Premiership

Leaders, MU drop points

Football

AFP, *London*

Liverpool missed out on the chance to regain the lead at the top of the English Premiership after they were held to a goalless draw by struggling Sunderland at Anfield on Sunday.

Despite dominating the match throughout Liverpool could not force a goal and fine saves from Austrian keeper Jurgen Macho and spirited defending denied Gerard Houllier's team all three points.

The result meant Liverpool stayed in second place, a point behind leaders and reigning champions Arsenal.

Elsehwere West Ham rescued a 1-1 draw against Manchester United in the closing stages, struggling Bolton inflicted a 4-2 home defeat upon Leeds, Everton continued their winning run with a 1-0 win away to Blackburn and nine man Fulham held on for a goalless draw against Birmingham.

Liverpool's failure to score capped a frustrating week for the Merseyside club who on Tuesday went out of the Champions League to Swiss side Basel, having sustained their first Premiership defeat of the season against Middlesbrough last weekend.

But Houllier insisted: "The game against Basel was more frustrating - we had more chances then. Sunderland rode their luck, and their defending was heroic at times.

"Their goalkeeper was probably man of the match and made some good saves. I can't ask for more from my players.

Sunderland manager Howard Wilkinson, whose team are just outside the relegation zone in 17th place said: "The target is 40 points. Until we get that we can't look at what's next. I hope that will come sooner rather than later. Every point is vital."

Meanwhile at Upton Park, Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy's 11th goal of the season was not good enough to give Manchester United victory as West Ham forward Jermain Defoe's goal rescued a point four minutes from time.

Both goals had hints of offside about them with van Nistelrooy retreating from an offside position before scoring.

And Defoe's immediate look at the linesman after slotting home told how close he was to straying into an illegal position.

"It's always a tough match when you come here. I admire the way West Ham try to play football," United boss Alex Ferguson said.

"They deserved a point but at the end of the day they had the linesman to thank."

The result left United fifth, nine points behind Arsenal, but Ferguson said his side could still mount a title challenge after Christmas.

"There's nothing you can do about decisions. But hopefully, in the second half of the season, the breaks will go our way."

The final score meant West Ham were left searching for their first home league win of the season after eight attempts but they at least stayed off the bottom.

However, a draw might have turned to defeat had not keeper David James saved with his legs in injury time when Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was clean through.

And James again rescued West Ham in the dying seconds with a superb reaction stop from a Laurent Blanc header.

Proud West Ham managed Glenn Roeder said: "Our supporters kept us going but we gave them plenty to cheer."

But the under pressure boss readily acknowledged James' contribution. "When a keeper makes saves like that it's the equivalent to a goal at the other end."

Asked if his team's luck had changed, Roeder replied: "What's luck? What we got today we deserved."

It had seemed as if United were all set to make the ideal start to life without David Beckham after it was revealed Sunday the England captain was unlikely to play before Christmas after fracturing a rib.

Elsewhere Kevin Campbell's 19th minute goal made it five wins in a row for Everton and cemented the Liverpool club's fourth place.

Delighted Everton manager David Moyes said: "We are enjoying the run and the players are enjoying it - you could see that by how hard they had to fight to stay in the game."

There were no goals at St Andrews between Birmingham and Fulham but it was still an incident-packed match.

Fulham had Rufus Brevett sent-off after 35 minutes and then lost Steve Marlet to a red-card 11 minutes from time.

The nine men held on although Dutch keeper Edwin van der Sar had to save Stern John's penalty to ensure a share of the points.

At Elland Road two goals in the final two minutes took Bolton to victory, a Michael Ricketts penalty and Henrik Pedersen's second of the match securing all the points after Harry Kewell's late equaliser looked like rescuing a draw for Leeds.

Pedersen opened the scoring in the third minute before Alan Smith levelled barely 60 seconds later.

But Smith's goal could not prevent Leeds fans turning on manager and ex-England coach Terry Venables at full-time with chants of "Venables out" as United suffered their fourth successive home league defeat.

