

Eto'o brace saves Barca

AFP, Madrid



Samuel Eto'o scored twice as leaders Barcelona came from two goals down to preserve their 22-

match unbeaten league run with a 2-2 draw at Real Betis on Saturday.

The result gives champions Real Madrid, currently 13 points behind in second, a chance to cut the gap at the top to 10 points when they face Sporting Gijon on Sunday.

Juan Melli and former Liverpool man Mark Gonzalez put Betis into a 2-0 lead after just 25 minutes as Barcelona looked set for their first defeat since the opening day of the season.

Eto'o pulled a goal back close to half-time and then equalised six minutes from the end for his 23rd goal of the season but Barcelona's run of ten straight league wins still

came to an end. "A point isn't bad and I can't fault the players for their effort," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola. "We dominated the game and had lots of chances to win it but Betis are a good side and they defended well."

"After so many consecutive victories it is normal that we eventually slip up and it happened here (in Seville)."

Barcelona had a number of stars in action on international duty during the week and Guardiola rested forwards Lionel Messi and Thierry Henry while captain Carles Puyol was missing through injury.

Barcelona had a nightmare start with Betis scoring twice inside seven minutes.

Melli found the target on 18 minutes with a fine header before Gonzalez struck for the hosts on 25 minutes after the visitors failed to deal with Sergio Garcia's cross.

Trailing 2-0 Barcelona got a break seconds before the break when Andres Iniesta used his quick feet to win a penalty although contact was

minimal. Eto'o stepped up and his weak spot-kick was saved by Ricardo but the ball fell back into his path and he reacted sharply to prod home the rebound.

Barcelona's unbeaten league run - stretching back to the opening day of the season - was under threat.

Betis, who won at rivals Sevilla for the first time in 13 years last weekend, thought they had made it 3-1 but a 48th minute strike was ruled out for offside.

A minute later Eto'o should have equalised. The Cameroon forward lost his marker with a great turn but shot wide with the whole goal to aim at.

Eto'o made amends late on though with the leveller to salvage a point.

Elsewhere, Deportivo La Coruna and Osasuna played out a scoreless draw at the Riazor Stadium.

Valencia, beaten by Osasuna last weekend, climbed to third above Sevilla on goal difference following a 1-1 draw with Malaga at the

Mestalla Stadium.

Valencia had lost their last five away matches so a home match was welcome and David Villa put them ahead with his 18th goal of the season after 53 minutes.

Villa made history on Wednesday by becoming the first Spanish player to score in six successive internationals following his goal in Spain's 2-0 friendly victory over England and he produced another masterclass finish curling the ball into the top corner. Malaga, lying sixth just two points behind Valencia, equalised six minutes later when Raul Albiol put a cross into his own goal.

Champions Real Madrid play at Sporting Gijon Sunday hoping to repeat the 7-1 thrashing they gave the promoted outfit earlier this season.

Coach Juande Ramos must do without Dutch duo Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder who picked up knocks on international duty with the Netherlands while compatriot Rafael van der Vaart is suspended.



Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o is about to smash home the rebound from a missed penalty during their Primera Liga match against Real Betis at the Ruiz de Lopera Stadium in Seville on Saturday.

Di Vaio on fire

SOCCERNET



Serie A top scorer Marco Di Vaio netted his 16th goal of the season to earn lowly Bologna a 1-1 draw at Napoli on Saturday.

The former Italy forward equalised in the 23rd minute, tapping in the rebound from a shot by Sergio Volpi, who appeared to handle after being gifted possession by a defensive blunder.

Christian Maggio had sidefooted Napoli ahead three minutes earlier after a German Denis cross from the right of the area.

Bologna's Davide Bombardini hit the bar with a powerful strike in a lively second half.

Napoli are joint seventh with Palermo ahead of the rest of the

Serie A programme on Sunday but their hopes of being in next season's Champions League are fading as they now have picked up just two points in their last six games.

Lazio's ambitions of quali-

Robinho upset at Scolari sack

AFP, London

Chelsea were wrong to sack Luiz Felipe Scolari according to the Brazilian's compatriot Robinho.

Scolari was axed by Chelsea on Monday just seven months into his reign after Blues owner Roman Abramovich lost patience with the team's spluttering form and reports that senior players were unhappy with the manager's

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fying for Europe are waning as well after they were held to a 1-1 home draw home by third-bottom Torino earlier on Saturday.

Lazio defender Sebastiano Siviglia levelled with a header in the 75th minute after Stefano Mauri had attempted to score with an overhead kick to end a run of four consecutive league defeats for the Rome club, who remain 11th.

Midfielder Ignazio Abate had put Torino ahead in the 36th when he controlled a loose Ousmane Dabo clearance and found the net with a right-foot shot from the edge of the area.

Serie A leaders Inter Milan face third-placed AC Milan on Sunday in Milan captain Paolo Maldini's last derby before retirement. Second-placed Juventus, who trail Inter by seven points, welcome Sampdoria earlier in the day.

Peer denied Dubai visa

INTERNET, undated

Israeli Shahar Peer lost her chance to make a political point as the Dubai government denied her a visa to play in the Barclays Championships starting on Sunday. The 21-year-old ranked 48th, was to have travelled to the Gulf after a semifinal at the weekend in Pattaya, Thailand, and had been drawn to face 15th-seeded Russian Anna Chakvetadze.

But tensions in the Middle East after Israeli's bombing campaign last month of Palestinians in the region ended any hope of a former Israeli soldier being admitted to the moderate Arab emirate. "We are deeply disappointed by the decision of the UAE denying Shahar Peer a Visa that would permit her to enter the country," said WTA boss Larry Scott in a statement.

"Ms. Peer has earned the right to play in the tournament and it is regrettable that the UAE is denying her this right."

"The WTA Tour believes very strongly, and has a clear rule and policy, that no host country should deny a player the right to compete at a tournament for which she has qualified by ranking."

He added: "The Tour is reviewing appropriate remedies for Ms. Peer and also will review appropriate future

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Hertha on cloud nine

AFP, Berlin

Hertha Berlin striker Andrey Voronin admitted he was on cloud nine after firing his side to the top of the Bundesliga with both goals as Bayern Munich were beaten 2-1 on Saturday.

The Ukrainian forward, on loan from Liverpool, scored either side of half-time to put Hertha top of the league and knock Hoffenheim into second following their shock 4-1 hammering by Bayer Leverkusen on Friday.

"Beating Bayern is obviously a bit special," said Voronin after his two superb strikes at Berlin's Olympic Stadium.

"We're top of the league, and the whole city and club will be overjoyed."

"We were disciplined, we kept it tight, and we gave them very few chances."

Voronin said the first-half injury to Bayern's Luca Toni, who was forced off with an Achilles tendon injury, helped Hertha's cause as Munich lost their Italian World Cup-winning striker who was the league's top-scorer last season.

"We were lucky too when Luca Toni had to go off. But Bayern weren't as good as we'd been expecting," he said. And Hertha's Swiss coach Lucien Favre said it was his finest hour since he took over in July 2007.

"I have to say this is the best day I've had since coming to Hertha," he said.

"It's just fantastic. I'm truly delighted. We were a unit out

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Hertha Berlin striker Andrey Voronin celebrates scoring against Bayern Munich during their Bundesliga clash at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Saturday.

Hertha hell for Bayern

AFP, Berlin



Hertha Berlin's Ukrainian striker Andrey Voronin fired his side to the top of the

Bundesliga on Saturday with both goals which sealed a 2-1 win over Bayern Munich.

With Hoffenheim suffering their first defeat at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena when Bayer Leverkusen hammered them 4-1 on Friday night, the way had been paved for the winner of the Bayern-Hertha clash at Berlin's Olympic Stadium to take over.

And Hertha took their chance to go from third to top and now lead Hoffenheim by a single point with Bayern third with two defeats in their last three games.

"I am very, very happy," said Berlin coach Lucien Favre after Voronin, who is on loan from Liverpool, fired Berlin top.

"We played as a team and the 2-1 result was deserved."

"A victory over Bayern Munich - that is enough for today."

Hertha's utter joy at the final whistle, in front of 74,000 fans,

was in stark contrast to Bayern's utter misery as they missed another chance to go top of the league.

"We are disappointed and very annoyed," said Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"We wanted to get three points here, but if we can start getting some results together we will get to the top."

"We have to keep faith."

Even without star striker Marko Pantelic, who has a knee injury, Hertha made the brightest of starts and deservedly took the lead after Patrick Ebert fired in a long ball and Bayern defender Christian Lell gave Voronin too much space.

The Ukrainian fired his header past stranded Bayern goalkeeper Michael Rensing to make it 1-0 after 38 minutes.

It remained that way after the break until Munich, the defending champion, forced an equaliser midway through the second-half.

Brazilian defender Lucio smashed in a shot from far out which Czech goalkeeper Patrick Ebert blocked before midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger stabbed in a shot which Ebert again deflected.

But Germany striker Miroslav Klose was on hand to header the ball over the Berlin

goalkeeper to make it 1-1 with 61 minutes played.

Ten minutes later, French midfielder Franck Ribery went on a darting run and put United States forward Landon Donovan, on for ankle-injury victim Luca Toni, into a perfect position, but he misfired his shot.

And the winning goal came when Brazilian midfielder Rafael went on a run through midfield which split the Bayern defence before Voronin slid his shot past Michael Rensing for the winner on 77 minutes to put Hertha top.

Germany midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger scored an 88th minute goal to seal a 3-3 draw for Stuttgart at Hanover as his side drop to seventh.

Wolfsburg are up to sixth after their 2-0 win at Eintracht Frankfurt, while Werder Bremen's dreadful run of results continue as they drew 1-1 with bottom side Borussia Moenchengladbach.

City crash on the road

AFP, Portsmouth



Mark Hughes has admitted that Manchester City are not getting their money's worth from misfiring Brazilian Robinho.

The 32-million-pound striker was substituted with 25 minutes left following another woeful away performance in Saturday's 2-0 defeat at Premier League strugglers Portsmouth.

Robinho has been sensational in home matches since joining City from Real Madrid but has repeatedly failed to recapture that scintillating form on the road.

Saturday's loss was City's seventh away defeat in the league and Hughes admitted the frustrating inconsistency was simply down to the likes of Robinho and fellow Brazilian Elano not performing to their best week in, week out.

"It was very disappointing from our point of view,"

Hughes said. "The Premier League is the hardest in the world and you need an amount of players performing at the top of their ability. If you don't hit a certain level as a team you get beaten."

"The opposition try and stop the threat of world class players and Robinho and Elano struggled to stamp their ability on the game."

"We are not the biggest team physically and sometimes we are compromised by that away from home. It is about having the mentality and desire to get the job done."

"We missed the spark of (Shaun) Wright-Phillips but at the end of the day we had enough quality on the pitch to get a better result."

City were facing a Portsmouth side playing their first game since sacking manager Tony Adams after just 22 games in charge.

The home outfit, under the temporary control of Paul Hart and former Manchester United number two Brian Kidd, were clearly eager to impress any prospective new

boss. David Nugent has wasted four gilt-edged opportunities before England defender Glen Johnson finally opened the scoring twenty minutes from time with his third goal of the season.

City defended poorly throughout and were made to pay as Johnson waltzed into the penalty area before seeing his powerful right foot shot beaten away by goalkeeper Shay Given.

Johnson was quickest to react to the rebound than the visitors' static backline and hammered his follow-up shot past the stranded Given and into the roof of the net.

City's hopes of a fightback were dashed five minutes later when Hermann Hreidarsson notched for the second successive game with a bullet header from Jermaine Pennant's corner.

The match also saw Portsmouth goalkeeper David James set a new Premier League appearance record of 536 games and his fine flying save to keep out

substitute Ched Evans' 80th minute header was a fitting way to mark the occasion.

Portsmouth's bid to bring Mexico coach Sven Goran Eriksson to Fratton Park appears to be floundering and caretaker Hart is likely to remain in charge for next weekend's trip to relegation rivals Stoke.

Former Nottingham Forest manager Hart is unsure if he wants the job on a permanent basis.

Hart said: "I was brought in to do the youth development and I enjoy that. There was a tingle in the stomach today I have not felt for four or five years but I am not looking that far ahead."

"I have had a well done phone call from the owner and everybody knows where I am. I have been asked to do a job and help the club out and that is what I am doing."

"It is possible I will be in charge at Stoke next weekend. We are planning the training around that game and we will see what happens. This was a good start."

Anelka hits treble

AP, London



Nicolas Anelka scored three times in the last 15 minutes to lift Chelsea to a 3-1 victory at

Watford on Saturday and avoid embarrassing FA Cup defeat.

When Hungarian forward Tamas Priskin broke away

from the Chelsea defense to give the second tier League Championship side the lead in the 69th minute, the wealthy west London club appeared in danger of becoming one of the upset victims of soccer's oldest and most famous club competition.

After firing coach Luiz Felipe Scolari on Monday, Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich sat next to Guus Hiddink, the man who is replacing Scolari until the end of the season, while the Watford fans cheered for a

major upset. But Anelka equalized with an overhead shot off Frank Lampard's corner in the 75th minute and headed home Ashley Cole's leftwing cross for the second two minutes later.

After Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech blocked what would have been a Watford equalizer by Jobi McAnuff, Chelsea broke away and Anelka scored the third in the final minute with a low left-footer.

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Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka (2nd from L) hooks the ball home acrobatically to score against Watford in their FA Cup clash at Vicarage Road on Saturday.

Emerton out for season

AFP, Sydney

Blackburn Rovers' Australian midfielder Brett Emerton says recovering from a serious knee injury will be one of the biggest tests of his career.

Emerton has been ruled out for the rest of the English Premier League season with the cruciate ligament injury, suffered while playing for Blackburn against fellow relegation candidates Middlesbrough late last month.

He has flown home to have knee reconstruction surgery, scheduled for Wednesday, and is expected to spend the next six months undergoing intensive physiotherapy.

Emerton, 29, said he was facing his greatest test as he had not previously had a serious injury. Since joining Blackburn in 2003, Emerton has played 190 matches for the club and has also made 69 appearances for Australia since 1998.

"I had a scan done the morning after the game and I couldn't believe it when they told me it was my cruciate and I was going to be out for six months with a knee reconstruction," Emerton told the Sunday Telegraph.

"I've never had a long-term injury throughout my career. I've been very lucky in that respect."

"So for me to face six months out is something I've never experienced before."

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