

## Real on a streak

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid had Gonzalo Higuain's 49th minute winner to thank for a 1-0 win over Racing Santander on Saturday, but the Spanish giants' seventh successive league win did little to appease their fans' concerns.

Argentine Higuain netted the decisive goal shortly after the restart but Real were made to sweat as they awaited the final whistle at the Santiago Bernabeu.

The reigning champions held on to close to within nine points of runaway leaders Barcelona, but another 1-0 win - an emerging habit under new coach Juande Ramos - could not stop the jeers, or fans heading for the exits early.

"It was like a lot of our recent matches," confessed Ramos. "We won which is great although we are finding it difficult to get that second goal."

"However, one big positive is the team kept a clean sheet and we got the three points."

The grumbling is likely to grow louder in Madrid if a 10th successive league win for Barcelona, who host Sporting Gijon on Sunday, restores their advantage over Real to 12 points.

Third-placed Sevilla fell nine points behind Real following a painful 2-1 derby

defeat to Real Betis which puts more pressure on coach Manolo Jimenez.

Sevilla were reduced to ten men when Argentine Aldo Duscher was sent off on 69 minutes and a minute later Sergio Garcia opened the scoring.

Debutant Ricardo Oliveira, a nine-million-euro signing from Real Zaragoza, added a second and it proved important as Freddy Kanoute pulled one back for the hosts.

There was no trouble at Sevilla's Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium and the Spanish football authorities will hope for more of the same on Wednesday when Spain host England in a friendly match.

It is a fixture that will come under extreme scrutiny considering the racial controversy that marred a friendly in Madrid between the two nations back in 2004.

Several England players were subjected to racist insults by the home crowd and the English FA refused to play the match at Madrid's Bernabeu stadium prompting the switch to Sevilla.

Iker Casillas made history making his 454th appearance to equal Paco Buya's club record in the Real goal and he had little to do as Real controlled proceedings without making the breakthrough.

It was a heated match and tempers flared close to half-time when Racing striker Jonathan Perreira was fouled three times and the referee failed to take any action against Real.

Pepe cynically pushed Perreira to the

floor before Gabriel Heinze and Fabio Cannavaro hacked the grounded striker.

The referee waved play on and livid Racing players encircled Heinze while words were also exchanged as both sets of players trudged off at half-time.

Racing then conceded four minutes into the second half with Higuain cutting inside before finishing with aplomb.

The Argentine should have scored again shortly afterwards but keeper Antonio Martinez saved with an outstretched foot.

Real's new French signing Julien Faubert, recruited on loan from West Ham, made his debut just after the hour mark coming on for Arjen Robben who seemed less than happy about the decision.

"He (Robben) wasn't in the right physical condition to play the 90 minutes," explained Ramos. "When you are tired the risk of injury increases and we are not willing to take those risks."

Racing went close to equalising and Cannavaro had to clear off the line to prevent an own goal from Pepe.

Nicola Zanicchi headed over a great chance for Racing and angry Real fans flocked out of the turnstiles with several minutes remaining.

"Real are not the same team as three months ago when they needed to score three goals to win," said Racing coach Juan Ramon Muniz.

"They take their chances and when they need to close the game off they do."



Real Madrid forward Gonzalo Higuain (R) shoots past Racing goalkeeper Antonio Rodriguez to score the only goal of the game in their Primera Liga encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Saturday.



Liverpool striker Fernando Torres celebrates his injury-time winner against Portsmouth in their English Premier League match at Fratton Park on Saturday.

## HULL-TIMES FOR CHELSEA

# Torres does it again

AFP, London



Fernando Torres kept Liverpool's dream of a first English league title in 19 years alive with a stoppage-time winner at Portsmouth but Chelsea look dead and buried after yet another stumble.

Rafael Benitez's side twice came from a goal down at Fratton Park before Torres, left on the bench until 15 minutes from time, met Yossi Benayoun's cutback with a bullet header to seal a 3-2 win that lifted the Reds a point clear of Manchester United at the top of the table.

The champions have played two games less but the resilience displayed by Liverpool on Saturday suggests the title battle is far from over.

"We showed character, determination to the end and desire," said a relieved Benitez, who had gambled on starting first-team regulars Torres, Dirk Kuyt and Xavi Alonso on the bench on a day when he was missing injured captain Steven Gerrard.

"We are in a good position and we are confident we can stay there. If we are near the top in the final month of the season, we can fight for the title."

Chelsea, though, appear to be out of the reckoning after a goalless draw at home to Hull left Luiz Felipe Scolari's side languishing in fourth place.

The Stamford Bridge stalemate meant the Blues have won just two of their last six matches in the league and enabled Aston Villa, 2-0 winners at Blackburn, to leapfrog them into third place.

