



Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo (L) heads in the third goal against Osasuna during their Primera Liga clash at Bernabeu on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Real leave it late

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo scored two goals, including a late headed winner, as Real Madrid beat Osasuna 3-2 on Sunday and cut the gap on La Liga leaders Barcelona to just one point.

Real got off to the worst possible start as a poor back pass by Raul Albiol allowed in Carlos Aranda to give Osasuna the lead.

Real looked to battle back with Kaka heading straight at keeper Ricardo Lopez while Osasuna remained a danger on the counter-attack.

Ronaldo brought Real level with a strike from the edge of the area but as Real continued to press Krisztian Vadocz smashed in Osasuna's second.

In a breathless conclusion to the first half, Marcelo scored a rare header to equalise to Real again.

Substitute Masoud Soleimani missed an open goal for Osasuna as the visitors missed several excellent chances and the game appeared to be heading for a draw until Ronaldo headed home a Gonzalo Higuain cross from close range.

Real are now once again on the shoulders of Barcelona who responded in style to their heartbreaking Champions League exit at the hands of Inter Milan with a 4-1 win at Villarreal on Saturday.

A brace from Lionel Messi along with goals from Xavi Hernandez and Bojan Krikit led the Catalans to victory with a single strike from Joseba Lorente the only reply.

"Osasuna made us suffer a lot. It was the worst performance defensively this year although we did deserve to score three goals," said Real coach Manuel Pellegrini.

"The calendar is equally bad for both teams now (Real and Barcelona) and I think every-

thing will be decided in the final week. My players are in good spirits, that is important for our last three games and so all we can do is push Barcelona to the end."

A clinical attacking display from Mallorca helped them to a 3-1 victory over Athletic Bilbao which puts them back in a Champions League place.

Mallorca, the surprise package this season, had dropped down to fifth with Sevilla's 3-1 victory over Atletico Madrid earlier in the day but scoring against the run of play they came away winners from Bilbao to regain fourth behind Valencia.

Athletic appeared the only side with a cutting edge with Gaizka Toquero and Igor Gabilondo going close before Chori Castro headed Mallorca ahead.

Fernando Llorente in turn headed Athletic back on level terms two minutes later but it all fell apart for the home side at the start of the second half with Jose Nunes flicking

a ball home from a corner and then Aritz Aduriz slotting in the third.

An Alvaro Negredo penalty double helped Sevilla beat Athletic Madrid.

In a forerunner of the Copa del Rey final later this month, there was a flurry of early goals with an unmarked Luis Fabiano putting the home side ahead after five minutes.

Tiago Cardoso then levelled after latching onto a loose ball in the box.

Negredo restored Sevilla's advantage with a penalty after Juan Valera upended Adriano Correia and then, six minutes before half-time, scored his second spot kick following a foul by Luis Perea on Fabiano.

It was a crude challenge by the Colombian which forced Fabiano off the pitch with an ankle injury which is expected to keep him out for up to ten days and puts him in danger of missing the cup final.

RESULTS	
Sevilla 3 (Luis Fabiano 5, Negredo 13-pen, 40-pen) Athletic Madrid 1 (Tiago 8)	
Real Madrid 3 (Ronaldo 25, 89, Marcelo 44) Osasuna 2 (Aranda 7, Vadocz 43)	
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 45+2) Real Mallorca 3 (Castro 43, Nunes 49, Aduriz 51)	

Inter edge closer to title

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan followed up their passage into the Champions League final with a 2-0 defeat of Lazio on Sunday as Jose Mourinho's side edged closer to a fifth successive Serie A title.

With just two games left, Inter restored their two-point lead over Roma, who won 2-1 at Parma on Saturday, and also stayed on course for a treble.

They face Roma in the Italian Cup final on Wednesday and Bayern Munich in Madrid on May 22 in the Champions League final.

Inter face lowly opposition in their last two league games -

Chievo (12th place) at home next weekend before a trip to relegated Siena (19th).

Roma also face Chievo a week after welcoming 14th-placed Cagliari.

But Roma could have a 'joker' to play because if the two sides are level on points at the end of the season, the capital city side would be champions thanks to their better head-to-head record against Inter.

A 1-1 draw in Milan was followed by a 2-1 home win at the Olympic Stadium.

On Sunday, Lazio fans, with their team languishing two places off the relegation zone, but reluctant to see their Roma rivals take the championship, were content to see Argentine defender Walter Samuel head in the first goal on the stroke of half-time from a Wesley

Sneijder cross. Inter, fresh from knocking defending champions Barcelona out of the Champions League in mid-week, piled on the pressure, but found Lazio goalkeeper Fernando Muslera in inspired form.

Muslera saved well from Maicon, Thiago Motta, Sneijder and Samuel Eto'o in the first half.

But the home side's resistance crumbled in the 70th minute when Motta scored from a Maicon corner.

