



CHAMPIONS: (L) Barcelona fans gather at the city's famous Ramblas with flags and memorabilia to celebrate their first Primera Liga triumph in two years yesterday. Barcelona won as Real Madrid crashed to Villareal on Saturday. (R) In the famous city of Milan the Inter faithful are comparatively muted in celebration as their third Serie A title in three years came courtesy of city-rivals AC Milan's loss to Udinese.

## Beauty wins in Spain

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona were crowned Spanish champions for the 19th time on Saturday as holders Real Madrid gifted the title to their bitter rivals after a 3-2 defeat at Villarreal.

Real knew anything other than a win would see Barcelona lift the title but Juande Ramos's side crashed to a third straight loss to hand the title to Barcelona.

"Our arch rivals are champions and we have to congratulate them," said Real defender Sergio Ramos.

Villarreal move level on points with Valencia following the Real win - courtesy of a late goal from Joan Capdevila - to keep up their Champions League charge.

Veteran French winger Robert Pires scored the 17th-minute opener with a rare header after Ariel Ibagaza had put in an enticing cross.

Real boss Ramos, who has admitted he is unlikely to be in charge next season, was visibly disappointed with the first half showing and Gonzalo Higuain replaced Klaas-Jan Huntelaar.

Higuain had an immediate impact setting up Rafael van der Vaart, a huge disappointment following a 13-million-euro switch from SVHamburg, for the equaliser a minute after the break.

Villarreal responded and Cani put the hosts back in front in the 63rd minute before Higuain equalised late on, although it looked suspiciously offside.

Capdevila was the hero scoring in the final minute after Real keeper Iker Casillas had dropped the ball.

Earlier third-placed Sevilla spurned a chance to secure a Champions League place following a 0-0 draw at Osasuna.

Sevilla needed a win to make sure of a place in Europe's premier competition but fired blanks to leave coach Manolo Jimenez disappointed.

"We wanted a victory and are not happy to come away with a point," said Jimenez. Osasuna continue to hover above the drop zone sitting fourth from bottom three points clear of the final relegation spot.

Their next game is a testing trip to Camp Nou to face newly-crowned champions Barcelona.

Elsewhere Saturday, Getafe rued a late equaliser in a 1-1 draw against Deportivo La Coruna at the Riazor Stadium.

Roberto Soldado put Getafe ahead in the first minute of the second half and the visitors looked set to move six points clear of the relegation places.

However, Riki levelled in the 85th minute as Depor salvaged a point.

La Coruna move two points off the top four although a UEFA Cup place looks the more realistic target.

## Xavi's best title ever

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona playmaker Xavi expressed his delight at winning the Spanish championship saying the 2009 title gave him more satisfaction than his previous three triumphs.

The 29-year-old Spanish international had won the title with Barca in 1999, 2005 and 2006 but the pain of watching Real Madrid win the past two seasons made the 2009 title taste all the sweeter.

"This is my fourth league title and it is the one I have enjoyed most," Xavi told local newspaper Sport. "We have played offensive, ambitious football and there is no doubt about the talent we have here."

"Football is incredible because you can never stop to think about what you have done. A year ago they pilloried us without mercy and now we are heroes."

Andres Iniesta said the 6-2 thrashing of Real Madrid in 'El Clasico' at the Santiago Bernabeu was his highlight of the season.

"For me the 6-2 at the Bernabeu is above all other records," Iniesta said. "We didn't win the league there but it was great for all of us."

"I have said all along that the league is an important competition. I don't know if it is as important as the Champions League but it is."

## PREMIERSHIP Boro in deep trouble

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United clinched their third consecutive Premier League title with a 0-0 draw against Arsenal on Saturday. The point gave United an unassailable seven-point lead over Liverpool at the top, with their rivals having just two games to go.

At the other end of the table, Hull City moved out of the relegation zone thanks to a 1-1 draw at Bolton, lifting them one point above Newcastle, who were beaten 1-0 at home by Fulham.

Middlesbrough are in desperate trouble after they could only draw 1-1 with Aston Villa, leaving them three points away from safety, but with an inferior goal difference to their rivals.

Hull gave their survival hopes a massive boost as they drew 1-1 at Bolton Wanderers, where Craig Fagan's second-half goal equalized Greter Steinsson's early opener.

The point could prove crucial for Phil Brown's side, who are now one point better off than ten-man Newcastle, who were beaten 1-0 at home by Fulham.

Diomansy Kamara scored what turned out to be the only goal of the game, while Newcastle had a Mark Viduka goal ruled out and Sebastian Bassong was sent off for a foul on Kamara.

"We are bitterly disappointed at the disallowed goal," said manager Steve Bruce.

## Inter's fourth on the trot

AFP, Rome



When Jose Mourinho arrived at Inter Milan amongst much pomp and fanfare in June last year he was set a definite target - win the Champions League.

Inter were on a run of three straight titles, in no small part thanks to the match-fixing punishment that sent Juventus down to Serie B, and two of their best players into Inter's colours.

Back then, in the summer of 2006, Inter were known as the country's perennial underachievers and chokers.

But they romped to the 2007 title more by default as points penalties dealt out to AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio had robbed Inter of any meaningful challengers.

For a team that had gone 17 years without a title the goodwill afforded Mourinho's predecessor Roberto Mancini for landing that first scudetto in a generation did not last long and despite guiding the nerazzurri to three Serie A crowns in a row, he was dismissed just days after the end of last season.

