

Napoli trump Juve

AFP, Rome

LEGA CALCIO

Napoli bounced back from conceding an early goal and missing a penalty to beat Juventus 3-1 at the San Paolo stadium on Thursday and boost their hopes of Champions League qualification.

In doing so they condemned Juve to an 11th Serie A defeat of the season and hit the Turin giants' own hopes of a top four finish.

Goals from Marek Hamsik, Fabio Quagliarella and Ezequiel Lavezzi rendered Giorgio Chiellini's early opener meaningless.

Napoli dominated the game, particularly after the break and could easily have won by more goals.

But the victory, their second over Juve this season, was enough to move them up to sixth, ahead of Alberto Zaccheroni's team on head-to-head record, and within three points of fourth-placed Palermo.

Juve were off to a dream start, taking the lead after only seven minutes.

Alessandro Del Piero flicked on a Mauro Camoranesi free-kick from the right and Napoli's defence were caught out, leaving Chiellini alone at the back post to head home from six yards.

The hosts took their time to strike back and when they did it was from distance as Quagliarella forced Alex

chance to equalise from the spot in the second minute after the break when Zebina was penalised for another shirt tug on Quagliarella, but Hamsik clipped the top of the bar with his lashed effort.

But only three minutes later, Napoli had the equaliser they deserved as Quagliarella robbed Camoranesi, turned Zebina and crossed to the back post where Hamsik rose high to head home from close range.

Napoli piled on the pressure and almost took the lead from an identical chance on 61 minutes as Juan Zuniga crossed from the left but Cristian Maggio headed over.

Juventus simply could not handle crosses and Hamsik turned provider next, sending an in-swing from the left that Quagliarella slid in to poke home at the back post with Manninger beaten by the cross 18 minutes from time.

Lavezzi finished off Juve on the counter-attack two minutes from the end as he collected Hugo Campagnaro's pass unmarked in the box and shot home low past Manninger.

Napoli 3 (Hamsik 50, Quagliarella 72, Lavezzi 88) Juventus 1 (Chiellini 7)

Manninger into a sprawling save from 25 yards.

Napoli poured forward and Lavezzi robbed Fabio Cannavaro on 20 minutes before cutting in from the left and shooting from 20 yards, with Manninger tipping the ball over the bar.

Juve then had a let-off when Del Piero was shown only a yellow card for slamming his forearm into the back of Gianluca Grava's neck.

The hosts had a golden



Napoli forward Fabio Quagliarella (R) scores the second goal past Juventus goalkeeper Alexander Manninger (L) during their Serie A encounter at the San Paolo Stadium in Naples on Thursday.

Inter visit Rome

AFP, Rome

LEGA CALCIO

There may still be eight games left to the end of the season but champions Inter Milan's visit to AS Roma on Saturday could have a crucial bearing in the title race.

Inter lead the Serie A table by four points from Roma and AC Milan who are level on points as well as goal difference.

Roma and Milan may be locked together, but many observers believe it is the giallorossi who have the best chance of denying Jose Mourinho's team a fifth straight league crown.

That is because since a disastrous start to the season, Roma have already clawed back 10 points on Inter.

They lost five and won only three of their opening 10 games and when the sides met back in November, they were separated by 14 points with the capital-based club hovering

just above the relegation zone.

But since then they have been the best team in the league and even their usually cautious coach Claudio Ranieri is allowing himself to get excited by this fixture.

"Just being in this situation is the result of the hard work and sacrifice the players have put in," he said.

"We're on the final straight and now we're arriving at the match of the year against the superpower that is Inter."

Despite Inter's 3-0 home success over rock bottom Livorno on Wednesday, they have not been in good form in

the league recently having won only once in seven ahead of that midweek match.

That is another reason why many feel Roma are capable of overhauling the leaders because despite their win over Livorno, it was the visitors to the San Siro who had enjoyed the better chances before Samuel Eto'o opened the scoring.

Eto'o's goal, the first of two, was crucial for Inter not least because it was his first in the league since December.

The top of the table encounter will not be the only Milan-Rome clash as Milan host Lazio on Sunday, knowing they too could move to within a point of top should they win.