Earlier, Sampdoria and Palermo remained locked in battle for fourth place and the final Champions League qualifying spot after both recorded wins.

Sampdoria, who lead Palermo by two points, at times laboured to a 2-0 success at home to rock-bottom and already relegated Livorno while the Sicilians held on to a 2-1 victory at Siena.

Antonio Cassano scored after just five minutes as he got beyond the defence and beat goalkeeper Alfonso De Lucia.

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However, six minutes from time Swiss full-back Reto

RESULTS
Bari 3 (Riccardo Meggiorini 57, Castillo 85, P. Barreto 88) Genoa 0
Chievo 1 (Granoche 74) Napoli 2 (Denis 45+1, Lavezzi 86)
Cagliari 2 (Lazzari 15, Jeda 58) Udinese 2 (Di Natale 26, Sanchez 28)
Atalanta 1 (Guarente 23) Bologna 1 (Peluso 84-og)
Siena 1 (Calaio 80) Palermo 2 (Cavani 24, Miccoli 58)
Catania 1 (Silvestre 24) Juventus 1 (Marchisio 52)
Sampdoria 2 (Cassano 5, Ziegler 84) Livorno 0
Lazio 0 Inter Milan 2 (Samuel 45+1, Motta 70)

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Ziegler crashed home a free-kick to calm Sampdoria nerves.

They stay fourth, four points behind AC Milan.

Siena joined Livorno in Serie B next season after their relegation was confirmed by the defeat to Palermo.

Uruguayan forward Edison Cavani gave the visitors the lead on 24 minutes after converting a cross from Antonio Nocerino.

When Fabrizio Miccoli added the second just before the hour mark, the game seemed over but 10 minutes from time Emanuele Calaio headed home a cross from former Middlesbrough forward Massimo Maccarone to set up a tense finish.

In other games Napoli and Juventus both ensured themselves a place in the Europa League next season.

Napoli won 2-1 away to Chievo thanks to goals from Argentine pair German Dennis and Ezequiel Lavezzi, sandwiching a Pablo Granoche strike.

Juventus dropped to seventh, a point behind Napoli, but secured their spot with a 1-1 draw at Catania due to Genoa's 3-0 defeat at Bari.

Bologna boosted their survival hopes as they came back from a goal down to draw 1-1 at 10-man Atalanta.

Italy name pre-WC squad

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Marcello Lippi on Sunday named a 29-man squad for a pre-World Cup get-together in Rome on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Of the players likely to go to the World Cup only AS Roma's Daniele De Rossi was missing from the squad.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli), Federico Marchetti (Cagliari), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo)

Defenders: Salvatore Bocchetti and Domenico Criscito (Genoa), Leonardo Bonucci (Bari), Fabio Cannavaro, Giorgio Chiellini, Fabio Grosso and Nicola Legrottaglie (all Juventus), Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Christian Maggio (Napoli), Gianluca Zambrotta (Milan)

Midfielders: Mauro German Camoranesi, Antonio Candreva and Claudio Marchisio (all Juventus), Andrea Cossu (Cagliari), Gennaro Gattuso and Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Simone Pepe (Udinese)

Forwards: Marco Borriello (AC Milan), Antonio Di Natale (Udinese), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Vincenzo Iaquinta (Juventus), Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria), Fabio Quagliarella (Napoli)

IN BRIEF

Loew overlooks Kuranyi

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew will not be selecting Schalke 04 striker Kevin Kuranyi for this summer's World Cup, the German football federation announced on Monday.

Kuranyi has not played for Germany since walking out on the team in October 2008 after being left out of the matchday squad for a World Cup qualifier, prompting coach Loew to declare he would never pick him again.

Loew has said he will announce his World Cup squad on May 6.

Blanc offered France job

AFP, Bordeaux

Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc has been offered the chance to replace France coach Raymond Domenech after the World Cup, French football federation (FFF) president Jean-Pierre Escalettes has revealed.

Escalettes, quoted by the French daily Sud Ouest ahead of Bordeaux's 1-0 win over Toulouse on Sunday, said the ball was now in the court of the former World Cup and European championship winner.

Domenech is set to leave his post after the World Cup with his successor due to be named before the tournament gets under way on June 11.



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan midfielder Thiago Motta (R) celebrates his goal with teammate Maicon during their Serie A tie against Lazio at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.

Bordeaux bounce back

AFP, Paris



Having seen their chances of retaining the French league title implode owing to a recent poor run of form Bordeaux belatedly returned to winning ways on Sunday with a 1-0 win over Toulouse.

Lyon, deflated by their midweek Champions League exit to Bayern Munich, also found their form with a win by the same score at previously high-riding Montpellier.

Both sides will now hope to ensure they can pick off a lucrative Champions League berth for next season.

One point in five games had seen Laurent Blanc's side slide out of contention as Marseille set the pace to open up a five-point lead after their goalless draw with second-placed Auxerre.

