

**Lyon join PSG**

AFP, Paris

Argentine striker Lisandro Lopez was on target on Saturday as Olympique Lyon recorded a 3-0 home victory over 10-man Nice to join Paris St Germain at the top of the Ligue 1 standings.

Lisandro opened the scoring in the 40th minute from a Bafetimbi Gomis pass following a quick counter-attack. He then set up Anthony Revellere for the right back's first goal in five years, 16 minutes into the second half.

Gomis added the third from the penalty spot in the 77th minute after goalkeeper David Ospina had fouled him in the box and was sent off. Lyon had centre back Dejan Lovren dismissed for a second yellow card in the 90th minute.

Lyon now trail leaders Paris St Germain on goal difference. Third-placed Olympique Marseille, who have 35 points, host St Etienne on Sunday.

"We wanted to reach the winter break with an average of two points per game. It's done," Gomis told French channel beIN Sport.

"Nice came here to try to upset us but we proved patient and have shown we have learned after Nancy," he added, referring to the last home game against the bottom-placed side which ended in a 1-1 draw.

Nice, who were unbeaten in Ligue 1 since late October, fell to eighth on 29 points.

**Landreau signs for Bastia**

AFP, Bastia

France international keeper Mickael Landreau, who left Lille this month after falling out with manager Rudi Garcia, has signed a six month contract with Bastia, the Corsican club announced Sunday.

Landreau became available after telling Lille he wanted out of his contract which ran until 2014. He left the former French champions on December 6.

Lille's management and in particular Garcia had become unhappy with the player's outspoken behaviour in the locker room and media.

**Sturridge set for L'pool medical**

AFP, Liverpool

Chelsea striker Daniel Sturridge is due to have a medical at Liverpool on Sunday ahead of a £12million transfer, British media reported Saturday.

Liverpool are ready to complete the deal with the European champions after a dispute with the striker's representatives was resolved, the Liverpool Echo newspaper claimed.

The 23-year-old former Manchester City striker has only made seven league appearances for Chelsea this season, scoring one league goal against Tottenham in October.

Sturridge, who has four England caps, has scored 24 goals in 49 starts and 47 substitute appearances since his arrival at Stamford Bridge in 2009.



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**Jose defiant**

AFP, Madrid



Defiant Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho insisted on Saturday that he would not be resigning despite his team crashing to a 3-2 loss at Malaga which left the champions 16 points behind leaders Barcelona.

The disappointment of the defeat was compounded by Mourinho's controversial decision to drop goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas from the starting line-up.

Mourinho appeared incredulous when asked if he was worried about his job.

"Not at all, I'm not worried about my job at all and I'm not going to resign," said the Portuguese.

"I'm not a child. I know that results count. If I felt the players did not want to continue I'd be too honest to continue.

"But they are not like that, we are just lacking some luck in the last few games, that is all."

It was the first time in 10 years that Spanish World Cup winner Casillas had been axed with 25-year-old Antonio Adan called up to take the place of the benched veteran.

"At the moment, for me and my coaching staff, Adan is better than Iker," said Mourinho.

"We have been struggling in a number of areas, one of those has been defence. The coach analyses who is in the best situation to play and chooses his team and that is what I have done.

"You (the media) can invent what you want but it's purely a technical decision."

On being questioned about the 16-point gap behind Barcelona, Mourinho was again clear.

"I think it's an insurmountable lead. Last season we won the league with a similar gap and now we are not going so well. I'm not happy with that but this is the reality," he said.



**A pensive Jose Mourinho wonders what went wrong during Real Madrid's 3-2 reversal against Malaga at the Rosaleda Stadium on Saturday. (INSET) The club's veteran custodian Iker Casillas, who was controversially benched for this game, couldn't bear to watch the horror show.**

PHOTO: AFP

**Lazio leapfrog Inter**

REUTERS, Rome



Lazio moved up to second in Serie A after a 1-0 win at Sampdoria saw them leapfrog Inter Milan, who were held at home by Genoa,

while AS Roma beat AC Milan 4-2 in a thrilling end to 2012's Serie A action on Saturday. Hernanes' goal for Lazio 30 minutes into a scrappy match lifted Vladimir Petkovic's team to 36 points, eight behind champions and league leaders Juventus, who won 3-1 at Cagliari on Friday.

