

## Barca keep firing

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's formidable attacking trio of Lionel Messi, Samuel Eto'o and Thierry Henry came up trumps again as the league leaders crushed Numancia 4-1 at Camp Nou on Saturday.

Barcelona's victory opened up a 15-point cushion over Real Madrid and Sevilla at the top of the Spanish league table.

Numancia had defeated Barca 1-0 on the opening day of the season - their only league defeat of the whole campaign - and revenge was sweet as Barca stretched their unbeaten run to 19 games.

Real Madrid are in action against Deportivo La Coruna on Sunday desperate to cut Barca's lead back down to 12 points.

Messi grabbed a brace scoring the 49th minute opener and on 76 minutes to make it 14 goals for the season while Eto'o and Henry grabbed a goal apiece.

Eto'o now has 19 goals in as many games while Henry has 12 underlining Barca's potency in front of goal.

It was a sombre mood in Barcelona after strong winds had ripped the roof off a sports centre in the city taking the lives of four children who had been inside preparing for a

baseball game. The players paid a minute's respect for the victims before the kick-off.

Dani Alves almost put Barca in front after just five minutes when his cross deflected onto the crossbar.

Numancia had lost nine out of their 10 away matches while Barca had the best home record in the division but it was the visitors who had the ball in the net first.

Javier del Pino rose highest to head past Victor Valdes but the goal was disallowed with Del Pino accused of climbing on Andres Iniesta.

At half-time it was a frustrating 0-0 for Barca but Alves set Messi up for an opener four minutes after the break and Eto'o showed great strength to add another four minutes later.

Jose Barkero got his side back in it with a brilliant free-kick but Henry and Messi wrapped up the game late on.

Villarreal's Champions League hopes suffered a setback as they dropped two more points in a 1-1 home draw with lowly Osasuna on Saturday.

Giuseppe Rossi struck on 28 minutes to put Villarreal in front at El Madrigal and they looked set to climb to fourth in the table until Osasuna levelled through Eduardo Dady in the 64th minute.

It was a repeat of the 1-1 draw between the two sides in Pamplona and Villarreal stay fifth, four points behind Real Madrid and Sevilla who both

have a game in hand. For Osasuna it was an important point in their survival battle.

They have moved off the foot of the table at Real Mallorca's expense but are still six points from safety.

Real host Deportivo La Coruna on Sunday searching for a fifth straight win against a team that defeated them 2-1 on the opening day.

Real coach Juande Ramos has been impressed by Deportivo this season claiming they could become a magnificent team if they continue progressing.

"Deportivo were an excellent team that reached the Champions League semifinals (in 2004), but the current squad is young and under construction," said Ramos.

"They've made some interesting changes recently and I believe that they could become a magnificent team if they carry on playing like this."

Valencia can pull three points clear of Villarreal on Sunday when they take on struggling Mallorca.

Valencia have been busy in the transfer market this week recruiting 37-year-old goalkeeper Cesar Sanchez from Tottenham as cover for the injured Renan Brito.

"I am like a 17 or 18-year-old and I have a real desire to help out," said Sanchez. "This shirt comes with a certain responsibility."



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi (R) plucks the ball over the onrushing challenge of Numancia goalkeeper Juan Pablo to score during their Primera Liga encounter at the Nou Camp on Saturday.

## Jose fancies Liverpool

AFP, London

Liverpool have "everything they need" to win the English Premiership title this season, according to ex-Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho, now coaching Inter Milan.

Rafael Benitez's Reds sit second in league, level on points with leaders Manchester United but behind on goal difference having also played one game more.

"It has been interesting watching Liverpool this season," Mourinho wrote in the Sunday Telegraph. "I think they have everything they need to win the title."

"I still can't understand why they didn't do it in the last four years. Why wouldn't they be able to do it this season? Of course they can."

"The manager is good, the players are good, the crowd is unique, the tradition of the club is big, so why can't they do it? I think they can."

Mourinho warned, however, that the resumption of the Champions League at the end of next month could again be a distraction for the Anfield club.

"Usually it is when the Champions League starts that they lose their focus on the Premiership," he continued. "It was like this in previous years when they did very well in the Champions League but they lost too many points in the championship."

