

# Champagne on ice for Barca

AFP, Barcelona

Mighty Barcelona moved to within a point of a third successive Spanish league title on Sunday with a 2-0 win over Espanyol in the Catalan derby.

Goals from Andres Iniesta and Gerard Pique took Barcelona to 91 points, eight ahead of Real Madrid, who stayed alive in the title race with a 6-2 win over Sevilla on Saturday.

Barcelona, who have a superior head-to-head record over Real, will be crowned champions if they avoid defeat against Levante on Wednesday.

A real failure to see off Getafe on Tuesday will also be enough for the championship celebrations to start.

"The later that Barca win the title, the better," said Cristiano Ronaldo who scored four times in Real's demolition of Sevilla to take his season's league tally to 33, two better than Barca star Lionel Messi.

Barca started slowly on Sunday,

appearing to suffer a hangover from their Champions League semi-final against Real where they came out on top in a tumultuous double header.

Espanyol were still in the hunt for a place in the Europa League despite a dismal run which had seen them win just once in six games.

It became seven as Barca slowly cranked up their customary passing game and started to find cracks in the defence.

Pedro Rodriguez tested 'keeper Carlos Kameni with a strike from 20 yards and then Iniesta had a shot from the edge of the area before he made the breakthrough.

The Spain international jockeyed his man, making space for himself, and then fired past Kameni.

Any hopes of an Espanyol comeback suffered a blow at the start of the second half when poor defending at a corner allowed Pique to steal in and head home at the near post.

"We had an excellent first half although after the first goal we relaxed a bit," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola.

"In general terms it was a good game against a side who always cause us problems. The league is now very close and it is down to us."

Valencia are strong favourites to finish third following a 0-0 stalemate between Mallorca and Villarreal.

A brace from Roberto Soldado and a Jonas Goncalves goal gave Valencia a 3-0 win over Real Sociedad and now they are five points clear after a lethargic performance from Villarreal on Sunday.

Almeria's survival dream came to an end as a 2-0 win for Getafe gave them only their third victory of the year and took them out of the relegation zone.

Hercules' future is also looking bleak as they are now six points from safety following a 3-2 defeat at home by Racing Santander.

## RESULTS

Real Mallorca 0 Villarreal 0  
Barcelona 2 (Iniesta 29,  
Pique 48) Espanyol 0  
Real Zaragoza 1 (Lafita 14) Osasuna 3  
(Camunas 62, Sergio 70, Sola 80)



Barcelona's defender Gerard Pique celebrates after scoring during their La Liga match against Espanyol at the Camp Nou on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Bale out for the season

Soccernet

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp does not expect Gareth Bale to play any part in the rest of season after the winger picked up an ankle injury following a challenge from Blackpool's Charlie Adam at the weekend.

Bale had to be carried off in the second half of Tottenham's 1-1 draw against Blackpool on Saturday and the Welshman will go for a scan on his left leg at hospital amid fears he suffered serious ankle ligament damage.

Bale is definitely out of Tuesday's game at Manchester City, a game Spurs must win to stay in the hunt for the fourth Champions League spot, and is unlikely to play in the club's other two remaining games against Liverpool and Birmingham City.

Redknapp said: "It looks like he has done his ankle ligaments. I don't see him

## Barca, Man Utd again in July

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona will take on Manchester United in a friendly in the United States in July in a repeat of the Champions League final later this month, the defending Spanish champions said Monday.

The two sides will face each other at the 90,000-seat FedExField stadium in Landover, Maryland near Washington D.C. on July 30, the club said in a statement posted on its website.

Barcelona and Manchester United will clash in the Champions League final on May 28 at London's Wembley Stadium.

## Napoli boss lashes out at players

Soccernet

Furious Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis has ripped into his players following a 2-1 defeat at relegation-threatened Lecce on Sunday, claiming they are not fit to wear the Azzurri shirt.

Javier Chevanton's controversial late strike earned last season's Serie B champions Lecce a vital victory at the Stadio via del Mare.

Napoli, who earlier this season were challenging for the Serie A title, need to take one more point from their final two matches to secure a Champions League berth but De Laurentiis was not happy with the performance at the weekend.

De Laurentiis told Italian television channel Rai 2: "The game was decided by a last-minute goal, it is true. But it was a performance that made me very sad."

"A goal such as Chevanton's indicates the presence of a team very immature and not ready to compete at the highest levels. We did not play as a cohesive group and were not able to concentrate at the decisive moments."

"The players were not worthy to wear the jersey and to represent the colours of Napoli."

Coach Walter Mazzarri said his side had been "naive" but felt the loss was harsh. He told club website: "The team were inaccurate and naive, this is true, but showed the right determination. Perhaps we were a bit tired from the heat, but we did not deserve this [defeat]."

## Terry left without answers

AFP, London

John Terry had no answer to Chelsea's miserable first-half performance during a defeat by Manchester United that all but ended the Blues' Premier League title hopes.

United's 2-1 victory on Sunday left Sir Alex Ferguson's side six points clear of second-placed title-holders Chelsea, with two games of the season left, and needing just one more point to be crowned champions.

Chelsea were fortunate not to be more than two goals down at the break and their opening 45 minutes was in stark contrast to the work the London club had done over the previous two months to reduce a 15-point deficit.

Indeed they were a goal behind after a mere 36 seconds at Old Trafford and Chelsea captain Terry was unable to explain why his team were overwhelmed early on in such a crunch match.

"I'm not sure," the England central defender told Chelsea TV. "We were fully prepared and it's one of those things."

"Disappointing day but, going back two months, we would've taken this - being in the position (three points behind United at the start of the game)."

"We felt it was in our hands and we could come here and we could win the game."

"Sometimes, you have to hold your hands up."

Terry added: "We came here hoping and praying that we started well and the role was completely reversed."

"They had a great start and got the early goal, which settled them."

"But, first half, we didn't deserve anything from the game at all."

"I thought second half we came out, we had nothing to lose and went for it and dominated the second half."

"It just would've been interesting to get that second goal and get it back to level terms."

Chelsea's Italian manager, Carlo Ancelotti, has been widely tipped to lose his job with the Blues set to endure a season without silverware and their worst campaign since Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich bought the club eight years ago.

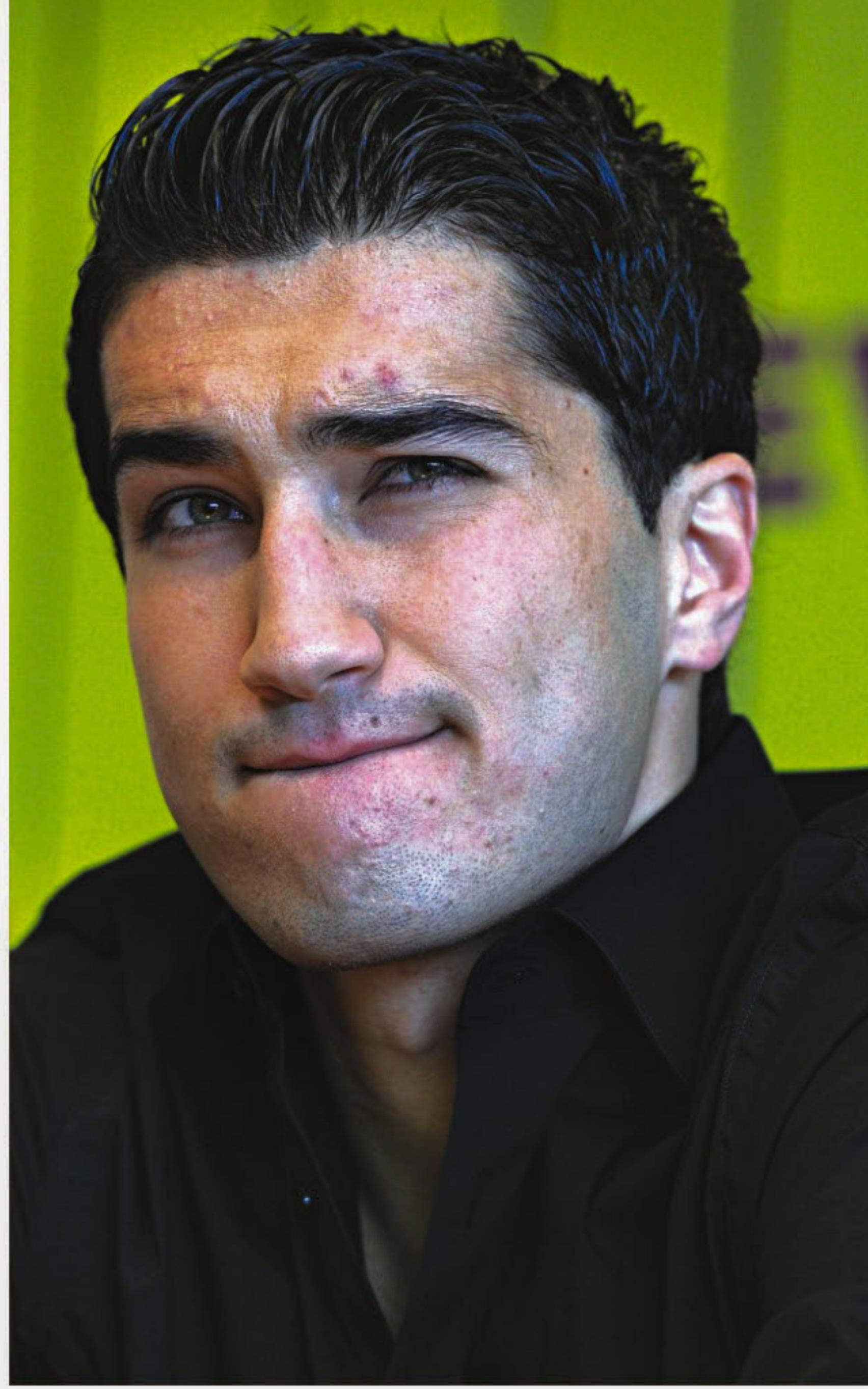


PHOTO: AFP

Borussia Dortmund star Nuri Sahin speaks at a press conference in Dortmund on Monday. Sahin announced his move to Real Madrid for next season.

## Real swoop for Dortmund's Sahin

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have reached an agreement to sign German-born Turkish international Nuri Sahin from Borussia Dortmund for six seasons, the Spanish club said Monday.

The Spanish giants said the 22-year-old midfielder "has a knack for distributing the ball as well as recovering it."

"With a powerful left foot and an eye for ball placement, he is also a master at free-kicks," the club added on its website.

Real gave no financial details but German media put the value of the transfer at around 10 million euros (\$14 million).

Sahin, who was under contract with the German side until 2013, made his league debut with Dortmund in 2005 when he became the youngest player to play and score in the Bundesliga at the age of 16.

He scored six goals this season to help Dortmund win its first Bundesliga title since the 2001/02 campaign.

Sahin, who spent the 2007-08 season on loan at Dutch club Feyenoord, will join two other Turkish players Mesut Oezil and Sami Khedira who joined the Spanish club from the Bundesliga last year.

## Udinese closer to Europe

AFP, Rome

Udinese moved back into fourth and the final Champions League qualification place with a 2-1 victory over Lazio on Sunday.

Serie A top scorer Antonio Di Natale was once again the hero as he scored both goals to give the northerners a two-point lead over Lazio and Roma in the race for fourth with two games to play.

Udinese coach Francesco Guidolin paid tribute to his young guns, in particular the returning Alexis Sanchez.

"This is the youngest team ever to be in a fight for a Champions League place," said a jubilant Guidolin.

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The result also meant that should Juventus beat Chievo on Monday, they will be only three points off fourth place.

With AC Milan securing the scudetto crown on Saturday night with a 0-0 draw at Roma, attentions on Sunday turned to the other matters still to be decided.

Di Natale timed his run in behind the defence perfectly on 35 minutes to collect Sanchez's lofted pass, control it and volley home from an angle.

## RESULTS

Bologna 0 Parma 0  
Brescia 1 (Diamanti 90) Catania 2  
(Silvestre 27, Bergessio 75)

Cagliari 0 Cesena 2 (Jimenez 54,  
Malonga 84)

Inter Milan 3 (Pazzini 25,  
Cambiaso 28, Coutinho 77)

Fiorentina 1 (Gardino 74)

Lecce 2 (Corvia 49, Chevanton 88)

Napoli 1 (Mascara 67)

Udinese 2 (Di Natale 35, 42)

Lazio 1 (Kozak 76)

Genoa 2 (Floro Flores 45, Boselli  
90+6) Sampdoria 1 (Pozzi 67)

defence this time and he opted to square to his captain for a simple tap-in.

Things were made more complicated in the second period when Gabriele Angella was sent-off for bringing down Tommaso Rocchi in the box. However, Mauro Zarate curled an awful spot-kick straight into goalkeeper Samir Handanovic's arms and Udinese survived.

Fourteen minutes from time, Zarate crossed from the left and Libor Kozak stuck out a boot in a crowded penalty area to volley home and set up a tight finish.

Lazio piled forward and even hit the post but Udinese hung on grimly to snatch the victory.

Inter Milan secured their passage directly into next season's Champions League group stages with a 3-1 victory over Fiorentina.

Goals from Giampaolo Pazzini and Esteban Cambiasso, both set-up by Cameroon captain Samuel Eto'o, gave Inter a 2-0 lead at half-time.

Alberto Gilardino slotted the ball the wrong side of the post when one-on-one with goalkeeper Julio Cesar but then volleyed home after some neat control on his knee to reduce the deficit.

However, Brazilian starlet Coutinho curled home a late free-kick to make the points safe.

That left Inter 10 points clear of Udinese but Napoli still need another point to secure their place in the group stages after they lost 2-1 at Lecce.