

Premiership Hats off to Henry

Football

AFP, London

Thierry Henry scored his 100th Arsenal goal as the reigning Premier League champions re-established a five-point lead over Manchester United at the top of the table with a crushing 4-0 victory over Birmingham City here at St Andrews.

Earlier Sunday, Tottenham moved up into eighth place with a thrilling 4-3 win over Everton (sixth), Republic of Ireland striker Robbie Keane netting his first Spurs' hat-trick.

Henry's double strike plus goals from Robert Pires and Lauren gave Arsenal a comfortable win after floodlight failure had delayed kick-off by more than 30 minutes.

A delighted Henry, who scored twice, said he was simply doing his job.

"It meant a lot. When I first arrived at Arsenal it didn't look like I was going to do that (score 100 goals)," Henry, who began his Gunners career out on the wing, told Sky Sports.

"I have to give a lot of credit to Arsene (Wenger, the Arsenal manager) and my team-mates. I just have to finish the job," Henry explained.

Wenger, while pleased by the result, said the title race was far from over. "We are in a good position but there's a long way to go. In England the turning point comes at Easter," the Frenchman said.

Blues manager Steve Bruce - whose team are still six points clear of the relegation zone - was happy with the debut performance of new signing and France 98 World Cup winner Christophe Dugarry, on loan from Bordeaux until the end of the season.

"He's going to be a big player for us," Bruce said.

And Bruce, a former Manchester United defender, said his side should not be too downcast by the defeat.

"They're (Arsenal) a world-class side. We've got to keep this in perspective," explained Bruce who gave Blues debuts to four players on Sunday.

"But we made it difficult for ourselves by giving away an early goal. We've got to learn to defend better," said Bruce, who added that four

more wins would keep the Premiership new boys in the top flight.

At White Hart Lane, Tottenham boss Glenn Hoddle was delighted after Keane's treble eased the pressure on Spurs after a run of three successive defeats.

"It was fabulous character from the team. There's nothing wrong with our team spirit," Hoddle told Sky Sports.

Former England coach Hoddle said Republic of Ireland international Keane, a 7 million pounds (11 million dollars) pre-season capture from Premiership rivals Leeds, had been threatening to run riot.

"That has been waiting to happen," said ex-Tottenham and England midfielder Hoddle.

"I don't think I've ever worked with a player who creates chances for others as well as finishing the chances we create for him."

"If we can get his ratio up, which I think will happen with time and hard work, there's no reason why he can't become a clinical finisher."

Meanwhile at St Andrews former

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the English Premiership after Sunday's matches:

15 - James Beattie (Southampton)
14 - Thierry Henry (Arsenal)
13 - Alan Shearer (Newcastle)
10 - Nicolas Anelka (Manchester City), Robbie Keane (Tottenham)
9 - Harry Kewell (Leeds), Michael Owen (Liverpool), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Manchester United), Gianfranco Zola (Chelsea)

international forward Dugarry went close with a first-time attempt following a cross from Wales midfieler Robbie Savage.

But in the sixth minute Henry was released by Holland international Dennis Bergkamp's through ball and the Frenchman's searing pace took him past the Birmingham defence before he calmly beat Belgian keeper Nico Veesen for his 19th goal of the season.

In the 29th minute Arsenal went 2-0 up, Birmingham central defender Michael Johnson, under challenge from Sylvain Wiltord, failed to get enough power on a clearing header.

The ball fell to the onrushing Pires who promptly volleyed the ball

into the top corner from 18 yards.

After half-time the luckless Johnson was also involved in Arsenal's 67th-minute third goal.

Birmingham cleared an Arsenal corner but the ball went straight to Bergkamp. His return cross found Lauren, whose header deflected off Johnson and looped over Veesen.

Barely three minutes later Arsenal produced a sublime fourth goal. Bergkamp released Pires who cut inside off the left flank and went past a couple of defenders.

He found Wiltord and his delightful lay-off teed up the advancing Henry who slotted the ball past the helpless Veesen for his 100th Gunners goal in 181 appearances.

Earlier on Sunday, Everton's on-loan United States international Brian McBride marked his debut for the Merseysiders by opening the scoring in the tenth minute when he slotted past compatriot and Tottenham keeper Kasey Keller.

But within four minutes Tottenham were level through Uruguay veteran Gustavo Poyet.

In the second half, Spurs took a 50th minute lead through Keane only to lose it eight minutes later when Toffees' defender Dave Watson equalised from a corner.

Keane's second was a blistering low strike from 25 yards that keeper Espen Baardsen could do nothing about, but then Canada international Tomasz Radzinski brought Everton level again when he beat Keller at his near post in the 74th minute.

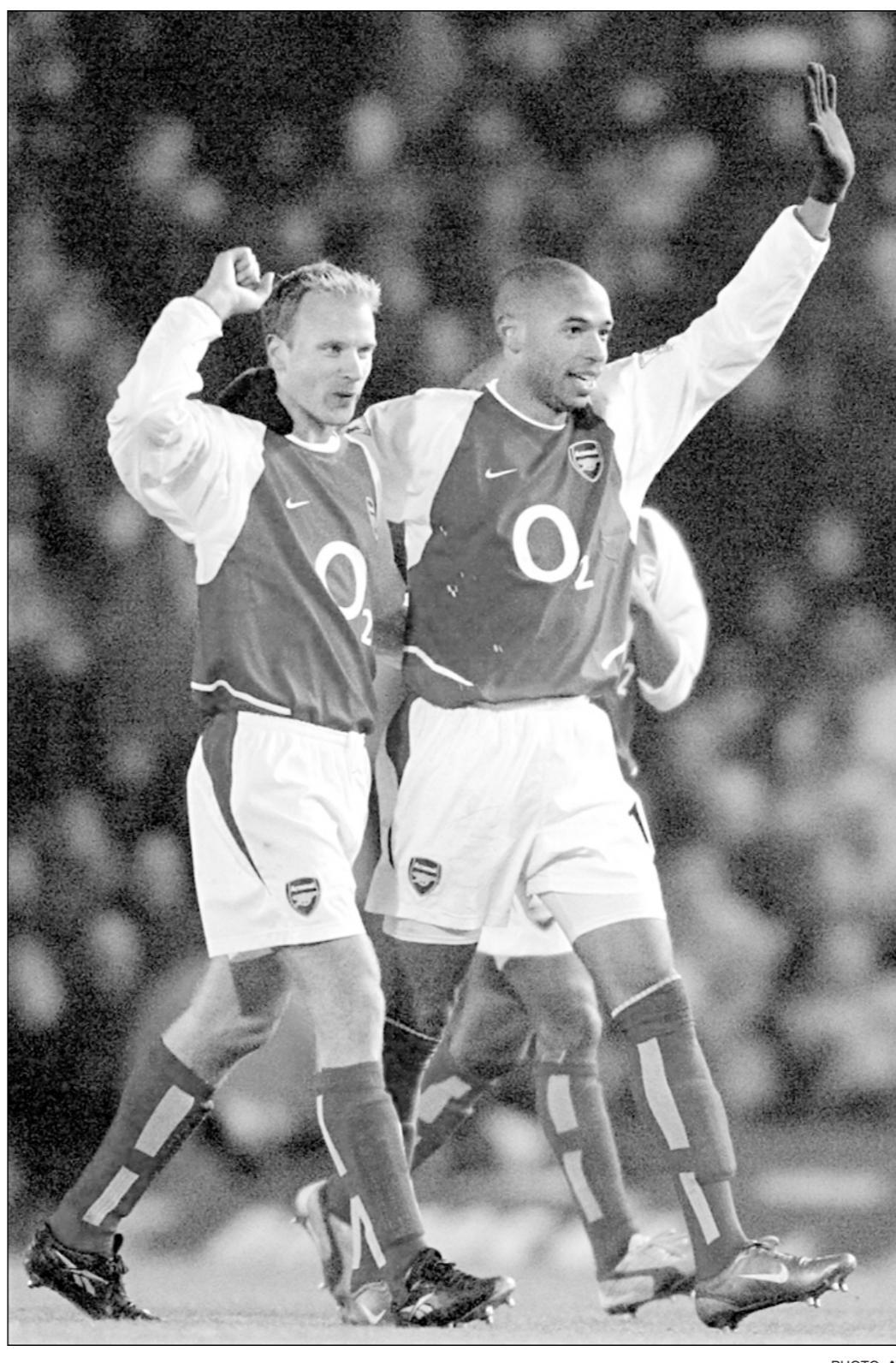
The match decider came when Keane pounced on a failed clearance by Everton centre-back Alan Stubbs seven minutes from the time.

Keane surged into the box and chipped the ball over Keller to complete a memorable treble.

TOP SIX

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

Arsenal	23	15	4	4	49	24	49
Man Utd	23	13	5	5	38	23	36
Chelsea	23	11	8	4	40	21	41
Newcastle	22	12	3	7	37	31	39
Southampton	23	9	9	5	27	23	36
Everton	23	10	6	7	28	28	36



All-star Brazil for China

Football

AFP, Beijing

China will play a full-strength Brazil on February 12 at the 80,000 capacity Guangdong Olympic Centre in one of the biggest matches staged on the mainland.

The mouthwatering showdown pitting the World Cup champions against the World Cup cup is expected to be played in front of a packed house with superstars Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Roberto Carlos and Cafu on show.

It will also be the debut game for new Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, who with Mario Zagallo has taken over from Luis Felipe Scolari.

And it will be a chance for the home fans to get a look at their new boss as Arie Haan takes the reins for the first time in front of an increasingly football-mad Chinese public.

State press had announced the match last week and promoters and the Guangzhou Football Association confirmed it on Monday.