After the weekend action, Lille still have the third slot

which would bring about a Champions League qualifying slot with 64 points to 72 for Marseille and Auxerre.

But Lyon are now only two points behind Lille and they have a game in hand after Michel Bastosdrove home the only goal of the game with 18 minutes left at Montpellier to leave the hosts without a win

in five weeks. Bordeaux are on 60 points, as are Montpellier as the season enters its final furlong.

Michael Ciani's 17th-minute decider from a cross by Brazilian star Wendel was enough to secure full points for Bordeaux earlier in the day and Blanc admitted the relief was tangible.

Lille saw off Nancy 3-1 to stay third with goals from Gervinho 35, Yohan Cabaye and Pierre-Alain Frau.

"We want to finish as high as possible and we know what we have to do," said Cabaye while Frau added: "It's down to us and this is another step towards Europe."

At the wrong end of the table, St Etienne did themselves no favours in going down 4-1 at home to Lens - although Les Verts are still seven points clear of third-bottom Le Mans, who pinched a point at Monaco in mid-week.

The Mans still are set to follow tailenders Grenoble and Boulogne into the second division next season.

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MU set up tense finale

AFP, Sunderland



Manchester United set up a dramatic last-day shootout with Chelsea for the English Premier League title after Nani struck to seal a 1-0 win at Sunderland on Sunday.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side showed they are determined to keep fighting until the last moments of the season after Chelsea's 2-0 win at Liverpool earlier in the day meant only a victory would realistically maintain United's bid for a record 19th top flight title.

United got the win they needed thanks to Portugal international Nani's third league goal of the season midway through the first-half at the Stadium of Light.

The margin of victory would have been far more handsome had Dimitar Berbatov not wasted three clear chances to reward United's dominance.

Despite the win, Ferguson's side go into the last day as significant under-dogs.

After their comfortable victory at Anfield, Chelsea head towards Sunday's final fixtures with a single-point advantage and vastly superior goal difference in their efforts to secure a first title in four years.

It means Carlo Ancelotti's side need only to match United's result as they host Wigan.

Only victory for United at home to Stoke City will give them hope of clinching a record fourth consecutive Premier League crown.

Wayne Rooney marked his return from a one-match injury absence by almost breaking the deadlock inside seven minutes, but the United forward's shot was saved by Craig Gordon, with Ryan

Giggs' close-range follow-up blocked by Phil Bardsley.

In front of a crowd of almost 48,000, which included England coach Fabio Capello's right-hand man Franco Baldini, Sunderland boss Steve Bruce had insisted there would be no favours for his former club as he went in search of his first victory over his mentor Ferguson in 14 attempts.

John Mensah, who succumbed to a knee problem inside 20 minutes, and Lorik Cana both headed narrowly wide from early set-pieces, but they were sporadic forays from the hosts as the influential Giggs clipped the woodwork with an angled 18-yard drive after good work from Patrice Evra.

In a rare scare, Edwin Van der Sar was forced to tip over a 25-yard Steed Malbranque effort destined for the top corner, but it was United who broke the deadlock on 28 minutes as their weight of pressure finally told.

Giggs' harmless-looking cross from the left was turned into something altogether more threatening by neat inter-passing form Rooney, Dimitar Berbatov and Darren Fletcher inside Sunderland's box before the ball found its way to Nani, who made no mistake with an angled drive into the bottom corner from 12 yards.

Michael Turner almost diverted Giggs' cross into his own net shortly afterwards, while the unmarked Berbatov spurned the first of three golden opportunities to secure the points either side of half-time.

First, he fired wide from a narrow angle after Rooney and Nani carved Sunderland open with ease.

The Bulgarian was even more culpable shortly after the interval when, stretching

to meet Rooney's cross in front of an open goal, he somehow managed to balloon his shot wide.

A close range header over from Giggs' tempting cross capped an unwanted hat-trick for the former Tottenham forward.

Gordon again came to Sunderland's rescue when a slip by Kieran Richardson let in Nani after a neat Fletcher back-heel, as the Scotland international stood firm to keep out the midfielder's point blank effort.

Turner cleared off the line late on from substitute Michael Carrick, but United's wastefulness didn't matter in the end as they secured a fully deserved victory to leave the destination of the title in doubt until the season's final day.

Mourinho to stay at Inter

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan sporting director Marco Branca insisted on Sunday that Jose Mourinho would quit the San Siro at the season's end.

Mourinho, who has guided Inter to the Champions League final, Italian Cup final and to the verge of a fifth successive Serie A crown, has been linked with a switch to Real Madrid.

"This is the type of thing which was being said last year," said Branca.

"There are journalists who have written about that (the Real Madrid link). We are happy with Mourinho and Mourinho is also happy. It's unthinkable that he'll be far away from Milan next season."



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United winger Nani is ecstatic after scoring the all-important goal against Sunderland during their Premiership encounter at the Stadium of Light on Sunday.