If United win at West Ham on Sunday, Chelsea will find themselves eight points adrift of the leaders having played a game more and the jeers of their own fans spoke volumes about the club's decline.

Chelsea have now dropped 16 points at home this season and Scolari was conspicuous by his absence from the post-match inquest, leaving assistant Ray Wilkins to defend the man who guided Brazil to World Cup glory in 2002.

"People do pay a lot of money to watch football and if they want to boo then by all means come and boo," Wilkins said.

"But to say someone does not know what he is doing when he has achieved what he has in the game, is out of order."

## Beckham recalled

AFP, London

David Beckham was on Saturday handed the opportunity to win a record-equalling 108th cap for England when Fabio Capello named his squad to face European champions Spain in a friendly in Seville on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old Beckham, currently enjoying a successful loan spell at AC Milan from Los Angeles Galaxy, needs just one more appearance to match Bobby Moore's best mark for an outfield player.

West Ham striker Carlton Cole and Phil Jagielka, the Everton midfielder, are in line for their first caps after also being named in the squad while Aston Villa's James Milner has been elevated to the senior squad.

England goalkeeping great Peter Shilton holds the record for the most England caps, with 125.

Capello believes that the style of play that helped Spain lift the European title will be very different to England's last encounter with Germany.

"(The game with Spain) is very important because it will be a different style of play," Capello explained.

"Against Germany they were the runners-up in the European Championship, but this will be a different. I'm very interested in this game because Spain play fantastic football, very quick."

"But we are strong and I think England will be strong in Spain. I am very confident in my team, I have big confidence."

Beckham's selection in the squad came just hours after his club career took another dramatic twist when LA Galaxy turned down a reported 10-million-dollar bid from Milan to make his switch to Italy permanent.

His selection also paves the way for a possible place in the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa should England, as expected, qualify.

Cole will have the opportunity to shine in front of Capello at Upton Park on Sunday when West Ham entertain title favourites Manchester United. The 25-year-old has scored six times in the

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## INTER THUMP LECCE

# Milan held on both fronts

AFP, Rome



AC Milan suffered a double blow on Saturday as Los Angeles Galaxy refused their reported 10-million-dollar bid for David Beckham and

rock-bottom Reggina held them to a 1-1 draw at the San Siro.

Earlier in the day Inter Milan had cruised to a convincing 3-0 victory at lowly Lecce to extend their lead at the top to eight points.

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani revealed before kick-off that Galaxy had turned down their initial bid for Beckham and then sat and watched his team frustrated by a team fighting for their Serie A survival.

"We made an offer to Galaxy which they didn't accept," said Galliani.

Milan were without the suspended Andrea Pirlo and lined up with a very attacking formation that included the recalled Ronaldinho, Kaka and Pato.

But coach Carlo Ancelotti complained that his team hadn't played at the right tempo, although he denied they had one eye on next week's Milan derby.

"It was a difficult and nervous match for everyone," he said. "We were too soft."

"Maybe we thought that sooner or later a goal would come. Were we distracted by the derby? Certainly not."

For all Milan's early possession and pressure, they fell behind on 33 minutes.

Reggina burst away on the counter-attack and Bernardo Corradi set up Carlos Carmona, whose fierce drive was parried by Christian Abbiati in the Milan goal.

The Italian giants failed to clear their lines, though, and a Corradi flick set up the late arriving Davide Di Gennaro to lash home left-footed.

Milan continued to push forward and Ronaldinho demonstrated a glimpse of his Barcelona form of old on 41 minutes with some typical Brazilian magic.

The 28-year-old ran at goal, twisting, turning and sending three defenders the wrong way before curling his shot just past the far post.

After the break, Di Gennaro almost doubled his tally but arrowed his shot just wide while Kaka had two chances, sending one softly into goalkeeper Andrea Campagnolo's arms and the other past the nearest post.

On the hour, Kaka hit the post and substitute Clarence Seedorf bundled the ball home, but the Dutch midfielder was penalised for a handball.

Milan were given a lifeline on 67 minutes as Matej Kraljick brought down a marauding Pato in the box and Kaka smashed home the penalty.

Ronaldinho made way for Filippo Inzaghi and he almost converted a sumptuous cross from Beckham, heading just over

the bar 17 minutes from time.

Five minutes from the end Inzaghi was inches away from converting another devilish cross from the former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder.

Goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Luis Figueroa and Dejan Stankovic gave Inter only their third win in six games since the resumption of Serie A following the winter break.

Even so, Inter coach Jose Mourinho was furious by what he thought was yet another penalty decision going against his team when Ibrahimovic was booked for diving after going down in the box.

