

Ibra stabs Inter

AFP, Milan



Zlatan Ibrahimovic came back to haunt his former employers and silence the boo-boys as 10-man AC Milan went back to the top of the table with a 1-0 win at Inter Milan on Sunday.

Ibrahimovic scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot to enrage the Inter fans who once adored him as Milan earned a crucial three points, despite Ignazio Abate's second half dismissal, to underline their title credentials.

Earlier in the day Lazio had briefly gone top as they beat Napoli 2-0 in Rome.

The defeat means Inter dropped to fifth in Serie A, six points behind their arch city rivals but Ibrahimovic insisted there's a long way to go yet.

Milan set their stall out from the off with some vibrant counter-attacking football.

On three minutes Abate got to the byline down the right and crossed for Clarence Seedorf, who should have done far better than head wastefully high.

But just moments later they had won a penalty as Seedorf released Ibrahimovic down the right and as he entered the area he dragged back the ball, only for Marco Materazzi to take his legs out from under him.

Ibrahimovic stepped up amid a cacophony of boos to smash home the spot-kick.

Milan really should have had another as Ibrahimovic again beat the offside trap but his cross to the waiting Mathieu Flamini was imprecise and cut out by a back-tracking Lucio.

Materazzi then took the ball away from Seedorf as Ibrahimovic tried to tee him up from close in.

Massimo Ambrosini hit a diagonal ball over the top to the busy Sweden forward who tried a

Marco van Basten-esque volley from an angle that fizzed just over.

Robinho had the ball in the net on 22 minutes but was denied by a linesman's flag.

Inter didn't start exerting pressure until the end of the half when Wesley Sneijder shot a free-kick into the side netting.

Early in the second period Sneijder had another free-kick from close in and although he struck it well, Christian Abbiati beat it away with his fists.

And momentum swung Inter's way on the hour mark when Abate picked up a second booking after a tiff with Goran Pandev, with Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri immediately replacing forward Robinho with full-back Luca Antonini.

Centre-back Materazzi then had to come off after a nasty clash with Ibrahimovic and Inter coach Rafael Benitez made the bold move of replacing him with winger Jonathan Biabiany.

Yet it was Seedorf who was inches away from doubling Milan's lead with a shot from 20 yards.

Push as Inter did they created little of real substance as a dogged Milan held out for a famous win.

In Rome, Mauro Zarate was the hero as he scored the first and made the second for Sergio Floccari to end a run of two straight defeats.

Zarate gave the hosts the lead on the quarter hour mark when he latched onto a ball launched forward by captain Stefano Mauri and from the inside left channel the Argentine took the ball down on his chest and fired left-footed across Morgan De Sanctis.

Lazio doubled their advantage on 61 minutes as Zarate pounced on a ricochet and teed up Floccari, alone 15 yards out to side-foot home almost casually with De Sanctis strangely static.

RESULTS

Lazio 2 (Zarate 15, Floccari 61) **Napoli 0**
Bari 0 Parma 1 (Candreva 33)
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 58) **Brescia 0**
Cagliari 0 Genoa 1 (Ranocchia 84)
Palermo 3 (Pastore 33, 47, 85)
Catania 1 (Terlizzi 46)
Sampdoria 0 Chievo 0
Udinese 4 (Di Natale 10, 24, 40, Floro Flores 55) **Lecce 0**
Inter Milan 0 AC Milan 1



Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic (L) celebrates his all-important goal with teammate Mathieu Flamini during their Serie A clash against Inter at San Siro on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Gomez fires Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Mario Gomez scored twice on Sunday as defending champions Bayern Munich went sixth in the Bundesliga with a 3-0 win over Nuremberg.

The defending champions are still 12 points behind league leaders Dortmund, who have a seven-point lead at the top of the table after their 2-0 win over Hamburg on Friday.

Bayern took an early lead in Munich when Gomez took a clever pass from Croatia's Danijel Pranjić and fired home on 10 minutes.

Germany captain Philipp Lahm then netted a penalty in the 57th minute before Gomez sealed victory with his 75th-minute header, his seventh league goal.

There was more good news for Bayern as France winger Franck Ribery made a second-half appearance, his first game since he injured his ankle in September.

