



Villarreal midfielder Marcos Senna (L) celebrates his goal with teammate Bruno Soriano during their Primera Liga match against Malaga at the El Madrigal Stadium on Thursday.

Mario wants to stay

AFP, Rome

Mario Balotelli wants to stay with Manchester City despite manager Roberto Mancini's belief that the controversial Italian striker could be sold in the summer.

Balotelli's four red cards in two seasons, as well as a chequered life off the field, have exhausted Mancini's patience, but the player's agent Mino Raiola said his client wants to stay at Eastlands.

"This is not the moment to return to Italy. Mario must progress and learn in England. We haven't asked for a transfer for Mario," Raiola told Sky Sport after being quizzed on whether or not Balotelli would return to Inter Milan or even sign for AC Milan.

"Mancini has denied having said that he no longer wants to have anything to do with Mario. He expected a heavy suspension and can't use him again this season."

"There has been a moment of tension, but now the situation is calm (with Mancini)," added Raiola.



SET Max (SATURDAY) Indian Premier League Pune v Chennai Live from 8:30pm
(SUNDAY) Indian Premier League KKR v Punjab Live from 4:30pm Bangalore v Rajasthan Live from 8:30pm
ESPN (SATURDAY) English Premiership Norwich City v Man City Live from 6:00pm Swansea City v Blackburn Live from 8:00pm
(SUNDAY) English Premiership Man United v Aston Villa Live from 8:00pm
STAR Sports (SATURDAY) English Premiership Sunderland v Wolves Live from 8:00pm
TEN Cricket (SUNDAY) West Indies v Australia Second Test, Day One Live from 8:00pm
TEN Sports (SATURDAY) Serie A Udinese v Inter Milan Live from 12:45am (Sunday)
TEN Action (SATURDAY) La Liga Real Madrid v Sporting Gijon Live from 12:00am (Sunday) Levante v Barcelona Live from 2:00am (Sunday)

Malaga miss chance

AFP, Madrid



Malaga missed the chance to go third in La Liga when they conceded two late goals to lose 2-1 at Villarreal on Thursday.

It seemed that a win was on the cards for the Andalusian side when

Cazorla put them ahead on 65 minutes.

But it all went wrong on 80 minutes when goalkeeper Carlos Kameni was sent-off for bringing down substitute Hernan Perez.

Marcos Senna converted the penalty and, in the fourth-minute of injury time, Perez shot home from the edge of the area to give a much-needed win to Villarreal who started the evening only four points above the relegation zone.

Malaga remain in fourth place and still in a Champions League place on 50 points, two

ahead of fifth-placed Levante.

The night got better for Villarreal when other results confirmed defeats for two of their nearest rivals at the bottom of the table.

Zaragoza went down 3-0 at Sevilla and bottom club Racing Santander lost 3-0 at home to Mallorca to leave both teams struggling in the relegation zone, seven and 10 points behind Villarreal and safety.

Emilio Nsue put Mallorca ahead on 20 seconds in Santander and Chori Castro scored within 60 seconds of the restart before Alejandro Alfaro fired home a third to put Mallorca safely into 12th position.

Spain striker Alvaro Negredo scored two first-half goals for Sevilla to make it 10 goals for the season after Fazio had opened the scoring.

The result leaves Sevilla in seventh position, just a point behind Osasuna in sixth place and entry into next season's Europa League.

MU's test of nerve

AFP, London



A week may be a long time in football and if Manchester United take anything less than maximum points against Aston Villa this week-end it is going to feel like an eternity.

Last Sunday, pundits unanimously declared the Premier League title race to be over after Manchester City slumped to defeat at Arsenal, a loss which left Roberto Mancini's men eight points adrift of United with six games left.

But United's hitherto serene progress towards a 20th league crown was rudely

interrupted in the form of a shock 1-0 defeat at Wigan in midweek, a reverse which cut their lead at the top of the table to five points.

Just as significantly, City's thumping 4-0 win over West Brom means Mancini's side have now taken a handy advantage over United in terms of goal difference.

With United still to face City at Eastlands on April 30, the Wigan loss means Sir Alex Ferguson's side now have precious little margin for error -- provided of course that Mancini's side can keep on winning.

City have the opportunity to put pressure on United by cutting their lead to two points with victory at Norwich on Saturday.

Milan digging deep

AFP, Rome



AC Milan are being forced to use all their resources in order to keep pace with Juventus in the Serie A title race with just six games remaining.

Milan lined up with 14 players missing when they travelled to Chievo in midweek and it was testament to their courage and determination that they came away with a narrow, and perhaps undeserved, 1-0 victory.

That ensured they kept the gap to leaders Juve to a single point ahead of this weekend's games.

The champions may get a couple of players back for the visit of Genoa, the team with the worst defensive record in the league, but midfielder Antonio Nocerino insists they will keep fighting whatever happens.

"We'll try to win every match by giving every last drop of blood, we won't let up," he said.

RESULTS

Racing Santander 0 Real Mallorca 3 (Nsue 1, Chori Castro 47, Alfaro 53)
Villarreal 2 (Senna 83-pen, Perez 90+4) Malaga 1 (Cazorla 65)
Sevilla 3 (Fazio 11, Negredo 29, 43) Real Zaragoza 0

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated)
Saturday
Norwich v Man City (1245),
Sunderland v Wolves, Swansea v Blackburn, West Brom v QPR
Sunday
Man Utd v Aston Villa (1500)
Monday
Arsenal v Wigan (1900)

FIXTURES

Saturday
AC Milan v Genoa (1600GMT),
Udinese v Inter Milan (1845GMT)
Sunday
(1300GMT unless stated)
Novara v Lazio (1030GMT), Atalanta v Chievo, Cesena v Juventus, Lecce v Napoli, Palermo v Parma, Siena v Bologna, Roma v Fiorentina (1845GMT)
Monday
Cagliari v Catania (1845GMT)

Spanish world order

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

World Cup winner, check. European Cup winner, check. Defending Champions League winner, check. World Club Cup winner, check; it is clear that the balance of power in the footballing world now lies with Spain and Spain alone.

Having flattered to deceive internationally throughout their history, the Spaniards have finally made football their own, dominating almost every international and regional competition that they have taken part in over the last few years. Nowhere is this better evidenced than this season's European competition, where five out of eight semifinalists in the Europa League and the glitzy Champions League are Spanish teams.

It raises the very realistic possibility that we could be on the cusp of witnessing two all-Spanish finals in the two European competitions; an unprecedented event in its near half-century history.

Of course, a major catalyst in this domination has been Barcelona who have forged what could easily challenge to be one of the greatest football sides of all time. But even minus Lionel Messi, the Catalan contingent also dominates a Spanish team that has ruled the international football scene since 2007.

The Spanish dominance, coupled with a drop in performance by both the Italian Serie A and the English Premier League will see a seismic change in the landscape of European football over the

next few years. UEFA's Co-efficient system already rates the German Bundesliga ahead of its Serie A counterparts and now Spain is all set to overtake England for the number one spot. Although, England's drop in position will not see them lose teams in the Champions League, like the Italians, what it does go to show is how fleeting dominance at the top level of football can be.

In 2008, Manchester United and Chelsea took part in a thrilling final in Moscow. The all-English affair had the press working overtime finding superlatives for the high-octane English Premier League and how it was living up to the marketing hype of "the best league in the world". But fast forward to 2012 and the only English team amongst the last eight in Europe are a struggling Chelsea who will count their miracles if they can get past Barcelona.

Of course the change has not been overnight. Fuelled by tax holidays and the lure of Iberia, the true superstars in world football have gradually swapped the hustle of the Premier League for the culture of Catalunya or Madrid. No wonder then, that the slightly attritional Clasicos boasts the presence of the best players in the world. England's best hope then has been to feed of scraps; consider the transfer of David Silva, perhaps the best non-Barca or Real player in the La Liga last season, to Manchester City who despite their money seems to have not been able to lure the cream of the crop.

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OUR new weekly column, *Third Eye*, will attempt to deconstruct happenings in international football. Do you agree that La Liga is now the strongest league in the world? Do you think that Spaniards will dominate European competition for the foreseeable future? Write in with your view and objections to sports@thedailystar.net

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

Which Tiger will perform better in the IPL?

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