

Premiership Ruud misery

Football

AFP, Manchester

Ruud van Nistelrooy smashed an injury time penalty against the woodwork as Manchester United's Premiership showdown with Arsenal ended in an acrimonious goalless draw here on Sunday.

Moments later in a television interview, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hit out at van Nistelrooy, labelling him a cheat.

Arsenal, reduced to ten men when skipper Patrick Vieira was sent off ten minutes from the end, looked doomed to defeat when Martin Keown bundled Diego Forlan to the ground as they both chased Gary Neville's cross more than a minute into stoppage time. Van Nistelrooy, normally so deadly from the spot, attempted to blast the ball past Jens Lehmann only to see his effort smash against the bar.

Seconds later referee Steve Bennett blew the final whistle but that was not the end of the drama as van Nistelrooy was surrounded and jostled by a group of Arsenal players.

The post-match scuffles were the result of van Nistelrooy's involvement in the incident which saw Vieira awarded a second yellow card.

Challenging for a high ball, van Nistelrooy climbed all over Vieira and bundled the Arsenal midfielder to the ground.

As he hit the turf, Vieira lashed out furiously with his studs. There was no contact with the Dutch striker but the

intent was clear and the referee had little option but to send Vieira back to the dressing room.

Wenger told Sky Sports: "I think van Nistelrooy does not help. He's a great player but I think his attitude is always looking for a reaction or diving. He looks a nice boy but I think on the pitch he is not always fair."

"Vieira was 100 per cent sure that van Nistelrooy went for him first." When asked if it was cheating, Wenger added: "I think so. Maybe Patrick reacted but you are punishing the reaction and not the first incident."

On hearing Wenger's comments, United manager Alex Ferguson said: "I'm disappointed with what he said," adding van Nistelrooy had made a fair challenge and was blameless in the incident.

Up until then Arsenal had done a good job of containing United despite the absence of central defender Sol Campbell, who missed the match following the death of his father.

United were inches away from taking the lead in the 14th minute when Giggs floated a freekick into the Arsenal area.

Inexplicably, Kolo Toure allowed the ball to fly over his head, leaving Jens Lehmann stranded as the ball bounced onto the outside of the post.

The absence of Campbell was felt by Arsenal again seven minutes later when Van Nistelrooy was allowed a free header at the back post which the Dutchman looped over the bar.

Cristiano Ronaldo was giving Ashley Cole a torrid time on the right flank but the Arsenal defender turned the tables in the 25th minute with a run to the edge

of the area and a shot that flashed just wide of Tim Howard's left post.

Quinton Fortune tested Lehmann with a long-range header just before the half hour mark and Van Nistelrooy was just inches away from connecting with an enticing Ronaldo cross as United dominated proceedings.

Arsenal seemed happy to sit back and soak up the pressure and they very nearly caught United cold with a counter attack a minute after the restart.

Freddie Ljungberg looked to set to break clear of the United back line only to be denied by Gary Neville's frantic last-ditch intervention.

At the other end Van Nistelrooy spun away from Martin Keown to give himself a sight of goal but his shot from a tight angle never troubled Lehmann.

In the other match of the day, Cameroon star Joseph Desire Job earned Middlesbrough their first win of the season as Everton's stuttering start to the new campaign continued at the Riverside.

Job's sixth minute strike ultimately proved enough to deliver the three points. But it was a close run thing with Boro surviving an intense second half onslaught from the visitors, who have themselves won just once in six matches this season.

Everton were vastly superior in terms of pressure and possession for the second period but Boro were unfortunate not to have ended the first half with a two-goal cushion after Franck Queudrue's header was judged not to have crossed the line.

Television replays clearly showed the ball striking the bar and bouncing behind the goal-line before being

cleared by the Everton defence.

Queudrue, outstanding on his return from a five-match suspension, did at least have the satisfaction of ensuring the assistant referee's mistake did not cost Boro the points when he cleared Duncan Ferguson's header off the line two minutes from the end.

With Gaizka Mendietia injured, Boro boss Steve McClaren dropped Juninho, Andrew Davies and Szilard Nemeth and brought in Queudrue, Job, Doriva and Malcolm Christie.

And it was Christie who delivered the cross which allowed Job to nip in front of Joseph Yobo and tuck the ball past Nigel Martyn.

Wayne Rooney thought he had equalised for Everton two minutes after the break but his effort was ruled out with Lee Carsley penalised for a foul in the build-up.

That was to set the tone for a frustrating 45 minutes for Everton with Rooney repeatedly getting into good positions only to be denied by the run of the ball or the increasingly frantic efforts of the Boro back four.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	6	4	2	0	11	3	14
Chelsea	5	4	1	0	15	6	13
Man United	6	4	1	1	9	2	13
Southampton	6	3	3	0	8	3	12
Man City	6	3	2	1	14	8	11
Liverpool	6	3	2	1	9	4	11



ALL SEE YOU OUTSIDE! Arsenal's French international Patrick Vieira (L) is being restrained by Manchester United's Gary Neville (2ndL) following an altercation with Ruud van Nistelrooy (R) that lead to Viera being red carded at Old Trafford on September 21.

Primera Liga Deportivo feel Real force

Football

AFP, Madrid

League leaders Deportivo La Coruna held on to their 100 per cent record but Real Madrid showed the Galicians why they can't relax by winning 3-1 at Malaga on Sunday.

Deportivo turned on the style in the second half, after a goal less first 45 minutes, to beat bottom club Albacete 3-0.

They now have 12 points from their first four games, but Madrid are also unbeaten and lie second with 10 points after their victory on the Costa Del Sol.

Goals from Nourredine Naybet and Alberto Luque within five minutes after the break ensured that Deportivo would stay in pole position.

An injury time header from Uruguayan striker Walter Pandiani, the fifth consecutive game in which he has scored, added Deportivo's third goal.

"It was a game of two halves," said Deportivo coach Javier Irureta, employing the well-used phrase to describe his team's performance.

"We lacked spark in the first half and Albacete defended well but one reason was that we had the sun in our eyes. The two quick goals after the break allowed us to dominate the game after that," added Irureta.

Irureta that he wouldn't be allowing too many celebrations, despite their latest triumph.

"The life of a Deportivo player with me in charge is a lousy one. I always want more," he joked.

If Deportivo win at Osasuna next

week they will equal their best ever start to a season, when they managed five consecutive wins at the start of the 1992-93 campaign.

Naybet broke the deadlock for Deportivo after 48 minutes.

The normally lethal Pandiani fluffed his attempt at a header from a Victor Sanchez cross but the Moroccan international was on hand to stab the ball home.

The Albacete defence still appeared stunned two minutes later and Luque was left in the clear to add a second goal, before Pandiani completed the scoring late in the game. Albacete are still without a point.

It was not a day of completed undiluted joy for Deportivo as Lionel Scaloni was sent off in a bizarre incident, without the right-sided midfielder even getting on the field.

Scaloni was warming up on the sidelines just before half-time when referee Miguel Perez Lasa appeared to take exception to a comment made by the player.

Protesting his innocence did Scaloni no good, as Perez Lasa then showed him a second yellow card and insisted he leave the bench.

Real got in front early against Malaga thanks to a 13th minute goal from Ronaldo, the Brazilian superstar tapping the ball in after a David Beckham corner had glanced off the head of Zinedine Zidane.

Beckham then got his second league goal for Real after 72 minutes, and the 100th first class strike of his career, with a curling freekick from the edge of the area which beat the outstretched arms of Malaga goalkeeper Francesc Arnaou.

Five minutes later, Real Madrid cast-

off Edgar Patricio got a modicum of revenge over his former club by closing the deficit, only for Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez to put the game beyond doubt by finishing off a counter-attack four minutes from the whistle.

Valencia move up to third, just behind Real Madrid on goal difference, and also remain unbeaten after their 3-0 victory at Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

Real Sociedad, who went unbeaten during the first half of last season, have made an equally impressive start to this campaign and lie fourth with eight points.

Sociedad beat Real Zaragoza 3-0 and the victory could have been at least twice as emphatic but for some heroics from Zaragoza goalkeeper Raul Valbuena.

However, Valbuena could not keep the tide at bay forever and Nihat Kahveci headed Sociedad ahead after 55 minutes, in his first league game this season after recovering from a groin injury.

Two goals in the last seven minutes from second half substitute Oscar De Paula finally gave a more accurate reflection of the San Sebastian side's dominance.