Meanwhile, Mourinho hailed the decision of Kaka to snub the advances of Manchester City and remain in Serie A with AC Milan.

"I am happy that Kaka didn't go there," he said. "I want the best players to be in my league."

"She was way too good," he said. "I couldn't even be on the same court. It's great. I always enjoy seeing them do well. For literally about two-and-a-half, three years we had three courts in Florida, and it was me, Serena and Venus."

"We just spent hours and hours out there just playing. We all have done pretty well, and all three of those little kids out there got to No. 1, which is pretty cool."

"I'm just happy for them. They're good girls. It's nice."

## Juve go level with Inter

AFP, Rome



Juventus went level on points with Inter Milan at the top of Serie A for the first time this season as a Claudio Marchisio goal gave them a hard-fought 1-0 win over Fiorentina at Turin's Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Both Juventus and Inter Milan have 43 points, but Jose Mourinho's defending champions can reclaim top spot outright if they avoid defeat at home to Sampdoria on Sunday.

For Fiorentina it was a third straight Serie A defeat which leaves them in danger of losing touch in the race for a top four finish and Champions League football next season.

Juventus coach Claudio Ranieri said Fiorentina's recent troubles had fired them up.

"We knew Fiorentina were going through a tough time and had already won here last season, so they were fired up and we knew they would give us real problems," he said.

Fiorentina had an early penalty appeal on 10 minutes as Stevan Jovetic weaved his way into the box but he went down far too easily under contact from Olof Mellberg when he seemed to have created a shooting opportunity.

Juventus then went ahead on 21 minutes after a delightful pass from Alessandro Del Piero found Marchisio's clever angled run and the midfielder dinked the ball over the onrushing Sebastian Frey.

Fiorentina were unlucky not to find themselves level.

Manuel Pasquale sent an inviting cross in from the left and the diminutive Mario Santana beat centre-back Nicola Legrottaglie in the air only to see his header crash back off the bar.

Juve failed to clear their lines and Riccardo Montolivo shot from distance, an effort that Gianluigi Buffon failed to hold, allowing Alberto Gilardino to slot home the rebound.

But the linesman wrongly flagged for offside as TV replays showed Marco Marchionni was playing Gilardino onside at the time of Montolivo's shot.

That decision left Fiorentina president Andrea Delle Valle fuming.

"I'm offended by what I saw," he moaned. "There's a certain behaviour that is apparent during our matches. I'm disgusted by what I saw. These things need explaining."

Marchionni should have sent Juventus into the break 2-0 ahead when he had a chance late on in the half but he dithered, shot straight at Frey and then hit the keeper again when the rebound fell to him.

In the last minute of the half Fiorentina came close again

but Alessandro Gamberini and Per Kroldrup got in each other's way diving for the ball at the back post.

On the hour mark, Juventus stretched Fiorentina down the right and Marchionni pulled the ball back for Zdenek Grygera to shoot but Frey made a spectacular one-handed save.

Juventus were enjoying success down their right and Marchionni teed up Del Piero on 69 minutes but the veteran forward skied his effort.

The hosts were almost made to pay two minutes later but Buffon made a miraculous reaction save with his leg from a close-range Gilardino flick.

In the day's other game, Chievo won the basement battle 1-0 at Reggina. The two sides started the day level on 13 points at the bottom but Chievo won their second straight match to boost their survival hopes.



PHOTO: AFP

Frenchwoman Marion Bartoli makes a double-handed forehand return during her crunch match against Serbian Jelena Jankovic at the Australian Open on Saturday. Bartoli won in straight sets to send the Serb favourite crashing out of the year's first Grand Slam.

## Australian Open SECRETS

INTERNET, undated

World number three Dinara Safina saved two match points and won the last five games in an extraordinary comeback to beat French teenager Alize Cornet 6-2 6-7 5 in the fourth round of the Australian Open on Sunday.

Cornet was on the verge of a huge upset when she recovered from losing the first to lead 5-2 in the third until her game suddenly fell apart under a ferocious attack from the Russian.

Cornet twice failed to serve out the match and squandered two match points in the 10th game as Safina abandoned her cautious approach and started playing more aggressively.

"I played like a junior today, it's just lucky that I went through," Safina told reporters. "I guess she was just not ready to beat me. I was just hanging in there."

"There was nothing special that I did... on match point I hit a winner but it's her unforced errors (that proved decisive)."

Safina, 22, is yet to win a grand slam title but has inherited the same self-deprecating humour as her older sibling, berating herself for allowing Cornet to get so close.

"I'm just a little bit disappointed about this match, playing against this girl and allowing myself to do these kind of mistakes," she said.

"The game is there. I just don't know what's going on through my mind. Somebody (should) smack me so hard in my head that something shakes finally and I put the cables together."

### RODDICK WANTS A REMATCH

Having enjoyed grand slam glory and held the world number one ranking, there cannot be too many tennis regrets for Andy Roddick.

There is one defeat he cannot expunge, though, one that still causes him to wince a loss to Serena Williams.

"She always just gives me crap," the American groaned at the Australian Open on Sunday, "ask her about it."

"But she won't give me a rematch. I saw her yesterday, and she walked on the court and started laughing because she knew I had probably seen it," he smiled, referring to a post on Serena's website (www.serenawilliams.com) revealing the result.

The match in question took place when the pair were children and Roddick claims there

were good reasons for the upset.

"When we were ten, I had to literally run around in the shower to get wet. I was this big. She was bench pressing dump trucks already at that time."

"I told her that yesterday, and she got a good laugh. Any chance she gets she just does it to get under my skin, and she does it very successfully."

"But, you know, however many some odd Wimbledon titles (she has won) and she's like, 'What's your best match? I have a win over Andy Roddick.'"

"She forgets to mention that it was 1993."

Roddick, who on Sunday reached the Australian Open quarterfinal, had not dared tackle Serena's big sister Venus at the time.

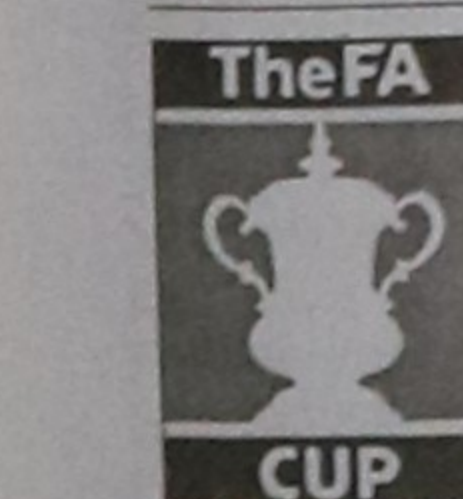
"She was way too good," he said. "I couldn't even be on the same court. It's great. I always enjoy seeing them do well. For literally about two-and-a-half, three years we had three courts in Florida, and it was me, Serena and Venus."

"We just spent hours and hours out there just playing. We all have done pretty well, and all three of those little kids out there got to No. 1, which is pretty cool."

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## Adams realistic

AFP, Portsmouth



Tony Adams admitted Portsmouth got exactly what they deserved as the FA Cup holders crashed out in the fourth round after being out-played and out-fought by Championship team Swansea.

Adams was horrified by his team's lack of desire and their failure to impose themselves during a dismal display at Fratton Park on Saturday.

Last season, Portsmouth were parading the cup around

Wembley after Harry Redknapp's men defeated Cardiff in the final.

But a lot has changed at the Premier League club in the last seven months and Adams presided over a shocking run since Redknapp quit to take over at Tottenham.

"In the first half we were out-played and out-fought," Adams said. "I did warn the players we were up against a very good Swansea team who like to pass the ball and that we would be in trouble if we weren't prepared."

"Sadly, I was proved right. Without that fight you go out of this competition. We didn't deserve to be 2-0 down at half-time but we didn't play well in

the first half either. We were very poor."

"It's disappointing to go out of the FA Cup, no matter what round it is. You have to put defeats like this to bed as quickly as possible."

Swansea, ninth in English football's second tier, played the better football throughout and took the lead in the 27th minute when Nathan Dyer, on loan from Portsmouth's local rivals Southampton, converted Jason Scotland's pass.

