



Inter Milan striker Samuel Eto'o is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Parma during their Serie A encounter at San Siro on Sunday.

Strike pair fires Inter

AFP, Rome



New Inter Milan strike pairing Samuel Eto'o and Diego Milito scored the goals as the Italian champions beat Parma 2-0 at the San Siro on Sunday to move up to fourth in Serie A.

Eto'o and Milito were bought by coach Jose Mourinho to replace Zlatan Ibrahimovic and they repaid the Portuguese's faith by scoring their second goals in three matches.

It leaves Inter in excellent shape ahead of Wednesday's Champions League visit of Barcelona and Ibrahimovic.

Mourinho was satisfied with what he saw.

"That was a normal match. We didn't have enough intensity in the first half but we could have scored four or five goals," he said.

"Parma played really well and I was expecting that. But my team played to win and I like it that way."

But those two second half goals did not tell the true story of a game in which Inter toiled for long periods and was unconvincing in a stale first 45 minutes.

The only significant chance they fashioned in the opening half came on 11 minutes when another summer signing, Wesley Sneijder, forced Parma goalkeeper

Antonio Mirante into a fine save.

Mourinho was clearly unhappy with what he saw and he wasted little time in shaking things up, throwing on striker Mario Balotelli for midfielder Thiago Motta at half-time and switching from a 4-4-2 formation to 4-3-3.

That move almost paid instant dividends as Balotelli twice came close to giving the hosts the lead in the first five minutes of the second period.

Twice he found himself free at the back post barely eight yards out but he hit his first shot weakly along the ground and skied the second well clear of the crossbar.

The move, though, had changed the complexion of the game and Inter looked in control.

They survived a scare at the other end when Jonathan Biabiany skipped through their defence and clipped the ball past goalkeeper Julio Cesar only to see it run across the face of goal.

Inter got the breakthrough through their second half performance deserved when Eto'o curled a delightful shot from just outside the box over Mirante on 71 minutes.

The clincher came two minutes from time when a long ball from out wide by Balotelli found Milito unmarked in the area. The Argentine took a touch and poked the ball beyond Mirante's despairing dive in one movement before the defence could recover.

Balotelli ended his eventful afternoon

in embarrassing fashion when he found himself clean through in injury time only to try to over-complicate matters -- as he tried to round Mirante, the goalkeeper easily plucked the ball off his toes.

Claudio Ranieri began his AS Roma career with a come-from-behind 2-1 victory at 10-man Siena thanks to a late free-kick from substitute John Arne Riise.

But the former Chelsea, Juventus and Valencia boss said there was still room for improvement.

"Our initial attitude wasn't good enough. We have to do a lot of work on the team's mentality," he said. "They can't play as open as this because we're vulnerable on the counter-attack."

Genoa went top of the table after a 4-1 win over Napoli in a game in which both teams had a player sent off in the first half.

Former Argentina striker Hernan Crespo scored his first goal for Genoa, who also had two penalties during a controversial match.

Juventus are second following their 2-0 win at Lazio on Saturday while Sampdoria joined the top two on three wins out of three after Daniele Mannini scored the winner in a 1-0 success at Atalanta.

The comeback of the day went to Udinese and their striker Antonio Di Natale who scored a second-half hat-trick as the hosts overturned a 2-1 half-time deficit to beat Catania 4-2.

Magnificent seven in action

AFP, Paris



Manchester United are among the European giants taking their first major step towards the chance of Champions League glory at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in 2010 when the much-awaited group stages kick-off this week.

With no less than seven former winners in action on Tuesday's mouth watering eight-match menu, the English champions, who were outclassed 2-0 by Barcelona in the 2009 final, are odds-on to register their first win in Group B against Besiktas in Istanbul.

Premier League rivals Chelsea are on superb domestic form but despite home advantage will be wary of 2004 champions FC Porto in a match that Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho, formerly in charge of both teams, may be watching closely.

