

Premiership Bolton stall Gunners

Football

AFP, Bolton

Champions Arsenal let slip a two goal lead against Bolton in a 2-2 draw here at the Reebok Stadium on Saturday, the visitors missing out on a chance to regain the Premiership lead.

The result left second-placed Arsenal two points behind Manchester United, who play Tottenham on Sunday.

For relegation-threatened Bolton, a point put them five points clear of West Ham, who currently occupy the last remaining drop spot.

All the goals came in the second half, France duo Sylvain Wiltord and Robert Pires putting Arsenal in a commanding position.

But Yuri Djorkaev pulled one back and from his free-kick Martin Keown headed into his own net six minutes from time.

After a goalless first half, Arsenal eventually broke Bolton's resistance barely two minutes into the second period.

Thierry Henry beat Bruno N'Gotty down the left touchline, his pace taking him clear of the Bolton defence.

His pull-back from the byline found compatriot Wiltord free inside the six yard-box and the striker eased the ball in.

Bolton tried to respond, England keeper David Seaman having to be alert to tip over Per Frandsen's looping header.

But minutes later Arsenal had a second. Ashley Cole won the ball out on the left and found Henry, who eluded a couple of Bolton defenders

before finding Pires. And the midfielder's low curling

56th minute shot into Jussi Jaaskelainen's bottom left corner gave

the Bolton shot-stopper no chance. However, Arsenal were left with a



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's French international striker Sylvain Wiltord celebrates after scoring against Bolton Wanderers during their Premiership clash yesterday. The game ended 2-2.

potential problem when central defender Pascal Cygan limped off after an hour with a calf problem.

With England centre-back Sol Campbell starting a four game ban after this match that rules him out for the rest of the season, it meant Wenger had to bring Keown off the bench in a game where he was looking to rest the veteran defender, who has been suffering with a hamstring problem.

And Arsenal's injury problems worsened when full-back Lauren went off after a hard challenge in the 71st minute, leaving Wenger with eight days to get his defenders fit for the match against Leeds on May 4.

But before he could worry about that, Wenger saw Bolton get back into the game with a goal by Djorkaev.

After Arsenal cleared a corner, Frandsen's shot from outside the box came back off the left post and Djorkaev, following up, cleverly chipped the ball over Seaman to give Bolton a 74th minute lifeline.

Then Bolton almost had an equaliser when Henrik Pedersen just failed to get on the end of a long throw-in.

But Sam Allardyce's men were not finished and they completed their impressive comeback six minutes from time.

From Djorkaev's dangerous curling free-kick from the left, Keown failed to make proper contact, the ball skimming off the top of his head and past a helpless Seaman.

With less than a minute of normal time remaining, Bolton had midfielder Florent Laville sent-off for a second bookable offence after he was late with a challenge on Cole.

Ronaldo says no problem

INTERNET, Madrid

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo believes Real Madrid would have no problem finding a place in their illustrious ranks for Manchester United's David Beckham.

Beckham came on as a substitute in Wednesday's Champions League clash and managed to score twice in a 4-3 victory - although Real came



through 6-5 on aggregate.

Ronaldo, the three-time world-footballer-of-the-year who scored a hat-trick for Madrid, said on TV station Antenna 3: "I greeted him affectionately after the game on Wednesday night."

"I don't know if he is coming to Madrid or not, but I am certain it won't be difficult to find a place for him."

The words of Madrid's newest hero were echoed by one of the club's oldest and greatest stars - Alfredo Di Stefano.

"(Luis) Figo, (Zinedine) Zidane and Ronaldo have all fallen to Real Madrid and from what it seems Beckham will also fall," he said.

"The problem of making him fit into the side will be down to (coach) Vicente del Bosque, but Figo can play in several positions on the pitch."

'He's staying put'

Football

AFP, Manchester

England skipper David Beckham is staying at Manchester United, according to the superstar's father.