Trinidad striker Scotland added the second on the stroke of half-time with a penalty after Nadir Belhadj fouled Jordi Gomez and Swansea coasted into the fifth round for the first time since 2004.

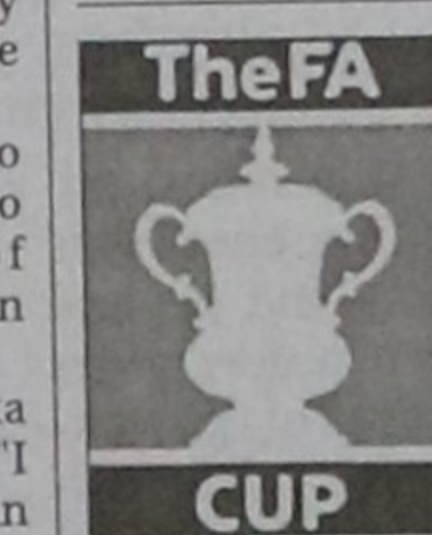
Balotelli had been pushing for a transfer window loan move to get more playing time as he has been only intermittently used by Mourinho this campaign.

But the former Chelsea boss insisted the young Italy under-21 star should stay and learn how to train properly.

He also told Balotelli that he would not be considered for selection until the end of the window but put the youngster on the bench in midweek for the Coppa Italia clash against AS Roma.

Balotelli didn't come on during the 2-1 victory and now finds himself out of the match-day squad once again, despite Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic being suspended.

AFP, London



Holders Portsmouth crashed out of the FA Cup on Saturday as Manchester United were forced to come from behind to overcome Tottenham and keep their quadruple bid on track.

On a day when non-league interest ended with the exit of Kettering Town and Torquay, the only shock came at Fratton Park, where the holders were beaten 2-0 by Championship side Swansea.

To rub salt into the wounds,

it was Nathan Dyer, on loan from Pompey's bitter rivals Southampton, who scored the Welsh club's opener.

That was the first Pompey had conceded in 651 minutes of FA Cup action. The second followed when Jason Scotland converted from the spot after Jordi Gomez was brought down by Nadir Belhadj in first-half stoppage time.

Swansea boss Roberto Martinez said the win showed his side, promoted from League One to the Championship only last season, could aspire to joining the top flight.

"We were able to come to a Premier League environment and be ourselves," he said. "I'm extremely proud of the

way the players dictated things from the beginning."

Portsmouth boss Tony Adams admitted his side had been "out-played and out-fought."

A makeshift United line-up was rattled when Roman Pavlyuchenko headed Spurs into an early lead at Old Trafford.

But a deflected shot from Paul Scholes and Dimitar Berbatov's 10th goal of the season sent United into Sunday's 5th round draw and kept alive the possibility of a clean sweep of every tournament entered for the reigning English, European and World Cup champions.

Kettering were left heartbroken after goals in the last

two minutes from Andrew Johnson and Bobby Zamora gave Fulham a barely deserved 4-2 win at Rockingham Road.

The Conference side had dominated after Craig Westcarr had cancelled out Simon Davies's early strike ten minutes before half-time.

Danny Murphy's 77th-minute strike restored Fulham's lead but Kettering equalised again through a Westcarr penalty before finally running out of steam.

Torquay's exit was equally cruel, Coventry's Elliot Ward scoring the only goal of the game in the 87th minute.

A Michael Ballack double helped Chelsea to a 3-1 win over Ipswich at Stamford Bridge. Alex Bruce, son of Wigan manager Steve, cancelled out Ballack's opener before the break but the Germany captain settled the contest with a 59th-minute free-kick and Frank Lampard added a late third.

West Ham's passage into the last 16 was eased by a blunder from referee Lee Mason, who mistakenly whistled for a penalty after a handball by Hartlepool defender Michael Nelson that was clearly outside the box.

Valon Behrami had just given the Hammers a barely-deserved lead and Mark Noble converted the spot-kick to make it 2-0, which was how it finished.

Aston Villa were taken to a replay they could have done without after a goalless draw at Doncaster and the all-Premier League clash between Sunderland and Blackburn also ended goalless.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack takes a free-kick to score in their FA Cup match against Ipswich at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.