Earlier, Senegal striker Papiss Demba Cisse fired Freiburg up to fourth with his tenth goal in 12 games to seal a 1-0 win at Hoffenheim after he netted in stoppage time.

The 25-year-old scored in the 91st minute after forward partner Stefan Reisinger threaded a pass through the Hoffenheim defence for the African to fire home.

The win lifts Freiburg into the top four and knocks Hoffenheim -- who suffered their third straight league defeat -- to eighth in the table.

Freiburg now have the chance to take on top side Dortmund at home next Saturday.

Higuain keeps Real top

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid remain top of the Primera Liga after Gonzalo Higuain scored the

only goal of a hard fought battle filled with tension against Sporting Gijon on Sunday.

With Barcelona provisionally overtaking them on the top of the table on Saturday after a 3-1 win over Villarreal the onus was on Real Madrid to respond against Sporting.

Higuain hit the post with a cross early on but Real caused little danger in the first half while Sporting were a threat on the break down the wings through Diego Castro and Nacho Novo.

After the break it looked as though Real were not going to find a way through but as the

game wore on it began to open up for both sides.

Higuain should have scored with just keeper Juan Pablo to beat and Sporting's Gaston Sangoy saw a shot go a whisker past the post.

With nine minutes to go substitute Karim Benzema headed a Sergio Ramos cross which was parried by the keeper to Higuain, who tucked the ball home from close range.

In the final minute Alberto Botia was given a straight red for a late challenge on Cristiano Ronaldo.

Mourinho was in the stands serving a touchline ban and his assistant Aitor Karanka claimed it was an important win in the championship race.

Valencia brought a run of four matches without a win to an end as they beat Getafe 2-0 and moved back into a Champions League place.

After a strong start to the

season, Valencia had dropped down the table in recent weeks but they got the perfect start against Getafe scoring after just eight minutes with Juan Mata bringing the ball down for Tino Costa to score.

Getafe had plenty of possession but created few chances and mid-way through the second half defender David Navarro stabbed home the second after the keeper parried a Costa header from point blank range.

A last ditch Alvaro Negredo

goal gave 10-man Sevilla a 2-1 win over bottom side Zaragoza.

They went ahead when Luis Fabiano slotted home from Frederic Kanoute's defence splitting pass. After the break Nicolas Bertolo headed home a Gabi Fernandez corner but in the dying moments a defensive error by Jiri Jarosik allowed in substitute Negredo who made no mistake in front of goal.

Espanyol have dropped down to sixth after they drew 0-0 with Racing Santander.

Hercules brought Real Sociedad's good run to an end as they won 2-1 with goals from David Trezeguet and Royston Drenthe turning the game around after Antoine Griezmann put the visitors into a deserved lead.

Deportivo La Coruna drew 0-0 with Real Mallorca while Malaga came out on top 1-0 in the relegation battle with Levante.

RESULTS

Racing Santander 0 Espanyol 0
Real Mallorca 0 Deportivo La Coruna 0
Real Zaragoza 1 (Bertolo 53) **Sevilla 2**
(Luis Fabiano 29, Negredo 90)
Hercules 2 (Trezeguet 46, Drenthe 51)
Real Sociedad 1 (Griezmann 15)
Malaga 1 (Eliseu 63) **Levante 0**
Sporting Gijon 0 Real Madrid 1
(Higuain 82)

Black Cats bite Chelsea

AFP, London



Chelsea's lead at the top of the Premier League was cut to two points as the champions suffered a stunning 3-0 home defeat against Sunderland, while Arsenal moved into second place with a 2-1 win at Everton on Sunday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side were without the injured John Terry and Frank Lampard, as well as the suspended Michael Essien, and Sunderland took full advantage with a superb display.

Nedum Onuoha opened the scoring for Steve Bruce's side with a fine solo effort on the stroke of half-time before Asamoah Gyan and Danny Welbeck netted in the second half.

It was Chelsea's first home league defeat of the season - and Sunderland's first away success - and ended a bad week for the Blues, who were rocked by the sudden sacking of assistant coach Ray Wilkins in midweek.

Arsenal had put pressure on Chelsea earlier on Sunday with a victory at Goodison Park.

Arsene Wenger's team took the lead through French defender Bacary Sagna's first half strike and Cesc Fabregas added the second soon after half-time.

