

Cavani follows Maradona

AFP, Milan

Edinson Cavani relaunched his campaign to finish Serie A's top scorer -- and Napoli's first since Diego Maradona -- with a hatrick in an emphatic 4-1 win over Roma on Sunday.

If he succeeds, the Uruguayan will emulate former Napoli hero Maradona, who helped the Partenopei to their two league titles to date and remains the only Napoli player to finish as top scorer in Serie A.

"I'm happy to be taking the match ball home after this hatrick," Cavani told Sky Italia after the match.

"It was a great performance by everyone tonight and helps put our recent poor spell behind us. We've shown that we can be professional and fight for important objectives this season."

Prior to the winter break Napoli had slipped to fifth place at 10 points behind champions and leaders Juventus having kept pace with the Old Lady of Turin for the first 12 weeks of the season.

But in their first game back Walter Mazzarri's side proved a class above the visitors from Rome, who were a goal behind after just four minutes when Cavani latched on to Goran Pandev's through ball to beat fellow Uruguayan Mauro Goicoechea in the Roma goal with the outside of his foot.

Cavani scored two more, in the 48th and 70th minutes, before Roma reduced arrears thanks to Argentine striker Pablo Osvaldo in the 72nd minute.

Any hope of a late fightback was quashed, however, when Roma midfielder Miralem Pjanic was red carded for a rash challenge, his second bookable offence, two minutes later and Christian Maggio made it 4-1 when he bundled the ball over the line in the dying minutes.

Led by Maradona, Napoli won their only Serie A titles to date in 1987 and 1990 when the Argentine star was arguably at the peak of his career.

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2-1 India (20%)

2-1 Pakistan (46%)

3-0 Pakistan (34%)

Total votes: 138

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DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Cricket League

(Four-day match, Day-1)

Prime Bank South Zone v BCB North Zone

Time: 9:15am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

Walton Central Zone v Islami Bank South Zone

Time: 9:15am

Venue: Shaheed Chandu



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (C) shoots during their Primera Liga match against Real Sociedad at Bernabeu on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

C'Ron rescues Real Suarez sparks new storm

AFP, Madrid



Goalkeeper Iker Casillas came off the bench for 10-man Real Madrid who needed a second half double from Cristiano Ronaldo to beat Real Sociedad 4-3 while leaders Barcelona cruised to a 4-0 win over Espanyol.

Barcelona, whose goals all came in the first-half against their city neighbours, remain 16 points clear of their bitter rivals and eleven ahead of second-place Atletico Madrid who drew 1-1 with Mallorca.

Madrid captain Casillas was left out for the second consecutive game but was called upon after just five minutes following a penalty conceded by his replacement Adan Garrido who was red carded.

Xabi Prieto, who was to grab a hatrick, scored from the spot-kick to equalise after Karim Benzema had put Madrid ahead in the second minute with Sami Khedira then restoring the lead for Jose Mourinho's side after 35 minutes.

Prieto struck again before half-time

before Ronaldo came to the rescue with a brace after the restart.

Prieto hit his third with 14 minutes to go but Sociedad also finished with 10 men as Daniel Estrada was given a second yellow card.

They got the perfect start with Khedira finding Benzema in space in the centre of the penalty area and he found the corner with a clinical finish.

Adan's poor pass to Ricardo Carvalho went to Carlos Vela who bore down on goal and was upended by the shot-stopper. The referee pointed to the spot and also dismissed Adan which meant Casillas would play after all.

The player nicknamed 'Saint Iker' by Spain fans for his exploits in the recent successes of the national

side was unable to make the perfect start as Prieto fired home the penalty.

Madrid went back ahead with Khedira flicking in a shot by Carvalho from the edge of the area but they were never comfortable at the back and Prieto got his second when a Vela strike fell to him and he drove the ball past Casillas.

After the break the game hit a lull before Ronaldo responded with a double.

AFP, London



Luis Suarez sparked a new handball storm by helping Liverpool edge non-league Mansfield Town 2-1 in the FA Cup third round on Sunday, after Arsenal were held to a 2-2 draw by Swansea City.

Suarez came off the bench to double Liverpool's lead after Daniel Sturridge had opened the scoring on his debut, but his goal prompted an angry reaction from the fifth-tier hosts, who later replied through Matt Green.

The Uruguay international, who famously used his hand to block a goal-bound shot in a World Cup quarter-final with Ghana in 2010, appeared to stop the ball with his hand in the process of scoring, but the officials let the goal stand.

