

## REAL HELD IN DERBY Barca gain edge again

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's run of wins came to an end on Saturday when they were held to a 1-1 draw at the Santiago Bernabeu by city rivals Atletico, allowing Barcelona to extend their lead at the top to six points.

After two successive defeats Barcelona got back on track with a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao to stretch their advantage over Real by two points.

Real had won ten straight league games to cut Barcelona's advantage from 12 points to four in just three games and were hoping to put wind in their sails for Tuesday's Champions League showdown with Liverpool at Anfield, a match in which they trail 1-0 from the first leg.

Uruguayan striker Diego Forlan put Atletico ahead on 38 minutes with his 18th goal of the season but Klaas-Jan Huntelaar - cup-tied for the Champions League - equalised after 57 minutes.

"We are six points behind

now but it is not insurmountable," said Real coach Juande Ramos. "It is just two games and Barcelona still have to come to the Bernabeu."

The draw meant Atletico's derby hoodoo continues and they have not beaten Real since a 3-1 win back in 1999.

Atletico felt hard done by against Real and striker Sergio "Kun" Aguero vented his frustration at not being awarded a late penalty claiming the referee took the easy way out.

"It was a penalty," fumed Aguero. "It was the final incident in the game but you aren't going to get a penalty in the dying minutes at the Bernabeu."

"We just have to worry what we are doing and not talk about Real Madrid, only Barcelona," explained Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o.

"Are we back to our best? Well we won and kept a clean sheet which is great but to be honest we were playing well before. However, we were conceding goals and drawing or losing the games."

It was a crucial win for Barcelona and their next task is at home to Lyon in the Champions League on Wednesday with the tie 1-1 after the first leg.

Personnel problems saw Ramos use French midfielder Lass Diarra as an emergency right back for Sergio Ramos who was required at centre-half.

Against Aguero and Forlan - who tore Barcelona to pieces in last weekend's 4-3 win - it was a big ask.

The Atletico point was good news for Barcelona who capitalised with victory over

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi strokes home the winning goal from the penalty spot in their Primera Liga match against Athletic Bilbao at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on Saturday.

## 'Dream' deal done

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham on Sunday confirmed a deal has been agreed between AC Milan and Los Angeles Galaxy that enables him to stay in Italy until the end of the season.

Beckham's current loan deal from the Major League Soccer side was due to end on Monday, with Milan's home game against Atalanta later on Sunday presumed to be his last match in the red and black shirt.

But Beckham released a statement through Galaxy confirming the rumours this week that a deal has been reached allowing him to remain in Italy until the end of

the season before returning to Galaxy to see out the rest of the MLS season.

"I'm grateful to both clubs for making this dream come true," said Beckham.

"I will be able to play for Milan and Galaxy in the same season, hence keeping with my commitment to Major League Soccer in order to develop football in the USA, which is something I feel really passionate about."

Milan have yet to comment publicly on securing the services of the England midfielder.

The deal follows weeks of negotiations between the two clubs during which Milan baulked at the size of transfer fee demanded by Galaxy -- thought to be around 12 million euros.

Milan too were keen to keep hold of the former Manchester United and Real Madrid star who immediately became a first-team fixture.

## Forget draw, focus on L'pool

SPORTINGLIFE

Real Madrid defender Fabio Cannavaro has urged his teammates not to dwell on Saturday's disappointing draw against arch rivals Atletico and focus their efforts on Tuesday's crucial Champions League clash against Liverpool.

Real went into the derby at the Bernabeu on the back of a 10-match winning streak in La Liga, during which time they had cut Barca's lead at the summit from 12 points to just four.

However, that gap is now back to six points after Barca won and Real were held to a 1-1 draw by Atletico in a match where the Rojiblanco really should have been celebrating their first win over Real in a decade after creating a host of excellent chances.

It was a disjointed display by Real, who were without the suspended Pepe and Wesley Sneijder while key striker Gonzalo Higuain started the game on the bench, and Cannavaro knows they can ill afford a repeat at Anfield, when they try to overturn a 1-0 deficit against Liverpool.

"We have to get our form back quickly because on Tuesday we cannot fail. We have to play as a team and quickly forget this game. It's time to start talking about Liverpool," said the Italian World Cup winner.

"We've not played well (against Atletico), but at times, after winning 10 successive games and before a match as important as the Liverpool one, these things can happen."

"You always need to be optimistic, and more so in football because anything can happen."

With Clint Dempsey also forcing an early save from United keeper van der Sar, Fulham could claim to have had the best of the opening 19 minutes.

That was as good as it got, however, for Roy Hodgson's side who saw all their good early work go to waste when they failed to deal with a 20th minute corner, allowing Tevez to head United into the lead.

Anderson's ball in was won by Rooney and the England striker's header flew towards the back post where his strike-partner easily out-jumped Fulham left-back Paul Konchesky to finish from close range.

United were moving smoothly through the gears, and when Fulham midfielder Davies volleyed over from inside the area, there was a sense of inevitability about the outcome.

That feeling was reinforced in dramatic style when Tevez conjured a superb individual effort to put United 2-0 up

against Rennes last week.

"I took a hit in the same

area after about 10-20 minutes of the game."

## Inter click into gear

AFP, Turin



Inter Milan clicked ominously into gear ahead of their Champions League trip to

Manchester United with an impressive 2-0 victory at Genoa on Saturday.

Goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Mario Balotelli maintained Inter's seven-point lead at the top of Serie A after Juventus won 1-0 at Torino in the Turin derby.

Inter played like a Jose Mourinho team, full of power, commitment, organisation and a little swaggertoo.

The only negatives for Mourinho were injuries to centre-backs Marco Materazzi and Nicolas Burdisso who both left the game during the first period.

That was United's impressive showing in beating Fulham in the FA Cup, will be Mourinho's two main worries ahead of Wednesday's Champions League last 16 clash at Old Trafford which is finely balanced at 0-0 after the first leg.

This win was the perfect response to Inter's midweek 3-0 Coppa Italia defeat to

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They are now level on 45

points with Genoa but crucially one point behind

fourth-placed Fiorentina, who host Palermo on Sunday.

Brazilian Felipe had given

Udinese the lead nine minutes

into the second period but

substitute Mirko Vucinic

in a game that was dominated by good goalkeeping until Giorgio Chiellini's 81st minute winner.

Matteo Sereni made a diving one-handed save from Vincenzo Iaquinta early on while Torino's Roberto Stellone headed over the bar from six yards.

Juve's Gianluigi Buffon then dived full length to hold a Simone Barone header before Sereni saved Iaquinta's header on the line.

After the break Juve almost took the lead as Sereni beat out a Chiellini header before Hasan Salihmidzic hit the post with the follow-up.

But nine minutes from time Chiellini headed home Pavel Nedved's free-kick to the relief of Juve coach Claudio Ranieri.

Earlier, 10-man AS Roma missed the chance to move into the top four as they were held to a 1-1 home draw by Udinese.

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However Ancelotti did explain what would constitute success for his club given they have next to no hope of ending the season with silverware.

"Third place (in Serie A) is our aim. You can't put that in the trophy cabinet but for this season that's what we're aiming for and that can be the building blocks for future success.

"I don't want to make comparisons with what Inter win or what Mourinho said, we have our objectives and we are going to go after those."

Milan host Atalanta on Sunday as they look to hold onto a top three place, which would give them direct entry into the Champions League group stages next season.

Ancelotti plays the big man

AFP, Milan

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti refused to rise to Jose Mourinho's bait when asked about the Inter Milan boss's claims that the 'rossoneri' would win nothing this season.

In a midweek rant Mourinho hit back at his critics by claiming that his team's main rivals Milan, Juventus and Roma would win nothing this season. But Ancelotti refused to be drawn into a war of words.

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Rio headache for Red Devils

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson faces an anxious wait on the fitness of Rio Ferdinand ahead of Manchester United's Champions League clash with Inter Milan on Wednesday.

The centre-back left Craven Cottage here Saturday wearing a protective support after injuring his ankle during United's commanding 4-0 FA Cup quarter-final win over Fulham.

Ferdinand had been forced to withdraw at half-time with United already in a comfortable two-goal lead and manager Ferguson admits he is uncertain whether the player will recover in time for the second leg clash with Italian giants Inter at Old Trafford.

That last 16 tie is finely poised after a scoreless draw in the San Siro.

Ferguson said England defender Ferdinand's importance to his side's hopes of reaching the quarterfinals of the competition, and so keeping alive their hopes of winning five trophies in a season, could not be underestimated.

"Ferdinand is a concern for us. He went over on his ankle and we will have to wait and see how he is," Ferguson said. "We just hope he makes it because he is so important for us."



Manchester United forward Carlos Tevez (C) heads home from close range past goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer (2nd from L) in their thumping win over Fulham in the FA Cup at Craven Cottage on Saturday.

## Tevez propels Man Utd

AFP, London

Manchester United's imperious march towards five trophies in a season continued here Saturday as Carlos Tevez scored twice in a 4-0 win over Fulham that saw his side into the FA Cup semifinals.

Tevez's first-half double at Craven Cottage put Sir Alex Ferguson's team in charge before further goals from Wayne Rooney and Park Ji-Sung wrapped up a commanding victory.

With the FIFA Club World Cup and the League Cup already in the Old Trafford trophy room and the Premier League title theirs to lose, this win left United two victories away from winning the FA Cup for the twelfth time.

And before they resume league action against Liverpool next weekend, they face Inter Milan in Manchester with a place in the Champions League

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AFP, Paris

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