

Inter rule the roost

AFP, Abu Dhabi



European champions Inter Milan lifted the Club World Cup on Saturday after a 3-0 win in the Abu Dhabi final over African champions TP Mazembe.

The Italians largely dominated proceedings and had the match in their pockets once Goran Pandev and Samuel Eto'o had bagged goals in quickfire succession inside the opening 20 minutes at Zayed Sports City.

Frenchman Jonathan Biabiany slid home a third to add further gloss in the closing stages as Inter succeeded last year's winners Barcelona and added to Intercontinental Cup triumphs in 1964 and 1965 - a previous incarnation of the now expanded event.

Mazembe, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, had already made history by becoming the first African team to reach the final after a 2-0 upset win over Copa Libertadores champions Internacional of Brazil in the semi-finals - the biggest surprise in the 10-year history of the event.

But wily Inter proved a bridge too far as the experienced Italians struck early and then soaked up what limited and sporadic pressure the Africans were able to produce thereafter.

Inter had gone into the game hot favourites despite the injury absence of Dutch flier Wesley Sneijder - only the latest in a spate of injuries the Milanese have suffered this season, which had led to pressure on Inter coach Rafael Benitez as he attempts to replicate the success of the club last season under Jose Mourinho.

Adding the Club World Cup trophy to the Champions League, Serie A and Italian Cup titles masterminded by his predecessor will relieve some of that pressure on the former Liverpool boss as he looks to lift Inter in the second half of the season from their current seventh spot in Serie A.

Mazembe have become a major force in

the African game on the back of five league title wins in the last decade and also the last two editions of the African Champions League.

But Inter proved a class above as Pandev fired home a neat left-footed poke after Eto'o had helped tee him up in the 13th minute.

Cameroon star Eto'o then claimed his own piece of the limelight as he drove in an instinctive right foot drive on the turn after Champions League final hero Diego Milito had combined with Esteban Cambiasso.

Milito should have made it three after beating the offside trap but drove his shot against the feet of onrushing keeper Muteba Kidiaba, who had earlier led the customary goalline pre-match prayer session for his teammates.

Brazilian defender Maicon went on the attack on the hour as Inter pressed for a third in style reminiscent of his World Cup goalline scoring showing against North Korea - but could only hit the outside of the post as the Europeans continued to look comfortable.

Eto'o then tried to go it alone down the left rather than look for either substitute Stankovic or Milito but he ran into a forest of defenders and was hustled out of possession.

Again Inter came forward and Maicon whipped over a fine cross from the right in the 73rd minute but Pandev could not quite twist his head to make sufficient contact.

Inter had a brief but all too rare scare on 74 minutes when Dioko Kaluyituka went clear on goal but he lost his footing as he bore down on Inter keeper Julio Cesar, whom he tried to round but then knocked the ball too far before crumbling in a heap.

Biabiany, on for Milito, bundled home the third with five minutes to go after a Stankovic chip through the middle, to ensure that a European team would take the title for the fourth consecutive time.

Earlier, Internacional won the third-place play-off match 4-2 against South Korea's Seongnam Ilhwa.



Inter Milan forward Diego Milito (L) and captain Javier Zanetti celebrate with the trophy after winning the 2010 FIFA Club World Cup at Zayed Sports City in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

11 out of 10 for Mourinho

AFP, Madrid

Jose Mourinho on Saturday rated 2010 as "the best year of my career" after guiding his former club Inter Milan to the Italian league, Cup and Champions League titles.

"If I had to give 2010 a mark from 1 to 10 it would be an 11," the ever modest Portuguese coach told a press conference here.

"I won everything with Inter. And then with Real Madrid every possibility is still available. The championship is open, we are still in the (Spanish) Cup, and the Champions League."

Mourinho was speaking ahead of Real Madrid's league date with Sevilla on Sunday. Real are in second, two points behind Barcelona who slaughtered Mourinho's men 5-0 at the Nou Camp last month - the only blot on Mourinho's landscape.

Borriello sinks old club Milan

AFP, Rome

Marco Borriello came back to haunt former club AC Milan on Saturday, scoring the only goal of the game as Roma blew the Serie A title race wide open.

Borriello struck 21 minutes from time with a lucky goal he knew next to nothing about but that won't have worried the 28-

RESULTS

Cesena 1 (Jimenez 18) Cagliari 0
AC Milan 0 Roma 1 (Borriello 69)

year-old who was ditched by Milan in favour of bog-money signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic at the start of the season.

