

Higuain bags treble

AFP, Madrid



Defending champions Barcelona went top of La Liga on Sunday with a laboured 1-0 win at rock-bottom Sporting Gijon while Gonzalo Higuain blasted a hat-trick in Real Madrid's 4-0 cruise at Espanyol.

An injury-plagued Barcelona moved into first place with 14 points as Adriano gave them their first away win of the season.

Unfashionable Levante are tucked just behind on goal difference after a 1-0 win against Real Betis, while Real are a point further back in third spot ahead of Malaga and Valencia who also have 13 points.

After draws against Real Sociedad and Valencia, Barcelona went into their game at Sporting with a lengthy injury list.

Adriano grabbed the only goal after 11 minutes, knocking in a rebound after a Xavi Hernandez shot came back off a post.

Eric Abidal went off injured after the break to add to Barca's defensive worries but they never looked likely to concede.

Real Madrid have had a stuttering start to the season but have now bounced back from one point in two games with back-to-back wins.

Cristiano Ronaldo hit the post after just three minutes at Espanyol but Real went ahead after 17 minutes with Ronaldo setting up Higuain.

Kaka should have added to their lead before keeper Iker Casillas also blocked shots from Thievy Bifouma and Sergio Garcia for Espanyol.

Midway through the second half Higuain hit a powerful drive into the top corner while Vladimir Weiss missed a good opportunity to reduce the deficit.

Substitute Jose Callejon slotted in a third against his former club and Higuain completed his hattrick a minute from time as Real condemned Espanyol to their first defeat at home.

RESULTS

Real Betis 0 **Levante 1** (Juanlu 33)
Real Sociedad 1 (Martinez 61) **Athletic Bilbao 2** (Llorente 34, 70)
Atletico Madrid 0 Sevilla 0
Sporting Gijon 0 **Barcelona 1** (Adriano 11)
Espanyol 0 **Real Madrid 4** (Higuain 16,



Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain (L) scores his second goal against Espanyol during their Primera Liga encounter at the Cornella-El Prat Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Marchisio sends Juve top

AFP, Rome



Claudio Marchisio scored a dramatic late brace to give Juventus a 2-0 win over champions AC Milan and take them back to the top of Serie A on Sunday.

In the biggest test yet of Juve's title credentials the Turin giants dominated the match against a lacklustre and unrecognisable Milan but had to wait until three minutes from time to score a deserved winner.

The result leaves Juve above Udinese, who beat Bologna 2-0, on goals scored heading into the international break.

Milan, though, remain hovering above the relegation zone in 15th, just a point above 17th placed neighbours Inter Milan, suffering from a similar early-season crisis.

Although it was played at high intensity from the off, the game took a while to warm up in terms of decent goalscoring chances.

And when it did, they all went Juve's way.

On 27 minutes Andrea Pirlo, facing his former employers for the first time since his summer move, sent in a free-kick that Christian Abbiati punched clear.

Mirko Vucinic went close on 37 minutes as his chip from outside the box was tipped onto the bar by Abbiati as Milan escaped again.

Still Juve poured forward and they wasted a great chance when Marchisio collected Arturo

RESULTS

Novara 3 (Rigoni 47-pen, Morimoto 65, Jeda 85) Catania 3 (Legrottaglie 14, Lodi 56, Gomez 90)
Cesena 0 Chievo 0
Fiorentina 1 (Cerci 8) **Lazio 2** (Hernanes 28, Klose 83)
Lecce 0 **Cagliari 2** (Ribeiro 10, Biondini 40)
Palermo 3 (Migliaccio 19, Hernandez 90-pen) Siena 0
Parma 3 (Giovino 29, 42-pen, Morrone 50)
Genoa 1 (Palacio 90-pen)
Udinese 2 (Benatia 29, Di Natale 72-pen) Bologna 0

Vidal's dink into the box, took Gianluca Zambrotta out of the game with a sublime first touch but then rushed his shot and didn't trouble Abbiati.

The onslaught continued two

minutes into the second period as Pirlo's cross from the left was flicked on by Simone Pepe and Leonardo Bonucci found himself six yards out but seemed surprised by the arrival of the ball which hit him in the midriff and then his head before Abbiati acrobatically tipped it over the bar.

Milan's best chance came when Antonio Cassano picked out the returning Kevin-Prince Boateng but his cross-shot lacked conviction and Gianluigi Buffon tipped it around the post.

Vidal was hair's breadth away from giving Juve the lead 14 minutes from time when his vicious shot from 20 yards whisked just past the post while Vucinic curled another effort past the opposite upright.

The deadlock was finally broken when Marchisio went for a one-two with Vucinic and as he ran onto the return pass, Daniele Bonera, in trying to clear the danger, hooked the ball onto Marchisio's foot and beyond Abbiati.

In injury time Marchisio added a second thanks to woeful goalkeeping from Abbiati who let a speculative strike from 25 yards slip between his legs.

Goals from Morocco centre-back Mehdi Benatia and a captain Antonio Di Natale's penalty ensured Udinese maintained the form that took them to a surprise fourth last season.



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus midfielder Claudio Marchisio is ecstatic after scoring his second goal during their Serie A clash against Milan in Turin on Sunday.

Italy recall Barzagli

AFP, Rome

World Cup-winning Juventus centre-back Andrea Barzagli has earned a recall to the Italy national team for the first time in three years.

Atalanta midfielder Luca Cigarini was also given his first call-up by coach Cesare Prandelli for the Euro 2012 qualification matches against Serbia in Belgrade on October 7 and at home to Northern Ireland in Pescara four days later.

Italy have already qualified for the finals in Poland and Ukraine next year as Group C winners but both their opponents are still in contention for second place and a spot in the play-offs.

Barzagli last played for Italy in September 2008 against Cyprus when Marcello Lippi was the coach.

He had also been part of the squad Lippi took to Germany for their successful World Cup campaign in 2006.

He has 25 caps for Italy and replaces Inter Milan centre-back Andrea Ranocchia, who had been first choice recently under Prandelli but has lost his place in the Inter side.

Cigarini has been rewarded for his and Atalanta's surprisingly good start to the season and comes in for Inter's injured midfielder Thiago Motta.

Amongst the forwards there was only one change with the injured Alberto Gilardino omitted.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Salvatore Sirigu (Paris St Germain/FRA), Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli)

Defenders:
Davide Astori (Cagliari), Federico Balzaretti (Palermo), Andrea Barzagli (Juventus), Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus), Mattia Cassani (Fiorentina), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Domenico Criscito (Zenit St Petersburg/RUS), Christian Maggio (Napoli)

Midfielders:
Alberto Aquilani (AC Milan), Luca Cigarini (Atalanta), Daniele de Rossi (Roma), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Antonio Nocerino (Palermo), Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)

Forwards:
Mario Balotelli (Manchester City/ENG), Antonio Cassano (AC Milan), Sebastian Giovinco (Parma), Giampaolo Pazzini

North London is lily white

AFP, London



Tottenham piled on the misery for north London rivals Arsenal as Kyle Walker's long-range strike clinched a 2-1 win on Sunday.

Harry Redknapp's side condemned the Gunners to their fourth defeat in seven Premier League games this season after Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny failed to deal with Walker's swerving 30-yard effort in the 73rd minute at White Hart Lane.

Sixth-placed Spurs had taken the lead through Rafael van der Vaart's cool finish in the 40th minute, although the Dutch midfielder appeared to use the upper part of his arm to control Emmanuel Adebayor's pass prior to the goal.

Arsenal equalised in the 51st minute when Wales midfielder Aaron Ramsey finished off Alex Song's cross from close-range, but Walker settled a fiercely-fought derby when his shot slipped through Szczesny's grasp.

There was more bad news for Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger, whose side are languishing just two points off the relegation zone in 15th place, as France right-back Bacary Sagna was stretched off in the second half.

Elsewhere, Fulham romped to their first league win this season as Andrew Johnson's hat-trick inspired a 6-0 demolition of west London rivals QPR at Craven Cottage.

Martin Jol's side had gone six matches without a victory, but Johnson struck from close-range in the second minute and Danny Murphy netted a 20th minute penalty after a Paddy Kenny foul on Johnson.

The game was all but over when Johnson scored again in the 38th minute and he earned his treble with a fierce effort in the 59th minute.

Clint Dempsey got the fifth six minutes later and Bobby Zamora sealed the rout in the closing stages.

Swansea striker Danny Graham scored his first goal for the club as Brendan Rodgers' side beat Stoke 2-0 at the Liberty Stadium.

Scott Sinclair opened the scoring with a ninth minute penalty after the former Chelsea winger was brought down by Ryan Shawcross.

City confirm Tevez talks

AFP, London

Manchester City officials confirmed on Monday that they are due to open talks with Carlos Tevez.

Tevez has been suspended for two weeks after reportedly refusing to come on as a substitute during his side's 2-0 defeat at Munich's Allianz Arena.

Tevez initially claimed he "didn't feel right to play," but later backtracked and said the situation had been caused by a "misunderstanding".

After meeting with City officials, Tevez will not be allowed to return to the club until his suspension ends on October 12.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Who do you think West Indies will miss the most during the ODI series?

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Cape Cobras v T&T

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Chennai v NSW