Former France captain Didier Deschamps is hoping his tactical nous pays off when his Marseille side host seven-time champions AC Milan while Juventus, winners back in 1996, host French champions Bordeaux.

Real Madrid, the record

nine-times winners, are set to unleash record signing Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema on the far more modest FC Zurich in Switzerland in a bid to take control of Group C.

Elsewhere, Maccabi Haifa host Bayern Munich in northern Israel, faltering German champions Wolfsburg are at home against CSKA Moscow and Atletico Madrid host Cypriot side Apoel.

With Wolfsburg, Moscow and Besiktas to contend with United are expected to finish among the top two before Christmas and qualify for February's first knockout round.

And despite United's infamous European Cup exit to Galatasaray in 1994, and a defeat at Fenerbahce in 2004, Sir Alex Ferguson is already looking forward to avenging last season's defeat to Barcelona.

"I would love the chance to redress the situation with Barcelona. Absolutely. I would love another final with them," Ferguson said.

"You don't like losing finals of European games. It was the first one I have lost so it was really disappointing for everyone."

As United do battle in Besiktas's Inonu stadium, Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti

will watch his much-vaunted midfield diamond at Stamford Bridge.

Ancelotti indicated that injured playmaker Deco could be back for the visit of Porto but the Italian, who led AC Milan to their last two Champions League triumphs in 2003 and 2007, said facing Porto after a win, and with confidence flying, is paramount.

"A victory is always welcome and this is a very important period for us as we now have the Champions League ahead," said Ancelotti after Chelsea took the lead of the Premier League on Saturday.

"To be top of the league is very important. We have good confidence in our play and a very good atmosphere in the dressing room."

Bayern Munich have made

amends for their mediocre start to the Bundesliga season with a 5-1 hammering of Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

But the Germans will be wary of a Maccabi Haifa team that famously beat Manchester United 3-0 at home on their group phase debut in 2002-2003.

Featuring Milan, Real Madrid and Marseille, as well as minnows Zurich, Group C is arguably the toughest in this year's competition and while Milan and Real are odds-on to qualify Marseille, too, fancy their chances.

Deschamps was part of the side that overcame Milan 1-0 to win what was then the Champions Cup in 1993, and the former Juventus and Chelsea midfielder has told their players they must raise their game for Tuesday.

"Simply being in the Champions League means we have to demand more. I want all my players to lift their game for this competition," said Deschamps.

Milan suffered more Serie A misery on Saturday after being held 0-0 at promoted Livorno but Juventus, who lost to Chelsea in the first knockout round last season, host Bordeaux with confidence flying after winning all three of their domestic fixtures.

FIXTURES

Tuesday

Juventus (ITA) v Bordeaux (FRA), Maccabi Haifa (ISR) v Bayern Munich (GER), VfL Wolfsburg (GER) v CSKA Moscow (RUS), Besiktas (TUR) v Manchester United (ENG), FC Zurich (SUI) v Real Madrid (ESP), Marseille (FRA) v AC Milan (ITA), Chelsea (ENG) v FC Porto (POR), Atletico Madrid (ESP) v Apoel (CYP)

Into the unknown

INTERNET, Madrid



Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Sevilla are working around the clock to find out something useful about their first Champions League opponents.

Atletico are at home on Tuesday to Apoel Nicosia and Real are in Switzerland at Zurich.

On Wednesday, Sevilla take on another team of debutants, Romanian side Unirea Urziceni.

Zurich are better known than Apoel and Unirea, which gives Atletico and Sevilla the hardest time to find out about their mysterious opponents.

Atletico coach Abel Resino admitted that "we do not really know very much" about Apoel. He said that he had seen a couple of videos of their preliminary round heroics, but "very little else."

"They must be a good team," he concluded, "to have got this far... We shall treat them with respect."

Anything less than a convincing win on Tuesday will bring the wrath of the Estadio Calderon down on Resino and his players, who have made a poor start in La Liga, picking up just one point from their first

two matches.

Prior to Saturday's 1-1 draw at home to Racing Santander there was a noisy fans' demonstration against club owners Enrique Cerezo and Miguel Angel Gil Marin, partly because of their failure to sign any big-name new players this summer.

This is the second successive season that Atletico have reached the group stage of the Champions League, but there is much more anger than satisfaction in evidence at the Estadio Calderon these days.

The long-suffering Atletico fans had to suffer this summer as profligate neighbours Real Madrid went on a record 256 million euro (373.14 million dollars) spending spree, whilst Cerezo and Gil Marin actually raked in more from player sales than they spent in purchases.

Last season Atletico reached the round of 16, where they were edged out by FC Porto. Porto are one of their opponents in Group D, along with Chelsea and Apoel.

Sevilla, meanwhile, have been struggling to get information about Unirea Urziceni, their first Group G rivals.

Unirea surprisingly won the Romanian championship last season, just three years after being promoted to the top flight.

When asked on Sunday, Sevilla striker

Luis Fabiano was unable to name a single Unirea player. The in-form Brazilian, however, said that "just because we do not know much about them we should not think it will be an easy game."

Luis Fabiano scored twice in Saturday's 4-1 destruction of Zaragoza.

Sevilla's only absentee on Wednesday will be defender Ivica Dragutinovic, who has a heavy cold.

This will be only the second campaign in the Champions League for Sevilla, who won the UEFA Cup in 2006 and 2007. Two years ago they made their Champions League debut and reached the round of 16, where they were eliminated by Turkish giants Fenerbahce.

Real's opponents Zurich are not quite as exotic, but Cristiano Ronaldo and company are also under the biggest pressure to do well.

Real must confirm their record-breaking summer spending spree in an event they have not won since 2002. Even more important, the final on May 22, 2010, takes place in their home stadium.

"The ambition is to win the Champions League. On top of that, you have the possibility of us being at home - and it would be fantastic to play the final at the Bernabeu," Brazilian midfielder Kaka told the UEFA website.

IN BRIEF

Stan Chart to sponsor L'pool

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool announced on Monday that they have agreed the largest sponsorship deal in their history, after signing a four-year agreement with Standard Chartered Bank. It is believed the deal is worth 80 million pounds (132.6 million dollars).

The bank will become the club's main sponsor from next season onwards, replacing Carlsberg who the club's shirt sponsor for 17 years.

"This partnership brings together two highly successful organisations with a really strong cultural and strategic fit," said the club's managing director Christian Purlow.

"The sponsorship opportunity attracted a huge level of interest from a wide array of globally recognised brands and in Standard Chartered we believe we have the ideal partner to move forward and help develop our global ambitions for the club.

"It is a real sign of the progress we have made at Liverpool that we have been able to secure the largest ever commercial deal in our history."

Diego out for a week

AFP, Rome

Brazilian playmaker Diego will be on the sidelines for only a week after injuring his thigh, his Italian club Juventus said on Monday.

Diego was stretched off the field during the first half of Saturday's 2-0 win at Lazio and an initial diagnosis had suggested he may miss two weeks.

But Juventus said there was no tear in the muscle and that he would need only seven days of treatment before being ready to rejoin the team.

It means he will miss the visit of Bordeaux in the Champions League on Tuesday but should be fit for the home match against Livorno on Saturday.

Capello targets WC final

AFP, London

Fabio Capello has told his England stars that reaching the World Cup final is the least he expects from them in South Africa next year.

Capello's side booked their place at the 2010 World Cup with a 5-1 demolition of Croatia at Wembley in midweek.

That victory maintained England's 100 percent record in the qualifying stages and raised the possibility of completing the campaign with a perfect 10 wins from 10 matches.

Such a successful run has boosted Capello's belief that England are failed to make a major impact on the tournament they won for the only time in 1966.

England have often fallen at the quarter-final stage of international competitions in the last 20 years, but Capello is eyeing a place in the final at Soccer City on July 11.

