

## MONACO WIN 2-0 AT LORIENT TO GO 2ND IN FRENCH LEAGUE

**PARIS:** Monaco moved up to second place in the French league after winning 2-0 at Lorient yesterday, with both goals coming in an improved second-half performance.

Promising midfielder Thomas Lemar put Monaco ahead with a shot that crashed in off the underside of the crossbar in the 54th minute, and Portugal midfielder Joao Moutinho curled in an excellent free kick four minutes later.

"It was a tough game against a good passing side," Monaco center half Andrea Raggi said. Lorient played better in the first half but striker Benjamin Jeannot failed to muster a shot on target.

"I don't know how we lost this game, they created absolutely nothing in the first half," Lorient defender Francois Bellugou said. "Once they scored early in the second half we were all a bit stunned." Monaco is two points ahead of third-place Angers

but trails runaway league leader Paris Saint-Germain by a massive 21 points. PSG won 1-0 at Toulouse on Saturday thanks to a late header from Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Elsewhere, Marseille moved provisionally up to seventh place with a much-needed 3-1 win away to Normandy side Caen.

Marseille had drawn its previous four league matches, and also lost 2-1 at Toulouse midweek in the League Cup

quarterfinals. But Spanish coach Michel's team got off to a good start when Belgium striker Michy Batshuayi put the visitors ahead in the 12th minute, finishing from close range after good work from midfielder Abdelaziz Barrada.

Having grabbed his 12th league goal of the season, Batshuayi missed a great chance to make it 2-0 in the 28th when he volleyed wide from Bouna Sarr's cross. Batshuayi then turned provider in

the 60th, latching onto a pass from midfielder Barrada and setting up winger Georges-Kevin Nkoudou.

But Marseille's defense fell asleep moments later and forward Ronny Rodelin was left unmarked to head in Julien Feret's free-kick Marseille rallied and, after Nkoudou and Sarr both missed chances in quick succession, Sarr wrapped up the win in the 83rd when he volleyed in a cross from midfielder Alaixys Romao. —AP

## NEVILLE STILL WINLESS IN LIGA AFTER VALENCIA DRAW

**MADRID:** Valencia coach Gary Neville called his side's first-half performance "unacceptable" after they were held to a 2-2 draw at home to Rayo Vallecano in La Liga on Sunday but said he was confident they could turn things around soon.

Neville is still without a win in six Spanish top flight games in charge since taking over from the sacked Nuno Espirito Santo last month and Valencia are stuck down in 10th place after four draws and two defeats during the former Manchester United and England defender's tenure.

The ambitious Singapore-owned club are in danger of missing out on a berth in continental competition for 2016-17 and are eight points adrift of the European places with just over half the season played.

"It's hard to explain what happened in the first half, it was a very disappointing performance," Neville told a news conference after Valencia twice had to come from behind to rescue a point at the Mestalla.

"In football you have to win and enjoy yourself and we didn't show any of that," added the 40-year-old. "We have to correct

this immediately."

Valencia, who last won La Liga in 2004 under Rafa Benitez, are struggling in their domestic league but still have a chance of silverware in the Europa League and the King's Cup.

They play Las Palmas home and away in the quarter-finals of the Spanish Cup this month and the first leg of their Europa League tie against Rapid Vienna is at the Mestalla on Feb. 18.

Neville, whose contract runs until the end of the season, said there were two positives from Sunday's setback, which prompted whistling from disgruntled home fans:

"Our response in the second half and the fact that the players showed a will to fight," he said.

"I have confidence in the work that we are undertaking and I agree that the results aren't what we had hoped for.

"It isn't due to a lack of effort from the players. We've got a point, we will carry on working tomorrow and I'm sure that if we apply ourselves as we did in the second half we will get more points." — Reuters



**UDINE:** Juventus's Kwadwo Asamoah, center, and Udinese's Molla Wague, left, challenge for the ball during the Serie A soccer match between Udinese and Juventus at the Friuli Stadium in Udine, Italy, yesterday. — AP

## VILLARREAL DRAW TO PULL LEVEL WITH REAL MADRID IN LIGA

**BARCELONA:** Villarreal's scoreless draw with Real Betis was good enough for it to provisionally pull level on points with third-place Real Madrid in the Spanish league on Saturday. Villarreal's best scoring opportunity came just moments after kickoff of the evenly contested match at El Madrigal Stadium, when Roberto Soldado sent the ball off the far upright.

Fourth-place Villarreal's winning streak ended at six straight rounds, but it equaled Madrid on points, and moved within four points of leader Atletico Madrid and two points of Barcelona before all three title rivals play.

"Those were a lot of victories, but they covered up how we were playing. We need to rest our minds and then get back to training," Villarreal coach Marcelino Garcia said. "This can help us to improve."

Elsewhere, Celta Vigo got two goals from John Guidetti to earn a 4-3 win after weathering bottom-side Levante's spirited second-half rally, while Sevilla downed Malaga 2-1. Guidetti turned in Iago Aspas' back pass to break through in the first half, and five minutes later the striker chipped home his second.

Aspas added a third from a solo effort, but Celta staggered after Levante's Deyverson and Pedro Lopez scored twice in a three-minute span with 20 minutes left.

Fabian Orellana's goal appeared to have finished Levante off, until Jose Morales added drama to the end after

scoring in the 88th.

"We played more with heart than with good football, now we must start winning games," Levante goalie Diego Marino said. Manuel "Nolito" Agudo watched from the stands amid speculation of a transfer to Barcelona, as his Celta broke a three-game losing streak to remain in fifth place. Sevilla stayed in sixth after striker Kevin Gameiro scored two goals just before halftime to help beat Malaga for its ninth consecutive home win.

Gameiro ran onto a long free kick by Adil Rami and lifted the ball over goalkeeper Carlos Kameni to open for the hosts before halftime.

He made it 11 league goals this season just two minutes later when Sevilla struck on the break, this time using a deft flick with the inside of his boot to beat Kameni.

Charles scored in the second half for Malaga, which had its first defeat in eight rounds. "This team needs confidence and Kevin showed that today," Sevilla manager Unai Emery said. "He has a knack for scoring and it's our job to create chances for him." Sevilla's Vicente Iborra and Malaga's Arthur Boka were sent off for two yellow cards each. Also, Real Sociedad midfielder Xabi Prieto earned and converted a penalty in the 75th to salvage a 1-1 draw at home with Deportivo La Coruna, after Luis Alberto put the visitors in front. Sociedad hit the crossbar twice in the final minutes, and settled for a point. — AP

**MILAN:** Juventus beat 10-man Udinese 4-0 to move back into second spot in Serie A yesterday, while Luciano Spalletti's second spell in charge of Roma began with a 1-1 draw against bottom side Hellas Verona.

Paulo Dybala scored twice, including a 25th-minute penalty after Udinese defender Danilo was sent off for bringing down Mario Mandzukic. Dybala also provided two assists for Sami Khedira and Alex Sandro as Juventus dominated the first half.

With its 10th consecutive league win, Juventus moved two points behind Napoli after the Serie A leader's 3-1 win over Sassuolo on Saturday. Inter Milan, which drew at Atalanta on Saturday, was two points further back.

"There are still 18 games to go, we need to get a lot more wins to get to the right amount for the title," Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri said. "Napoli is on an extraordinary run, it is the favorite at the moment, but the top five in the table all have the chance to win it."

Fiorentina can leapfrog above Inter with a win at AC Milan later. Roma is nine points behind Napoli.

"We didn't do very well, even if we tried to and created chances which we then didn't make the most of," Spalletti said. "It's a difficult result to

accept, but there are things to take from it, like the great work rate and the disappointment of the team when they came back into the dressing room. We have to work."

Elsewhere, Lazio fought back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Bologna after home defender Adam Masina was sent off, while relegation-threatened Carpi beat Sampdoria 2-1 for a second successive win. Chievo Verona drew 1-1 against Empoli and Genoa beat 10-man Palermo 4-0 in the lunchtime kickoff.

Udinese had beaten Juventus on the opening day and was looking for a similar result to celebrate the inauguration of the Nuovo Stadio Friuli, where all 25,000 seats were sold out.

### EMBARRASSING ROUT

However, Juventus took the lead in the 15th minute when Dybala curled a free kick over the wall and matters grew worse three minutes later.

Udinese failed to clear a corner and Dybala nodded the ball across the six-yard box for an unmarked Khedira to head home.

Any hope Udinese had of rescuing something from the match evaporated in the 25th. Stephan Lichtsteiner sent Mandzukic clear and he was brought down by Danilo, who was duly sent off.

Dybala converted for his 11th goal of the sea-

son. Alex Sandro netted his first in Serie A three minutes from halftime, firing into the far corner from the edge of the area to complete the embarrassing rout.

Udinese almost got a consolation in the second half but Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon fingertipped Francesco Lodi's free kick onto the post.

Spalletti, who first coached Roma from 2005-09, returned to the club this week after Rudi Garcia was sacked following just one win in its last 10 matches in all competitions.

But Roma's struggles continued against Verona, which hasn't won a match all season.

Radja Nainggolan broke the deadlock four minutes from halftime with his first league goal of the season after a brilliant backheeled assist from Daniele De Rossi.

The goal came moments after Edin Dzeko had hit the post, prompting hope of a better second half for the hosts.

Both sides hit the woodwork after the break before Verona levelled just after the hour when Leandro Castan brought down Pawel Wszolek and Giampaolo Pazzini fired the resulting penalty in off the underside of the crossbar. Dzeko should have won it for Roma in stoppages but headed over the bar from close range. —AP

## HIGUAIN HITS 20 FROM 20 AS NAPOLI STRETCH LEAD

**MILAN:** Gonzalo Higuain took his tally to 20 goals in as many Serie A games this season as Napoli went four points clear of Inter Milan after a thrilling 3-1 win over Sassuolo on Saturday.

Until Saturday's clash in Naples, impressive Sassuolo had gone unbeaten against five of this season's title challengers having claimed wins over Napoli, Juventus and Inter and drawn with Roma and Fiorentina.

But Higuain, who is well on his way to this season's Capocannoniere (top scorer) award, did brilliantly to give Napoli a 42nd minute lead after Jose Callejon's 19th-minute header cancelled out Diego Falcinelli's opener from the spot.

Even before his second goal, he had already done enough to earn the praise of Sassuolo coach Eusebio Di Francesco. "For 41 minutes my defenders made sure he didn't get a touch. Then on his first touch of the ball he showed all his class," said Di Francesco.

"You don't need me to explain how good he is." Just as Napoli were hanging on to a 2-1 lead, Higuain beat Andrea Consigli with a fierce shot from inside the area in the third minute of added-on time to wrap up the win.

Napoli's 13th win of the campaign leaves them top on 44 points with a four-point cushion on Inter, who scraped a 1-1 draw away to Atalanta to drop points for the second consecutive match after last week's defeat to Sassuolo.

It means champions Juventus, in third at five points off the pace, can move back up to second and two points clear of Inter with a win away to Udinese yesterday.

Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri has been credited with transforming a side that finished fifth

under Rafael Benitez last season, but he was quick to praise his players. "This was a good and important win for us," he said. "It wasn't easy to come back into the game but the reaction the lads gave showed that they are a real team."

Napoli had the worst possible start, Nicola Sansone earning an early penalty after being fouled by Raul Albiol and Falcinelli stepping up to wrong-foot Pepe Reina in the Napoli goal after just three minutes.

If memories of Napoli's defeat to Sassuolo on the opening season floated back, they were soon put to rest as Napoli replied in positive fashion.

When Insigne ran half the length of the pitch to set up Higuain the Argentine's drive sailed off target while under pressure. The threat of pacy front man Insigne finally came good on 19 minutes when he got deep, waited for Callejon's call and watched as the Spaniard flicked a near post header past Consigli to claim his first league goal of the season.

Napoli immediately took the momentum, and although Reina had to look sharp to palm Matteo Politano's angled drive to safety the hosts saw Insigne hit the upright with a curler after he had nutmegged a defender.

The stadium erupted three minutes before half-time when Higuain put his predator's instincts on display to give the hosts a 2-1 lead, throwing Lorenzo Ariaudo to the ground and off his scent before rushing in to pounce on Hamsik's pinpoint delivery.

Napoli enjoyed a bright start to the second half and twice Higuain came close inside the opening six minutes, his second effort notably flashing inches wide of Consigli's upright.



**NAPLES:** Napoli's Argentinian-French forward Gonzalo Higuain (R) kicks and scores a goal during the Italian Serie A football match between Napoli and Sassuolo Calcio at the San Paolo stadium in Naples on Saturday. — AFP

Insigne came close again when he curled an effort just over, minutes before being replaced by Dries Mertens. Napoli, however, remained under threat and Pepe Reina did well not to panic when he desperately pushed away a cross before seeing a diving header

from Lorenzo Pellegrini go wide.

Reina wasn't helping to settle nerves either, the Spaniard scuffing a clearance that he chased down and swept from the feet of Falcinelli 35 metres out from his goal.

But Sassuolo took their eye off the ball, lit-

erally, in the final minute of added-on time. Callejon did well chasing to stop the ball going out of play and found Higuain unmarked inside the area to beat Consigli down low in what was the final kick of the game. — AFP