Andrea Stramaccioni's Inter dropped to third after Esteban Cambiasso's equaliser five minutes from time cancelled out Ciro Immobile's superb individual goal for second-bottom Genoa.

The 1-1 draw left Inter nine points off the top going into the Italian mid-season break.

Roma remained firmly in the race for a Champions League qualifying spot after beating Milan in an end-to-end thriller, with the visiting defence looking ragged.

Goals from Nicolas Burdisso, Pablo Osvaldo and two from the sensational Erik Lamela put the home side 4-0 up in just over an hour and the win moved Zdenek Zeman's flamboyant side into sixth place and within four points of Lazio.

Roma had Marquinhos sent off with 13 minutes left for handball as Milan's Serie A top scorer Stephan El Shaarawy looked to be heading for a one-on-one with Mauro Goicoechea.

Milan staged a late rally with two goals in the last five minutes but it was too late to make up for their earlier defensive

TOP TEN					
TEAM	P	W	L	D	PTS
Juventus	18	14	2	2	44
Lazio	18	11	3	4	36
Inter Milan	18	11	2	5	35
Fiorentina	18	10	5	3	35
Napoli	18	11	3	4	34
Roma	18	10	2	6	32
AC Milan	18	8	3	7	27
Parma	18	7	5	6	26
Catania	18	7	4	7	25

failings and the defeat left the club loitering in seventh, seven points off a Europa League qualifying spot.

Fiorentina moved into third spot with a 3-0 win over troubled Palermo as Stevan

Jovetic netted twice, including a penalty, and Gonzalo Rodriguez scored with another spot-kick.

Vincenzo Montella's dark horses now stand above Inter on goal difference and are one point

behind Lazio.

Napoli, who were docked two points in midweek for the involvement of their players in a betting and match-fixing scandal from 2010, scored twice in the last five minutes to claim a dramatic 2-0 win at bottom club Siena.

Christian Maggio netted before Edinson Cavani converted from the spot.

Walter Mazzarri's side were far from their thrilling best but stay in fifth within two points of Lazio, putting pressure on the other challengers for the Champions League places.

Serie A now takes a mid-season break until Jan. 5.

**Real in the mire**

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho was under renewed pressure on Saturday after his team lost 3-2 at Malaga, a defeat which left the champions 16 points behind leaders Barcelona.

The disappointment was compounded by Mourinho's controversial decision to drop goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas from the starting line-up.

It was the first time in 10 years that the Spanish World Cup winner had been axed with 25-year-old Antonio Adan called up to take the place of the benched veteran. Isco and Roque Santa Cruz, with a double, grabbed the goals for Malaga.

Madrid did level at 1-1 with an own-goal by Samuel Sanchez and Karim Benzema made it 3-2 eight minutes from time but the home side clung on to celebrate their first win over Real in 29 years.

Malaga's win left the Costa del Sol club in fourth, two points behind Madrid on 31 points while Atletico Madrid, who beat Celta Vigo 1-0 on Friday, are second, nine points behind Barcelona.

Barca had earlier won 3-1 at Valladolid, a timely boost for cancer-stricken coach Tito Vilanova who left hospital Saturday 48 hours after undergoing surgery to remove a tumour in his saliva gland.

Isco opened the scoring for Malaga after 48 minutes with a well-placed shot from just outside the area, that Adan could do nothing about, after Joaquin Sanchez had found space on the left.

Mourinho brought on Kaka on 63 minutes and his side equalised immediately when the Brazilian's cross caused chaos in the home defence and Sanchez turned the ball into his own goal.

However Malaga's attacking play was justly rewarded with two further goals,

both from the same source.

On 72 minutes, Joaquin's clever back-heel found ex-Manchester City forward Santa Cruz, who had replaced former Real star Javier Saviola, in front of goal and three minutes later the Paraguayan finished well from a clever Joaquin pass.

Benzema gave Madrid hope but Mourinho's side never looked like getting anything from the game in the closing stages.

Xavi Hernandez, Lionel Messi and Cristian Tello steered La Liga leaders Barcelona to victory at Valladolid.

The win allowed Barcelona to finish 2012 with 16 wins in 17 games this season, the 2-2 home draw with Real Madrid being the only game in which Barca have dropped points. Valladolid goalkeeper Dani Hernandez was called

into action on 11 minutes to stop a shot from Messi and Xavi went close with a curling free-kick after 26 minutes.

Messi hit a free-kick against the post on 35 minutes after centre-half Henrique Sereno had blocked Thiago Alcantara on the edge of the area.

Barca took the lead with three minutes of the half remaining when a quick attack saw Messi find full-back Jordi Alba in an advanced position on the left and his cross

left Xavi with the easiest of finishes.

Messi doubled the lead with a stunning goal on the hour mark.

The Argentine put the ball through a defender's legs during a driving run before hitting a crisp left-footed shot into the corner to finish 2012 on a staggering 91 goals.

The capacity 26,500 crowd sportingly applauded Andres Iniesta onto the pitch as a late substitute before Javi Guerra gave the home side a late consolation from close range.

But substitute Tello made it three for Barca with his only touch of the game in injury time.

TOP TEN					
TEAM	P	W	L	D	PTS
Barcelona	17	16	1	0	49
Atletico Madrid	17	13	1	3	40
Real Madrid	17	10	3	4	33
Malaga	17	9	4	4	31
Real Betis	17	9	1	7	28
Levante	17	8	3	6	27
Real Sociedad	17	7	4	6	25
Rayo Vallecano	17	8	1	8	25
Valencia	17	7	3	7	24

LEADING SCORERS	
26:	Messi (Barcelona)
17:	Falcao (Atletico Madrid)
14:	Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
10:	Aritz Aduriz (Athletic Bilbao)
9:	Ruben Castro (Real Betis), Soldado



**Manchester United defender Patrice Evra (L) celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Swansea City at Liberty Stadium in Swansea yesterday. However, the lead was cancelled by Swansea striker Michu as the game ended 1-1 and United settled for a 4-point lead over Manchester City before Christmas break.**

**Swansea hold MU**

AFP, London



Manchester United were prevented from restoring their six-point lead over Manchester City at the top of the Premier League after being held to a 1-1 draw at Swansea City on Sunday.

Swansea's top scorer Michu cancelled out Patrice Evra's opener for United in the first half and despite twice hitting the crossbar in the second period, the visitors left South Wales with only a point.

It was United's first draw of the season in all competitions and leaves them four points above second-place City ahead of the home game with Newcastle United on Wednesday.

Swansea threatened first at the Liberty Stadium, Michu firing off-target after out-pacing the returning Nemanja Vidic, before Wayne Rooney and Ashley Young tested fit-again Swansea goalkeeper Michel Vorm at the other end.

United took the lead in the 16th minute, with Evra getting in front of his marker to dispatch Robin van Persie's corner and claim his third goal -- all headers -- of the season.

Michu headed over from Nathan Dyer's cross, but it did not take long for the Spaniard to find the net.

In the 29th minute, Wayne Routledge's cute pass freed Jonathan de Guzman and when his shot was parried by David de Gea, Michu followed up from close range to claim his 13th league goal of the campaign.

Vorm saved from Rooney again before half-time, while at the interval, United manager Alex Ferguson harangued referee Michael Olivier for failing to penalise Chico Flores for a challenge on van Persie prior to Swansea's equaliser.

De Gea thwarted Kemy Agustien and Routledge early in the second period, before van Persie hooked a superb volley onto the top of the Swansea crossbar from a left-wing Rooney cross.

Michael Carrick then hit the bar from a corner, while both van Persie and Ashley Young were thwarted by some last-ditch defensive blocks.

Arsenal climbed to third place with a 1-0 victory at third-bottom Wigan Athletic on Saturday and they are one of four teams on 30 points along with Everton, Tottenham Hotspur and West Bromwich Albion.

Seventh-place Chelsea -- back in England after their loss to Corinthians in the Club World Cup final -- were slated to take on Aston Villa in the late game on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP