

# Inter thrash Bologna

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan maintained their one-point lead at the top of Serie A as all the top three posted victories on Saturday.

Mario Balotelli made a goalscoring return for the champions after his midweek apology to the club netting the second in a 3-0 home thrashing of Bologna at the San Siro.

Mirko Vucinic scored the only goal of the game as second-placed AS Roma triumphed 1-0 at Bari while AC Milan stayed three points off top with a 3-2 success at Cagliari.

Inter came into their game in poor league form having won only two of their previous nine matches but they dominated from start to finish despite suffering from a

number of suspensions, notably captain Javier Zanetti, Cameroon forward Samuel Eto'o and Brazilian defenders Maicon and Lucio.

But, having apologised publicly in midweek for his part in a bust up with coach Jose Mourinho, Balotelli, who had been frozen out of the first team picture for the previous six matches, ensured Eto'o's absence was hardly felt.

He was involved in much of Inter's attacking work and got his name on the score sheet with a

low right-foot finish from Diego Milito's cross seven minutes after the break.

Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta had given Inter a first half lead with a low shot from distance just before the half hour mark.

And he rounded off the scoring with a crisp curling left-foot finish five minutes from time after playing a one-two with Dejan Stankovic as he burst into the box.

Roma, who had on paper what appeared to be the toughest weekend test of the top three, produced a professional and controlled performance decided by Vucinic's 19th minute goal in a game of few chances and little action.

Coach Claudio Ranieri was rewarded for his bold team selection of a three-pronged attack with Francesco Totti and Vucinic flanking Luca Toni as the three combined for the winner.

Totti fed Toni on the edge of the box and he slipped in Vucinic running in behind him to finish with aplomb.

Milan's victory came courtesy of a crazy first half in which all five goals were scored.

Marco Borriello opened the scoring on seven minutes after he played a one-two with Clarence Seedorf and then finished right-footed inside the near post.

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Inter Milan midfielder Thiago Motta (R) scores the opening goal against Bologna during their Serie A encounter at San Siro on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## RESULTS

- Atalanta 2 (Valdes 16, Pinto 71) Siena 0
- Bari 0 AS Roma 1 (Vucinic 19)
- Cagliari 2 (Ragatzu 17, Matri 32) AC Milan 3 (Borriello 7, Huntelaar 19, Astori 38-og)
- Chievo 1 (Mantovani 76) Sampdoria 2 (Cassano 1, Pazzini 55)
- Genoa 1 (Boakye 51) Livorno 1 (Tavano 88)
- Inter Milan 3 (Motta 29, 85 Balotelli 52) Bologna 0
- Lazio 1 (Floccari 4) Napoli 1 (Hamsik 38)
- Parma 1 (Bojinov 68) Fiorentina 1 (Silvestri 22)

## IN BRIEF

### Liverpool after Rangers start

AFP, Glasgow

Liverpool are one of two Premier League clubs interested in Rangers' teenage defender Danny Wilson, the Scottish champions confirmed on Friday.

The 18-year-old was expected to sign a new contract at Ibrox this week, but manager Walter Smith said that discussions remain ongoing between his representatives and chief executive Martin Bain.

### Domenech livid at Wenger

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger and French national coach Raymond Domenech squared up on Friday over the injury which has ended William Gallas's domestic season.

Wenger insisted that it was right that Gallas played in the midweek Champions League clash against Barcelona even though the veteran French defender suffered a recurrence of a calf injury.

Domenech was furious that the influential Gallas was risked with the World Cup finals in South Africa due to get underway on June 11.

"I didn't speak to (Domenech) after the game. But we have to first take care of the interests of Arsenal," said Wenger.

"The French national team is important but Arsenal are as well and he is paid by the club - not the French national team. We have to use the players when they declare themselves fit."

# Webber grabs pole

AFP, Sepang



Mark Webber gained the reward his commitment and courage deserved on Saturday when he survived tropical storms and a flooded circuit to grab pole position for the Malaysian Grand Prix.

On an afternoon of downpours and high-cost bungled decisions by some of the leading teams, the Australian steered his Red Bull to a best lap of one minute and 49.327 seconds after swapping to "intermediate" wet weather tyres.

It was a decision praised by team boss Christian Horner, who was delighted to see Red Bull record their third successive pole in three races this season and the second of his career for Webber.

"That showed you how committed and determined he is," said Horner.

"There was a lot of risk involved, but as a team we were happy to split the cars. It was right on the bubble, but he got the lap in. He did a great job."

Webber wound up fastest by 1.3 seconds ahead of German Nico Rosberg who grabbed the best grid position of his career for the new Mercedes team.

"It was a tough call and it could easily have gone wrong," said Webber.

"I was thankful to get through earlier on when the other guys went out and today we all did it together. It's a great one for the team, we got the job done."