Liverpool will now face third-tier Oldham Athletic for a place in round five.

Sturridge, a £12 million (\$19.6 million, 14.8 million euros) signing from Chelsea, broke the deadlock in the seventh minute at Field Mill,

running onto Jonjo Shelvey's pass and beating Mansfield goalkeeper Alan Marriott.

Marriott denied Sturridge a second goal on two occasions in the first half, but the Stags could have drawn level in the 36th minute when Green's rising drive forced Brad Jones into a flying save.

Mansfield put Liverpool's goal under sustained pressure early in the second half before the visitors turned

RESULTS

Mansfield 1 (Green 79) **Liverpool 2** (Sturridge 7, Suarez 59)

Swansea 2 (Michu 58, Graham 87) Arsenal 2 (Podolski 81, Gibbs 83)

to Suarez, who doubled his side's lead in controversial circumstances in the 59th minute.

After squeezing between a pair of challenges, the Uruguayan saw an initial shot saved by Marriott but the ball rebounded against his right hand and he stroked it into an empty net to furious protests from the nearby defenders.

Green finished on the turn from 12 yards with 11 minutes to play, but Liverpool held on to steer clear of a famous upset.

John Obi rubbishes injury fears

AFP, Lagos

Chelsea midfielder John Obi Mikel has dismissed fears he is still injured and may not feature for Nigeria at this month's Africa Cup of Nations.

Mikel has not played in his English club's last three games after he suffered a knee injury against Norwich City.

However he and teammate Victor Moses trained with the rest of the Nigeria squad at a training camp in Faro, Portugal, on Sunday.

"I'm okay. I had a knock two weeks ago and was told to rest for some time, but now I am fit and I actually started training two days ago with the Chelsea first team," said Mikel.

"So there should be no fears about any injury. I'm ready for the Nations Cup."

The 25-year-old is now set for his fourth Nations Cup finals appearance after he made his bow in 2006 in Egypt.

The 2013 tournament starts in South Africa on January 19.

Sampdoria stun Juve

AFP, Milan



Juventus's hopes of dropping Inter Milan virtually out of the Serie A title race suffered a setback after the champions went down to a shock 2-1 home defeat to Sampdoria on Sunday.

Inter had been stunned 3-0 by Udinese in the day's early match, handing Juventus the chance to take their lead over the Nerazzurri -- widely considered Juve's main title rivals -- to a massive 12 points.

But after Sebastian Giovinco had given the Bianconeri a 24th minute lead from the penalty spot the hosts were stunned by a double from Argentine striker Emanuel Icardi in the 52nd and 68th minutes.

Fiorentina had hoped to close the gap to Lazio to one point, as well as further distance fourth-placed Inter, only to suffer a shock 2-0 defeat at home to visiting Pescara.

La Viola finished the day in fourth place after Napoli moved up two places to third thanks to a superb 4-1 win over Roma at the San Paulo.

Napoli's 12th win of the campaign came largely courtesy of an Edinson Cavani hatrick, which put the Uruguayan on 16 league goals and two clear of AC Milan's Stephan El Shaarawy (14) at the top of the scoring charts.

Giovinco stepped up to convert Juve's

penalty with relative ease after Claudio Marchisio was adjudged to have been fouled in the box.

But Sampdoria came fighting back in the second half and when Icardi broke free in the 52nd minute he beat Gianluigi Buffon with an impressive angled strike from the edge of the area.

Italy 'keeper Buffon was then left clutching at thin air when, from a tight angle, the Argentine blasted the ball inside the near post and into the roof of the net on 68 minutes.

Sampdoria held on to record a famous win at Juventus Stadium and hand the champions only their third defeat of the season, which will be seen as a missed chance to leave Inter behind for good.

AC Milan, who hit the headlines midweek after midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng led his team off the pitch during a friendly to protest racist chants from fans of fourth division

side Pro Patria, secured a precious 2-1 win at home to Siena.

Milan were whistled off the pitch after a scoreless first half, but Boateng provided the cross for Spain international Bojan to head their opener just after the hour mark.

Giampaolo Pazzini stepped up to convert a penalty in the final 10 minutes, but Michele Paolucci made it a nervy finish for Massimiliano Allegri's men at the San Siro when he reduced arrears in the closing minutes.



Liverpool striker Luis Suarez scores the second goal against Mansfield Town during their FA Cup third round tie at Field Mill in Mansfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP