



Inter Milan striker Adriano (C) heads the ball past Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati (R) to score the opening goal during their Serie A clash at San Siro on Sunday.

Milan suffer Inter defeat

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan defeated bitter local rivals AC Milan 2-1 in a thrilling derby at the San Siro on Sunday to close in on a fourth straight title.

First half goals from Adriano and Dejan Stankovic fired Inter to a nine-point lead over Juventus at the top of Serie A with Milan at the foot of the table.

"There are still 33 points up for grabs, there is a long way to go yet. I cannot think the Scudetto is over," said Inter coach Jose Mourinho.

"I can say that if we don't win it, then it will be because we've given it away. It's in our hands now."

Milan were playing some attractive football early on but without overly threatening the Inter goal.

One sweeping move that went from left to right ended with Gianluca Zambrotta trying a speculative bicycle kick but his effort plopped tamely into Julio Cesar's arms.

Inter opened Milan up on 17 minutes and only a last ditch tackle from Massimo Ambrosini saved the seven-time European champions, although Stankovic dithered

on Esteban Cambiasso's pass a moment too long.

Milan had a few half chances and Pato couldn't quite get enough purchase on Ronaldinho's ball into the area to trouble Julio Cesar while Ronaldinho met a David Beckham corner on the volley without connecting cleanly.

They were made to pay for that when a deep Maicon cross from the right on 29 minutes was headed home by Adriano, via a deflection off his own arm.

Inter doubled their lead two minutes before the break as Zlatan Ibrahimovic headed down a long ball into Stankovic's path for the Serbian to rifle home.

Adriano could have settled the match early in the second period after a slip by Georgia centre-back Kakha Kaladze but the Brazil striker curled his shot narrowly wide.

Inter were cruising until 19 minutes from time when a perfect Ronaldinho through ball put in Marek Jankulovski, who pulled the ball back for Pato to tap home.

There was late drama as substitute Filippo Inzaghi seemed to have snatched an equaliser with a stunning left foot volley but it was controversially chalked off for offside.

Inzaghi had another chance in stop-

page time but Julio Cesar saved with an outstretched boot.

Earlier in the day Juventus saw their title hopes dealt yet another blow as they were held to a 1-1 home draw by Sampdoria.

They have won just one of their last four matches and that only courtesy of an injury time winner from Denmark midfielder Christian Poulsen at Catania last weekend.

Juve fell behind to Giampaolo Pazzini's 10th-minute opener for Sampdoria following a pass from reported Juve target Antonio Cassano.

The hosts dominated the match thereafter but could only muster a single goal from Brazilian Amauri's header from Sebastian Giovinco's cross on 62 minutes.

Fiorentina held on to fourth spot and the final Champions League qualifying position as they came back from 3-0 down at Genoa to snatch a 3-3 draw with Roma captain Adrian Mutu's equaliser deep into injury time completing his hat-trick.

The aftermath of the game, however, was marked by a serious injury suffered by a Genoa fan who fell beneath the wheels of the Fiorentina team bus as it left the ground.

BUNDESLIGA Hamburg go third

AFP, Berlin

Hamburg enjoyed a 2-0 win over Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday to go third in the Bundesliga and knock Bayern Munich down into fourth following their defeat at new leaders Hertha Berlin.

A goal from a freekick by Germany winger Piotr Trochowski and a strike from Peru forward Jose Guerrero sealed the win for Martin Jolo-coached Hamburg who climb up from fourth to third behind second-placed Hoffenheim and Hertha.

With just four points separating the top five, this is the closest the title race has been since 1995.

Ten-man Borussia Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw by Energie Cottbus and had South Korean Lee Young-Pyo sent off in the last few moments when he kicked an opponent.

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 Muenchengladbach.

Mid-table Cologne and Karlsruhe ground out a 0-0 draw, while Schalke 04 striker Kevin Kuranyi put last week's internet prank behind him as he scored for the Royal Blues in their 2-1 defeat at Bochum which leaves them ninth.

Drenthe anxious, not to be picked

INTERNET, undated

Royston Drenthe has asked not to be picked to play because he is suffering from anxiety, according to Real Madrid coach Juande Ramos. Ramos told radio station Cadena SER early on Monday morning that Drenthe has asked not to be picked for Real's last three matches, against Numanica, Racing Santander and Sporting Gijon. The 20-year-old Dutch midfielder has failed to convince since joining Real from Feyenoord in July 2007, and was jeered by many fans in the Estadio Bernabeu after a nervous display on January 25 in the 1-0 home defeat of Deportivo Coruna.

"After that game Drenthe confessed to being 'very sad'. He has not played since then."

Ramos told Cadena Ser that "Drenthe has asked not to be picked, because he is suffering from anxiety."

Ramos added that "He is a young boy and he needs the help and the affection of the people who work with him. As the coach, I am prepared to give him all my support, because he is a player with a lot of potential."

The new coach finished by saying that "playing in front of 80,000 fans in the Bernabeu is not easy."

Raul brace fires Real

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Juande Ramos paid tribute to captain Raul after the former Spain international scored twice in Real's 4-0 win over Sporting Gijon to become the club's all-time leading scorer with 309 goals.

Raul, 31, scored twice to overtake Alfredo Di Stefano's long-standing record of 307 as Real marched to an eighth successive league win that helped them close to within ten points of leaders Barcelona.

"It will be many years before there is another player that emerges to beat his record," said Ramos. "The team scores the goals but Raul has had a great career over many years and deserves all the praise that comes his way."

Dutch forward Klaas-Jan Huntelaar was also on target with his first Real goal while Brazilian Marcelo also grabbed a rare goal.

Real have managed to shave two points off Barcelona's lead this weekend after their rivals' run of ten consecutive wins came to an end with a 2-2 draw at Real Betis on Saturday.

Real are ten points behind Barcelona with 15 games left although the leaders have the superior head-to-head record having beaten Real 2-0 at Camp Nou in December.

Raul struck after 15 minutes with his record-breaking 308th goal in Real's colours and Sporting - hammered 7-1 by Real in September - justifiably feared another rout.

Huntelaar had not scored for Real since a 20-million-euro move from Ajax but broke his duck with a neat finish on 37 minutes.

Marcelo, jeered by Real fans on several occasions this season, then produced a deft finish to wrap up the game

early in the second period before Raul netted again.

Villarreal finished above Barcelona last season but have been anything but consistent this campaign and drew 1-1 with Racing Santander on Sunday.

Villarreal are now locked on 38 points with Valencia who drew 1-1 with Malaga on Saturday.

After three straight defeats Sevilla got back to winning ways with a 2-0 victory over ten-man Espanyol to go third, three points clear of Valencia and Villarreal.

Villarreal's Frederic Kanoute, 31, scored twice in the final seven minutes to leave Espanyol deflated.

Espanyol have not won since the beginning of

November and fell to the foot of the table, three points from safety, after Real Mallorca climbed above them with a 1-0 win over fellow strugglers Numancia.

Atletico Madrid could not take advantage of slips from Valencia and Villarreal drawing 1-1 with derby rivals Getafe.

Diego Forlan scored his 15th goal of the season to put Atletico ahead but Juan Albin equalised in the 88th minute for Getafe.

It was an emotional rollercoaster for Albin who had horribly skied a penalty over the crossbar eight minutes before his leveller.

Atletico lie sixth two points behind Valencia and Villarreal with Sevilla five points ahead.



Real Madrid striker Raul celebrates scoring one of his two goals against Sporting Gijon during their Primera Liga encounter at the Molinon Stadium in Gijon on Sunday. Raul became the club's all-time leading scorer with 309 goals surpassing Alfredo Di Stefano's long-standing record of 307 goals.

