



Barcelona midfielder Seydou Keita celebrates one of his three goals against Zaragoza during their Primera Liga encounter at Nou Camp on Sunday.

# Barca back to their best

AFP, Madrid



Mali international Seydou Keita scored a first ever hat-trick as champions Barcelona got back to their best, crushing Real Zaragoza 6-1 at Camp Nou on Sunday to move three points clear of Real Madrid at the top of the table.

Barca had experienced a blip with a Champions League home defeat to Rubin Kazan in midweek but responded with a football masterclass to punish Real's 0-0 draw at Sporting Gijon on Saturday.

Keita scored a memorable hat-trick (24 min, 41, 86) to take his season's tally to five while Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice and also had two goals ruled out for offside.

Ibrahimovic joins Valencia's David Villa at the top of the scoring charts on seven goals while Lionel Messi has six goals after scoring a fine chip.

Barca were three goals up after a destructive first half but that was not enough as they tore Zaragoza to shreds in the second half and it could have been double figures.

On 24 minutes Barca made the breakthrough with Messi showing quick thinking from a corner to clip a ball in and Keita got in front of his man to score with a diving header.

Five minutes later Ibrahimovic thundered in a ferocious free-kick from 25

yards although goalkeeper Juan Carrizo will be disappointed.

Barca scored a third on 41 minutes with Xavi producing a sublime pass to release Ibrahimovic and the Swede crossed for Keita to smash home his fourth goal of the season crashing into the back of the net as he did so.

In a spot of role reversal Keita turned provider for Ibrahimovic zipping in a low cross which the Swede deftly flicked in off his boot on 56 minutes.

Messi produced a cheeky chip in the 80th minute and Keita completed his hat-trick four minutes from time as Zaragoza prayed for the final whistle.

Earlier Spanish international Villa returned with a bang scoring his seventh goal of the season as Valencia defeated 10-man Almeria 3-0 on Sunday to move into the top four.

Villa missed the 0-0 draw with Barcelona due to a thigh injury but started against Almeria and headed in on 54 minutes before Pablo Hernandez scored a sensational 35 yard chip and Juan Mata completed the scoring.

Almeria's cause was not helped by the dismissal of goalkeeper Diego Alves after an hour for fouling Pablo.

Valencia supplant Deportivo La Coruna in fourth on goal difference with Sevilla just a point ahead in third.

"This was an important game for and three points that could make the difference between Champions League foot-

ball at the end of the season," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

Depor saw a four-game winning run come to an end in emphatic fashion, crashing to a 4-0 defeat at Valladolid.

"Nobody in the dressing room is talking about the Champions League," insisted Depor coach Miguel Lotina.

Earlier Villarreal finally recorded their first win of the season with a first goal from Brazilian club record signing Nilmar and a free-kick from Spanish international Joan Capdevilla sealing a much-needed 2-1 home win over Malaga on Sunday.

"Perhaps we sat a bit too far back but the points were too important and we couldn't slip up," said coach Ernesto Valverde. "It was our first win and you always hope a good run can start from here."

It was Valverde's first league win since taking over in the summer and lifts the club off the foot of the table with Malaga replacing them.

Nilmar arrived at Villarreal with a big reputation and his 11-million-euro fee made him the most expensive player in the club's history.

It had been a slow start for the Brazilian forward but in the 27th minute he got his first goal in Villarreal's colours.

Malaga responded close to half-time through Albert Luque but Capdevilla's free-kick on 54 minutes restored Villarreal's lead and for once they held on.

# Swine flu strikes France

AFP, Paris



Toulouse bounced back from Europa League disappointment to beat struggling Lens 2-0 on Sunday, while fellow European representatives Lille fell to a 3-2 defeat at in-form Auxerre.

Marseille's hotly anticipated game at home to fierce rivals Paris Saint-Germain was postponed, however, after three players from the capital club contracted swine flu.

Defender Mamadou Sakho and midfielders Ludovic Giuly and Jeremy Clement have all been confirmed as having the H1N1 virus, with the rest of the squad and management confined to quarantine for a period of 72 hours.

It was the first time a top-flight match in France had been called off due to the virus.

"After further examining the health situation among the Paris Saint-Germain squad on Sunday morning, our committee of medical experts issued us with a

recommendation to postpone the match with Marseille and to place the PSG players and staff in quarantine for the next 72 hours," the French Professional League (LFP) said in a statement.

"We have taken this position in order to avoid any possibility of contagion, including that of the players in the opposing team. A new date for the match will be decided later."

Around 2,000 PSG fans had already travelled south for the match, with Marseille police forced to disperse hundreds of supporters from both sides after violent clashes in the city centre.

Lille had produced a superb performance to beat Italian side Genoa 3-0 in the Europa League on Thursday, but their eight-game unbeaten run in all competitions came to an end at Auxerre.

Ivorian summer signing Gervinho sweetly half-volleyed Lille into a 26th-minute lead before Polish striker Irenusz Jelen, last season's top scorer, equalised from close range 10 minutes later.