"I don't think he wants to go anywhere. He loves it at United - that's where his heart is," Ted Beckham said in response to growing speculation that his son is set for a 40-million-dollar move to Real Madrid, the side who knocked the English side out of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Beckham started the match on the bench but came on to score twice in his side's 4-3 win although his heroics were not enough to prevent the Spaniards from winning 6-5 on aggregate.

"On Wednesday after the game he told me he was disappointed, devastated really, about not being chosen for the game."

"I think he should have played, but I would say that being his dad, Sir Alex Ferguson usually gets it right, but this time I think he got it wrong. He made a difference when he came on and I hope he stays in the team on Sunday against Tottenham and I hope David puts three past them."

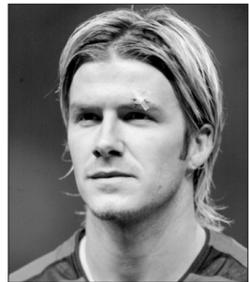
"My gut feeling is he will stay at United. He never said a word to me about Madrid," Beckham senior told the Manchester Evening News.

The England captain has reportedly been a target for Real Madrid and the player has never publicly ruled himself out of a move but Ted Beckham insists

that the matter has never been raised between the two men.

"He's never said he wants to leave United and all this stuff in the national papers is just nonsense. He has been there 11 years," he said.

"No one knows what'll happen in the future but I am convinced my son doesn't want to leave Manchester United and it would break his heart if he did go - and that might be when he retires."



DAVID BECKHAM

"People have been saying that's two big games he didn't start, but against Arsenal not many people knew he was injured, a hamstring I think, and had only trained for one day."

"I would love him to end his career at Old Trafford. He gets on with everybody at the club. He's known them since he was a young lad. You see that in the way the team celebrates whenever they score. They are a great bunch of lads."

Sir Alex wants goals

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said it was vital his side kept up their enviable goal-scoring record if they were to win the Premier League title.

United lead holders Arsenal by three points at the top of the table but the Londoners have the marginally superior goal difference ahead of this weekend's matches.

That makes winning, and winning well, away to Tottenham on Sunday, all the more vital to United.

"We have to maintain the determination and focus we have shown in recent weeks and try to keep the goal ratio going because in the end, that could be important," Ferguson said Friday.

Goals have been flowing for the Scot's team, with 23 scored in their last seven games.

But United must now get over the disappointment of their Champions League quarterfinal exit against Real Madrid on Wednesday. Although they won that match 4-3, holders Real took the tie 6-5 on aggregate.

But Ferguson insisted his players

would bounce back in their bid avoid a second successive season without a trophy.

"Losing on Wednesday was disappointing but we are still top of the league and the players know if they win their last three games they have an outstanding chance of winning it and that has to be our aim now."

Meanwhile Ferguson refused to discuss the Old Trafford future of England captain David Beckham.

The midfielder started Wednesday's match on the bench - not the first time this season he has failed to make it into the starting line-up for a big game.

But after coming on in the 63rd minute scored twice as United almost completed a remarkable comeback.

However, the decision of Ferguson - who earlier this season kicked a boot at Beckham which hit the dead-ball expert in the face after a dressing room tirade intensified British newspaper speculation that the player would leave for Real at the end of the season.

However, the Spanish giants have not yet made any formal approach and Beckham's father, Ted, told Friday's edition of the Manchester Evening News: "I don't think he wants to go anywhere. He loves it at United - it's where his heart is."

"On Wednesday after the game he told me he was devastated about not

Magpies fans' choice

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

Newcastle would be the neutral football fan's choice to make the Champions League next season claimed their manager Sir Bobby Robson on Saturday.

The 70-year-old former England handler's side is involved in a thrilling three way battle with Chelsea and Liverpool but while the latter two are on a brilliant run of form Newcastle have slumped of late having not won their last four matches.

"We can't afford to slip-up," Robson told the BBC.

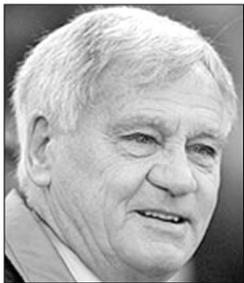
"However it would be slightly unfair if we didn't get one of the places as I believe of the three sides we are the neutral fan's choice to qualify."

"We've had a bit of a blip of late and we recognise that but it is up to the players to rally round and get the results we need," added Robson, whose side are in the fourth and final Champions League position a point

ahead of Liverpool.

His Chelsea counterpart Claudio Ranieri - whose recent run of five wins in six matches has seen them surge into third spot a point to the good of Newcastle - has no illusions of the cost of not making Europe's premier club competition.

"There are lots of different reasons



SIR BOBBY ROBSON

of why it is good to make the Champions League, for the players, the club and the fans but most of all it is a

question of money," said the Italian.

Failure to make the Champions League can have dramatic effects as Leeds manager David O'Leary discovered when he was sacked last summer for missing out on a lucrative spot estimated to have cost them 10 million pounds (15 million dollars).

The cost to the club soon became apparent as they were forced to sell several of their best players as they sought to alleviate their debts.

Liverpool's manager Gerard Houllier said it was crucial for the club to gain a place, though it could all boil down to the final match of the season which sees the Frenchman's outfit travel to Chelsea.

"A few weeks ago there was little hope of making the race for the Champions League," he said.

"However we have picked ourselves up and credit to the players they have given us a wonderful run of six wins in seven matches and put us right back in it."

"However it will be all for nothing if we don't make that Champions League spot," he added.

Vieira's season

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger admitted Friday it was possible that midfielder Patrick Vieira would not play again this season.

Arsenal captain Vieira's recovery from a knee injury is taking longer than the France international hoped. The Gunners' skipper now aims to be back for the final league match of the season against Sunderland on May 11.

After that holders Arsenal will face Southampton in the FA Cup final at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium on May 17.

Vieira had aimed to be back in time for the May 4 league game against Leeds. But Wenger said: "Patrick is still out, at least for another week or two more

weeks. The Leeds game is too early for him."

"There is a slight possibility he will not play again this season, it depends how he improves over the next week," the Frenchman added.

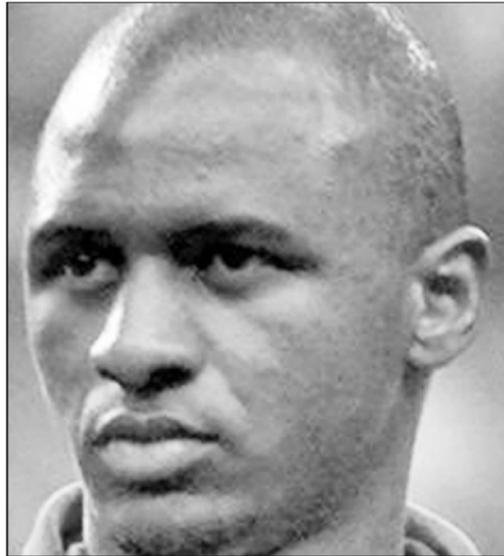
"My best-guess scenario is that he will play against Sunderland."

"You always have to fight for him not to come back too quickly but this time I think he knows that he cannot do that."

But Wenger said that Vieira, 26, would recover eventually, especially as France has not included him in their squad for this summer's Confederations Cup tournament.

"We have very good news about his knee. His long-term future is not in danger at all. It is just an inflammation but as long as you have that, you cannot be 100 per cent," Wenger added.

"I think he needs the summer off. He has not had that for a long period and that would do him some good."



PATRICK VIEIRA

No Kahn do for EA Sports

AFP, Hamburg

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn on Friday won his fight to stop a computer company selling a game based on last year's World Cup and featuring the German international.