LA return tough: Becks

AFP, Milan

David Beckham has admitted that he would find it hard to go back to Los Angeles if the Galaxy and AC Milan failed to come to an agreement over his proposed transfer.

Beckham was speaking following his team's 2-1 defeat to champions Inter in the Milan derby on Sunday that virtually ended Milan's hopes of claiming the Scudetto crown this season.

And while he said he had nothing new to add in the way of developments to his potential switch from the Americans to the Italian giants, he left no doubt as to how he would feel should the move not go through.

"(There's) nothing that I know of, not yet," said Beckham who is desperate for a switch to Italy to enhance his chances of playing in the 2010 World Cup finals.

"I've said I want to stay here and obviously if I do go back it will be a bit difficult. But I'm always professional so we will have to wait and see when the final decision is made."

"I hope things go the way I want them to. I've already said that I want to stay, I'm enjoying my time here and hopefully I'll stay."

"Talks have obviously been going on and on

and whether talks will go on or not, everyone's still talking about it. It's out of my hands but there will be talks next week."

Beckham said it was an honour to have played in a Milan derby having previously played in 'El Classico' in Spain between Barcelona and Real Madrid and clashes between Manchester United and Liverpool in England.

"It's one of the biggest games in football, sure it would be better if you win it. It was a tough game, in the first half we conceded two goals. It's tough to come back from that," said Beckham who was substituted in the second half.

"We played better towards the end and put more men up front and that caused them more problems."

"They are all huge games, the biggest games in football and I'm proud to have played one in England, one in Spain and now one in Italy, but it would have been better to have had a different result."

"The pressure that they (Inter) put on us in the first half, especially the first 20-25 minutes set the tempo for the game."

"We came back in the last 20-25 minutes and there were some decisions that went more their way than anything else but I'm taking nothing away from them, they have great players and they're a very good team."

Villa most wanted

AFP, Madrid

Spain's Euro 2008 golden boot winner David Villa has become Spanish football's most-wanted man and cash-strapped Valencia may be forced to sell their highly-prized asset in the summer.

Villa, 27, made history when he became the first Spanish player to score in six successive international followings his goal in Wednesday's 2-0 friendly win over England.

"It gives me enormous pleasure to have scored again and to know that I've achieved something that nobody else has done," said Villa.

"But, as I always say, the most important thing is that my goals help the team and that we continue the way we have been going."

"It's not necessarily straightforward to score (at international level), but in a team like this, with this quality, you know that you are not going to be lacking in opportunities."

Former Spanish international's Telmo Zarra and Ladislao Kubala had scored in five successive internationals, but Villa was the first to score in six.

Spain are unbeaten in 29 games, incredibly winning 27

of them, and Villa now has a strike rate of 25 goals in 42 internationals.

While Spain rely on Villa, Valencia are even more dependent on the prolific target-man who has scored 18 out of their 43 league goals this season.

Villa was hot property in the summer after firing Spain to Euro 2008 glory - with the tabloids labelling him 'maravilla' which translates as 'wonder'.

After missing out on Manchester United winger Ronaldo, Spanish champions Real offered a reported 45 million euros for him, but Valencia didn't want to do business and the striker signed a contract extension until 2014.

"The club wanted to keep me and I feel comfortable here so it is all fine," Villa explained at the time.

However, Valencia's financial problems are well known and the club may choose to cash-in or alternatively sell his Spanish international teammate David Silva.

At 27, Villa could also feel the time is right especially with Valencia, currently 22 points behind Barcelona, looking far from title challengers.

Real, Barcelona, Liverpool and Arsenal have all been mentioned as potential suitors for the former Real

LEAGUE ONE Racial insults mar Lyon win

AFP, Paris

Seven-time champions Lyon put daylight between themselves and the chasing pack on Sunday with a 3-1 home win over rock-bottom Le Havre which was marred by racial insults hurled at home player John Mensah.

