



Future starts now at Milan

Rossoneri lift first title since 2004

8 in 8 for Zlatan

INTERNET, Undated

AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic has proven to be something of a lucky charm for the clubs he has plied his trade for in the last eight years.

The trend has continued as he clinched an eighth successive league championship following AC Milan's goalless draw with Roma on Saturday evening, which secured the Serie A title for Massimiliano Allegri's men.

Ibrahimovic, who joined Milan last summer from Barcelona, was in ecstatic mood after clinching his third Italian title, despite missing five key games through suspension this year.

"I have won the Scudetto with the three top teams in Italy (Juventus, Inter and AC Milan)," said the Swede.

"I have been six years in Italy and I have always won."

"I want to thank Milan president Silvio Berlusconi for bringing me to Milan and for allowing me to return to smile."

"I came to Milan to win and we have done that."

"I hope to make history with Milan, I am very happy here."

AGENCIES, Rome



His hair and suit were still soaked with celebratory champagne but AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri was already looking

forward to next season.

Milan secured the point they needed in a 0-0 draw at Roma on Saturday night to land an 18th Serie A crown, and first since 2004, with two games to spare.

This campaign has not even come to a conclusion and quite apart from Milan's two remaining meaningless league games, they also have a Cup semifinal, second leg and maybe even final to come.

But it is the one bitter experience of the season that seems already to be dominating the thoughts of those with the power within the San Siro's fabled halls.

And that is the Champions League.

During the six successive seasons in which they had to look on enviously as main rivals Juventus (who were stripped of their titles for match-fixing) and Inter Milan basked in the glory of championship success, Milan insisted to anyone who would listen that they were a team for the biggest European occasion rather than mundane domestic matters.

Although Juventus have won the most league titles and until Saturday, Inter had one more scudetto crown than their cross-town rivals, Milan have more Champions League tro-

phies than the other two put together.

Juventus have won it twice, Inter three times but Milan have lifted Europe's premier trophy seven times.

And yet this season, they flopped in the Europe's premier club competition for the third time in four seasons -- and the one season they didn't flop was because they hadn't qualified.

Since last lifting the trophy in 2007, Milan have yet to go beyond the last 16.

And while second round defeats to Arsenal in 2008 and Manchester United last season could be excused, the 1-0 aggregate loss to debutants Tottenham this time around hit hard.

RESULTS

Palermo 2 (Miccoli 40, Bovo 52)
Bari 1 (Bentivoglio 2)
Roma 0 AC Milan 0

Club president Silvio Berlusconi is a huge fan of the reflected glory brought by European success and Allegri revealed straight after this title triumph that the Italy Prime Minister has promised him funds to sign big players in the summer.

As vice-president Adriano Galliani had previously said: "They will be Champions League acquisitions."

So who will be on the radar?

Already they will have January signings Antonio Cassano, Mark van Bommel and Urby Emanuelson available having been cup-tied against Spurs due to their involvement in the competition with their previous

respective clubs.

Despite rejecting their detractors' claims over being over the hill, Milan will indeed be trying to reduce the average age of their squad as they have 13 players aged 33 and over.

Galliani has already said they will have to trim up to five or six players from the squad, which could spell the end for several veterans and some fringe players.

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo is apparently top of their shopping list although Milan's recent history of dealing in the transfer market suggests a huge bid for the Portuguese star is unlikely to materialise.

More likely, particularly given Galliani's claim that South America is their focus, would be a deal for either or both of Brazilian club Santos's young stars Neymar and Ganso, with the latter's representatives already in talks with the Italians.

The club may also be expecting a step up in level from promising youngsters already at Milan, such as German midfielder Alexander Merkel.

But a renewed push on Europe does not mean Milan will give up their domestic crown lightly.

There are many who feel this season they have won it almost by default as their rivals have failed more than they have succeeded.

But Inter and Juventus are sure to be rejuvenated next season and if Napoli keep progressing or Roma sort out their internal turmoil, they could also push Milan hard.

Spurs stalled in CL pursuit

AFP, London



Tottenham Hotspur failed to take advantage of a slip-up by Champions League rivals Manchester City as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Premier League strugglers Blackpool on Saturday.

Jermain Defoe equalised for Spurs a minute from time at White Hart Lane after Blackpool's Charlie Adam had missed and then scored from the penalty spot in the space of 70 seconds.

Tottenham are now six points behind City, who occupy the fourth and final Champions League place.

But victory would have seen them move closer ahead of their midweek trip to Eastlands following City's 2-1 defeat at Everton.

Heurelho Gomes produced a fine save to deny Adam after Spurs defender Michael Dawson was penalised for handball in the box.

But the erratic Brazilian goalkeeper went from hero to zero when he fumbled a corner and was ruled by referee Lee Probert to have brought down Gary Taylor-Fletcher.

This time Adam, who could have been red-carded minutes earlier for a challenge on Gareth Bale that saw the Spurs star carried off on a stretcher, blasted the ball to Gomes's right to give

RESULTS	
Aston Villa 1 (Young 17)	Wigan 1 (N'Zogbia 10)
Bolton 1 (Klasic 87)	
Sunderland 2 (Zenden 45, Knight 90-go)	
Everton 2 (Distin 65, Osman 72)	Man City 1 (Toure 28)
Newcastle 2 (Ameobi 36-pen, Taylor 43)	
Birmingham 1 (Bowyer 45)	Tottenham 1 (Defoe 89)
Blackpool 1 (Adam 76-pen)	West Ham 1 (Hitzlsperger 78)
Blackburn 1 (Roberts 12)	

the Tangerines the lead with 14 minutes left.