The official explanation given was Inter's continuing failure in Europe.

Reading between the lines, it was clear that Mourinho's brief was success in Europe as well as at home.

His minimal aim, of course, was to retain the title that Inter have now owned for four years in a row.

And while he will be given some credit for that, there is also the feeling that he has done nothing more than his predecessor.

Of course, it has been his

first season in Italy and his team had the misfortune of being drawn against holders Manchester United in the second round of the Champions League.

There is no shame in losing to United -- who have since gone on to reach a second straight final -- and the English team's strength was taken into consideration when judging the Italian league novice Mourinho.

But next season he will be playing by different rules.

His honeymoon period will

be over and he will be expected to deliver, for president Massimo Moratti is known to not be a patient man when it comes to coaches.

In the meantime, Mourinho has been everything the English had come to expect of him during just over three years in the Premier League.

His team started the season in efficient if unspectacular style, never drifting far from the Serie A summit and usually dominating it.

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## Figo to retire from football

INTERNET, undated

Portuguese legend Luis Figo has announced his retirement from football after Inter Milan were crowned Serie A champions.

AC Milan's defeat by Udinese on Saturday evening gifted their city rivals the title ahead of Inter's clash with Siena on Sunday.

The title success has prompted Figo to confirm that he will stop playing top-level football at the end of the season.

"This is the first time I have celebrated before playing," Figo told A Bola. "This is the best way to end."

The 36-year-old had appeared close to retirement 12 months ago after falling out with former coach Roberto Mancini at the Giuseppe Meazza.

However, the appointment of compatriot Jose Mourinho saw Figo agree to stay for another season and he has been involved on a regular basis.

Reports have linked the former Barcelona and Real Madrid schemer with a move to Major League Soccer, but Figo suggests it is unlikely he will head to the United States.

He added: "I will not play again at the highest level and I will most likely not accept any offer."

"Only if something special emerges, and it is from outside of Europe, but it is not likely."

Figo started his career with Sporting Lisbon in 1989 before moving to Barcelona in 1995 and then on to arch-rivals Real Madrid for a world record fee five years later.

He signed for Inter in 2005 and has won a string of major titles during a career which saw him win 127 caps for Portugal in addition to being named the European Footballer of the Year in 2000 and the World Player of the Year 12 months later.

## Milan lose, Roma win

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan won a fourth straight Serie A title on Saturday despite not playing when nearest challengers AC Milan lost 2-1 at Udinese.

Second-placed Milan trail Inter, who host Siena on Sunday, by seven points but the Rossonero have only two matches left to play.

Milan went into the game in Udine knowing that they had to get a result to stop their bitter city rivals claiming the title, but they put in one of their worst performances of the season in what could be one of coach Carlo Ancelotti's final matches in charge with rumours growing that he will join Chelsea next season.

The coach was magnanimous in defeat but was clearly unhappy with his players.

"Did Inter deserve the title? I think they've been the most consistent team and hence they deserved to win," he said.

"Tonight I wasn't expecting us to play as we did. We never turned up."

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## Wolves nearly home

AFP, Berlin



Germany striker Lukas Podolski admits only a miracle can now stop Wolfsburg winning the Bundesliga title after defending champions Bayern Munich slipped to a 2-2 draw against Hoffenheim.

While Bayern were held, Wolfsburg hammered Hanover 5-0 with three goals from striker Edin Dzeko and two from Brazilian Grafite which put the league leaders two points clear at the top of the table with just one game to play.

Second-placed Bayern face title rivals Stuttgart at Munich's Allianz Arena next Saturday with both sides on 64

points and mathematically able to claim top spot if Wolfsburg slip.

Podolski says Bayern have to hope Werder Bremen can beat Wolfsburg on Saturday to give his side a fighting chance of winning a consecutive title.

"Now we have to win our last game, and who knows, maybe there'll be a miracle and Wolfsburg will slip up," said Podolski. "Whatever, if we win, we're sure of second place."

After Frank Ribery put Bayern 1-0 up at Hoffenheim after 16 minutes on Saturday, the home side hit back through striker Demba Ba on 21 minutes.

Hoffenheim took the lead through Carlos Eduardo eight minutes later before Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni levelled for Bayern on the stroke of half-time to share the

points. "We were a goal up and could have made it two or three, but then we let in two silly goals in the space of seven minutes," complained Podolski.

"That made it much harder for us, now we need the miracle."

Stuttgart have won eight and drawn one of their last nine games leaving Bayern defender Philipp Lahm to admit they face an uphill task against Markus Babel's side.

"We have to beat Stuttgart at home, and that's a big ask because Stuttgart are on a roll," said the Germany star.

Thanks to their rout of Hanover, Wolfsburg, who have topped the table since April 4, are now in pole-position to win their first Bundesliga title.

"This was a step in the right

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## 'Greatest season for Barca'

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta paid tribute to coach Pep Guardiola after guiding the club to a league and cup double and said it would be the greatest season in the club's history if they could beat Manchester United in the Champions League final on May 27.

Real Madrid's 3-2 defeat at the hands of Villarreal on Saturday night saw Barcelona crowned champions for the 19th time and they now have the chance to become the first Spanish side to ever win the treble.

"Football speaking this is one of the best seasons in the history of Barcelona when you consider the way we played and the titles won," Laporta told Barca TV. "It could be the



Wolfsburg striker Edin Dzeko is delighted after scoring the first of his three goals against lowly Hanover 96 in their Bundesliga encounter at Hanover on Saturday.

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