Tim Cahill got one back for Everton in the final minute but it wasn't enough to stop Arsenal going above third placed Manchester United.

Chelsea had suffered the blow of losing captain John Terry to injury the day before the game and the home side's makeshift back four was repeatedly exposed by Sunderland forwards Welbeck and Gyan.

Carlo Ancelotti's team look far from invincible at present and second placed Arsenal will suddenly fancy their chances of taking top spot from the champions sooner rather than later.

Chelsea had most of the play early on though and Nicolas Anelka bore down on John Obi Mikel's long pass,

only to be narrowly beaten to the ball by visiting keeper Craig Gordon.

Then a minute later Yuri Zhirkov slalomed through the Sunderland back four before wastefully pulling his shot across the face of Gordon's goal.

That proved to be a rare spell of pressure from the home side although Sunderland's knack of conceding free kicks in dangerous areas allowed Didier Drogba to twice test Gordon with long range efforts.

The more incisive attacking play, however, came at the other end of the pitch where Welbeck and Gyan repeatedly exposed Chelsea's makeshift

central defensive pairing of Branislav Ivanovic and Paulo Ferreira.

Welbeck served the first warning of the visitors' threat with a 35th minute header that Cech did well to push to safety.

And the Chelsea keeper again had to be at his best three minutes later when Welbeck was released by Gyan and fired in a powerful low shot.

Then when Ivanovic bundled over Welbeck with the striker bearing down on goal, it was clear Chelsea were creaking and they had every reason to be grateful the Serb centre back escaped with only a yellow card.

That proved to be only a temporary reprieve, however, as Sunderland finally found a way past Cech immediately before the interval.

Onuoha was the unlikely source of the goal but there was no doubting the quality of the finish as the right back ran past three home defenders before finishing left footed.

Chelsea were caught wide open again when Jordan Henderson celebrated his first England call-up with the decisive pass that allowed Gyan to get between Ivanovic and Ferreira and finish past Cech.

Chelsea's attacking efforts continued to lack conviction and a miserable afternoon was made complete when Ashley Cole's misdirected back pass was intercepted by Welbeck, who scored with three minutes remaining.

RESULTS

Chelsea 0 Sunderland 3 (Onuoha 45, Gyan 52, Welbeck 87)
Everton 1 (Cahill 89) **Arsenal 2**
(Sagna 36, Fabregas 48)



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) hurdles a challenge from Sunderland defender Lee Cattermole (L) during their Premiership encounter at Stamford Bridge on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Argentina seek revenge

Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina will look to end a run of five matches without beating Brazil when South America's big two renew their rivalry in a friendly in Qatar on Wednesday.

The Argentinians last beat Brazil 3-1 in a World Cup qualifier in Buenos Aires in June 2005, since when they have lost four and drawn one conceding 13 goals and scoring a mere two.

But coach Sergio Batista will look at a different statistic, no doubt, his Olympic team's emphatic 3-0 victory over Brazil in the 2008 Beijing Games semifinals.

Former Barcelona team mates Lionel Messi and Ronaldinho will meet again in Doha having faced each other at the Olympic Games where the Argentine ace inspired Batista's team to the gold medal.

Ronaldinho, overlooked by Brazil's 2010 World Cup coach Dunga, has been recalled by Mano Menezes who has overseen three friendly wins since he was handed the task of preparing his country's team to host the 2014 finals.

Menezes said recently Argentina were better prepared for the match since he was carrying out a major overhaul in personnel and tactics with Brazil whereas Argentina were not much changed from the World Cup side coached by Diego Maradona.

Batista would differ with the later part of

Menezes's opinion since he has sought better balance to an Argentina side crushed 4-0 by Germany in their World Cup quarterfinal in Johannesburg in July.

The 1986 World Cup-winning former midfielder has recalled Javier Zanetti in order to play with full backs rather than converted central defenders and added more company for Javier Mascherano in midfield with the likes of Esteban Cambiasso and Ever Banega. However, Cambiasso is out injured as are two of his centre-backs, Walter Samuel and Gabriel Milito and strikers Carlos Tevez and Sergio Aguero. He has recalled Porto central defender Nicolas Otamendi, one of the makeshift fullbacks who flourished under Maradona.