Coach Leonardo insists his team can bounce back once again this season after having picked up just one point from their last two matches--with two wins they would have gone top.

"It's not been the first difficult period of our season but we've always picked ourselves up and we will do so again," he said.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Palermo v Bologna, AS Roma v Inter Milan

Sunday
AC Milan v Lazio, Chievo v Parma, Fiorentina v Udinese, Juventus v Atalanta, Livorno v Bari, Napoli v Catania, Sampdoria v Cagliari, Siena v Genoa

IN BRIEF

Aragones turns down Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

Spanish Primera Liga side Sevilla on Friday announced that Antonio Alvarez, a member of their technical staff, will replace sacked coach Manolo Jimenez until the end of the season.

The decision came a day after former Spain coach Luis Aragones, 71, turned down an offer to take over at the club.

Sevilla fired Jimenez on Tuesday following a string of poor results.

Alvarez's first match in charge will be against 10th-placed Villarreal on Sunday.

Corinthians shoot for green goals

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian club Corinthians on Thursday came up with a novel way of helping the environment by announcing they would plant 100 trees for each match played and 100 more for each goal scored.

The 'Playing for the Environment' project will see a total of 4,800 trees planted to cover the 20 games and 28 goals played this season.

Nani signs new deal

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United winger Nani signed a new four-year contract with the Premier League champions on Friday.

Nani's previous deal had two years still to run but his impressive form in the second half of the season has persuaded United manager Sir Alex Ferguson to offer the former Sporting Lisbon star an extended stay at Old Trafford.

The 23-year-old's new contract, which keeps him with United until June 2014, completes a remarkable revival from a player who looked to be on the way out of Old Trafford.

Carlo stays focused

AFP, London

BARCLAYS PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti says his side will face the first of nine 'finals' when their quest for the Premier League title continues against Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

The Blues are one point behind leaders Manchester United with both teams having seven league games of the season left.

But victory over Villa would see Chelsea go two points in front before reigning champions United kicked-off in Saturday's late match against Bolton.

Chelsea, who thrashed basement club Portsmouth 5-0 in midweek, also face Villa in the semifinals of the FA Cup and Ancelotti said: "There are eight or nine games until the end of the season and we need to maintain this spirit.

"We have to prepare for these nine games like a final."

Key to Chelsea's hopes of silverware this term is Didier Drogba.

The in-form Ivory Coast striker scored twice against Pompey to take his tally for the season to 30 goals in all competitions.

United got the Reebok Stadium looking for a seventh straight victory in all competitions.

With goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar and defenders Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic now looking strong at the back, Sir Alex Ferguson's side have conceded just two goals

in their last six matches.

They have also won nine of their last 10 matches against Bolton, including victories in their last four meetings, with just one goal conceded.

This match is sure to come too soon for midfielder Owen Hargreaves, who made his first appearance after 18 months out of with a knee injury with a 45-minute run-out for the reserves last week.

He was due to play for the reserves again on Thursday and although the game against Burnley's second string was eventually called off due to a waterlogged pitch, he had already been pulled out in order to step up his training with the first team.

Ferguson left the 29-year-old former Bayern Munich player out of his Champions League squad.

Third-placed Arsenal are only two points behind United and still very much in the title hunt.

They travel to Birmingham with Gunners boss Arsene Wenger hoping to have striker Nicklas Bendtner fit following

an ankle knock.

Almost as tight as the title race itself is the battle for the fourth place finish that guarantees the last spot on offer to English clubs for next season's Champions League.

Tottenham Hotspur currently hold the coveted position and could go as much as five points clear of their nearest pursuers for the prize if they beat Portsmouth at White Hart Lane.

The match pits Spurs manager Harry Redknapp and several of his players against their former club while also acting as a dress rehearsal for next month's FA Cup semi-final.

Meanwhile, across London, West Ham will look to bounce back from a 3-1 midweek loss to fellow strugglers Wolves when they welcome Stoke to Upton Park.

The Hammers' fifth straight loss left the club just three points above the relegation zone and piled the pressure on novice manager Gianfranco Zola.

Wolves can take another step towards safety at home to Everton.

Saturday also sees relegation candidates Hull at home to Fulham while fellow bottom three side Burnley face Blackburn in a Lancashire derby on Sunday.