"We are pleased to have confirmed Brazil for China," said ProEvents chairman Paul Kam. "We are thrilled to be able to bring the world champions to China and we naturally

are expecting a capacity crowd."

He said the world champions had agreed to field a full-strength squad amid reports that they are being paid 1.25 million dollars to play.

China is expected to field its three English Premiership stars, Everton duo Li Tie and Li Weifang and Manchester City's Sun Jihai, if their releases can be negotiated from their clubs.

Haan will be happy if his team manage to score a goal during the match in Guangzhou, capital of China's southern Guangdong province after their failure to find the net during their World Cup debut last year.

Their three losses included a 4-0 hammering by Brazil.

It proved the end of the line for Bora Milutinovic who quit, opening the door for Haan, a former Ajax great who played for the renowned Dutch national side in the 1974 and 1978 World Cup Finals.

He has stated his aims as a good showing at the Asian Cup next year and qualification for the 2006 World Cup.

Brazilian coach Parreira will be looking for a resounding win in his first match in charge after his appointment last week following the resignation of Scolari who is now in charge of Portugal.

Primera Liga

Alaves deny Betis

Football

AFP, Madrid

High-flying Real Betis must have thought that they had three points in the bag when Joquin Sanchez scored a minute into injury time to give them a 2-1 lead over Alaves. However the Basque visitors salvaged a point two minutes later thanks to Jesus Turiel in the Spanish First Division on Sunday.

Betis had taken the lead two minutes before half time when Fernando Fernandez had headed home a Joquin cross but Magno Mocellin equalised for Alaves just after the hour.

Nevertheless the point moves Betis up to fifth. They overtake Celta Vigo on goal difference after the Galicians lost 1-0 at home to Real Madrid on Saturday.

Real Madrid now lie second in the Spanish First Division with 36 points from 17 games, one point behind league leaders Real Sociedad who drew 2-2 at Valencia on Saturday to maintain their unbeaten record.

Valencia's point was good enough for them to stay in third on goal difference after fellow championship challengers Deportivo La Coruna went 3-1 at Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

It was Deportivo's first loss in 11 games and the rot started after barely a minute into the game when Jose Mari beat Deportivo goalie Juanmi Garcia with a thunderbolt from just inside the area.

Roy Makaay equalised four minutes later with his 12th goal of the season but Atletico found another gear late in the game.

Teenage sensation Fernando Torres put Atletico in front after 77 minutes and then a minute later he was instrumental in providing the service that helped Fernando Torres get Atletico's third.

Catalan giants Barcelona were held to a torrid 0-0 draw by Malaga, who have now gone eight games without a win.

Bal control was a scarce commodity for both sides and Malaga's La Rosaleda stadium started emptying well before the final whistle as spectators gave their verdict on the match with their feet.

Villarreal got their first away victory in 25 attempts and Espanyol had their best win for nearly 15 months as teams in the basement showed that they had some fight left.

Villarreal won 1-0 at Athletic Bilbao thanks to a Francisco Farino strike after just four minutes.

TOP SIX

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

Sociedad	17	10	0	33	20	37
Real	17	10	1	37	16	36
Valencia	17	8	5	4	27	14
Deportivo	17	8	5	4	24	29
Betis	17	7	6	4	28	21
Celta	17	8	3	6	20	17

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the Spanish league after the weekend's matches:

12 - Roy Makaay (Deportivo La Coruna)
10 - Darko Kovacevic (Real Sociedad), Nihat Kahveci (Real Sociedad)
9 - Patrick Kluivert (Barcelona), Ismael Urzai (Athletic Bilbao), Walter Pandiani (Real Mallorca), Fernando Torres (Atletico Madrid)
8 - Raul Gonzalez (Real Madrid), Julio Alvarez (Rayo Vallecano)
7 - Kiki Musampa (Malaga), Ronaldo (Real Madrid)

6 - John Carew (Valencia), Raul Molina (Recreativo Huelva), Javi Guerrero (Racing Santander), Joseba Etxeberria (Athletic Bilbao), Savo Milosevic (Espanyol)
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Del Bosque the best in business

Football

REUTERS, Wiesbaden, Germany

Real Madrid coach Vicente del Bosque has been voted the world's best club coach in 2002 in a poll carried out by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics.

The 52-year-old Spaniard guided Real to victory in the Champions League last season, the ninth time the club have lifted European soccer's premier trophy.

Arsene Wenger, the Frenchman

who inspired Arsenal to the English premier league title and FA Cup success last season, finished second in the poll of experts from 92 countries.

Del Bosque secured 244 points, with Wenger on 136. Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson and Klaus Toppmöller, German boss of Champions league runners-up Bayer Leverkusen, were joint third on 69 points.

Nery Pumpido, the former Argentinian World Cup winner who coaches South American champions Olimpia of Paraguay, was fifth with 61 points.

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