"Playing in the final would be success," he said. "For now, playing in it will do, rather than winning it. But if people are asking me what my aspiration is, then it is to reach the final."

Hamburg stay top

AFP, Berlin



Schalke 04 are up to third in the Bundesliga after Peru's Jefferson Farfan and Georgia's Levan Kobiashvili scored in the 2-1 win over Cologne on Sunday, while Hamburg stay top of the league.

Farfan headed Schalke into the lead after just two minutes, but Cologne, who are still chasing their first win of the season since promotion, equalised when Lukas Podolski scored his first league goal since returning from Bayern Munich.

But Schalke took the three points when Kobiashvili scored for the Royal Blues immediately after the break to pick up their fifth win in seven games, while Cologne are bottom with just a point.

Werder Bremen were held to a 0-0 draw at home to midtable Hannover to leave them sixth.

Both striker Claudio Pizarro and midfielder Mesut Ozil had their chances to score for Bremen, but Hannover's defence held firm to share the points.

On Saturday, Hamburg striker Mladen Petric hit a wonder goal to fire his side back to the top as Stuttgart were beaten 3-1.

The Croatian star took a neat return pass from Dutch midfielder Eljero Elia and drilled his shot past Stuttgart goalkeeper Jens Lehmann from outside the penalty area on 30 minutes as

Hamburg dominated the match.

Elia - whose goal eliminated Scotland from making the runners-up spot in their World Cup qualifying group earlier this week - then netted a goal of his own on 58 minutes.

But Stuttgart threatened to force their way back into the game when Russia striker Pavel Pogrebnyak one back on 62 minutes.

Hamburg's former Bayern Munich midfielder Ze Roberto put the matter beyond doubt in injury time when he fired home to give his side their fourth straight league win.

Germany team-mates Bastian Schweinsteiger and Mario Gomez both scored as Bayern Munich moved up to fifth in the Bundesliga after a 5-1 win at Borussia Dortmund.

Defending champions Wolfsburg are facing something of a crisis after they were beaten 3-2 by Bayer Leverkusen having had goalkeeper Diego Benaglio sent-off.

This was Wolfsburg's third consecutive defeat after falling to Hamburg and Bayern in the last two rounds and drops them down to tenth.

Eintracht Frankfurt are up to fourth thanks to their 2-0 win over Freiburg.

Hoffenheim, the surprise package of last season, enjoyed a 3-0 win at home to Bochum, while Mainz picked up another win after shocking Hertha Berlin 2-1 at home.

Mainz shocked Bayern earlier in the season and their Burkino Faso striker Aristide Bance, who scored in the 2-1 win over Munich, hit the winner in the 85th minute.

Valencia join top two

AFP, Madrid



After playing a pivotal role in Spain's qualification for the World Cup, David Villa, David Silva and Juan Mata were all on target in a 4-2 win at Valladolid on Sunday as Valencia joined Barcelona and Real Madrid on a maximum six points.

Cash-strapped Valencia managed to hold onto the trio in the summer and they tore Valladolid apart with four goals in less than an hour.

Silva opened the scoring with a 10th minute header from Mata cross before a mistake from Valencia goalkeeper Miguel Moya helped Valladolid equalise.

However, Spanish international Villa bagged a brace (34min, 55min) with Mata also on target.

Valencia should have scored more with Villa hitting the bar and substitute Jordi Alba missing a sitter to score his first ever goal for the club.

"We know we have a lot of ability going forward," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

"Now we have to try and give our opponents less goal-scoring chances but still keep our potency in front of goal."

Last season's Kings Cup finalists Athletic Bilbao also have a perfect six points after beating 10-man Xerez 1-0 to move up to fourth.

Promoted Xerez have yet to collect their first point in what is their first ever season in the Spanish top-flight and sit second from bottom.

New Villarreal coach Ernesto Valverde is still waiting for his first win in charge after his side

drew 1-1 at home to Real Mallorca.

Italian international forward Giuseppe Rossi put Villarreal ahead on 54 minutes but Borja Valero, on loan from West Bromwich Albion, equalised with a 75th minute free-kick.

It was the second successive game that Villarreal had scored first only to be pegged back and two 1-1 draws are not the start Valverde wanted.

"These are the type of games that leave a bad after taste in the mouth," said Valverde.

"We had one hand on victory and then let it slip. It is two more points dropped."

Mallorca, who finished last season like an express train, climb into fifth with four points from six.

Malaga drop down to sixth after a late 1-0 defeat at Deportivo La Coruna.

Brazilian left-back Filipe Luis, courted by Barcelona in the summer, scored the decisive goal nine minutes from time with a 25-yard scorcher.

"It was a great goal from distance and now we are wishing he had gone to Barcelona," joked Malaga coach Juan Ramon Muniz.

In other matches, promoted islanders Tenerife won their first game in the top flight for seven years with a 2-1 triumph over nine-man Osasuna.

Osasuna, another team expected to be in the relegation dogfight, pulled level at 1-1 but had to play close to half of the match with ten men after having Nacho Monreal sent off.

Ricardo Brito scored the Tenerife winner on 63 minutes and Osasuna had another player dismissed when Javad Nekounam got a straight red for violent conduct.

Monaco take down PSG

AFP, Paris



Guy Lacombe's resurgent Monaco side threw a spanner into Paris Saint Germain's drive for league honours this season with a dramatic 2-0 win in the Principality on Sunday.

South Korean Chu Young Park opened the scoring with a fine solo effort in the 85th minute and Brazilian midfielder Nene added a second barely three minutes later as PSG went into meltdown and finished the match a man down.

In a lively first half for both sides Ludovic Giuly first came closest to opening the score for the visitors when he headed Ceara's cross and forced Stephane Ruffier into a great diving save.

Six minutes later, on 22 minutes, Jeremy Clement ran on to a loose ball at the edge of the Monaco area and unleashed a fierce drive that had Ruffier scrambling to save.

Djimi Traore then tested Monaco keeper Gregory Coupet with a rebound

following a corner, and then Park saw his low drive from all of 25 metres saved by the PSG keeper on 26 minutes.

Nene then almost found himself with the perfect chance to put the hosts ahead when a lob totally found the PSG defence napping but Coupet anticipated well to come out and grab the ball to safety.

Monaco dominated for the remainder of the first half but after the interval both sides failed to produce the same fireworks and it took until the 68th minute for a sniff of a goal to emerge.

Peguy Luyindula sprung a counter-attack and carried the ball deep into Monaco territory where defender Cedric Mongongu's superb tackle dispossessed the PSG forward.

Barely seven minutes later the match was temporarily halted by the referee following the throwing of flares on to the pitch by fans, resuming a few minutes later and going on to become even more dramatic.

Park, launched by Alonso on a threatening counter-attack, then rounded Traore before unleashing a low angled drive that

beat Coupet in the PSG goal.

Luyindula missed a great chance to level a minute later when his header from Christophe Jallet's cross just shaved Ruffier's goalpost.

But Monaco virtually ended the match in the 88th minute when Alonso turned provider again, this time for Nene who beat Coupet with a great left-footed long range strike.

Sessegnon then saw red for a vicious lunge on Adriano, the referee immediately sending the PSG midfielder off.

The result means PSG remain fifth on 10 points from five games with Monaco two places further adrift on nine points.

Leaders Bordeaux, on 13 points, lead former seven-times winners Lyon on goal difference after their 1-0 win over Grenoble on Saturday.

Earlier Sunday struggling Auxerre grabbed their first win of the new campaign thanks a 2-0 home win against Nice that moved them up two places from 19th and second last to 17th.

Rennes beat Saint Etienne 1-0 to secure sixth place in the league.



Valencia striker David Villa celebrates his goal against Valladolid during their Primera Liga clash at the Jose Zorrilla Stadium on Sunday.