Rosberg added: "It is a great feeling to be here on the front row, but that was so difficult. I was just happy to keep I on the road."

Webber's Red Bull teammate, Germany's Sebastian

Vettel, who had been on pole for the first two races, was third ahead of two more Germans, Adrian Sutil of Force India and rookie Nico Hulkenberg of Williams.

Brazilian Rubens Barrichello, in the second Williams, was seventh ahead of his old Ferrari team-mate and seven-times world champion Michael Schumacher in the second Mercedes.

Japanese Kamui Kobayashi was ninth for Sauber and Italian Vitantonio Liuzzi 10th

1. Mark Webber (AUS/Red Bull-Renault) 1:49.327
2. Nico Rosberg (GER/Mercedes) 1:50.673
3. Sebastian Vettel (GER/Red Bull-Renault) 1:50.789
4. Adrian Sutil (GER/Force India-Mercedes) 1:50.914
5. Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Williams-Cosworth) 1:51.001
6. Robert Kubica (POL/Renault) 1:51.051
7. Rubens Barrichello (BRA/Williams-Cosworth) 1:51.511
8. Michael Schumacher (GER/Mercedes) 1:51.717
9. Kamui Kobayashi (JPN/Sauber-Ferrari) 1:51.767
10. Vitantonio Liuzzi (ITA/Force India-Mercedes) 1:52.254

in the second Force India car.

The session was hit by torrential rain shortly before it began and this caused widespread chaos -- most notably for Ferrari and McLaren who blundered in their strategy and kept their drivers in their garages when other teams went out.

This resulted in three of Formula One's four world champions contesting the 2010 title race skidding off the track.

# Arsenal leave it late

AFP, London

Arsenal closed the gap on the leaders to three points as Nicklas Bendtner's late goal clinched a 1-0 win over 10-man Wolves at the Emirates Stadium.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger, stripped of injury victims Cesc Fabregas, William Gallas and Andrey Arshavin, made seven changes from the team that battled back to draw with Barcelona on Wednesday and his stand-ins got the job done in dramatic fashion.

After a dour first half, Wolves captain Karl Henry was shown a straight red card in the 65th minute for a lunge on Tomas Rosicky.

That proved the turning point as Bendtner headed the winner in stoppage time from Bacary Sagna's cross.

Darren Bent missed two penalties but still made his point to Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp as the Sunderland striker's double clinched a 3-1 win at the Stadium of Light that dented his old club's push to finish fourth.

Redknapp once claimed even his wife would have taken a chance missed by Bent during his time at Spurs, but the England international got his revenge as he took just 36 seconds to get on the score-sheet with a close-range finish.

Bent added his second goal in the 29th minute as he converted a penalty after Spurs defender Kyle Walker handled.

Aston Villa bounced back from their 7-1 defeat at Chelsea with a 1-0 win at Bolton.

Stoke pushed Hull deeper into trouble with a 2-0 win at the Britannia Stadium.

Ricardo Fuller scored after six minutes as he collected Dave Kitson's header and flicked a fine finish past Boaz Myhill.

# Rafa shifts focus

AFP, Birmingham



Rafael Benitez is confident Liverpool will regain their Premier League focus in Sunday's clash at Birmingham after a stormy Europa League defeat to Benfica.

The Reds visited Portugal in the first leg of their Europa League quarterfinal and, although they took the lead courtesy of a Daniel Agger goal, they had Ryan Babel sent off and eventually lost 2-1.

Despite the scoreline, it was a brave performance from Liverpool and Benitez was pleased with his side's showing.

Yet before the second leg at Anfield on Thursday, Liverpool, who are four points behind fourth placed Tottenham in the table, have to overcome a difficult visit to St Andrew's.

Alex McLeish's men have been one of the surprise packages of the season and although they were expected to be relegation contenders, they sit comfortably in the top half of the Premier League, having lost just twice at home all term.

Benitez is wary of the threat Birmingham pose to his hopes of guiding Liverpool to a spot in the top-four come the end of the season and as a result, he does not want his squad looking ahead to Benfica.

"It will be another tough game. The Premier League is always very difficult so we will have to bring the players back quickly and be ready," Benitez said.

Liverpool's task will be made harder by the expected absence of midfielder Alberto

Aquilani, who is a doubt with an ankle problem.

Aquilani's injury, similar to the one which he had when he arrived on Merseyside after his pre-season transfer from Roma, ruled the Italy international out of the Benfica clash.

He is likely to miss out again alongside injured defenders Martin Skrtel and Fabio Aurelio.

Birmingham are unbeaten in their last 12 home games but they have managed just three victories in 12 encounters so far in 2010.

That statistic does not worry City boss McLeish too much and he wants his players to savour the experience of playing against Benitez's side now that their Premier League future is secure.

"I have tried to say to the players from day one to enjoy the Premier League because this is a spectacular moment in their lives," McLeish said.

