payment anyway.

El Mundo quoted a conversation taped two weeks ago between Jesuli and Inaki Badiola, president of Real Sociedad, which failed to win promotion due to Malaga's victory.

Badiola asked him: "How much would it cost? I mean, in your case you were paid to lose this match? It's just to know, I don't have any experience on this, how much did it cost for us not to get promoted?"

"I tell you, honestly... that I don't remember. But... it really annoyed me to take that money," the player said, according to El Mundo.

Badiola then asked him: "5,000, 7,000 euros?" Jesuli, who left Tenerife and now plays for first division side Seville, replied: "Yes, around that, if it wasn't 7,000 it was 6,000."

## Rennes stun PSG

AFP, Paris



Former Liverpool midfielder Bruno Cheyrou scored the only goal as unheralded Rennes beat

Paris Saint Germain 1-0 on Sunday to move into second place in the French first division.

Cheyrou came off the bench to replace the injured Stephane Mbia and hit the winner on the stroke of half-time to extend Rennes' unbeaten run to 14 matches with their last defeat coming back in August.

Rennes are five points behind leaders, and defending champions Lyon, with their victory allowing them to replace Marseille, who followed up their midweek Champions League elimination with a frustrating 0-0 draw at Toulouse, in second place.

That result extended Marseille's winless streak to four games, having drawn 2-2 at home to Lille and lost 3-2 at home to Lorient prior to the 1-0 defeat at Liverpool on Wednesday.

Eric Gerets's Marseille bossed possession in the first

half and came closest to breaking the deadlock when Mamadou Niang's close-range effort from Ronald Zubar's flick-on was kept out by Toulouse keeper Cedric Carrasco.

Marseille's frustration mounted as the game wore on, with Gerets introducing Mamadou Samassa and Mathieu Valbuena in place of Hatem Ben Arfa and Karim Ziani just before the hour in a bid to bolster his side's attacking impetus.

"I think we'll have to live with a draw, but we can live with it, because we were missing something in front of goal", Gerets said.

"We were well in the game in the last 10-12 minutes and we had a few chances, but in circumstances like that you need some success and unfortunately things didn't go for us at the end."

Saint Etienne brought a seven-game losing streak in the league to an end with a 2-1 victory at Nancy that fired them out of the relegation zone.

The visitors took the lead after just seven minutes when on-loan Portuguese midfielder Paulo Machado curled a 30-yard free-kick past home keeper Gennaro Bracigliano.

Three minutes before the

break Les Verts made their first-half dominance count when David Gigliotti slammed home after Bracigliano had saved from France international striker Bafetimbi Gomis.

Things took a turn for the worse for the home side when Bracigliano was dismissed for up-ending Gigliotti inside the penalty area in the 55th minute, but Bafetimbi Gomis wasted the chance to make the game safe by putting his spot-kick wide.

Nancy set up a nervy last fifteen minutes when Issiar Dia got away from Blaise Matuidi before finishing neatly past Jeremie Janot, but it wasn't enough to prevent Alain Perrin from claiming his first win as St Etienne coach.

"I am happy for the players", Perrin said. "It's a reward for their hard work in training over the last fortnight. When you arrive with the intention of claiming a point but leave with all three, you have to be satisfied."

On Saturday a depleted Lyon side were held to a goalless draw at home to Valenciennes in a match played in torrential rain.

Fifth-placed Bordeaux drew 0-0 at Sochaux, while Nice's game with Grenoble was called off due to a water-logged pitch.

## Real blame fitness coach

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid officials are having misgivings about its "expensive" fitness coach, Italian Valter di Salvo, as the club's injury list continues to grow, Spanish sports newspapers said Monday.

Di Salvo heads the club's High Performance Center, "an expensive and ambitious project the aim of which is to avoid injuries" while "14 players have suffered muscular problems which have left them unavailable," the Marca newspaper said.

Another paper, AS, noted that Real Madrid had to pay compensation to Manchester United in 2007 to bring over Di Salvo, who is receiving 600,000 euros a year.

Dutch international Wesley Sneijder, Portugal's Pepe and Spain's Miguel Torres received treatment at the weekend for muscular problems. All three will be out of around 10 days.

Four players returning from injury resumed training on Sunday: Gonzalo Higuain, Mahamadou Diarra, Fabio Cannavaro and Arjen Robben.

## Yakubu out for season

AFP, London

Nigeria striker Ayegbeni Yakubu has been ruled out for the rest of the season after rupturing his Achilles in Everton's 1-0 win at Tottenham on Sunday, according to his manager David Moyes.

Yakubu hobbled off after suffering the injury in a challenge with Ledley King just 11 minutes into the match at White Hart Lane.

Moyes also admitted that France striker Louis Saha - only recently back from injury - could miss significant time with a hamstring injury.

"Yakubu's done his Achilles and that's him out for the season," Moyes said.

## Espanyol sack coach Marquez

AFP, Barcelona

Espanyol sacked coach Bartolome Marquez on Sunday after a 1-0 home defeat to Sporting Gijon left the Catalan club teetering on the edge of the Spanish first division relegation zone.

Espanyol are believed to be interested in Serbia coach Miroslav Djukic and Luis Fernandez, who coached the club during the 2003-04 season, as potential successors.

## Villarreal close gap

AFP, Barcelona



Injury-hit Villarreal underlined their Spanish league title credentials with a 2-1 victory over rock-bottom Recreativo Huelva on Sunday to cut the gap on leaders Barcelona to four

points.

Despite missing seven players, including influential midfielder Marcos Senna, Villarreal had enough to overcome a Recreativo side who have won just once all season.

Villarreal were fortunate to go ahead when Santi Cazorla's shot from outside the area went in off a defender after 26 minutes.

Ariel Ibagaza doubled the lead with a well-struck free-kick before Recreativo pulled a goal back through a penalty from Adrian Colunga after Pascal Cygan brought down Marco Ruben.

"We had a good game and in my opinion deserved more goals," said Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini.

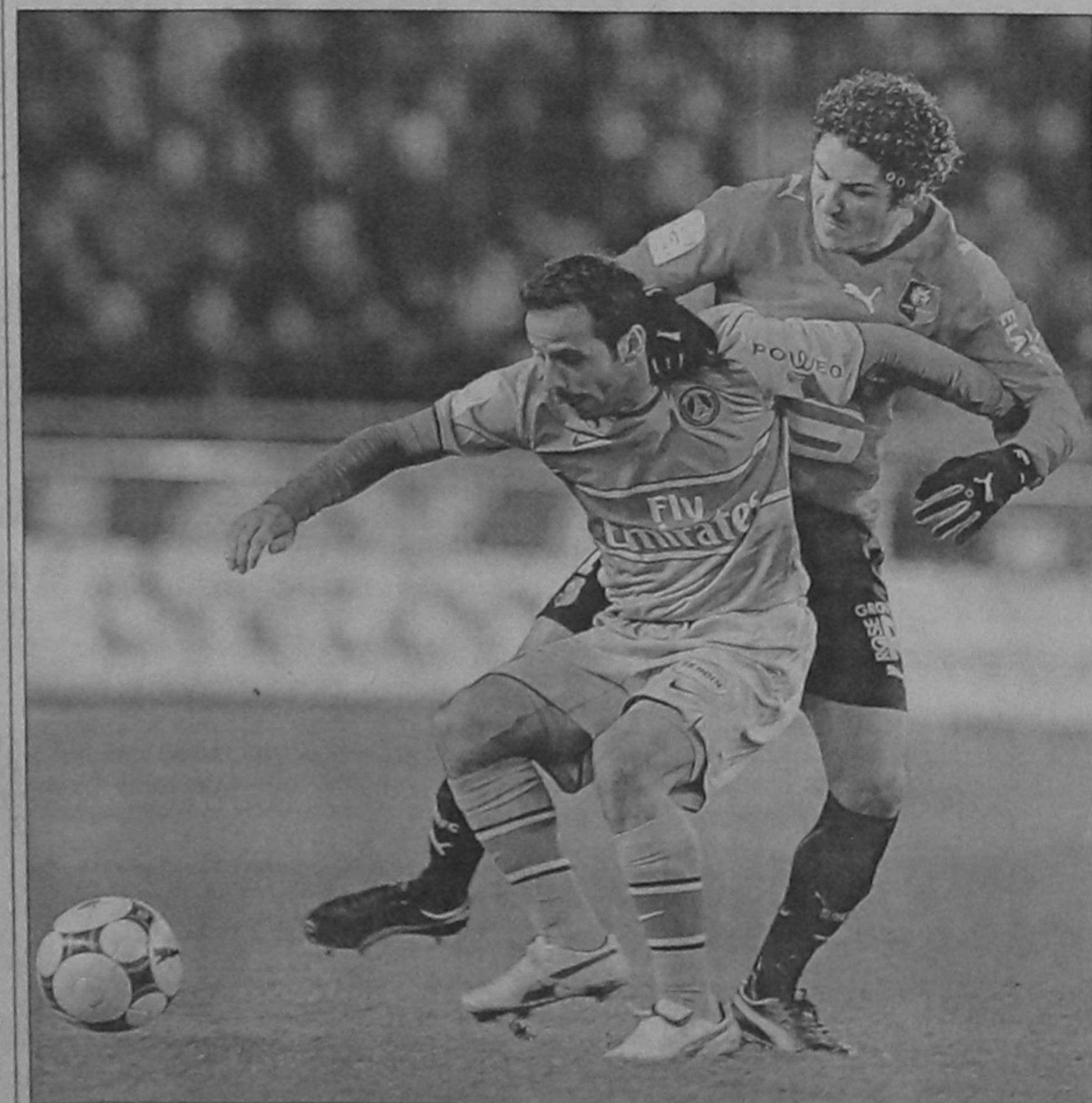
"After our second goal we were clearly superior although we didn't take our chances. We won in spite of missing a lot of players."

A Ruben Baraja header gave 10-man Valencia a 3-2 victory in a pulsating encounter with Real Betis at the Mestalla to keep them in the championship hunt.

Valencia had lost their last two home games but went into a commanding lead after first-half goals from David Villa and Juan Mata.

Betis reduced the deficit with Juanma Gonzalez scoring after 56 minutes.

Valencia then had Carlos Marchena sent-off for a foul on Sergio Garcia with Achille



Paris Saint Germain forward Ludovic Giuly (L) holds off Rennes' Fabien Lemoine during their League One match at the Route de Lorient Stadium in Rennes on Sunday.



Atletico Madrid striker Diego Forlan jumps for joy after scoring a goal against Racing Santander during their Primera Liga tie at the Vicente Calderon Stadium in Madrid on Sunday. Atletico Madrid won 4-1.