Victory was vital for Claudio Ranieri's team who would have fallen 13 points off the leaders had they lost.

Instead they are now just seven points behind Milan whose lead will be cut to three points should either Juventus, Napoli or Lazio win on Sunday.

Kahn pulls for Neuer

AFP, Berlin

Former Bayern Munich goalkeeper and captain Oliver Kahn on Sunday advised his old club to recruit a world-class goalkeeper, as speculation grows Germany's Manuel Neuer is set to join.

"A club like Bayern Munich should have a world-class goalkeeper, it makes the difference in a Champions League final," ex-Germany goalkeeper Kahn told German television channel Sport1.

At the moment, veteran Joerg Butt, 36, is Bayern's first-choice goalkeeper and his contract expires at the end of the season, while reserve Thomas Kraft, 22, is in the same situation.

'Wake up Werder'

AFP, Bremen



Werder Bremen's director of sport Klaus Allofs demanded Saturday his players wake up to the looming threat of relegation after their 2-1 defeat in the Bundesliga to Kaiserslautern.

Having been dumped out of the Champions League and German Cup, Bremen have won only one of the last eight league games and at the season's halfway stage they are 14th in the league, just four points from the bottom three.

With the threat of relegation looming ever larger, Allofs said the players must return from January's winter break with improved attitudes or risk dropping out of

Germany's top flight for only the second time in their history.

"We must fight to keep our place in the league," said Allofs.

"In view of our position, we are now in real danger.

"Some of our players have not learned yet that their jobs could be coming to an end."

Despite beating holders Inter Milan 3-0 in their final Champions League group match on December 7, Bremen are struggling for any kind of consistency in the Bundesliga.

Coach Thomas Schaaf, who has been in charge since 1999, has been given a vote of confidence by Allofs, but with only five wins from 17 league matches so far this season, results must improve in 2011.

Pirlo missing for a month

AFP, Rome

AC Milan midfielder Andrea Pirlo will be out for a month, his club said Sunday, after suffering a thigh strain in Saturday's 1-0 home defeat to Roma.

Pirlo limped off during the first half of the match to be replaced by Clarence Seedorf.

However, he will join the team for their winter training camp in Dubai as Serie A shuts down for two and a half weeks.

"Pirlo will be with the team as normal in Dubai for the start of the winter preparation as the warmer weather will help him," said a club statement.

Benitez issues ultimatum

Football

SOCCERNET

Inter Milan manager Rafael Benitez has essentially issued an ultimatum after they won the Club World Cup on Saturday, telling the club to support him, or terminate his contract.

Benitez has been the subject of criticism in recent weeks for Inter's slow start in Serie A and was told by club owner Massimo Moratti that he had to win the Club World Cup title in Abu Dhabi.

Now, after he made good on that requirement, beating African side TP Mazembe 3-0 in

the final, he has told Moratti and others at the club to show him support if he wants to see more trophies at the club.

"There are three possibilities (for the club)," he told reporters. "One, 100% support for the coach and buy four or five players - to build a stronger team with competition among the players to be able to carry on winning matches and trophies."

"Two, carry on like this without a project, without planning and go ahead with one person to blame, for the whole season getting to May this way."

"The third is to speak to my agent, reach an agreement if there is not this support. Simple."



Barca's derby demolition Dortmund falter

AFP, Madrid



Champions Barcelona will sit top of the Spanish first division for the Christmas break after notching a tenth successive league victory with a resounding 5-1 win over city rivals Espanyol at the Cornella-El Prat stadium on Saturday.

Spanish World Cup winners Pedro Rodriguez and David Villa grabbed two goals apiece with compatriot Xavi Hernandez, one of three players shortlisted for the Ballon D'Or crown, netting the other as Barcelona triumphed in the Catalan derby, and opened up a five-point lead over second-placed Real Madrid.

Barcelona signed off 2010 in the perfect fashion, ending Espanyol's 100 percent home record emphatically with a 5-1 thrashing and putting pressure on Real to win their game-in-hand against Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Real have won all seven of their home matches in the league while Sevilla's confidence is rock bottom after four successive league defeats.

Espanyol had a perfect seven wins and were flying high in fourth, however, Barcelona turned in a mesmerising display making it a remarkable 26 goals in their last five league matches with a drubbing of their local rivals to maintain their flawless away record with an eighth win.

"My team never cease to surprise me," purred Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola. "Espanyol had only conceded two goals at home in the league before

this match and it isn't a coincidence that they are up near the top of the table.

"It is a great night for us because not only did we beat our local rival, but we also beat a very good team."

