

# Toni blows title race open

AFP, Rome



Luca Toni scored the winning goal 18 minutes from time as Roma beat champions Inter Milan 2-1 at the Stadio Olimpico on Saturday to reignite the Serie A title race.

Roma's win means they move to within a single point of the leaders and AC Milan could join them if they beat Lazio on Sunday.

Daniele De Rossi opened the scoring for Roma in the first period but Diego Milito equalised after the break before Toni's potentially crucial winner.

The result means that Claudio Ranieri's team have clawed back 13 points on Jose Mourinho's men since the two clubs last met back in November, while Mourinho will count the cost of seven bookings that will see four of his players suspended next week.

Ranieri acknowledged that the title race will now go down to the wire with seven games left.

"Today we beat a stratospheric team," he said. "It will be a great battle of nerves, now we're in the final straight. We're in good shape and the players believe in themselves."

"I'm already thinking about our next match against Bari. Every game will be difficult and we need to be humble and focussed, as we were tonight."

Cesar spilled the ball and De Rossi acted quickly to slide in and poke home the rebound.

That sparked an immediate response from the champions and Wesley Sneijder lashed a 30-yard free-kick just wide.

Inter started to look more like the Serie A leaders and they produced a neat move on 22 minutes involving Thiago

thumped a rasping free-kick from 25 yards that swerved inches past the post and Vucinic forced Cesar to sprawl to his right to palm away another fierce shot from a clever free-kick routine.

Inter almost levelled four minutes before the break as Walter Samuel rose on the edge of the six-yard box to head Sneijder's corner powerfully goalwards only to see the ball crash down off the bar.

And Inter began the second period by hitting the woodwork again as Milito's shot was deflected onto the corner of bar and post.

The leaders were fired up and moments later Sneijder brought a fine save out of Julio Sergio, while at the other end Toni flicked a header just over the bar.

Mourinho threw on a third striker in former Lazio forward Goran Pandev and the game opened up further, with Sneijder ramming a shot down Sergio's throat before Riise blasted high and wide.

Inter equalised 24 minutes from time as Sneijder crossed

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## RESULTS

AS Roma 2 (De Rossi 17, Toni 72) Inter Milan 1 (Milito 66)

Palermo 3 (Miccoli 10, 43-pen, 79) Bologna 1 (Adailton 38)

As expected for a top of the table clash there was a cagey opening in the capital and it took a mistake from Inter goalkeeper Julio Cesar to break the deadlock in the 17th minute.

Nicolas Burdisso sent a weak header into the Brazilian shoot-stopper's hands from David Pizarro's free-kick but

Motta, Samuel Eto'o and Dejan Stankovic, who dragged his shot wide.

The hosts matched what the visitors threw at them, though, and another slick passing move at the other end resulted in Mirko Vucinic's curling effort being deflected wide.

Roma's Norwegian left-back John Arne Riise then

# Zola might quit

AFP, London



West Ham manager Gianfranco Zola has hinted he may quit Upton Park in the aftermath of Saturday's 1-0 defeat to Stoke.

Only goal difference is keeping Zola's side above the Premier League relegation zone following the east London club's sixth successive defeat.

The Italian, who was strongly criticised by Hammers co-owner David Sullivan after the midweek loss to Wolves, could be ready to walk away as the pressure starts to take its toll.

Asked whether he would consider resigning, Zola said: "I have to find out what the problem is. If the problem is me then why not?"

"The players are trying hard for us. The bottom line is to see whether I can help them or not. I will consider overnight whether I am doing a good job or not."

Former Chelsea forward Zola, who took charge at West Ham in September 2008, admitted the result had left him at such a low ebb that the only option was to take a close look at the way he has been doing the job.

"Right now I am flat because we lost another game and it is the sixth and it is not good for me," he said.

"It is very painful and I will think a lot about how the situation stands and find a solution. We will see what we can do."

"If I don't think I am the man I will let you know but right now the players are behind us, we just need to change something to be more helpful towards them."

Sullivan said before the Stoke match that Zola would not be sacked if West Ham lost, but Zola expects a week of discussions before next Sunday's game at Everton.

"I know my duties and I know right now the situation is not going the way it should. I am prepared to accept the situation," he added.

"It is going to be a week in which we will be talking to each other."

David Gold, the Hammers' other co-owner, told Sky Sports later Saturday: "We had a meeting with him (Zola) and told him we were 100 per cent behind him."

"It certainly won't be my decision (if Zola leaves West Ham) as we speak because my decision is that he is our manager as we speak."

# Khedira might miss WC

AFP, Berlin

Stuttgart's Germany midfielder Sami Khedira could miss June's World Cup finals in South Africa after damaging knee ligaments during Saturday's 2-1 win at Bayern Munich.

The 22-year-old was injured tackling Germany team-mate Miroslav Klose in the first-half and is expected to miss the whole of April, but should not need an operation.

Bayern's defeat in Munich saw them lose top place in the Bundesliga to Schalke 04 who beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-0 also on Saturday with two goals from ex-Germany striker Kevin Kuranyi.

Stuttgart's medical staff say Khedira should be back for their last two Bundesliga matches before the season ends on May 9, with Germany coach Joachim Loew set to announce his World Cup squad the week before.

Khedira has won two caps for Germany and came on as a second-half substitute in this month's 1-0 defeat by Argentina in a friendly.

He is the second German player to announce he is in danger of missing the World Cup, which runs from June 11 to July 11. Hamburg's Marcell Jansen revealed he has an ankle injury which could also keep him out of the tournament.

Germany, who finished third at the 2006 World Cup, have drawn Africa Cup of Nations finalists Ghana, Australia and Serbia in Group D.

# Wenger shouts expletives

AFP, Birmingham

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger turned on reporters after his side's bid for the English Premier League title suffered a setback with a 1-1 draw away to Birmingham.

The Arsenal boss made his feelings clear about a challenge by Birmingham's Craig Gardner on Gunners skipper Cesc Fabregas, which left the Spaniard with a knee injury that threatens the midfielder's participation in next week's Champions League quarter-final with Barcelona.

"How is Fabregas? I don't know," Wenger said after Saturday's match.

"We will have to assess him tomorrow (Sunday). But it was a bad tackle, one more. He got tackled at the knee, kicked just under the knee."

But asked if his team had been the victim of several poor challenges, the frustrated Frenchman replied: "Am I suggesting there were a lot of bad tackles? Leave me alone with that, for f\*\*\*'s sake."

"You (the press) are always looking for controversy, you do not need me to tell you what happened on the pitch. I can give you my opinion about our game but you always create this controversy."



AS Roma striker Luca Toni runs off on his trademark celebration after scoring the winner in their Serie A clash against Inter Milan at the Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Schalke inch closer

INTERNET, undated



Schalke 04 coach Felix Magath is keeping his feet on the ground although he is inching closer to football immortality at the club in particular and the Bundesliga in general.

"Schalke are not title favourites," Magath insisted after a classy 2-0 triumph at rivals Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday night.

Young defender Benedikt Hoewedes said that "we have achieved nothing yet."

The big win from Kevin Kuranyi's double for a league-leading season tally of 17 lifted Schalke to the top of the table as former leaders Bayern Munich crashed 2-1 at home against VfB Stuttgart.

Schalke can stretch their two-point lead over Bayern to five next week if they beat them in a table-topper on Saturday.

"Physically strong, ready for action and confident, that's what champions are made of under the leadership of Felix Magath who demands a lot and achieves a lot," said the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung paper in praise of Schalke's performance.

Magath led Munich to a unique league and cup double in successive years 2005 and 2006,

and VfL Wolfsburg to a surprise Bundesliga crown last year. He then moved on to Schalke, whose last national title dates back 52 years to the pre-Bundesliga days in 1958.

"Thanks to Magath and Kuranyi Schalke's fans dream of the title again," said Bild am Sonntag.

Magath's modesty is the same as in Wolfsburg but the meeting with Munich on April 3 comes all but exactly 12 months after Wolfsburg thrashed Munich 5-1 on April 4, 2009, en route to the title.

"We would have a (title) chance if we beat Bayern. We would a certain advantage," admitted Magath, who lost a German cup semi-final against Munich on Wednesday.

Munich, who visit Leverkusen after the Schalke match and also face a Champions League quarter-final tie against Manchester United, are derailed after a second straight defeat.

"It hurts a lot," said coach Louis van Gaal, with defender Philipp Lahm adding: "We lost our shape at the start of the second half, we went 2-1 behind, and it was always going to be difficult after that."

Munich not only failed to pick up three important points but also fear for their Dutch star winger Arjen Robben who sustained a calf muscle injury and is doubtful at least for Tuesday's first meeting with United.

# Marseille end drought



INTERNET, undated

After ending their 17-year drought without silverware by winning the French League Cup on Saturday, Olympique Marseille have found the self-belief to challenge for the Ligue 1 title.

Marseille, who had been chasing a title since their 1993 Champions League triumph, ended their long wait by flooring Girondins Bordeaux 3-1 at the Stade de France.

The southerners, lying three points behind champions Bordeaux in the Ligue 1 race before Sunday's action, see no reason why they should stop there.

Marseille, who beat title contenders Olympique Lyon 2-1 in the league last week, believe they are strong enough to claim the championship for the ninth time, the first since 1992.

"This makes us hungry for more," Marseille president Jean-Claude Dassier told reporters. "If we had lost (to Bordeaux), people would have

said we were doomed but now we want the title. We will not be content with just the League Cup."

Midfielder Mathieu Valbuena, who scored a goal against Bordeaux, agreed that Marseille had the right to be ambitious.

"We can't stop there," he said. "The confidence we got from our wins against Lyon and Bordeaux will help us a lot."

Tough times followed Marseille's Champions League win, the club being stripped of their 1993 French title over a bribery scandal and demoted to the second division.

They recovered, however, and often came close to success, losing French Cup finals in 2006 and 2007 and the UEFA Cup finals of 1999 and 2004.

Now they want more, although coach Didier Deschamps, who captained the side who beat AC Milan 1-0 in the inaugural Champions League final in 1993 in Munich, sounded a cautious note.

"Let us enjoy this first," he said. "Then we will have a marathon with five matches in two weeks. We will see after those games if we can afford the luxury and the pleasure of fighting for the title."

# Juve fans attack players

AFP, Rome



Juventus players were pelted with missiles by their own fans ahead of Sunday's Serie A home clash against Atalanta at Turin's Stadio Olimpico.

As the team boarded their bus from the hotel they stay at on the night before games, they came under fire from a hail of beer bottles and eggs, reported Ansa.

Fans, disgruntled at the team's dire form this season, also tried to prevent the bus from leaving and the police had to intervene to allow Juve's players to escape unscathed.

Before the barrage of missiles, fans had hurled abuse at the team, singling out in particular three players: Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro,

French full-back Jonathan Zebina and Brazil midfielder Felipe Melo.

Zebina was also shown on Sky TV to have been struck on the neck by a fan as he went to board the bus, although he didn't react.

Ahead of the match, which kicked off at 1300GMT, Juve coach Alberto Zaccheroni hit out at the behaviour of those fans.

"I didn't see the strike but you can't raise your hand to someone, that's not part of a civil society," he said.

"However, protesting against the team's results that's something else, we can accept it."

Fans continued their protests inside the ground, meeting the kick-off against Atalanta with a wall of silence.

Juve have already suffered 11 defeats in 30

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## IN BRIEF

### Robben might miss Utd tie

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich could be without winger Arjen Robben for Tuesday's Champions League clash against Manchester United after the Dutchman picked up a calf injury.

Robben appeared as a second-half substitute in Saturday's 2-0 Bundesliga defeat against Stuttgart, but the 14-goal winger suffered a recurrence of a calf strain in the game.

"Perhaps it's not very serious, but it seems it will be difficult for him to be available for the game against Manchester United," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal after his side suffered a second successive league defeat.

"Even so, we hope he will be able to play."

Bayern host English champions United in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal clash at the Allianz Arena on Tuesday.

### 'Lampard is world-class'

AFP, London

Frank Lampard was hailed as world class after the Chelsea midfielder fired up his side's Premier League title challenge with four goals in the 7-1 mauling of Aston Villa.

Lampard's goals took his season's tally to 21 - matching his best ever return for the London club and making him the third highest scorer in Chelsea's history.