"When you stop playing football you will say there is nothing in your life that compares to playing at the highest level."

"This game comes into the glamour side of the Premier League because they are one of the best teams."

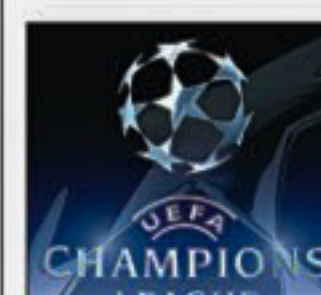
"We knew we had to win our bread and butter games this season, which we have done and that is why we are staying in this division but we have also done well against the big guns, especially at St Andrew's."

"There is no doubt that we are in for a hard game but we have to show Liverpool we are a very difficult side to play against, especially at home."

McLeish has no new injury concerns but remains without veteran midfielder Lee Carsley and striker Garry O'Connor.

# C'Ron angry at exit

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid winger Cristiano Ronaldo says he can't bear to watch the Champions League since his side was eliminated from the competition at the last 16 stage for the sixth successive season.

"I don't like to watch the Champions League matches because it leaves me a bit annoyed because I know that our team was good enough to remain in the competition and we are not because of our own fault," he said Friday during an interview with public television TVE.

"We made mistakes, me, the other players, we have to learn our lessons from this. We lost, now we have to raise our heads and think that we have to do better next year, which is possible," the Portuguese international added.

"I consider myself to be a winner. I try to always move ahead. I know it is very difficult, nothing in life is easy, if it was easy we would not be born crying."

Nine-time champions Real were eliminated from the Champions League in the first knock-out round on March 10 after drawing 1-1 against Lyon, sending the French club through 2-1 on aggregate.

The Spanish giants have not reached the quarterfinals of the tournament since 2004.

Ronaldo, 25, said he was confident that Real, who are locked at the top of La Liga with arch-rivals Barcelona, will win the Spanish league this season.

"We know that we have eight matches that we have to win, it is difficult but I am confident that we can do it," he said.

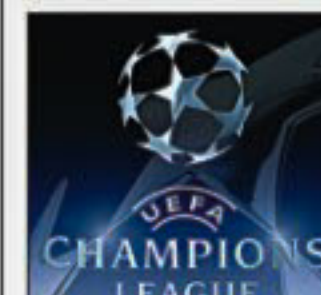
European and Spanish champions Barcelona and leaders Real have 74 points with third-placed Valencia 21 points behind. Barcelona are second on goal difference.

Real face Racing Santander on Sunday as they go in search of a 12th consecutive league win.

Ronaldo, the 2008 FIFA World Player of the Year, became the world's most expensive footballer when he was transferred from Manchester United to Real in July 2009 for 94 million euros.

# Fabregas feels broken

SOCCERNET



Cesc Fabregas has revealed he was running on pure adrenaline as he scored with a broken leg in Arsenal's Champions League draw with Barcelona.

Fabregas said he was "broken" at having his season ruined by the injury, particularly after already losing the chance to play at the Nou Camp in the quarterfinal return leg next week by reaching the yellow cards limit.

The Gunners skipper bravely scored the equaliser from the spot and then played out the match on a broken fibula as Arsenal fought back to 2-2 at the Emirates on Wednesday, with Fabregas' season almost certainly over unless his team-mates reach the Champions League final on May 22.

Fabregas told the Sun: "My leg is broken - and I feel broken too. The penalty I scored against Barcelona could be my last act as an Arsenal player this season. But I have to cling to the hope that we can get through at the Nou Camp, win our semifinal and I might be fit for the Champions League final. That might be asking a

lot but it is my dream and what I pray for.

"When Carles Puyol fouled me to concede the penalty all I could think about was to grab the ball put it on the penalty spot and hit it as hard as I could. The adrenaline must have been flowing through me so strongly because I didn't feel any pain as I smashed the ball past Victor Valdes. But as soon as I ran to collect the ball to take it back to the centre-spot I was in agony."

"I had been dreaming of playing for Arsenal at the Nou Camp - it's all part of the magic of us being drawn against Barcelona. I've never disguised how special the club is to me and I desperately wanted to be there and give a performance fit for such a wonderful stadium."

Fabregas has admitted he does not know if his leg was broken in the game before the Barcelona clash when he was tackled by Craig Gardner in the 1-1 draw at Birmingham, although his manager Arsene Wenger has insisted it was only bruised, and not broken, before Wednesday night.

"Some people think I may have even broken the leg against Birmingham a week earlier - and, to be honest, I just don't know. Yes, it's exactly the same spot but I didn't go into the game against Barcelona thinking 'My leg's broken'."



PHOTO: AFP

Australian driver Mark Webber of Red Bull-Racing (L) and Renault driver Robert Kubica of Poland (R) speed through a corner during the Malaysian Grand Prix qualifying in Sepang on Saturday.