Menezes's defence will face their sternest test yet against the likes of Messi and Gonzalo Higuain after their clean sheets in friendly wins against the United States, Iran and Ukraine.

Injury has also deprived him of two of his new young guard, striker Alexandre Pato and midfielder Paulo Henrique Ganso, so much will be expected from a new partnership of the experienced Ronaldinho and 18-year-old Santos striker Neymar.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Argentina: Sergio Romero; Javier Zanetti, Martin Demichelis, Nicolas Burdisso, Gabriel Heinze; Ever Banega, Javier Mascherano, Javier Pastore, Angel Di Maria; Lionel Messi, Gonzalo Higuain
Brazil: Victor; Daniel Alves, Thiago Silva, David Luiz, Andre Santos; Ramires, Lucas, Elias, Ronaldinho; Robinho, Neymar

Korea KO China

AFP, Guangzhou



Three-time champions South Korea dealt another body blow to Chinese football with an impressive 3-0 win in the Asian Games last 16 on Monday.

After struggling into the knockout stages, China were no match for the cultured and talented Koreans who now go on to face either defending champions Qatar or Uzbekistan for a place in the final.

South Korea had dominated the first half and could have gone in at the break at least three goals up.

They had taken the lead after 19 minutes when a swift break down the left forced the stretched Chinese defence to furiously back-pedal.

Cho Young-Cheol was left in plenty of space to gather the cross and slot the ball across to Kim Jung-Woo to score past Zhang Shichang in the China goal.

Zhang then saved well from Park Chu-Young

and Kim Bo-Kyung to keep the deficit down to one goal at the interval.

But even Zhang was powerless to keep out the second goal, scored by Monaco's Park Chu-Young with a curling free-kick around the defensive wall four minutes into the second half.

South Korea were now unstoppable and Kim Jung-Woo scored his second of the night after 57 minutes when he nipped between two defenders to slot home Ji Dong-Won's smart pass.

China searched for a way back in but both Wang Xuanhong and Li Kai seeing efforts going wide.

The defeat comes at the worst possible time for China whose national team failed to qualify for the World Cup and whose under-23 team here had failed to win a single match before home fans at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The sport has also been cursed by a series of corruption scandals.

Meanwhile, four-time champions Iran beat a depleted Malaysia 3-1 to make the quarterfinals where they will face Oman who trounced Hong Kong 3-0.

RESULTS

Iran 3 (Ansari Fard 53, Hosseini 60, Sharafi 67) **Malaysia 1** (Talha 86-pen)
Hong Kong 0 Oman 3 (Hussain 30, 61, Bait Nasib 68)
China 0 South Korea 3 (Kim Jung-Woo 19, Ji Dong-Won 57, Park Chu-Young 74)

Cassano left out

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli on Sunday left playmaker Antonio Cassano out of his squad for the friendly with Romania in Klagenfurt, Austria on Wednesday, but he did call up four uncapped players.

Cassano had been an integral part of Prandelli's team, with two goals in three Euro 2012 qualifying matches, but he has not played for Sampdoria in November after reportedly insulting his club president.

Sampdoria have since announced their intention to cancel Cassano's contract unilaterally, leading Prandelli to leave the talented but troublesome creator out of his squad.

Defenders Federico Balzaretto (Palermo) and Andrea Ranocchia (Genoa) and midfielders Alessandro Diamanti (Brescia) and Cristian Ledesma (Lazio) are the four players called into the Italy squad for the first time.

Prandelli is also able to call on Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli, Inter Milan full-back Davide Santon and midfielder Alberto Aquilani, who is on loan at Juventus from Liverpool, after all three overcame injury problems

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Antonio Mirante (Parma), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo), Emiliano Viviano (Bologna)

Defenders: Davide Astori (Cagliari), Federico Balzaretto (Palermo), Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus), Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Domenico Criscito (Genoa), Daniele Gastaldello (Sampdoria), Andrea Ranocchia (Genoa), Davide Santon (Inter Milan)

Midfielders: Alberto Aquilani (Liverpool/ENG), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Alessandro Diamanti (Brescia), Cristian Ledesma (Lazio), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Stefano Mauri (Lazio)

Forwards: Mario Balotelli (Manchester City/ENG), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria)