

Juve win Milan thriller

AFP, Rome

Juventus kept their own title hopes alive while dealing a potentially fatal blow to those of AC Milan with a thrilling 4-2 victory at Turin's Stadio Olimpico on Sunday.

Juve stay just six points behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat rock bottom Chievo by the same score earlier in the day.

Milan, who finished with 10 men after Gianluca Zambrotta was sent off on his return to his former club, are nine points back in fourth spot with the title now slipping away.

Juve took the lead through an Alessandro Del Piero penalty after the striker himself was felled in the box by Marek Jankulovski.

Milan hit back just after the half hour as Georgian centre-back Kakha Kaladze played in Ronaldinho on the left and he crossed for Pato to tap home.

But Milan failed to stay on level terms for very long and centre-back Giorgio Chiellini was left free to head home a Del Piero corner.

Brazilian Amauri scored Juve's third just before the break after more poor Milan defending as no-one closed down Paolo De Ceglie on the left, allowing him to pick out Amauri's head with a pinpoint cross.

Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati kept his side in it at the beginning of the second period with smart saves from

Claudio Marchisio and Momo Sissoko.

Massimo Ambrosini then scored Milan's second on 56 minutes with a deflected shot but any hopes the visitors had of claiming something from the game soon disappeared.

Zambrotta was dismissed for a second booking on 65 minutes and four minutes later Amauri slotted in his second with a bobbed volley.

Del Piero almost added a fifth but crashed his shot off the post with Abbiati well beaten.

At the San Siro Inter looked to be coasting two minutes into the second half when they led 2-0 but the Flying Pigs staged an unexpected fight-back to level things at 2-2 before Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic netted a late brace.

That ensured Inter will go into the Serie A winter break in a week's time at the top of the standings.

Inter were off to a dream start on three minutes as Brazilian full-back Maxwell centered down the left on the overlap, took a pass from Dejan Stankovic, cut inside and rifled home right footed.

It was a similar story at the start of the second period as the champions fashioned a brilliant goal through Stankovic, who finished off an Ibrahimovic flick from Maicon's cross.

Sergio Pellessier began the comeback with a stunning shot from distance that gave Julio Cesar no chance in the Inter goal.

And on 65 minutes the San Siro was stunned into silence

as Andrea Mantovani got to the byeline on Chievo's left and crossed for Simone Bentivoglio to bundle home from barely two yards out, and courtesy of a deflection off Maxwell.

But Ibrahimovic rose highest to head home a cross from Maicon with 11 minutes left and after Chievo's Santiago Morero was sent off for a second booking the Swede smashed home a stunning right foot shot two minutes from time.

AS Roma won for the fifth match in a row to continue their recent resurgence with a come from behind 3-2 success at home to Cagliari.

Roma have been upwardly mobile since a disastrous start to the season in which they lost six of their first nine matches and they now find themselves in the top half of the table for the first time this campaign.

Things looked good as Francesco Totti put them in front but goals from Daniele Conti and Brazilian Jeda turned the match on its head before Simone Perrotta's acrobatic finish restored parity.

Roma threw everything but the kitchen sink at Cagliari and Mirko Vucinic scored the winner in injury time after a scramble in the box.

Adrian Mutu and Alberto Gilardino scored as Fiorentina went fifth with a 2-0 home win over Catania.

Udinese's slump continued as they blew a 3-0 lead at home to Lazio to draw 3-3 and extended their winless streak to seven games.



Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati (R) dives acrobatically for the ball ahead of Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero (C) during their Serie A clash at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Sunday.

Real after Young

Football

SOCCERNET

Real Madrid's new head coach Juande Ramos is eager to strengthen the La Liga champions by signing Aston Villa winger Ashley Young, according to reports in the Spanish press.

Madrid based daily Marca claim that Ramos is concerned about the quality of Real's wide men and has identified Young, who the newspaper label as 'the new Beckham', and Inter Milan winger Mancini as the

club's top targets.