Liverpool, still with a chance of finishing fourth are at home to Sunderland on Sunday while Manchester City, one of their rivals for a Champions League place, must wait until Monday's match against Wigan to atone for their defeat by Everton last weekend.

FIXTURES

(1500GMT unless stated)

Saturday
Birmingham v Arsenal, Bolton v Manchester United (1730GMT), Chelsea v Aston Villa, Hull v Fulham, Tottenham v Portsmouth, West Ham v Stoke, Wolves v Everton

Sunday
Burnley v Blackburn (1200GMT), Liverpool v Sunderland (1600GMT)

Monday
Manchester City v Wigan (2000GMT)

Van Gaal eyes treble

AFP, Berlin

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal wants to win a treble of Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League titles despite his team having to face Manchester United in Europe next week.

"I want to win all three trophies," said the Dutchman, whose side host Stuttgart in the Bundesliga on Saturday before welcoming United in the Champions League quarterfinals first leg on Tuesday.

Even though they lost 2-1 at Eintracht Frankfurt last Saturday, Bayern are a point clear at the top of the league and booked their place in the German Cup final with a 1-0 extra-time win over Schalke on Wednesday.

Once resurgent Stuttgart and United have visited Munich, Bayern will continue a tough programme of matches.

They will face German league title rivals Schalke again in the Bundesliga on April 3.

Van Gaal's side will then travel to play United at Old Trafford for the Champions League last eight second-leg and then face title rivals Bayer Leverkusen away on April 10.

"I'm really looking forward to these games," said van Gaal. "The programme we have is the best thing that could happen to us."

"The league title is the priority for Bayern Munich, but all the players want to win the cup too. I want to win all three trophies."

Stuttgart have Germany defender Servar Tasci back from a groin injury in a rear-ranged defence with Stefano Celozzi suffering a thigh injury, Holland's Khalid Boulahrouz is expected to play despite illness in midweek.

Second-placed Schalke 04 take on third-placed Leverkusen on Saturday with two points separating the teams.

Leverkusen have lost two of their last three games, while Schalke are on a roll and are unbeaten in their last four league matches.

Bayer midfielder Stefan Reinartz takes over from the banned Arturo Vidal who picked up his tenth yellow card of the season in the 3-0 defeat at Dortmund.

Leverkusen's playmaker Toni Kroos replaces Renato Augusto while Germany striker Patrick Helmes starts a game for the first time since his cruciate ligament operation.

The league's top-scorer Stefan Kiessling sits out the match with a pulled muscle.

Buoyed by last Sunday's shock 5-1 win at defending champions Wolfsburg, bottom side Hertha Berlin will host Borussia Dortmund on Saturday who are up to fourth and chasing a European place.

Hertha coach Friedhelm Funkel has kept faith with the side which won in Wolfsburg as they look to close the five-point gap which keeps them from safety.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Mainz 05 v VfL Wolfsburg, Bayern Munich v VfB Stuttgart, Hertha Berlin v Borussia Dortmund, Hannover 96 v Cologne, Werder Bremen v Nuremberg, Bayer Leverkusen v Schalke 04

Sunday
Hoffenheim v Freiburg, Borussia M'Gladbach v Hamburg

Real Madrid

Real Madrid have a second derby in a week at home to Atletico Madrid on Sunday as they bid to hold top spot for the upcoming 'El Clasico' against Barcelona.

Real were comfortable 4-2 winners over local rivals Getafe on Thursday as they moved back to the summit, above Barcelona on goal difference, and now face more illustrious neighbours Atletico at their fortress Santiago Bernabeu where they have won all 14 home matches in the league.

Madrid have held the upper hand in the city derby to the extent that Atletico have not managed to beat their rivals for over a decade with their last win back in the 1999/00 season.

Real, who will face Barcelona on the weekend of April 10/11, won the first game 3-2 in a scintillating derby at the Vicente Calderon that could have ended in a draw but for a fine last minute save from Iker Casillas.

Atletico defeated Athletic Bilbao 2-0 on Thursday to move five points off the top six.