"I got banned for using the word fear so I won't use it again," said Mourinho, referring to the one-match touchline ban he was given for asking referee Domenico Celi if he was afraid of giving a decision to Inter in their 1-0 victory against Sampdoria last month.

"My Italian is only so-so, so this time I'll use the word strange. It was very strange what happened to Adriano (who was banned for three matches on video evidence for punching an opponent against Sampdoria) and this penalty decision was strange too."

It was Zlatan Ibrahimovic who gave the visitors the lead on 12 minutes as he controlled a pass from Cambiasso on the edge of the area and then ripped a right-foot shot past Francesco Benussi in the Lecce goal.

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# Hoffenheim held

INTERNET, undated



Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim left it late to snatch a 1-1 draw at bottom club Borussia Muenchengladbach while Hamburg were stunned by a stoppage-time goal as they went down 3-2 at lowly Karlsruhe on Saturday.

A 44th-minute long-range effort by Alexander Baumjohann gave Muenchengladbach the lead over Hoffenheim who had to wait until the 89th minute

before Brazilian striker Wellington headed an equalizer.

Hoffenheim stay top on 39 points, two ahead of Hertha Berlin, who drew 1-1 at Arminia Bielefeld on Friday, and three ahead of Hamburg, who threw away a two-goal lead as they went down at Karlsruhe.

Schalke 04 added to Werder Bremen's woes with a 1-0 win after Benedikt Hoewedes rose in the 48th minute to head home a free-kick.

"At last I saw a team that fought for a win," Schalke coach Fred Ruten said.

"We were a team on the pitch. Everyone did their job."

Schalke stay in ninth place but now have a four-point advantage over 10th-placed Bremen.

Two goals from Mario Gomez meanwhile helped visiting VfB Stuttgart to a 4-2 win at fifth-placed Bayer Leverkusen.

Hamburg looked like following up their 1-0 victory over Bayern Munich with three points at Karlsruhe after Jose Paulo Guerrero opened the account in the seventh minute and Collin Benjamin scored shortly after the break.

However the home side scored two quick goals through Sebastian Freis, who

benefited from a mistake by central defender Michael Gravgaard on his debut, and Giovanni Federico before grabbing victory when Freis headed the winner two minutes into stoppage time.

Both sides were down to 10 men after Hamburg striker Miladen Petric was sent off for a push on Marco Engelhardt in the 77th minute, and Engelhardt was dismissed for a second booking five minutes later.

"We defeated ourselves - three mistakes, three goals," Hamburg coach Martin Jol said.

"It's got nothing to do with character, it's just mistakes. These things happen sometimes when you have new players."

Stuttgart were full value for their 4-2 win at Leverkusen. Mario Gomez scored in the third and Thomas Hitzlsperger belted in a free-kick shortly after half-time before Stefan Kiessling pulled one back for Leverkusen in the 67th.

All hopes of a comeback by the home side, who were down to 10 men after the dismissal of Arturo Vidal shortly after the break for a second booking, were dashed when Gomez struck again in the 75th.

In a late flurry Leverkusen's Lukas Sinkiewicz put into his own goal and Angelos Charisteas scored a consolation for the home side in stoppage time.

In other matches, Eintracht Frankfurt were held 2-2 by Cologne, who twice came from behind to equalize through Milivoje Novakovic, the second from the penalty spot, while Edin Dzeko scored both goals as Wolfsburg ran out 2-0 winners over Bochum.



Borussia Muenchengladbach midfielder Alexander Baumjohann (R) lets fly from distance to score a stunning goal against leaders Hoffenheim in their Bundesliga match at Muenchengladbach on Saturday.

## SQUAD

**GOALKEEPERS:** Robert Green (West Ham/ENG), Joe Hart (Man City/ENG), David James (Portsmouth/ENG).  
**DEFENDERS:** Wayne Bridge (Man City/ENG), Ashley Cole (Chelsea/ENG), Rio Ferdinand (Man Utd/ENG), Phil Jagielka (Everton/ENG), Glen Johnson (Portsmouth/ENG), John Terry (Chelsea/ENG), Matthew Upson (West Ham/ENG), Luke Young (Villa/ENG).  
**MIDFIELDERS:** David Beckham (LA Galaxy/USA), Gareth Barry (Villa/ENG), Michael Carrick (Man Utd/ENG), Stuart Downing (Middlesbrough/ENG), Frank Lampard (Chelsea/ENG), James Milner (Villa/ENG), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Man City/ENG), Ashley Young (Villa/ENG).  
**FORWARDS:** Gabriel Agbonlahor (Villa/ENG), Carlton Cole (West Ham/ENG), Peter Crouch (Portsmouth/ENG), Emile Heskey (Villa/ENG).

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