Former Tottenham Hotspur boss Ramos was known to be scouting for wingers during his time in at White Hart Lane and with the clout of Real Madrid now behind him he is in the position to sign some of the Premier League's top talent.

Ramos confirmed that Madrid would be looking for 'new signings' during the January transfer window, adding: "I want two players with quality and fighting spirit who get stuck in."

Villa manager Martin

O'Neill described Young as "world class" following the 23-year-old's two goals in the 3-2 victory against Everton last week and the England winger scored again in Saturday's 4-2 win against Bolton Wanderers.

If a predicted price tag of 30 million pounds proves too expensive for Madrid then Ramos' second option would be Mancini. The Brazilian, who like Young is comfortable playing on both flanks, has struggled to break into Jose Mourinho's first team since his transfer from Roma earlier this summer.

The 24-year-old has come through the ranks with Bayern, whom he joined as a schoolboy in 1998.

He made his first-team debut in 2002 and has since made 168 Bundesliga appearances and been capped 62 times by Germany.

His performances for the national team at Euro 2008 and during the first half of the season have attracted a lot of interest from many of Europe's top clubs, including Juventus, but he has followed teammate Philipp Lahm by committing to Bayern.

Schweinsteiger's new contract with Bayern will run until June 2012.

Bastian signs new deal

SOCCERNET

Bayern Munich have confirmed midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger has agreed a new three-year contract with the club.

The Germany international put pen to paper on the deal over the weekend to end speculation linking him with a move abroad with his previous contract due to expire in the summer.

"We are happy we have been able to tie down in a positive manner a further important player in Bastian Schweinsteiger," said chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge on the club's website.

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Ancelotti waits for Beckham arrival

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti is looking forward to David Beckham boosting his injury-depleted squad in the New Year. England midfielder Beckham will join Milan on a loan deal in January but will return to Los Angeles Galaxy for the start of the 2009 Major League Soccer season in March.

His arrival could come at the perfect time for the Rossoneri, who were without injured midfielders Gennaro Gattuso and Kaka for Sunday night's 4-2 defeat at Juventus.

Gattuso is out for the season with a knee injury.

"At this point, Beckham becomes even more useful and important to us," said Ancelotti. "Although he (Beckham) doesn't have the characteristics of Gattuso."

The Rossoneri may also consider strengthening their defence in January with their performance against Juve undermined by some sloppy individual errors.

"We are too vulnerable in defence," said Ancelotti. "We have conceded too many opportunities and that annoys me."

"The difference between the two sides was defensively. Juve have taken advantage of our mistakes and we have given away four goals, that's too many."

Milan entertain struggling Udinese on Sunday with Beckham expected to watch the Rossoneri's last game of the year from the stands at the San Siro.

Ancelotti's side go into next weekend's game nine points behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan.

Renato sinks Villarreal

AFP, Madrid



Brazilian Renato was the hero again as Sevilla followed up their Real Madrid

scalp with a 1-0 home win over title rivals Villarreal on Sunday to go third in the table.

Renato had scored an 84th-minute winner as Sevilla overcame Real 4-3 last weekend and struck on the chime of half-time to secure a valuable three points and they move level on points with Valencia, eight behind leaders Barcelona.

Villarreal slip to fourth and trail Barcelona, who defeated Real 2-0 in 'El Clasico' at Camp Nou on Saturday, by nine points.

Atletico Madrid leapfrogged city neighbours Real with a 2-0 home win over Real Betis on Sunday.

Argentine duo Maxi Rodriguez and Sergio "Kun" Aguerro grabbed a goal apiece as Atletico moved up to fifth, two points behind Villarreal, while Real slumped to sixth.

Sevilla coach Manolo

Jimenez stuck by the same system that defeated Real with Ivica Dragutinovic the only personnel change replacing Fernando Navarro at full back.

Luis Fabiano and Diego Capel, two of their biggest stars, started on the substitutes bench to their dismay.

Both sides had conceded three goals in their last matches against Real and Getafe respectively, so goals were expected, but it was scoreless with half-time close.

The referee was close to blowing up only for Renato to score with Frederic Kanoute's miscoroll of a high ball inadvertently setting up the Samba striker who looked borderline offside.

"Sevilla's goal was offside," said Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini. "The mistake opened the game up for Sevilla and they started to play better. It was always difficult with one manless."

Villarreal had seen Jose Llorente sent off on eight minutes into the second half for a second booking.

Kanoute and substitute Fabiano wasted great chances to extend Sevilla's lead but in the end the single goal proved enough.

Sevilla are now emerging as surprise title contenders to Barcelona who opened up a 12-point gap over champions Real with a 2-0 win in 'El Clasico' at Camp Nou on Saturday.

Goals from Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi in the final seven minutes sunk Real and sparked wild celebrations.

Elsewhere, Real Mallorca coach Gregorio Manzano continues to feel the strain after his struggling team crashed to a 4-1 defeat at Getafe on Sunday.

Mallorca, who finished seventh last season, have now taken one point from their last 15 and the latest defeat sees them drop into the bottom three.

A Cosmin Contra penalty and a strike from Ikechukwu Uche put Getafe two goals up inside the first half an hour and Mallorca never recovered.

Manzano was furious at the opening penalty claiming Uche had deceived the referee.

Recreativo Huelva, second from bottom, moved level on 13 points with Mallorca after defeating Osasuna 1-0 in a relegation six-pointer on Sunday.

Adrian Colunga scored on 83 minutes to down Osasuna who are now four points adrift at the bottom.

Harry writes off Gunners

SOCCERNET

Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp has told North London rivals Arsenal that they can forget about winning the Premier League title this season.

The Gunners slipped out of the top four after being held to a 1-1 draw at Middlesbrough on Saturday and Redknapp believes that spells the end of their championship challenge.

"Arsenal aren't going to win it this year," Redknapp said. "I can't see them coming back into it and winning the championship."

Liverpool sit on top of the table but Redknapp feels the eventual winners will come down to a battle between second place Chelsea and defending champions Manchester United, who are currently in third place.

"One of those two will win," Redknapp said. "That's not being too clever, though, is it? Because there's only Liverpool up there as well with them."

"And I think Liverpool rely so heavily on (Steven) Gerrard and (Fernando) Torres. If something happened to Gerrard, I don't know what they'd do, really. So I still see them being short of Chelsea and Manchester United."

Redknapp's Tottenham held United to a 0-0 draw at White Hart Lane on Saturday.

Lyon keep their lead

AFP, Paris

Lyon ground out a goalless draw on Sunday at their Stade Gerland over title rivals Marseille to preserve their three-point lead at the top of the French league as they chase an eighth straight title.

Marseille, without a championship crown since 1993, could have gone joint top of the heap with a win but will head back to the deep south frustrated after failing to close the gap in a tense affair.

Marseille were left to rue misses in an entertaining opening period which saw home keeper Hugo Lloris save well in quick succession from Zenden and Valbuena.

On the plus side they showed great defensive rigour in closing out Lyon's usually dangerous France international striker Karim Benzema and Brazilian playmaker, who were all but suffocated by the visitors' backline.

Lyon thus lead the way after 18 games with 35 points ahead of a trio on 32 - Bordeaux, Paris St Germain and Marseille themselves with Rennes a point further back and Toulouse in sixth a point behind them.

Bordeaux had kept in touch Saturday with a 3-1 win at Le Mans while PSG also moved into the fray with a 2-1 success at Auxerre.

Earlier Sunday, Lille bolstered their hopes of a UEFA Cup spot with a 1-0 win at Nice which took the northerners into seventh spot, level on 29 points with their vanquished hosts who missed a chance to go joint second.

Michel Bastos scored the only goal on eight minutes.

Le Havre seem destined for the drop following a 3-1 home reverse against Lorient, who are three points adrift of Nice.



Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka (L) scores to make it 1-1 against West Ham United during their Premiership encounter at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Zola stabs Chelsea

AFP, London



Gianfranco Zola stopped his old club Chelsea from returning to the top of the English Premier League as his West Ham side claimed a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

On his return to Chelsea, where the former Italy striker holds legendary status, the fledgling manager's Hammers team gained a well-earned point in a fiercely contested London derby.

Wales striker Craig Bellamy gave the visitors a 33rd-minute lead with a well-taken strike but France forward Nicolas Anelka rescued a point for Chelsea in the 51st minute with his 100th Premier League goal.

The result means Chelsea remain second in the Premier League table, one point behind Liverpool, while West Ham's struggle to pull away from the relegation zone is helped by a useful point gained away from home.

Zola was given a warm welcome back to Stamford Bridge by the home fans, and the Sardinian's exit from the tunnel was delayed by several warm exchanges with Blues backroom staff.

Germany captain Michael Ballack missed the first scoring chance of the game, firing over the bar after Lampard dummied.

Lampard then combined with fellow former West Ham midfielder Joe Cole, sending his England teammate through but Cole's shot from close range deflected wide off former Blues midfielder Scott Parker.

Both sides were struggling to create goalscoring opportunities and convert corners into dangerous chances.

But fired-up forward Bellamy broke the deadlock with a well-taken strike in the 33rd

minute.

Parker took down Herita Ilunga's throw-in, rounded right-back Jose Bowwinga as he charged into the penalty box and cut the ball back for Bellamy, who chested it down and blasted a shot low inside goalkeeper Petr Cech's near post.

Anelka missed a good chance just before the interval, blasting a bobbling ball wide when presented with a good chance to hit the target.

Scolari had seen enough and replaced the booked Ballack with Drogba at half-time to sharpen up Chelsea's attack.

But within six minutes Anelka reminded Scolari of his shooting skills with a well-taken goal.

After smart passing among the Chelsea ranks, Drogba laid the ball off to Lampard outside the penalty box and the former Hammer clipped it over the visitors' back line for Anelka.

The France striker took a half-volley in his stride, hitting it down into the turf and beyond goalkeeper Robert Green's dive for the equaliser.

Chelsea went in search of a winner, with Lampard firing a volley straight at Green five minutes later and then screwing another shot wide.

Parker headed a 79th-minute effort off the line as Chelsea upped the pressure and Scolari brought on Kalou and Juliano Belletti in a bid to capitalise on their dominance.

Lampard was seemingly clipped in the penalty box by Hammers captain Lucas Neill but referee Mike Riley waved away his penalty claims.

In injury time, Carlton Cole could have hit a shock winner after being played through by Valon Behrami but Cech saved his low shot to secure a point for Chelsea in their bid to recapture the Premier League title.

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Sir Alex Ferguson is desperate for Manchester United to be the first British team to get their hands on the Club World Cup, one of the few trophies he has yet to win.

United were due in Tokyo on Monday after a long flight from London, hoping that the grueling mid-season trip will not damage their Premier League campaign.

Having already put back August's match against Fulham because of their participation in the UEFA Super Cup, the trip here leaves them with two games to make up on their chief rivals.

After a scoreless draw against Tottenham on Saturday, at least United will be buoyed by Chelsea's failure to take advantage in their 1-1 stalemate with West Ham on Sunday.

Even if United return home

facing a daunting points deficit in the league, the Scot believes the Club World Cup is worth the trouble.

Having won the Champions League in 1999, United qualified for the inaugural tournament of continental champions in Brazil in early 2000 after controversially pulling out of the FA Cup in order to feature.

But they failed to get past the group stage after being beaten 3-1 by Brazilian side Vasco De Gama and drawing with Mexico's Rayos del Necaxa.

"This is a very difficult tournament, different from what we were used to last time, but hopefully we can handle it," he said before United's departure.

"It's a good opportunity for us to get the team together in a serious competition because no British team has ever won it and it's a big challenge to us."

He said winning the trophy would be important for the club and for the club's record.



Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo (R) signs autographs upon their arrival at Narita International Airport in Tokyo on Monday.