TOP SIX

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

Arsenal	14	10	2	2	31	13	32
Liverpool	14	9	4	1	24	10	31
Chelsea	14	7	5	2	24	12	26
Everton	14	8	2	4	17	15	26
Man Utd	14	6	5	3	18	13	23
Newcastle	13	7	1	5	20	17	22

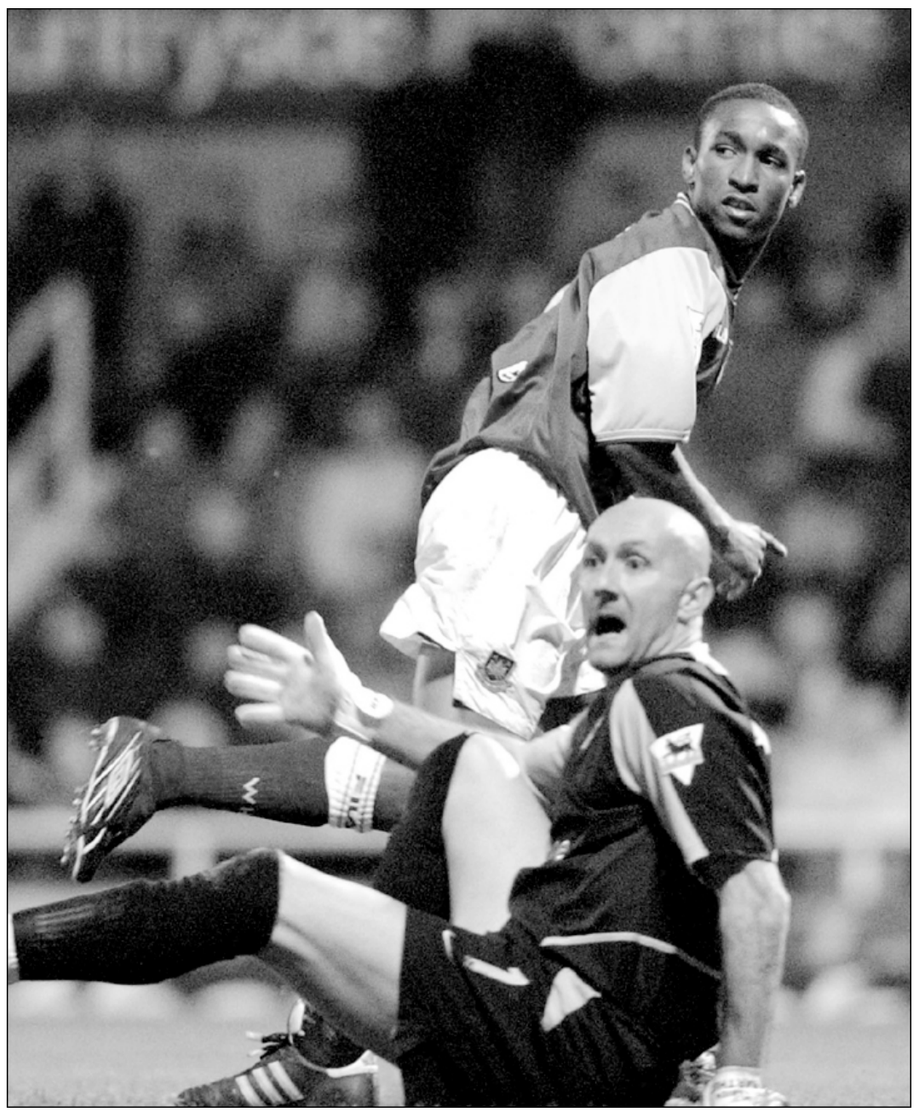


PHOTO: AFP

Fabien Barthez (below) , the Manchester United goalkeeper, appeals unsuccessfully for an off-side as West Ham United's Jermain Defoe starts celebrating his goal at Upton Park on November 17.

Serie A

Juve blaze to the top

Football

AFP, *Rome*

Reigning champions Juventus are the new leaders in Italy after thrashing city rivals Torino 4-0 at the Stadio Delle Alpi on Sunday.

Juve, still unbeaten, rise to the summit with 24 points from 10 matches, one more than second-placed Inter who were held by AS Roma on Saturday.

Czech international Pavel Nedved, in irresistable form this season, was the architect of both Juve's first-half goals.

In the sixth minute he floated over a free-kick from out on the left for Alessandro Del Piero whose back-heel flick beat Torino goalkeeper Luca Bucci at the near post.

Twelve minutes from the interval, Nedved picked up the pieces after a Torino attack broke down and picked out Marco Di Vaio's intelligent run.

The Italy international, who scored in the 2-1 win over AC Milan last week, was celebrating again after finding the bottom corner with a low right foot shot.

Nedved got on the scoresheet himself six minutes after the interval with a rising left foot drive before Dutchman Edgar Davids completed the scoring with a rare goal two minutes from time.

Torino's misery was compounded by Marco Ferrante's 73rd minute penalty miss.

Juventus coach Marcelo Lippi played down talk that his team look better than they did last season when they won the title.

"We were very concentrated, as you have to be in derby matches," he said.

"Our win was the result of hard work, compassion and determination.

"We may be top of the table, but that counts for nothing after 10 matches.

"Let's see where we are at the end of the season."

Asked if Juve's derby victory was perfect, Lippi replied: "There's no such thing as perfection in football, you can always improve on things," he said.

Andrea Pirlo converted two second-half penalties as AC Milan edged Parma 2-1 in an unconvincing display at the San Siro to cement third place in the table.

Milan's first spot-kick was awarded when Simone Barone handled in the box, the second was for a foul on midfielder Massimo Ambrosini.

Parma's consolation goal was scored by Emanuele Filippini.

Milan's Danish defender Thomas Helveg, a second-half substitute, said he was relieved to take the points from a Parma side who had the home side on the back foot in the second-half.

"It was a tough battle because Parma refused to give in, they didn't tire" he said.

"Parma played really well and had some good chances to earn at least a draw, but luck favoured us.

"We didn't play well but what is important is the three points."

Parma defender Sebastiano Siviglia said his side's performance at the San Siro merited more than their third defeat of the season.

"We had more attempts at goal. Other than the two penalties, Milan didn't really threaten us," he said.

Lazio put their financial worries behind them to win 3-1 at Como and keep pace with the leading pack.

Argentine striker Cladio Lopez was the star of the show, grabbing two goals in the second-half in a match marred by crowd trouble between rival fans at the end of the match.

Elsewhere a hat-trick by rising star Antonio Di Natale helped newly-promoted Empoli to a 4-2 win over Reggina.

German international Carsten Jancker scored the winner for Udinese who moved clear of the relegation zone with a 2-1 home win over Chievo.

Atalanta eased their relegation worries with a 2-0 win over Brescia while Modena continued to climb the table with a hard-fought 1-0 victory at home to Piacenza.

Inter conceded first place after drawing 2-2 at Roma on Saturday.

Okan Buruk scored a last-gasp equaliser to rescue a point for Hector Cuper's men.

Roma fell behind in the 58th minute to Dominico Morfeo's deflected shot but levelled the scores 60 seconds later through Vincenzo Montella's close-range tap-in.

Gabriel Batistuta netted a superb volley to give Roma a deserved lead three minutes after coming on as a substitute before Turkey international Okan's last minute heroics.

In Saturday's other match Guiseppe Signori fired the winning goal in Bologna's 2-1 triumph over Perugia.

TOP SIX

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

Juventus	10	7	3	0	18	5	24
Inter	10	7	2	1	21	11	23
Milan	10	7	1	2	25	8	22
Lazio	10	6	3	1	18	8	21
Chievo	10	6	0	4	19	12	18
Bologna	10	5	3	2	12	8	18

PHOTO: AFP

Juventus' young striker Marco Di Vaio (C) is being congratulated by teammates Alessandro Del Piero (L) and Czech star Pavel Nedved after Di Vaio had scored against Torino at Turin's Stadio delle Alpi on November 17.

Kadhafi may buy Lazio!

AFP, *Rome*

A consortium led by the son of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi is considering buying cash-strapped Serie A club Lazio, Italian news agency ANSA reported Sunday.

ANSA said Al-Saadi Kadhafi had sent them a statement saying the Libyans were evaluating a bid to become the major shareholder of the Italian First Division outfit.

Lazio's future was plunged into doubt earlier this week when Cirio, the debt-ridden company owned by club president Sergio Cragnotti, announced it would have to sell its stake in the club.

The board of the canned food giants also said it may have to offload its other businesses as part of a restructuring programme.

Cirio's has debts of around 150 million euros leaving many to fear that Lazio will founder like former Serie A outfit Fiorentina, who were demoted to the third division after amassing huge debts.

Al-Saadi Kadhafi recently became a board member of Italian champions Juventus after the Libyan Arab Foreign Investment Company (LAFICO) bought a share in the Turin club.

Kadhafi, who plays for the Libyan national football team, has a deal with Lazio to use the club's Formello training ground for which he is believed to have paid more than 500,000 dollars.

Aimar out for a month

AFP, *Valencia*

Valencia's inspirational Argentine playmaker Pablo Aimar will miss up to a month with a torn leg muscle, the club said on Monday.

The injury forced Aimar out of the Spanish champions' 1-0 defeat at Osasuna on Sunday. The diminuitive Argentine will miss Valencia's Champions League opener against Ajax on November 27 as well as the club's next three domestic matches.

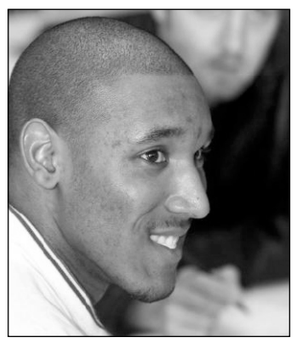
'No thanks' says Anelka

Football

REUTERS, *Clairefontaine*

The French soccer federation may ask Premier League Manchester City to ban Nicolas Anelka for two matches after he turned down a call-up for Wednesday's international friendly against Yugoslavia.

"The French federation is considering asking Anelka's club to ban him for two matches," a French media officer said in a statement on Monday. "It's the federation's rule in such a case and a plea could be sent to the English soccer federation.



NICOLAS ANELKA

"If no sanction is taken we will put the case to FIFA."

France coach Jacques Satini said he had learned of Anelka's decision in the newspapers.

"If he doesn't turn up here the sanction will be implemented. It's not up to me, it's the federation's rule. There are some values and duties I abide to and some players don't have the same values," Satini told a news conference at the team's training camp at Clairefontaine outside Paris.

"Everyone is responsible for his deeds. It confirms the character of this player."

The sports daily L'Equipe said on Monday Anelka had flown in to Charles de Gaulle airport late on Sunday to tell reporters about his refusal, which could spell the end of his international career.

"I met the coach last week when we played Manchester United and I was not convinced by what he said", Anelka was quoted as saying.

Santini wanted to compensate for the possible absence of Olympique Lyon's Sidney Govou, who sustained a thigh injury during a league match against Girondins Bordeaux on Saturday.

"I have a feeling that this choice is being in a way forced upon (the coach), while I need to be accepted by all the squad's members to feel at ease", said Anelka, who did not tell Santini about his decision, but informed several France team mates.

Anelka, who has won 28 caps, had not played for France since the goalless draw against Russia in a World Cup warmup match at the Stade de France in April.

The 23-year-old striker who joined City after a disappointing spell of six months with Liverpool last season had been overlooked by former coach Roger Lemerre for the World Cup finals.

Anelka has scored eight goals for his new side since the season started.

Crazy fan!

REUTERS, *Milan*

Cagliari's Serie B match at home to Messina was halted on Sunday when the visitor's goalkeeper was carried off on a stretcher after being hit by a fan.

Reports said two Cagliari fans entered the pitch and one punched Messina keeper Emanuele Manitta.

Manitta was knocked unconsciousness and after several minutes of attention from medical staff was carried off.

The referee called both teams off the field with 10 minutes of the match remaining and Messina leading 1-0.

The goalkeeper was taken to a hospital in Cagliari where he will stay overnight and have tests on Monday.

Messina club doctor Filippo Ricciardi said Manitta was in a stable condition but had no recollection of the event.

The Italian news agency ANSA said police were questioning 10 Cagliari fans in connection with the incident and had video footage to help their investigations.

Cagliari issued a statement condemning the attack as a "serious act of hooliganism".

PHOTO: AFP

Messina goalkeeper Emanuele Manitta (R) lies flat on the ground after an insane supporter (L) ran onto the pitch near the Messina goal while the action was in the other half and struck Manitta either with his fist or an object and ran away on November 17 during the Serie B match Cagliari vs Messina in Cagliari.

Primera Liga

Blank Madrid derby

Football

AFP, *Madrid*

Real Sociedad hung on to their place at the top of the Spanish First Division, and their 10 game unbeaten streak, with a 0-0 draw at Real Madrid on Sunday.