TOP SIX

Spanish football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Deportivo	4	4	0	0	8	1	12
Real	4	3	1	0	13	5	10
Valencia	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Sociedad	4	2	2	0	6	2	8
Barcelona	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
Osasuna	4	2	1	1	4	2	7

Spurs fire Hodde

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur manager Glenn Hodde has been sacked, the English Premiership club announced on Sunday.

Tottenham are currently third from bottom in the table having won just one of their six league games so far this season.

Former England boss Hodde has come under increasing pressure at White Hart Lane following the club's disappointing start to the new season.

Saturday's 3-1 defeat by Southampton appears to have come as the final straw for Hodde, who left the south coast club to take over at Spurs two years ago.

Spurs finished 10th last season but Hodde was allowed to bring in three strikers - Helder Postiga, Frederic Kanouté and Bobby Zamora - for an outlay of around 11 million pounds.

Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said: "Glenn and I spoke this evening. Following two seasons of disappointing results, there was a significant investment in the team during the summer, in order to give us the best possible chance of success this season."

"Unfortunately, the start to this season has been our worst since the Premiership was formed."

"Coupled with the extremely poor second half to last season, the current lack of progress and any visible sign of improvement are unacceptable."

The club's next match is at Coventry in the second round of the League Cup on Wednesday.

Serie A Zebina saves Roma

Football

AFP, Rome

A rare goal from French defender Jonathan Zebina three minutes from time salvaged a point for Roma in a 2-2 draw away to Italian champions Juventus at the Delle Alpi stadium on Sunday.

Zebina struck with a low drive to earn a point for Roma, who along with Juventus saw their 100 per cent record end in Turin.

Two first-half goals from substitute Marco Di Vaio either side of Christian Chivu's equaliser had given the home side a 2-1 lead at half-time.

Roma almost nicked victory at the death only for captain Francesco Totti to fire straight at Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon after breaking the offside trap.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi was forced into a change in the 15th minute when Alessandro Del Piero hobbled off with a knee injury following a hard challenge by Olivier Dacourt.

Del Piero made way for Italy teammate Di Vaio, who took just six minutes to score. Pavel Nedved's right wing cross

was cleared by Zebina only as far as David Trezeguet. The Frenchman's header was palmed away by Ivan Pelizzoli, and Di Vaio cashed in on the rebound.

The goal prompted a quick response from the visitors who drew level in the 24th minute. Francesco Totti tapped a free-kick sideways to Christian Chivu, who curled a left-foot shot into the far corner from 20 yards for his second goal in three games.

Paolo Montero headed wide before Juventus regained the upper hand 10 minutes from half-time.

Nedved's vicious free-kick appeared to be heading for Pelizzoli's hands until Di Vaio's toe diverted the ball beyond the Roma goalkeeper.

Chances were scarce in the second-half until Zebina fired past Buffon from just outside the penalty box.

In the day's early matches AC Milan, Lazio and Inter Milan also saw their flawless records come to an end.

Milan drew 1-1 at Perugia, Inter were held 0-0 against Sampdoria, while Lazio lost 3-2 at home to Parma, for whom midfielder Mark Bresciano scored two rare goals.

Parma stunned the home crowd at the Olympic stadium by taking the lead

with less than 60 seconds gone.

Brazilian striker Adriano broke free and picked out Bresciano, who took advantage of slack marking to slot the ball past Matteo Sereni.

Jaap Stam levelled with a low drive before Adriano restored the visitors' lead with a brilliant individual effort.

Simone Inzaghi restored parity with a header only for Bresciano to snatch the winner with a curling shot from outside the penalty box two minutes from time.

A rare goal by tenacious midfielder Gennaro Gattuso gave Milan a 19th minute lead at Perugia, but Greek international Zisis Vryzas' header from a pinpoint Jose Ze Maria's cross just after the half hour mark ensured a share of the spoils.

Milan, whose striker Filippo Inzaghi was stretched off with a neck injury, finished the game with 10 men following the late sending-off of midfielder Massimo Ambrosini.

Inter, 3-0 winners at Arsenal in the Champions League in midweek, failed to reproduce that form against newly promoted Sampdoria at the San Siro.

Both sides were guilty of missing good chances, the best falling to Nigerian teenager Obafemi Martins, who shot wide from close range with just

Sampdoria goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli to beat.

Federico Cossato secured a 2-1 win for Chievo at Lecce, while Japan international midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura was twice on target for Reggina in their topsy-turvy 4-4 draw away to Brescia.

The home side could have won had veteran Roberto Baggio not missed a penalty.

Sam Dalla Bona's late penalty sealed a 2-0 win for Bologna at home to Udinese after Andres Guly had put the home side ahead.

On Saturday Enrico Chiesa scored a hat-trick in Siena's 4-0 demolition of Tuscan rivals Empoli and newly promoted Ancona were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Modena.

TOP SIX

Italian league table after Sunday's late matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Roma	3	2	1	0	9	3	7
Juventus	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
Parma	3	2	1	0	8	4	7
Inter	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Milan	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Lazio	3	2	0	1	8	5	6



Real Madrid playmaker David Beckham (R) attempts a cross with Malaga's Salva Ballesta in pursuit at La Rosaleda stadium in Malaga on September 21.

Football

AFP/MAIL, London

Britain's most talked about marriage, between football star David Beckham and the singer popularly known as Posh Spice, is not on the rocks, the two partners insisted Monday in a press statement released by their agents.

"Contrary to newspaper reports, our marriage is not in crisis... we are extremely happy together as a family," the couple said, following reports to the contrary in tabloid newspapers.

The statement added the couple's most pressing problem was finding a house in Spain, where David Beckham was recently transferred to play for Real Madrid.

The tabloid Daily Mail newspaper suggested on Monday that the couple were finding an enforced separation - with "Becks" in Madrid and his wife Victoria in England - a strain.

"Since we first met, our careers have always meant that we've spent time apart. This is no reflection on the strength of our marriage and we are very much enjoying our new life in Spain," the statement said.

The Mail however reported that some of the couples' arguments are said to have centred on Victoria's close professional relationship with American rapper Damon Dash, who was her escort for a party on Saturday night. He has become her mentor as



CENTRE OF THE STORM! A recent photo of Victoria Beckham with American rapper Damon Dash.

he advises her on rebuilding her music career.

The England captain returned to the subject after scoring in Real Madrid's 3-1 win against Malaga last night, describing the reports as "all a load of rubbish".

He added: "Victoria's working and when she's not, she'll be here. We've not had any problems with our marriage in the week and we never would."

However, since the former Manchester United star moved to Madrid 83 days ago, Victoria has spent only 33 days there.

In the last month, the couple have been together for an average of only two nights a week.

As Beckham sat alone in a hotel room yesterday reflecting on the state of his marriage, it was clear that the statement will only add to the rumour mill.

The England captain has admitted to friends that he is feeling "so lonely" with the wife he adores nearly 800 miles away.

He will be staying at the Hotel San Mauro for at least another four weeks.

While Beckham spent the week-end without his family, preparing for

the away game, his 29-year-old wife was at a champagne reception with Dash until the early hours of yesterday to launch his clothing company Rocawear.

With the former Spice Girl in a figurehugging black and white dress, they were still side by side at 2.30am in the Ministry of Sound nightclub.

Mrs Beckham was introduced to the rapper by supermodel Naomi Campbell in April.

"Victoria still thinks her pop career can get back on track and Damon is the influencing factor in that train of thought," said one friend. "He believes

she needs to maintain a high profile both in Britain and the U.S., but David feels his wife is being too heavily influenced."

Beckham, 28, is said to have had a series of rows with Victoria over her increasingly close relationship with the New Yorker.

"I love her more than anything but things are ropey at the moment," he told one friend. "It's as if at times we are leading separate lives."

His wife has admitted to friends that the couple need to talk.

"Victoria has been jetting around the world, desperately trying to breathe life into her flagging pop career," one friend explained.

"But David thinks the family should be together, especially for the sake of Brooklyn and Romeo."

"Victoria thinks David is not being supportive enough about her career. She says that when she returns to Madrid later this week the pair of them are going to sit down and thrash out their problems."

Beckham is desperate for the family to set up home in Spain. But Victoria is equally adamant that she wants to spend most of her time with her parents and sister in England.

As a result, the pair have yet to agree on a house to buy, leaving Beckham spending the majority of his free time holed up alone in his