Barca should have scored in the eighth minute with Dani Alves setting up Lionel Messi, but the Argentine somehow fired over the goal to let Espanyol off the hook.

Messi made amends on 18 minutes by creating the opening goal with Pedro showing neat

David Villa celebrates scoring in their La Liga derby against Espanyol on Saturday.



PHOTO: AFP

control to lay the ball off and Messi fed a incisive pass back into his teammate's path. Pedro raced clear and showed great composure to drill home.

The hosts were carved open again on 29 minutes as Barcelona released Xavi on the right. The playmaker watched as his centre ricocheted back to him and showed great technique to drive a volley into the opposite corner.

Barcelona made the running after the break and made it 3-0 close to the hour mark with Messi again the creator.

The Argentine dribbled at incredible speed to leave three opponents in his slipstream and goalkeeper Carlos Kameni spilled his shot which allowed

the alert Pedro to prod in the rebound.

Pablo Osvaldo quickly pulled a goal back for the home side, but Villa registered his tenth and 11th league goals of the campaign on 75 and 83 minutes to cap a memorable win.

In other matches, Valencia took advantage of Espanyol's defeat coming from behind to win 2-1 at promoted Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Argentine midfielder Tino Costa scored a terrific equaliser before Aritz

Aduriz grabbed a stoppage time winner as Valencia moved above Espanyol into fourth.

Earlier on Saturday, Villarreal maintained their impressive unbeaten home record with a 3-1 win over Real Mallorca at El Madrigal to secure third place for the festive break.

Villarreal made it 23 points from a possible 25 at home and Juan Carlos Garrido's side move five points clear of fourth-placed Espanyol.

AFP, Berlin



Mainz closed the gap at the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday to 10 points with a tense 4-2 win at winty St Pauli as leaders Borussia Dortmund were beaten 1-0 at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Both Mainz striker Andre Schuerrle and St Pauli midfielder Matthias Lehmann scored two goals, but a deft first-half chip by Mainz's Hungarian striker Adam Szalai kept the guests ahead on a bitterly cold night in Hamburg.

Mainz midfielder Marco Caligiuri settled the matter in the 83rd minute when he took a clever pass from substitute striker Sami Allagui and drilled his shot past the goalkeeper as Mainz went second.

Dortmund's lead at the top has been cut to ten points and Leverkusen can bridge the gap further if they can reclaim second by beating Freiburg on Sunday.

Earlier leaders Dortmund were stunned when the league's top-scorer Theofanis Gekas netted his 14th league goal of the season on 86 minutes with some superb finishing.

It was only the second defeat of the season for the league's top side.

"They deserved to win," admitted Dortmund coach Jürgen Klopp with the

Bundesliga set to take its customary winter break on Sunday.

Dortmund would have claimed the German league record for the best start to the season if they had drawn or won.

Fourth-placed Hanover were stunned 3-1 at mid-table Nuremberg, while Champions League last 16-qualifiers Schalke picked up their third-straight league win with a 3-0 win over Cologne as Spain striker Raul

are eighth.

Werder Bremen slipped further towards the relegation zone when they were beaten 2-1 by Kaiserslautern to suffer their second straight defeat.

Both sides had players sent

Van Bommel expects to stay on

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain Mark van Bommel said Sunday he expects to remain as skipper of the German champions and played down rumours of a transfer to Bundesliga rivals Wolfsburg in January's winter break.

But Van Bommel said he does not expect Sunday's Bundesliga match at Stuttgart to be his final German league game for Bayern.

"Anything is possible in football, but it would certainly be something extraordinary if the captain left during the winter break," van Bommel told German daily Die Welt.

"I do not have to leave Bayern, I am very happy as captain of the club."

"If the club says that I must remain here for six months, then I have to stay," he said. "If the club says, we talk about a new contract in the spring, then I can't do anything about it."

"I can't leave without the club's consent."

RESULTS

Werder Bremen 1 (Hunt 34-pen)
Kaiserslautern 2 (Lakic 1, 52)
VfL Wolfsburg 2 (Diego 75, Dzeko 90+1) Hoffenheim 2 (Luiz Gustavo 35, Sigurdsson 40)
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Gekas 87) Borussia Dortmund 0
Nuremberg 3 (Cherundolo 28, Wolf 31, Schieber 82) Hanover 1 (Pinto 76-pen)
Schalke 04 3 (Raul 30, 50, 87) FC Cologne 0
St Pauli 2 (Lehmann 33-pen, 63)
Mainz 05 4 (Schuerrle 11, 28,