A court here ordered the firm Electronic Arts not to market the game arguing that by using Kahn's image they had violated the 33-year-old's personal rights.

If the company disobeys the order and goes ahead and markets the game it faces a fine of 250,000 euros (dollars).

Kahn's lawyer Matthias Prinz said the keeper was planning to sue for damages, which Prinz estimated could total one million euros.

Rivaldo out Robinho in

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's playmaker Rivaldo will miss Wednesday's friendly with Mexico in Guadalajara with a leg strain, the AC Milan star's absence opening the door to teen newcomer Robson de Souza, nicknamed Robinho.

Robinho, 19 and an emerging star with Pele's old club Santos, could win a place in the starting line up with the five-time world champions as coach Carlos Alberto Parreira looks to blood a new generation with the 'auriverde'.

The teen was asleep enjoying a siesta when his mother told him he had been called up.

"He jumped for joy," she told reporters.

Joining Rivaldo on the sidelines is AS Roma defender Cafu, who has a groin strain - but Parreira will not call up a replacement.

Door open for Di Canio

Football

AFP, London

West Ham caretaker boss Trevor Brooking said Friday Paolo di Canio still had a role to play in the club's relegation battle but warned that the controversial striker had to prove his fitness first.

Italian forward Di Canio found himself sidelined following public criticism of manager Glenn Roeder.

In his absence the team enjoyed a run of just one defeat in eight games.

However, Roeder is currently in hospital recovering from a blood clot in his brain suffered following a stroke after West Ham's 1-0 win over Middlesbrough on Monday.

West Ham midfield great Brooking, a director of the London club, has been called in to oversee the team for the final three matches of the season as they bid to avoid joining already relegated Sunderland and West Brom.

Former England international Brooking once named Di Canio in his all-time West Ham team and insisted he still had a high regard for the forward.

Brooking, speaking ahead of his first match in charge - Sunday's trip to Maine Road against a Manchester City team managed by his friend and former England team-mate Kevin Keegan - said: "The situation on Paolo is that he is not fit, he has had a

gastric problem all week.

"I have spoken to Paolo and had a very good chat with him and he is very supportive. I have told him that as soon as he is fit he will come in and he will give the club every support - there are no guarantees on selection, and he is quite happy with that."

"If he can contribute for no minutes, 10 minutes or 90 minutes at any stage then a fit Paolo will contribute, but it is up to him to get fit and until that happens there is no decision to be made."

West Ham are currently four points short of safety.

Di Canio told Friday's edition of The Sun that he had not added to the pressure on Roeder despite a string of critical comments. "Trying to blame players is nothing short of a disgrace."

"Everyone at the club has to take responsibility for our results this season."

"The most important thing at the moment is that Glenn gets better."

Earlier this month Di Canio, 34, launched his latest verbal volley against Roeder, saying: "Glenn's an example of what I find incredible in England. Young managers have control of big clubs and don't know how to handle players."

In a joint statement issued Friday, West Ham and the Royal London Hospital, where 47-year-old Roeder is being treated, said: "The family of Mr Glenn Roeder would like people to know that the situation is as it was and Glenn continues to be in a stable

No love lost

Football

AFP, London

There will be no love lost between West Ham caretaker manager Trevor Brooking and former England soulmate Kevin Keegan when the duo meet in opposing dugouts on Sunday at Maine Road.

Keegan, who teamed up with Brooking for England throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, played alongside Roeder in his final season as a player at Newcastle when they helped the Magpies to promotion in 1984.

"Somebody reminded me that in his last season as a player for Newcastle, Glenn was playing in the same team as him, so Kevin knows him well and will be very upset by what has happened to him," Brooking remarked.

"There is a bit of irony in the fact Kevin will be in the opposing dug-out," Brooking said.

"The little man is very competitive and he won't do us any favours - although I wouldn't expect any. He and I are both professional, we both played the game as it is meant to be played and we will have a chat afterwards whatever the outcome."

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