

# Messi steals the show

AFP, Madrid



Superstar Lionel Messi is on course for a record-breaking goal-scoring season following his sublime hat-trick in Barcelona's 3-0 win over Valencia on Sunday.

Argentine international Messi scored three brilliant goals to bamboozle third-placed Valencia and move him onto 22 goals for the season, three ahead of compatriot and Real Madrid forward Gonzalo Higuain at the top of the goalscoring charts.

Higuain also hit a hat-trick in Real Madrid's 4-1 win at Valladolid.

Messi opened the scoring

Villarreal 2 (Llorente 32, Escudero 90) Xerez 0
Tenerife 4 (Richi 20, Nino 49, 90, Alfaro 82) Espanyol 1 (Verdu 70)
Racing Santander 0 Real Zaragoza 0
Almeria 1 (Soriano 56)
Malaga 0
Barcelona 3 (Messi 56, 81, 82) Valencia 0
Valladolid 1 (Albiol 58-og)
Real Madrid 4 (Ronaldo 28, Higuain 45, 52, 65)

on 56 minutes dancing around three defenders with a mazy dribble at speed with cut-backs and body swerves before coolly finishing.

It was the pick of the goals but the other two were also impressive with a solo run and a left-footed curler on 81 minutes before another dribble and deft right-footed chip clinched his hat-trick a minute later.

Messi, still only 22, is now only one goal away from equalling his league best of 23 set last season and there are still 12 games to go.

"He (Messi) is the best player in the world but not a natural goalscorer. However, this year he has scored a lot and I hope he can continue doing so," team-mate Gerard Pique told the Barcelona official website.

"Everyone knows he would like the Golden Boot. But it is not something that he has to do. In the end he manages that then great.

"Messi is very important as everyone knows and we know that when he is playing well it is much easier to score goals and to win games."

Barca president Joan Laporta also paid tribute to Messi labelling him a down-to-earth genius.

"It is recognition for a player that is a genius but remains humble and respectful," said Laporta.

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PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona star Lionel Messi (R) scores one of his three goals past Valencia goalkeeper Cesar Sanchez during their Primera Liga encounter at Nou Camp on Sunday.

# Rooney fires MU to top

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney fired Manchester United back to the top of the Premier League as his double-strike inspired a 3-0 win over Fulham, while Adam Johnson's first Manchester City goal rescued a 1-1 draw at Sunderland on Sunday.

Sir Alex Ferguson's team had been knocked off top spot by Chelsea's victory against West Ham on Saturday, but Rooney struck 30 seconds after half-time at Old Trafford and added his 32nd goal of the season in the closing stages.

Dimitar Berbatov headed United's third goal in the last minute to ensure the champions moved two points clear of the Blues and third placed Arsenal.

Ferguson believes in-form Rooney should be able to surpass Cristiano Ronaldo's record of 42 goals in a season.

"I said a while ago it's impossible for a player to get 42 but he is on 32 and there is a challenge there for him,"

Ferguson told Sky Sports News.

"He is capable of scoring in the next eight league games and five possible European games, so he has 13 possible games and you never know, I wouldn't put it beyond him. I was just glad he got to the 30 mark, but we are enjoying his goalscoring."

"I think Fulham with their possession made us work hard and chase around a bit. It was hard to get the ball off them."

Man Utd 3 (Rooney 46, 84, Berbatov 89) Fulham 0  
Sunderland 1 (Jones 9) Man City 1 (Johnson 90)

They have experienced players who are comfortable on the ball.

"We had to try and increase the pace of the game and hurry them up a bit, but the most important thing about Rooney's first goal was it put their team on the back foot and gave us momentum."

United had lost 3-0 at Fulham earlier this season but Rooney, who has now scored 16 goals in his last 11 United

appearances, broke their resistance when he met Nani's cross with a first-time finish that flashed past Mark Schwarzer from 10 yards out.

England forward Rooney put the result beyond doubt when he swept in Berbatov's 84th minute cross.

Berbatov sealed the rout with a diving header from South Korea winger Park Ji-Sung's 89th minute cross.

At the Stadium of Light, City were hoping to keep pace with fourth-placed Tottenham in the race for the final Champions League spot.

Roberto Mancini's team suffered an early setback as Kenwyne Jones headed home Steed Malbranque's cross in the ninth minute.

City dominated the second half, with Carlos Tevez forcing Sunderland goalkeeper Craig Gordon to make a superb close-range save.

Gordon also denied Craig Bellamy twice but he could do nothing about former Middlesbrough winger Johnson's superb curling effort in stoppage time which moved City within two points of Tottenham.

## BUNDESLIGA Bayer back in hunt

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Stefan Kiessling scored twice on Sunday to put Bayer Leverkusen back in the title race and seal a 4-2 win over Hamburg while Bayern Munich stayed top of the Bundesliga.

Kiessling's double makes him the league's top-scorer with 16 goals for the season as he has now scored three goals in two games.

The Germany striker opened the scoring, then produced a powerful header after Swiss striker Eren Derdiyok also scored to put the hosts in control.

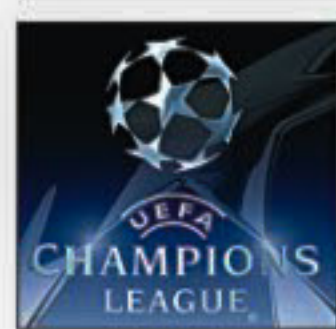
Hamburg fought back to 3-2 through goals by Brazil midfielder Ze Roberto and Czech Republic defender David Rozehnal before Leverkusen's Gonzalo Castro settled the tie with his side's fourth goal on 84 minutes.

Earlier, Werder Bremen moved a step closer to a European place for next season when their ex-Chelsea striker Claudio Pizarro scored a late goal to seal their 1-0 win at Hoffenheim.

## CHELSEA V INTER MILAN

# Mourinho targets revenge

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho returns to Chelsea with the ultimate revenge mission on his mind as Inter Milan attempt to knock his former club out of the Champions League.

Mourinho will be back at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday for the first time since being sacked in 2007 after losing a power struggle with Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich and his host of advisors.

The Inter boss, whose side have a slender 2-1 lead to protect from the first leg of this last 16 tie, has visited his old stamping ground on a scouting mission since his shock exit, but this is his first chance to inflict a significant wound

on the men that plotted to force him out.

Abramovich has made winning the Champions League the top priority for all the four managers who have led Chelsea since Mourinho's departure, but none have succeeded and the Inter boss could hardly be expected not to take extra pleasure from denying Abramovich his dream for another year.

Whatever the fractious nature of the relationship between Mourinho and his former employers, even Chelsea boss Carlo Ancelotti admits his counterpart is certain to be given a rapturous reception by the Stamford Bridge fans.

Mourinho has already acknowledged it will be an emotional day but Inter striker Samuel Eto'o insists his manager is far too cool and calculating to let the occasion distract

him from the task at hand.

"Mourinho going back to Chelsea is a big thing for him but he is very professional and will be prepared for the situation," Eto'o said.

"Chelsea are the favourites and the pressure is on them. Every minute that passes without a goal on Tuesday will add to that pressure. They will feel the tension."

The Match will be shown live on SuperSport3 at 1:45 am

"We will attack them from the start and if we win this game then I believe we will go on to win the Champions League."

Mourinho infuriated former AC Milan boss Ancelotti with a series of barbs during their short time as competitors in Italy, but the Chelsea boss refuses to turn the tie into

a personality clash.

"There is no problem with Mourinho. It's a game between Chelsea and Inter, not me against Mourinho," Ancelotti said.

"We know it will be a difficult game against an excellent team, but I think we have a good possibility to do our best to win and go forward. The atmosphere is a good atmosphere to have before a game against Inter."

"I think we don't have time to be worried. We have to stay concentrated, have confidence, have courage, have personality, only with this can we win the game."

"I'm excited because it's a fantastic game. All the world will look at this game and this is a very good motivation for me. It is my favourite competition. For Chelsea it is important, but so is the championship."

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PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United star Wayne Rooney celebrates his second goal against Fulham during their Premier League clash at Old Trafford on Sunday.

## IN BRIEF

### Hull sack Brown

AFP, Hull

English Premier League strugglers Hull announced Monday they have relieved manager Phil Brown of his duties with immediate effect and placed him on gardening leave.

Saturday's 2-1 loss at home to Arsenal left Hull second bottom of the table, three points from safety.

A statement on Hull's website said coaches Brian Horton and Steve Parkin would take charge of the first team until further notice, with the duo's first match since succeeding Brown away to tailenders Portsmouth on Saturday.

Brown still remains under contract with Hull but cannot work for another club.

### Minibus drivers protest in SA

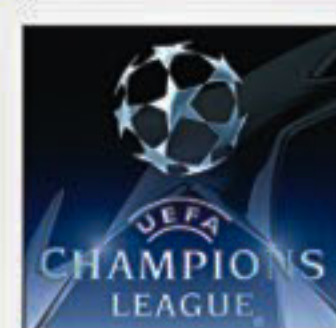
AFP, Johannesburg

Private minibus drivers barricaded Soweto with burnt tyres on Monday to protest a new public transport system being introduced in Johannesburg ahead of the football World Cup, police said.

"There is a protest of taxi drivers against BRT (Bus Rapid Transit). The situation is a little bit tense," police spokeswoman Edna Mamonyane told AFP.

"(The taxis) don't want any bus leaving Soweto," she said. "Early this morning they burnt tyres to block the roads."

AFP, Madrid



Sevilla can reach the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time on Tuesday if they defeat CSKA Moscow in the second leg of their last 16 tie after battling to a 1-1 draw in the opener.

Sevilla won back-to-back UEFA Cups in 2006 and 2007 but have never gone beyond the last 16 of the Champions League while this is the first time CSKA, 2005 UEFA Cup victors, have reached the knockout stage.

Sevilla can become the first Spanish side, with Real

Madrid already out and Barcelona playing VfB Stuttgart on Wednesday, to book their place among the last eight.

"We will go in Tuesday's match against CSKA with high hopes and will go for the victory without thinking about the result from the first leg," insisted Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez.

"We are involved in three competitions which we can be proud of. It takes its toll but we want to do well on Tuesday (against CSKA), be in the Champions League next season and win the (Kings) Cup."

Sevilla drew 1-1 at home to Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday to stay fourth in the

table but Jimenez called for his team to start killing teams off.

"We have to be more clinical in front of goal," explained Jimenez. "We have three magnificent strikers in (Luis) Fabiano, (Frederic) Kanoute and (Alvaro) Negredo but they haven't been able to hit top

The Match will be shown live on SuperSport7 at 1:45 am

form at the same time mainly due to injuries.

Kanoute, Fabiano and Negredo, who scored the goal in the first leg in Moscow, are all fit to play giving Jimenez a tough decision to make.

French defender Julien

Escude believes Sevilla have been unfairly criticised for recent displays and said the club was due some luck.

"We have received a lot of criticism, but lately we have changed, and have more possession now in the centre of the pitch," said Escude. "We just need that bit of luck to make it work, which hopefully will arrive on Tuesday."

Sevilla can get through with a 0-0 draw while CSKA know they have to score to have any chance of reaching the last eight.

Sevilla were unbeaten at home in the group stage drawing with VfB Stuttgart and defeating FC Unirea Urziceni and Rangers.

# Becks injury clouds win

AFP, Rome



Clarence Seedorf's stoppage-time goal gave AC Milan a 1-0 win over

Chievo on Sunday which cut the gap on Inter Milan to just a point, but the win was overshadowed by a serious injury suffered by David Beckham.

Milan, who were eliminated from the Champions League by Manchester United in midweek and had seen experienced defender Alessandro Nesta ruled out for the season with a torn knee tendon, had been frustrated by a Chievo side.

But with time ticking down, Seedorf, who had replaced Andrea Pirlo in the 79th minute, unleashed a long-

distance drive to secure the crucial win which cut the deficit on Inter who had slumped to a shock 3-1 defeat at Catania on Friday.

Milan's joy was tempered, however, when England midfielder Beckham limped off with three minutes left at the San Siro.

Juventus squandered a great opportunity to move into the Serie A top four when they were held 3-3 at Siena having roared into a 3-0 lead after just 10 minutes.

Juve stay in fifth place but were left to rue surrendering their early advantage after Alessandro Del Piero (2, 7min) and Antonio Candreva (10) had stunned Siena.

Massimo Maccaroni pulled one back after 16 minutes before Abdel Kader Ghezzal cut the deficit just

Lazio 0 Bari 2 (Almiron 51, Alvarez 64)

Genoa 5 (Zapater 36-pen, Palacios 40, Sculli 43, Rossi 45, Milanetto 59) Cagliari 3 (Dessena 17, Conti 41, Matri 55-pen)

Bologna 1 (Raggi 90+2) Sampdoria 1 (Gastaldello 87)

Udinese 3 (Floro Flores 44, 65, Asamoah 71) Palermo 2 (Fabio Simplicio 51, Cavani 80)

Parma 1 (Bojinov 71) Atalanta 0

Livorno 3 (C. Lucarelli 9, 26, 71-pen) Roma 3 (Perrotta 10, Toni 19, Pizarro 28)

Juventus 3 (Del Piero 2, 7, Candreva 10) Siena 3 (Maccaroni 16, Ghezzal 46, 74-pen)

AC Milan 1 (Seedorf 90+1) Chievo 0

after the break and then levelled from the penalty spot in the 76th minute to guarantee a share of the points.

Roma also failed to fully capitalise on Inter Milan's shock 3-1 defeat to Catania when they were held to a 3-3 draw at relegation-haunted Livorno.

Palermo and Sampdoria, who made up the top six at the start of the weekend, also failed to register a win.

Palermo lost 3-2 at Udinese while Sampdoria conceded a stoppage time equaliser in a 1-1 draw at Bologna.

Roma scored six goals with Livorno for whom Cristiano Lucarelli scored a hat-trick while Simone Perrotta, Luca Toni and David Pizarro all scored first-half goals for the capital city side.