



Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (L-up) celebrates his fiftieth strike this season during his side's La Liga match against Osasuna at Nou Camp on Saturday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Barca stay eight clear

Messi's historic half-century

AFP, Madrid



Argentine superstar Lionel Messi on Saturday became the first player to score 50 goals in a Spanish season as Barcelona and arch-rivals Real Madrid both triumphed ahead of their mouth-watering Champions League duel.

Messi reached his latest landmark when he found the target three minutes from time in his team's 2-0 win over Osasuna as Barcelona maintained their eight-point lead at the top of La Liga.

Now Messi has 31 goals in the league and nine in the Champions League after finishing with seven in the King's Cup and three in the Spanish Supercup.

Earlier Saturday, Real crushed Valencia 6-3 to set the foundation for Wednesday's Champions League semifinal first leg clash at their Bernabeu home.

However, ahead of another 'clasico' in Europe, Guardiola chose to leave the likes of Messi, Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta on the bench against Osasuna.

The impressive Jeffery Isaias supplied the 24th minute cross for Spain international David Villa to end one of his worst spells in front of goal when he fired passed the keeper

after having gone eleven matches and two months without scoring.

In the second half Barca tightened up and substitute Messi came on to secure the three points and his place in the record books.

A second-string Real side romped to a 6-3 win over Valencia. Coach Jose Mourinho fielded just Iker Casillas and Ricardo Carvalho from the side which beat Barcelona in the final of the King's Cup as he also looked to rest his players.

Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain made the most of his opportunity with a hatrick while Brazilian star Kaka grabbed a brace.

Karim Benzema opened the scoring when the keeper failed to reach a Higuain pass and the Frenchman slotted passed two defenders on the line.

Higuain then slipped the ball home while defender Jeremy Mathieu dawdled in possession.

Still before half time Kaka and Higuain netted from crosses with the Valencia defence again ball watching.

After the break Valencia were a little better with Higuain completing a hatrick before Roberto Saldado finally got the home side on the score sheet.

A piece of quality from Kaka saw him finish clinically after nutmegging a defender and then Valencia gave some respectability to the scoreline with goals from Jonas Goncalves and Jordi Alba.

RESULTS

Valencia 3 (Soldado 60, Jonas 80, Alba 85) **Real Madrid 6** (Benzema 23, Higuain 31, 42, 53, Kaka 39, 62)
Barcelona 2 (Villa 24, Messi 87) **Osasuna 0**
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Munain 18, Toquero 29) **Real Sociedad 1** (Javi Martinez 31-og)

Dortmund stunned

AFP, Stuttgart



Relegation-threatened Borussia Moenchengladbach shocked leaders Dortmund 1-0 on Saturday to ensure a tense finale to the Bundesliga title race.

With second-placed Bayer Leverkusen winning 2-1 at home to Hoffenheim earlier in the day, Dortmund's lead has now been cut to five points with three games left before the season ends on May 14.

"We played an anxious type of football and we were out of sorts," said Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp.

"We did much better in the second half and a draw would have been a fairer result."

The title race will now come down to the next few weeks with Dortmund playing Nuremberg on Saturday, Bremen in a fortnight and finishing against Eintracht Frankfurt.

Leverkusen are at Cologne on Saturday, then host Hamburg and finish against Freiburg.

"Gladbach, meanwhile, climbed off the bottom of the table for the first time since November thanks to Cameroon striker Mohamadou Idrissou's first half winner.

"My team played very well and defended superbly," said Gladbach coach Lucien Favre after his side's first win over Dortmund in four and a half years.

"Dortmund put us under a lot of pressure, but didn't have that many chances to score." Bayern Munich's hopes of playing in the Champions League next season remain on a knife-edge after they needed a last-gasp goal to secure a 1-1 draw at struggling Eintracht Frankfurt.

After Hanover 96 leapfrogged them with a 3-1 win at Freiburg on Thursday, Bayern failed to reclaim third spot which

leaves them out of the places for Europe's top domestic competition with three games left.

Frankfurt midfielder Sebastian Rode put his side ahead in the 54th minute.

Bayern were furious when a late call for a penalty was turned down after US midfielder Ricardo Clark appeared to handle the ball in the area.

But the referee did point to the spot after Czech striker Martin Fenin fouled Luiz Gustavo and the league's top-scorer Mario Gomez blasted home the spot kick in the 89th minute to secure a share of the points for the struggling German giants.

The draw left Frankfurt just above the relegation zone in 15th -- but with a five-point cushion -- while Bayern are fourth, a point behind Hanover.

"We are very disappointed," said Bayern caretaker coach Andries Jonker.

"In this situation, we simply had to win and when you travel to a relegation candidate like Frankfurt, you have to take three points.

"We really raised our game in the last 20 minutes to force the draw, but overall we had no right to claim three points."

Schalke 04's hopes of a morale-boosting win before Tuesday's Champions League semi-final with Manchester United were dashed in a 1-0 home defeat to Kaiserslautern.

Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, who on Wednesday told the Royal Blues he will not renew his contract which expires at the end of next season, was beaten in the 42nd minute by Srdjan Lakic.

VfB Stuttgart, the 2007 champions, pulled away from the bottom three with a 2-0 win at home to Hamburg to go 13th. Werder Bremen's 3-1 win over St Pauli means they are almost certain to stay up.

Milan home in on title

AFP, Rome



AC Milan need four points from their final four matches to be crowned Italian champions for the 18th time following Saturday's hard-

fought 1-0 win at Brescia. They lead reigning champions Inter Milan by eight points but due to their better head-to-head record, need only another win and a draw to lift the scudetto crown.

Inter moved above Napoli into second spot as the former beat Lazio 2-1 and the latter lost by the same score at Palermo.

Napoli are now nine points back in third and must concentrate on hanging onto that place to ensure they go straight into next season's Champions League group stages.

Robinho scored the only goal of the game for Milan eight minutes from time on a counter-attack as Brescia's defence went AWOL, allowing Antonio Cassano to pick out the Brazilian to slip the ball home.

Napoli were handed a gift after just two minutes when Mattia Cassani inexplicably handled the ball in the box.

Edinson Cavani made no mistake from the spot, unlike last week against Udinese, as he scored his 26th Serie A goal of the season to move level with Udinese's Antonio Di Natale at the top of the league scoring charts.

But Palermo, buoyed by their Italian Cup draw away to Milan in midweek, hit back and Cassani made amends by crossing for Federico Balzaretti to thrash home a crisp finish from the left.

And the hosts took the lead on the stroke

of half-time in bizarre and controversial fashion.

Giulio Migliaccio burst into the box past two Napoli players only to flop to the ground under apparent contact from Christian Maggio.

Antonio Nocerino crashed home the loose ball but the referee had already signalled a penalty.

It made no difference, though, as Cesare Bovo put the Sicilians in front from 12 yards.

Inter's faint title hopes may have all but ended in last week's defeat at Parma but Leonardo's team proved against Lazio that they're still going to fight to the end.

Inter looked headed for a disastrous afternoon when goalkeeper Julio Cesar brought down Mauro Zarate for a penalty midway through the first half.

Although Andrea Ranocchia had got back onto the line, the referee dismissed the Brazilian shot-stopper and Zarate added injury to insult by slotting home from the spot.

With a goal and man advantage, Lazio looked set to leapfrog Inter into third place courtesy of a better head-to-head record, but instead the champions showed their mettle.

Wesley Sneijder curled home a sumptuous free-kick five minutes before the break and then after half-time Samuel Eto'o pounced on a slip by Giuseppe Biava to round Fernando Muslera in the Lazio goal and shoot home.

At the bottom, Bari were relegated to Serie B following their 1-0 defeat at home to Sampdoria, who moved out of the drop zone due to their better head-to-head record with Lecce, 4-2 losers at Genoa.

RESULTS

Roma 1 (Perrotta 4) **Chievo 0**
Bari 0 Sampdoria 1 (Pozzi 59)
Bologna 0 **Cesena 2** (Giaccherini 48, Malonga 84)
Cagliari 1 (Cossu 47)
Fiorentina 2 (Cerci 45, 50)
Genoa 4 (Floro Flores 10, 62, Palacio 42, 54) **Lecce 2** (Di Michele 3, 30)
Inter Milan 2 (Sneijder 40, Eto'o 53)
Lazio 1 (Zarate 24-pen)
Palermo 2 (Balzaretti 38, Bovo 45-pen) **Napoli 1** (Cavani 2-pen)
Udinese 0 **Parma 2** (Amauri 13, 90)
Brescia 0 **AC Milan 1** (Robinho 82)
Juventus 2 (Del Piero 19-pen, 38)
Catania 2 (Gomez 81, Lodi 90)

Torres breaks duck

AFP, London



Fernando Torres scored his first Chelsea goal in his 14th appearance for the club as Carlo Ancelotti's side secured a 3-0 victory over West Ham to remain six points behind Premier League leaders Manchester United.

Frank Lampard had given the reigning champions a 44th minute lead and, after Torres broke his duck, Florent Malouda completed the win with a stoppage time strike at Stamford Bridge.

It was Torres's goal that triggered the loudest cheers as the Spaniard finally found the net for the first time after 733 minutes of action following his British record £50 million transfer from Liverpool in January.

The striker had again been left on the bench but his impact when he appeared as a 76th minute substitute ensured West Ham's chances of clawing their way back into the game disappeared and with it their hopes of lifting themselves off the foot of the table.

The Hammers were also forced to come into this game without their two senior players after injuries ruled out Matthew Upson and Scott Parker.

Attention immediately before

kick-off focused on the pre-match handshake with Chelsea captain John Terry and West Ham full back Wayne Bridge due to confront each other for only the second time since last February's allegations about the nature of the relationship between Terry and Bridge's former partner.

Once again the two players avoided contact and the sideshow over, Chelsea reacted immediately by creating the first opening of the game in the second minute.

Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti kept faith with the three-man strike force of Salomon Kalou, Didier Drogba and Malouda that has started both games since the Champions League exit to United.

And Kalou and Malouda combined to carve open the West Ham defence before Malouda was denied by an excellent save from Hammers keeper Robert Green.

Drogba's perfectly weighted ball allowed Cole to speed to the byline where the full back pulled back for Lampard to crash the ball home from 12 yards.

But substitute Torres made the game safe when he collected Nicoals Anelka's through ball and sent a left foot shot beyond Green in the 84th minute before Malouda wrapped things up with a superb long-range drive.



Chelsea's Spanish striker Fernando Torres celebrates scoring his first Premier League goal for the London club against West Ham United at Stamford Bridge in London on Saturday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Raul to discuss future

AFP, Berlin

Veteran Spain striker Raul is set to discuss his future with Champions League semi-finalists Schalke 04 when his agent meets club bosses during Tuesday's last four clash with Manchester United.

The 33-year-old is under contract with the Royal Blues until 2012, but has been in stellar form this season and his agent is set to meet with Royal Blues bosses during Tuesday's match to discuss an extension.

"There was a first meeting around the Inter Milan match (on April 13) and his agent will also come to the game against Manchester United, then there will be a second," Schalke's director of sport Horst Heldt said on Saturday.

A firm crowd favourite at Schalke, Raul has made 44 appearances for the Royal Blues this season, scoring 18 goals in the process.

Podolski commits to Cologne

AFP, Berlin

German international forward Lukas Podolski said on Sunday that he will remain with Cologne next season, even though the club are yet to confirm their top-flight status.

"Being at Cologne does me good. It's my club, it's my town," Podolski told Bild am Sonntag.

Cologne are currently 14th in the Bundesliga, six points above the relegation places with four games to play.

"If it's just up to me, I'll still be here (next season)," added Podolski, who returned to his formative club in 2009 after three mixed seasons at Bayern Munich.

Despite his vow to stay put, Podolski called for the club to get their house in order, as they seek a replacement for coach Frank Schaefer.

"At this club it's always a circus," said Podolski, who married his fiancée, Monika, last week.

"At Mainz, (Borussia) Dortmund and Hanover, there are no huge stars but there's a philosophy and everyone pulls in the same direction."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Who do you think will be cricket's next chief selector?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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ESPN

English Premiership
Blackburn v Man City
Live from 1:00am (Tuesday)

TEN Cricket

West Indies v Pakistan
Second ODI
Live from 7:30pm

SET Max

Indian Premier League
Chennai v Pune
Live from 8:30pm

TEN Action+

La Liga
Real Zaragoza v Almeria
Live from 1:00am (Tuesday)



National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day-4)
Dhaka v Rajshahi at Bogra
Sylhet v Barisal at Rajshahi
BCB Academy v SA Academy
(2nd 4-Day Match, Day-4)
Venue: SBNS, Mirpur