The win, achieved courtesy of goals from Ederson and Abdellkader Keita before the break and a Juninho clincher after 74 minutes, put an end to a run of four straight draws for the reigning champions at the Stade Gerland, Loic Nestor netting a consolation for a Le Havre side nine points adrift of safety.

Lyon moved on to 49 points from 24 games with Paris St Germain on 45 after their 2-1 win on Saturday over St Etienne and Bordeaux on 43.

Marseille were hoping to leapfrog Bordeaux in the late match with a win over Monaco.

Lyon officials said a spectator was arrested at the Stade Gerland following Sunday's game for making 'racist insults' in the direction of the champions' Ghanaian defender Mensah, who was clearly affected by the issue.

His participation ended early when he was ultimately sent off after picking up two yellow cards.

The stadium speaker announced the arrest of the fan believed to have made the insults early in the second half before reminding spectators that making racial comments in a public place are an offence.

"John was very shocked," Lyon coach Claude Puel said on French television.

Puel admitted that "I should perhaps have withdrawn John earlier (before his second booking). He heard scandalous words. We tried to keep him on the pitch and I thought he had perhaps got over it. But it's my fault - I should have taken him off beforehand."

Last season saw 14 arrests for similar offences at French league games, according to official figures.

MU stroll past Derby

AFP, London



Manchester United's bid for a remarkable haul of five trophies in one season remains on course after Sunday's 4-

1 win over Derby in the FA Cup fifth round.

Having already won the Club World Cup in December, Sir Alex Ferguson's side sit top of the Premier League, face Tottenham in the League Cup final and take on Inter Milan in the Champions League second round.

Now they are through to the FA Cup quarterfinals as well thanks to goals from Nani, Darren Gibson, Cristiano Ronaldo and Danny Welbeck at Pride Park.

United were took the lead in the 29th minute when Giggs slipped a pass to Nani on the edge of the Derby area. The Portuguese winger cut inside and lashed a superb strike past Stephen Bywater.

Gibson added a second goal

in the 44th minute when he deflected home from Ronaldo's deflected freekick.

Ronaldo got on the score-sheet himself three minutes into the second half with a powerful header from Giggs' corner.

Miles Addison's 56th minute header was no consolation for Nigel Clough's Derby, who also lost to United in the League Cup semifinal earlier this season, and highly-rated young winger Welbeck curled home a sublime fourth in the 81st minute.

Australia midfielder Tim Cahill scored the decisive goal as Everton booked their place in the FA Cup quarterfinals with a 3-1 win over Aston Villa.

Cahill struck with 14 minutes remaining to put the fifth round result beyond doubt at Goodison Park after Mikel Arteta's penalty had put Everton ahead for the second time.

Teenage midfielder Jack Rodwell gave Everton the perfect start as he scored his first goal for David Moyes' team in the fourth minute.

Cahill met Arteta's corner with a bullet header that

Silijani Petrov could only clear off the line to Rodwell, who lashed the loose ball back into the net from close range.

Villa equalised when Tony Hibbert chopped down Gabriel Agbonlahor in the eighth minute and James Milner's low penalty trickled under Tim Howard.

Everton, who last reached the quarterfinals in 2002, went back in front in the 24th minute through another penalty. This time Villa midfielder Steve Sidwell brought down Victor Anichebe and Arteta stroked home the spot-kick.

Cahill sealed the win after 76 minutes when he sprayed a pass wide to Anichebe and burst into the area to finish the striker's return pass with a scuffed shot.

Chelsea are the only other team definitely into the last eight after beating Watford 3-1 on Saturday.

Blackburn rescued a 2-2 draw with Coventry, West Ham drew 1-1 with Middlesbrough, Fulham were held to a 1-1 draw at Swansea and Hull were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw against Sheffield United.



Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo (L) scores a goal from a header against Derby County during their FA Cup tie at Pride Park on Sunday.