Pierre-Alain Frau swiftly restored the away side's advantage but with 12 min-

utes remaining Jelen claimed his second, before Daniel Niculae rose to head in an 81st-minute winner that earned Jean Fernandez's side a fourth straight league victory and lifted them up to seventh.

Toulouse, fourth in Ligue 1 last season, sank to a comprehensive 4-0 defeat at defending champions Shakhtar Donetsk in mid-week but they bounced back to win 2-0 at second-bottom Lens.

The visitors' French internationals Moussa Sissoko and Andre-Pierre Gignac secured the points, with midfielder Sissoko tapping home in the 35th minute after Franck Tabanou's shot had hit the crossbar and Gignac claiming a well-taken second 11 minutes into the second half.

"I wasn't worried," said Toulouse coach Alain Casanova after seeing his side return to winning ways following their European embarrassment.

"The Europa League is a different competition. You have to realise that we came up against a team (Shakhtar) that was just too strong. And we played a non-match ourselves. I knew the boys were going to react."

# Kevin denies Hamburg

AFP, Berlin



Ex-Germany striker Kevin Kuranyi headed a last-minute goal to seal the 3-3 draw which denied 10-man Hamburg the chance to go top of the Bundesliga on Sunday.

Kuranyi 90th-minute header sealed his side's fight back from 2-0 down after Hamburg's striker Markus Berg had put his side 3-2 up on 80 minutes despite the dismissal of defender David Rozehnal with an hour gone.

"For the fans, it must have been a great game, a feast of football, but for us it was very disappointing," said Hamburg captain Piotr Trochowski.

"We fought back with ten men to go 3-2 up, so to concede the equaliser right at the end was very hard to take."

The draw in Schalke keeps Hamburg second in the table behind leaders Leverkusen who drew 1-1 with Borussia Dortmund on Friday.

Hamburg opened the scoring when Berg slotted home from eight metres out after midfielder Eljero Elia darted down the flanks and into the penalty area before squaring and the Swede drilled his shot home.

And Trochowski launched his free-kick from almost 30 metres out to extend the guests' lead.

But Schalke fought back through Kuranyi's 50th-minute goal and when Hamburg's David Rozehnal then brought the striker down when

he was through on goal, the Czech defender was shown a straight red on 60 minutes.

Midfielder Lukas Schmitz headed home from the resulting free-kick to equalise on 62 minutes for Schalke to level the scores.

But Berg hit his second of the game when midfielder Ze Roberto thread his pass through the Schalke defence and Berg smashed his shot home with ten minutes which looked to have fired Hamburg top before Kuranyi broke the guests' hearts.

And Werder Bremen are third after their 4-1 win over Bochum despite conceding the fastest goal of the season inside a minute as three touches saw Stanislav Sestak put his side ahead.

But Bremen fought back with goals from Aaron Hunt, Marko Marin, Tim Borowski and Mesut Ozil.

Earlier, Bundesliga bottom club Hertha Berlin earned their first league point since the opening day of the season when they held defending German champions Wolfsburg to a goalless draw at home.

Hertha had lost all eight league games since beating Hanover 1-0 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on August 8 and new coach Friedhelm Funkel picked up his first point in charge since replacing Lucien Favre, but his side are still four points from safety.

"That was a very important point for us," said Berlin captain Arne Friedrich.

"We are on the right path now, but we have to keep working and it was important to not concede any goals."

## IN BRIEF

### CSKA sack Ramos

AFP, Moscow

Russian champions CSKA Moscow have sacked Spanish coach Juande Ramos after just 42 days at the helm, the club's press service reported Monday.

Ramos replaced Brazilian legend Zico on September 10, but the side have struggled and are currently lying fifth in the Russian Premier League with 43 points, 10 points behind leaders Rubin Kazan with four matches remaining.

Saturday's 3-1 defeat at the hands of city rivals FC Moscow was the last straw for the Red Army side's management, who announced their decision to part company with the Spaniard.

Ramos' main task for this season was believed to have been reaching the play-off stages of the Champions League.

But after defeats at the hands of Group B rivals Manchester United and German champions Wolfsburg the mission looks all but over.

Ramos, who moved to CSKA from Real Madrid, will be replaced by Leonid Slutsky, the former coach of FC Moscow and Samara.

# Milan ride on Nesta brace

AFP, Rome



Centre-back Alessandro Nesta scored a late brace to salvage a victory for AC Milan away to plucky Chievo, who had looked for more than 80 minutes to be heading for a famous win.

But Nesta's late heroics completed a stunning week for Milan which began last weekend with a come-from-behind 2-1 success over AS Roma before their sizzling midweek 3-2 win at Real Madrid.

The defeat, secured with a deflected winner, was harsh luck on Chievo, and in particular goalkeeper Stefano Sorrentino, who had long held Milan at bay during a second half onslaught.

And despite Nesta's heroics, the victory owed as much to maligned Milan goalkeeper Dida, slated in midweek for a howler, but the true match-winner here for his stunning one-handed injury-time save from a point-blank Pablo Granocchio header, just moments before Nesta's last gasp winner.

Chievo were off to a great start, taking the lead on 7min as Milan's defence crumbled, allowing Andrea Mantovani to cross from the left with the ball finding an unmarked Giampiero Pinzi, who bundled home a bobbling shot from 14 yards out with Dida rooted to his line and no Milan defender within touching distance.

On the quarter hour Milan should have been level but Clarence Seedorf didn't get hold of his shot from 10 yards and Sorrentino gathered at the second attempt.

The hosts could have doubled their advantage just before the break as Sergio Pellissier found space at the back post but he volleyed high from Pinzi's pinpoint cross.

Milan came out for the second period transformed and only Sorrentino kept them out as Ronaldinho dicated the play.

On 48min he teed up Pato but the young striker's first touch was too heavy and allowed Sorrentino to come out and block before Andrea Pirlo lobbed the rebound well over the bar.

Six minutes later Ronaldinho fired a shot at goal from seven yards that Sorrentino beat away as Chievo's defence struggled to cope with the Brazilian star.

On the hour Pellissier had a great chance to settle the match but having got in behind the Milan backline he failed to control the ball and the chance went begging.

With a quarter hour left Seedorf was again foiled by Sorrentino, who palmed away his swift close range volley.

But Chievo's resistance finally crumbled nine minutes from time as Marco Borriello headed Pirlo's sublime left-foot cross onto the bar and Alessandro Nesta reacted quickest to nod home the loose ball.

Into injury time Dida made his miraculous save and straight up the other end,

Nesta got his head on a corner with the ball taking a wicked deflection to deceive Sorrentino, who surely did not deserve to finish on the losing side.

The win, their third in a row, moved Milan up to sixth.

Earlier, Juventus ended their four-match league run without a win by beating Siena 1-0 away.

Juve struggled to break down stubborn opponents but got their breakthrough on 72min when Amauri headed home a Diego free-kick.

Despite their struggles, coach Ciro Ferrara was happy with his team, even insisting that his cup was neither half full nor half empty.

"I see the cup full. This was a vital victory and a deserved one. I'm very satisfied both by the performance and the result," he said.

The win left Juve four points behind leaders Inter Milan following the champions' 2-1 home win over Catania on Saturday.

Juve are third with Sampdoria, who on Saturday thrashed Bologna 4-1 in Genoa, second, just two points behind Inter.

AS Roma crashed again as they lost 1-0 at home to 10-man Livorno, who until that victory were winless and rock bottom.

Goalkeeper Alfonso Di Luca was sent off on 64min but Francesco Tavano's 40th-minute goal proved enough to give new boss Serse Cosmi a winning start.

# Galaxy win West title

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham's Los Angeles Galaxy will have a home-field playoff edge all the way to the Major League Soccer final after winning the club's first Western Conference crown since 2002.

The Galaxy had failed to make the playoffs in the prior two seasons since the English star midfielder arrived in the US league in 2007, finishing with the worst record in MLS last season.

But Beckham, expected to return to AC Milan after the Galaxy's title quest concludes next month, was adamant that the job is not over despite the club's rise from the worst record in MLS last year to the West title.

"It's nice to be on top but we don't stop here," Beckham said. "There is still a lot of work to be done but I'm happy with the position we're in."

The MLS regular season concluded Sunday, a day after the Galaxy's 2-0 home victory over San Jose to finish 12-6 with 12 drawn for 48 points. They won the West crown on a head-to-head tie-breaker over the Houston Dynamo.

"We wanted to finish off on a high, especially in front of our fans and we did do that," Beckham said.

"It was important we won the game to be on top in our division. We've played better in games and we've passed the ball better in games but we won the game."

Houston's 3-2 victory Sunday over Chivas USA set the West playoff pairings, with the Galaxy to face city rival Chivas in the first playoff round.

The clubs share the same home stadium so Galaxy would play only one match away from the home pitch before the championship match if they get so far. The Chivas-Galaxy winner will meet Houston or Seattle for a berth in the MLS final.

Beckham scored two goals on 19 shots and set up three other Galaxy goals this season while playing in only 11 games. US star Landon Donovan led the Galaxy with 12 goals in 25 games.

The last time the Galaxy won the West title it was an omen of a first MLS playoff crown in 2002. The Galaxy also won the MLS Cup final in 2005 but have not made a playoff appearance since, falling upon hard times in recent years.

"How many people would even have thought we would be here?" Galaxy coach Bruce Arena said. "We're pleased to be at this point."

### Flores has high hopes

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's new coach Enrique Sanchez Flores said Monday he aims to see that the club, currently hovering over the relegation zone, qualifies for the Champions League this season.

"I believe in this club and the aim is to see to it that moral returns," he told a news conference.

"Atletico must qualify for the Champions League by the end of the season."

Flores signed a deal with Atletico on Friday which will see him through the end of the season, replacing Abel Resino who was sacked earlier in the day.

Former Spanish international "Quique" Flores, 44, has previously been in charge of Getafe and Valencia as well as Benfica where he coached for a season before leaving this year.

Atletico, which has won the Spanish league nine times, qualified for this year's Champions League by finishing fourth.



Milan's veteran defender Alessandro Nesta points to his teammates after scoring one of his two goals against Chievo during their Serie A clash at the Marassi stadium.