"He has done his ankle, it looks quite bad," said Harry Redknapp, the Tottenham manager.

Spurs played in this season's Champions League but Redknapp didn't hold out much hope of a repeat after this result.

"It's going to be very difficult," he said. "We haven't been able to win games in the last month or so."

The draw saw Blackpool stay above the relegation zone on goal difference with two games of the season left.

"There's only one word for me: pride," Blackpool manager Ian Holloway told ESPN. "We believe in ourselves again. We've had a little wobble

but there's a few games to play yet."

West Ham remained rooted to the foot of the table despite a 1-1 draw at home to Blackburn Rovers and are three points shy of safety while Wigan also stayed in the bottom three following their 1-1 draw with Aston Villa.

West Ham fell behind when Blackburn striker Jason Roberts turned in Brett Emerton's 12th minute cross.

But a trademark Thomas Hitzlsperger shot 12 minutes from time gave the Londoners a lifeline.

Wigan took a 10th minute lead at Villa Park through Charles N'Zogbia but Villa equalised seven minutes later when Ashley Young fired in from 25 yards out.

At Goodison Park, Ivory Coast international Yaya Toure put Manchester City in front when his 28th minute shot beat Tim Howard.

But Sylvain Distin levelled in the 65th minute before Leon Osman's header just minutes later gave Everton the three points.

"It was incredible we lost this game," said a frustrated Roberto Mancini, the City manager. "But this is football. If you lose concentration, if you concede a yard to the other team, it is difficult."

At St James' Park, Newcastle piled on more misery for Birmingham with a 2-1 win.

Real go goal crazy

AFP, Barcelona



Cristiano Ronaldo grabbed four goals to take his season's tally to 33 as Real Madrid crushed Sevilla 6-2 on Saturday to keep their slim hopes of beating Barcelona to the La Liga title alive.

The gap at the top of the table is now down to five points but after Barcelona play Espanyol in the Catalan derby on Sunday, there will only be three games to play.

Real faced Sevilla on the back of tumultuous double header with Barcelona in the Champions League semifinal where they were beaten by their bitter rivals.

Looking to restore pride, coach Jose Mourinho played a full strength side against a Sevilla team in the fight for a place in the Europa League.

Frenchman Karim Benzema missed a glaring chance early on but finally the Real pressure told as Sergio Ramos headed home a corner.

Ronaldo extended the lead after bringing down a pass from Pepe and firing past the keeper before Kaka hit a third as Real dominated.

In the second half Sevilla threatened a comeback with an Alvaro Negredo goal

before Ronaldo struck three more times to take his league tally to 33 goals, two more than Barcelona's Lionel Messi.

Negredo wrapped up the scoring with what was only a consolation for Sevilla.

After the game Real's assistant coach Aitor Karanka attended the press conference with Mourinho refusing to speak to the media since receiving a five match ban from UEFA for criticising Barcelona.

"Each game is different. A league match, a cup game and a Champions League knock-out are all different and on top of this each referee has their own approach," said Karanka, alluding to the performances by the referees in both Champions League semifinal legs, which left Real angry.

Valencia boosted their hopes of finishing third with a 3-0 win over Real Sociedad.

After back-to-back defeats, Valencia needed a victory with Villarreal, who play Mallorca on Sunday, breathing down their necks.

Roberto Soldado scored twice and Jonas Goncalves found the back of the net in between.

"It is true that at the start of the season we were only thinking of finishing fourth but situations change and now we are playing for third," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

RESULTS

Athletic Bilbao 3 (Toquero 30, David Lopez 47-pen, Llorente 64) Levante 2 (Stuani 78, Nano 85)
Valencia 3 (Soldado 16, 37, Jonas 25) Real Sociedad 0
Getafe 2 (Colunga 5, Rios 53) Almeria 0
Sporting Gijon 2 (Ayoze 35-pen, Barral 90+6-pen) Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Lopez 9, 41)
Hercules 2 (Sendoa 40, Gomes 43)
Racing Santander 3 (Dos Santos 14, 41, Henrique 45+1)
Atletico Madrid 0 Malaga 3 (Rondon 29, Baptista 35, Maresca 84)
Sevilla 2 (Negredo 61, 84) Real Madrid 6 (Sergio Ramos 21, Cristiano Ronaldo 31, 65, 70, 75, Kaka 42)

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
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What to WATCH
SET Max
Indian Premier League
Rajasthan v Chennai
Live from 8:30pm
ESPN
English Premiership
Fulham v Liverpool
Live from 1:00am (Tuesday)
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh League
Muktijoddha v Arambagh
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Brothers Union v Soccer Club, Feni
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Kamalapur Stadium



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo roars after scoring his fourth goal in their La Liga clash with Sevilla at the Sanchez Pizjuan in Seville on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Magath to stick, even if relegated

AFP, Berlin

VfL Wolfsburg coach Felix Magath has vowed to stay with the 2009 German league champions, even if they are relegated on Saturday at the end of the Bundesliga season.

"I will stay at this club, even if we must play in the second division, but I am sure we will still be in the Bundesliga next season," he told German television channel Sport1.

The 57-year-old coached Wolfsburg to the 2009 league title, but was sacked by Schalke in March and promptly returned to Wolves, which he has said will be his last Bundesliga club.

Wolfsburg's 2-1 home defeat to Kaiserslautern on Saturday means they are 15th in the table and level on 35 points with 16th-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach, who are in one of the relegation places.

St Pauli had their relegation confirmed by an 8-1 defeat at home to Bayern Munich on Saturday, but either Wolfsburg, Gladbach or Eintracht Frankfurt will join them after Saturday's results.