The San Sebastian side have 22 points from their 10 games and are one point ahead of Real Mallorca, who won 2-1 at Racing Santander.

Despite the fact that neither side was able to score, the battle royal between Madrid and their Basque visitors was not short on excitement and opportunities fell to both sides to break the deadlock.

Raul Gonzalez nearly headed Madrid ahead after 14 minutes and the Real captain had several more chances in the second half.

"I think they will be happier with a point than us," commented the Real captain, taking over the armband from the injured Fernando Hierro.

Sociedad's Darko Kovacevic also went close on several occasions only to be thwarted by Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

"A draw here is fine. We are the league leaders on our own merit. My only disappointment is that I had a number of chances to score but couldn't put the ball in the net," lamented Kovacevic.

Real Mallorca notched up their seventh consecutive victory but had to come from behind after Racing went in front from an Ismael Ruiz penalty after 37 minutes.

Ariel Ibagaza got Mallorca back on level terms just five minutes later, scoring direct from a free kick.

Mallorca got their winner from the spot shortly after the break, Walter Pandiani scored his sixth goal of the season after Racing defender Sietes Suarez had pushed Samuel Eto'o to the ground.

"This is going to continue, we are not going to stop," warned Mallorca coach Gregorio Manzano.

"We have never had a streak like this before and never had so many points after the first 10 games. But the problems start now. Teams are going to be competing to see who can be the first to beat us."

Valencia started the day in second but slipped to third and stay on 18 points after going down 1-0 at Osasuna, their first away loss of the season.

Osasuna struck early when Ivan Rosado headed the Pamplona side ahead after seven minutes.

The home side had several first half chances to go further ahead, notably from Australian striker John Aloisi but then had to survive a second half fight back from Valencia in order to get three valuable points in their perennial battle against relegation.

"Everything was almost 100 per cent. I've never seen this team play so well against an opponent of Valencia's quality. Now we have three or four matches ahead of us against teams we can get points from and perhaps start demonstrating our true quality," purred Osasuna's Mexican coach Javier Aguirre.

Valencia's misery was compounded when they lost their inspirational Argentine midfielder Pablo Aimar with a hamstring strain midway through the first half.

Club officials said that Aimar miss his country's international against Japan on Wednesday and be out of action for between three and four weeks.

Real Betis moved up to fourth place following their 2-1 win over Celta Vigo, a game in which all the goals came in the last half hour.

Brazilian World Cup winner Denilson got the Seville side's winner two minutes from time, a lone run from deep in the midfield, although the debate will continue over whether he was offside when he ran on to the ball.

Jose Ignacio Saenz put Celta ahead after 64 minutes before Alfonso Perez got Betis' equaliser nine minutes later.

Spain's oldest club Reacreativo Huelva fell deeper into trouble after losing 3-0 at Alaves.

The Basques got off to a good start with two goals in 16 minutes from Ruben Navarro and Magno Mocellin and Recreativo, lying bottom with only one win to their name, could never recover from the early blow.

Romanian international Adrian Ilie fired home a thunderbolt from the edge of the area after 56 minutes to clinch the victory for Alaves.

Two goals in the last 14 minutes gave Athletic Bilbao a rare victory as they won 2-1 over Rayo Vallecano.

The three points will slightly ease the pressure on Athletic coach Jupp Heynckes, who got into hot water again this week by describing his short-of-stature central defenders as 'dwarves', the latest in a series of verbal gaffes.

Ismael Urzaiz headed home after 76 minutes to equalise the strike by Rayo's Bolo Perez just before half time.

It was then the turn of one of Heynckes' dwarves, the 1.73-metres tall Aitor Larrazabal, to rise to the occasion three minutes later and get the winner from the spot after Rayo's Sergio Corino had brought down Spanish under-21 international Joseba Arriaga.

PHOTO: AFP

Celta Vigo's Russian forward Mostovoi(C) is sandwiched between Real Betis' Tais (R) and Juanito at Manuel Ruíz de Lopera stadium in Seville on November 17.

TOP SIX

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

Sociedad	10	6	4	0	21	13	22
Mallorca	10	7	0	3	16	12	21
Valencia	10	5	3	2	18	7	18
Betis	10	4	5	1	19	11	17
Real	10	4	5	1	17	10	17
Celta	10	5	2	3	13	8	17