Real face derby test

AFP, Madrid

LFP

Champions Barcelona, behind Real on goal difference, have a testing game on Saturday when they travel to fourth-placed Real Mallorca who have been a real force at home this season.

Mallorca have won 12 out of their 13 home games and beat Barcelona in this fixture last season, although Barca had already been crowned champions.

Barcelona scrapped to a 2-0 win over Osasuna on Wednesday in what was a far from vintage performance but they got the points thanks to late goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Bojan Krkic.

People are saying Barcelona are not as strong as last season but their tally of 71 points is two more than they had at the same stage last season. The problem is Real have upped the ante with 71 points compared with their 63 at this stage 12 months ago.

In other matches, Sevilla travel to Villarreal on Sunday as they come to terms with the dismissal of coach Manolo Jimenez on Tuesday following the 1-1 draw with bottom side Xerez.

Sevilla are currently outside the Champions League spots in fifth, two points behind Mallorca, and have a long injury list with Diego Perotti, Jesus Navas and Luis Fabiano three key players on the sidelines.

Villarreal have changed coaches too this season getting rid of Ernesto Valverde and his replacement Juan Carlos Garrido is trying to get the club into the top six.

At the moment Villarreal are five points off the European places.

Valencia have taken advantage of Villarreal's and Sevilla's woes this season to claim third place, six points above Mallorca, and are targeting a third consecutive win at Real Zaragoza on Saturday.

Valencia's top-scorer David Villa is expected to be out after going to hospital with head trauma.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Malaga v Tenerife (1700 GMT) Real Mallorca v Barcelona (1900 GMT), Real Zaragoza v Valencia (2100 GMT)

Sunday
all 1600 GMT unless stated
Osasuna v Almeria, Xerez v Valladolid, Espanyol v Sporting Gijon, Deportivo La Coruna v Getafe, Villarreal v Sevilla (1800 GMT), Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid (2000 GMT)

Monday
Athletic Bilbao v Racing Santander (2000 GMT)

FA charges Mancini

AFP, London

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini has been charged with improper conduct by the Football Association after his touchline clash with Everton boss David Moyes.

Mancini barged into Moyes during the final moments of Wednesday's 2-0 defeat by Everton at Eastlands while trying to grab the ball from the Toffees' manager, who was holding onto it in what the Italian perceived to be an act of time-wasting.

The pair had to be separated by fourth official Howard Webb before referee Peter Walton sent both coaches to the stands.

Having considered Walton's report, the FA have decided to charge Mancini.

Moyes has escaped a charge but the FA have written to the Scot to remind him of his responsibilities and conduct.

Giggs hints at Wales return

AFP, London

Wales midfielder Ryan Giggs has hinted he could be willing to come out of international retirement to help his country cover for the loss of injured star Aaron Ramsey.

Giggs, 36, has not played for Wales since 2007 after deciding he needed extra rest to prolong his time at Manchester United.

But Giggs has a reduced role at United these days as he enters the twilight of his career. And with the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign looming and Wales without Arsenal midfielder Ramsey due to a broken leg, Giggs admits he may be prepared to return to international duty.

"It is something that I would have to talk about with (Wales coach) John Toshack and (United manager) Sir Alex Ferguson. But, at this stage, I wouldn't dismiss the idea," he told the Western Mail.

Rocha hits out at Malouda

AFP, London

Portsmouth defender Ricardo Rocha has hit out at Chelsea winger Florent Malouda after the France star's elbow left him needing hospital treatment on a facial injury.

Rocha was taken to hospital for checks on his cheekbone following Malouda's foul, which was only punished with a booking, during Chelsea's 5-0 win at Fratton Park on Wednesday.

It was initially thought Rocha had sustained a fractured cheekbone but tests showed he had suffered only bad bruising.

The 31-year-old Portuguese centre-back is still expected to miss Saturday's match against Tottenham as he recovers.

"I think it was a bad one from Malouda," Rocha told The Sun. "He just hit me and did not try to get the ball."

"These kind of actions are dangerous and it should have been a red card. But he just got a yellow."



A Boca Juniors fan dressed up as Al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden (R) holds a plastic chicken before the start of their First Division match against River Plate at the La Bombonera Stadium in Buenos Aires on Thursday. Boca won 2-0.