Chelsea assistant manager Ray Wilkins saluted the contribution of Lampard, but insisted Chelsea's recovery from the double blow of defeat to Inter Milan in the Champions League and a draw at Blackburn spoke volumes about the team's spirit.

"Frank is world class," Wilkins said. "We have a number of players you would either say are, or close to. But when you've consistently scored goals to the level he has played at over the years, you would have to say he is world class."

"He is invaluable to us. He has this ability to get forward. But he has the ability to get back and defend as well. The guy just loves playing football and works extremely hard week in and week out. He trains as he plays."

Wilkins knows the United clash is crucial to the title race and he said: "I'm not sure what sort of a message it sends out but from within the camp we're delighted with the way things are going."

Chelsea started with Didier Drogba on the bench and Nicolas Anelka up front and Wilkins said: "We are very fortunate here we have a squad of players and if one quality player drops out, another comes in."

"Didier's taken a couple of knocks over the last couple of weeks. He took one on Wednesday on his knee and Carlo thought it was best to give him a little rest. And we could bring in Nicolas Anelka which isn't a bad swap."

### Rooney, Rio fit for Bayern

AFP, Bolton

Wayne Rooney and Rio Ferdinand will both be fit for Manchester United's Champions League quarterfinal first leg at Bayern Munich on Tuesday after the duo missed Saturday's 4-0 win over Bolton.

The England internationals were rested as a precaution as United returned to the top of the Premier League by a point from Chelsea.

Star striker Rooney has been troubled by a foot problem and Ferdinand, whose season and much of his career in recent seasons have been plagued by fitness issues, was left out because of a groin injury.

"They're both a bit tender," said United manager Sir Alex Ferguson whose team faces Chelsea in what he titles a title decider this coming Saturday.

"But both will be fit for Tuesday. We have a big week coming up and we have to use the squad."

# Zlatan edges Mallorca

AFP, Madrid



Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored his third goal in a week, and 15th of the season, as Barcelona won 1-0 at Real Mallorca on Saturday to nudge Real Madrid off the top of the La Liga table.

Club record signing Ibrahimovic had an easy tap-in on 62 minutes as Barca became only the second team to win at Mallorca this season and move three points ahead of Real Madrid who host derby rivals Atletico on Sunday.

The win also boosts Barca morale further for Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal first leg showdown at Arsenal.

"I was never anxious about not scoring goals," said Ibrahimovic. "The important thing is to win and I am fine with everything because in the end the goals come."

For Mallorca it was only the second time they had dropped points at home this season and Sevilla, two points behind, can

move above them into fourth with a win at Villarreal on Sunday.

Despite the difficulty of the Mallorca game Barca coach Pep Guardiola still chose to put top-scorer Lionel Messi and midfielder Xavi on the bench with the Arsenal game in mind.

Thierry Henry and Gerard Pique were also rested while youth product Jeffren Suarez,

part," said Valdes. "These are three vital points."

Barca had the ball in the net on 11 minutes through Pedro Rodriguez but the goal was disallowed for a marginal offside.

Argentine centre-back Gaby Milito had a header tipped over and Jeffren saw a dipping shot go just over as Mallorca were put under intense pressure.

However, the islanders rat-

## RESULTS

Malaga 1 (Apono 66) Tenerife 1 (Alfaro 85-pen)

Real Mallorca 0 Barcelona 1 (Ibrahimovic 62)

Real Zaragoza 3 (Diogo 41, Arizmendi 63, Jarosik 71) Valencia 0

22, made his first league start of the campaign.

With two minutes gone Mallorca hit the woodwork with Ariz Aduriz thumping a fierce shot off the right hand post and goalkeeper Victor Valdes got up quickly to stop Gonzalo Castro's follow-up shot.

"This was a big win for us at a tough ground and we did our

part," said Valdes. "These are three vital points."

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ted the post again shortly before half-time with Borja Valero's free-kick crashing against the same post Aduriz had hit.

Just five minutes into the second half Messi, with 11 goals in his last six games in all competitions, came on for Andres Iniesta who appeared to be nursing an injury.

But it was a corner that

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PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic tries to get past Mallorca goalkeeper Dudu in their Primera Liga match at the Ono Stadium in Mallorca on Saturday.