

Premiership

Unthinkable happens to MU



AFP, London

Arsenal and Charlton were the real winners after Sunday's Premier League matches even though neither of the London clubs kicked a ball.

Reigning champions Manchester United's 4-1 derby defeat away to Manchester City left them 12 points behind leaders Arsenal, who have a nine point advantage over second-placed Chelsea.

Meanwhile Charlton retained the fourth and last Champions League spot available to English clubs after Newcastle lost 1-0 away to Tottenham and Liverpool were beaten 2-0 against Southampton.

Charlton were left a point ahead of Newcastle and four points clear of eighth-placed Liverpool who have a game in hand over their Euro rivals.

Meanwhile, Aston Villa's 4-0 thrashing of relegation-threatened Wolves catapulted them into seventh spot, just three points behind Charlton.

Goals from Robbie Fowler and former United trainee Jon Macken put City 2-0 up against United at the City of Manchester Stadium

before Paul Scholes pulled one back for United.

But second-half strikes from Trevor Sinclair and Shaun Wright-Phillips sealed City's victory.

The result completed a miserable week for United after they crashed out of the Champions League to Porto leaving their FA Cup semi-final with holders Arsenal as their last best hope of a trophy this season.

"It was a disappointing second half," said United manager Alex Ferguson.

"We've given away two goals from a long throw in and a free kick."

The Scot admitted it would be "very difficult" to overhaul Arsenal's lead with just 10 games left but said: "The most important thing is to get our form back."

Meanwhile City boss Kevin Keegan was understandably elated.

"I was really proud of the team. We played better against Chelsea last week and didn't get a result," said the former England coach.

"All over the field we had players who, though, they will have better days they won't have a better attitude."

At Southampton, Liverpool striker Michael Owen missed a penalty which would have levelled the match at 1-1.

But instead Saints man-of-the-

match keeper Antti Niemi piled on the spot-kick misery for Owen who last month had another penalty saved along the south coast at Portsmouth's Fratton Park when Liverpool crashed out of the FA Cup.

Second-half goals either side of that miss from England strikers James Beattie and Kevin Phillips wrapped up the points for Southampton.

Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier slammed the officials for allowing Beattie's opening goal.

"The turning point was when the linesman made a mistake. It was definitely offside," insisted the Frenchman.

And he added that Owen would remain the club's spot-kick specialist.

"He's still my penalty-taker. I'm stubborn, I like the guy. I'll stick with him."

Meanwhile, former Plymouth boss Sturrock, successor to fellow Scot Gordon Strachan, admitted: "We rode our luck. Our goalie kept us in it. I hope we don't get all our breaks in one game."

Andy O'Brien's own goal at White Hart Lane gave Spurs a 1-0 victory over Newcastle, something of a rarity for their fans this season.

Even more surprising, given the recent goal glut at their north London home, supporters had to wait until the 86th minute before

the luckless O'Brien put through his own net.

At Molineux, Colombia striker Juan Pablo Angel scored twice as visitors Villa thumped Wolves. The game was over as contest in the 24th minute after Thomas Hitzlsperger, Olof Mellberg and Angel had all netted.

Villa manager David O'Leary said it was vital the club retained Angel whose 59th minute second goal took his tally for the season to 20 in all competitions.

"I'm sure everyone at Villa wants him to stay and he knows that I want him to stay."

Wolves' defeat left them just two points ahead of basement club Leeds and level with fellow strugglers Portsmouth.

"We didn't win any battles and they played better than us by far," said Wolves boss Dave Jones. "But we've just got to be honest about it and admit that not one of us did our job properly."

TOP SIX

Table with 4 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GA, Pts. Rows include Arsenal, Chelsea, Man Utd, Charlton, Newcastle, Birmingham.

Baggio on an elite plane

AFP, Rome

Injury-plagued Roberto Baggio, who on Sunday became only the fifth player in Serie A history to score 200 goals, says he still intends to hang up his boots in the summer despite maintaining his goal-scoring touch.

The 37-year-old veteran netted Brescia's second equaliser in a 2-2 draw at Parma to join other double centurions Silvio Piola, Gunnar Nordahl, Jose Altafini and Giuseppe Meazza.

"My decision to retire is a very difficult one, but these injury problems have made up my mind for me," said the former Italy international.

"I will hang up my boots in May, even if it brings me great sadness."

Asked what was his best goal of the 200, he replied: "I couldn't say, but even when I haven't scored I've always given 100 per cent."



ROBERTO BAGGIO

Known as 'The Divine Ponytail' because of his hairstyle and his Buddhist beliefs, Baggio has had a stop-start season with several knee operations and a back strain limiting his number of appearances.

He began his professional career in 1982 at third division Vicenza and made his Serie A debut with Fiorentina three years later.

After four seasons in Florence, he signed for Juventus for a then record 11.3 million euros (13.8 million dollars).

He then enjoyed spells at AC Milan, Bologna and Inter Milan before signing for Brescia in September 2000 and his goals have helped keep the Lombardy club in the top flight.

Baggio enjoyed UEFA Cup success with Juventus in 1993 and was named FIFA's World Player of the Year the same year. He won two Serie A league titles, with Juventus in 1995 and with AC Milan the following year.

Baggio played 55 times for Italy and scored 27 goals. But despite a glittering career, he is perhaps best remembered for missing the penalty in the 1994 World Cup final shoot-out which handed Brazil the trophy in Pasadena.

Leicester start own probe

AFP, London

Leicester have initiated an internal probe into the events during their training week in Spain which ended with three players charged with sexual assault offences.

Paul Dickov, Keith Gillespie and Frank Sinclair spent seven nights in Sagonera jail near Murcia after being accused of breaking into the hotel room of two women from Kenya and one from Malawi and sexually assaulting them during a training trip to the La Manga complex.

The trio were released on bail on Friday but not considered for Saturday's 1-0 win over Birmingham which took Leicester out of the English Premiership relegation zone.

Leicester manager Mickie Adams, who offered his resignation last week, said Monday: "We will sit down, we will hold an inquiry. We need to find out what went on. Hopefully we can get to the bottom of exactly what happened but I am not putting a time-scale on the investigation."

Meanwhile Adams, who has been supportive of his players in public, said the trio could not expect to walk straight back into the side for this weekend's game against Everton.

"We will see what shape they are in this week and whether they are ready to play football because it must have been a traumatic time for them."

"I will assess them mentally and physically but I will pick a team to go out and beat Everton. Do we need them back and available? Not after a performance like that at Birmingham, we don't!"

Serie A

Milan pass biggest test



AFP, Milan

Leaders AC Milan took a step closer to their first Serie A league title since 1999 after defeating championship rivals Juventus 3-1 in Turin on Sunday.

Andrei Shevchenko's first-half opener was followed by Clarence Seedorf's brace as Milan chalked up their 11th league victory in 12 matches and left reigning champions Juventus nine points adrift in third place with just nine games left.

Shevchenko headed in Seedorf's cross in the 25th minute for his 18th league goal of the season before Seedorf found the net himself, his low drive clipping Juve defender Ciro Ferrara on its way past Gianluigi Buffon.

Dutch international Seedorf capped an impressive display by grabbing Milan's third 15 minutes from time with an angled shot before Ferrara side-footed home a late consolation goal for the Scudetto holders.

On a good day for the European champions, second-placed Roma could only manage a goalless draw at struggling Reggina.

Milan have 64 points from their 25 matches, seven more than Roma, who are two ahead of Juve.

Defeat for Juventus, who lost last season's Champions League final to Milan on penalties, was their second at the Delle Alpi stadium in six days following their loss to Deportivo La Coruna.

A 1-0 victory for the Spaniards on Tuesday dumped the 'Old Lady' out of the Champions League, while Milan booked their place in the quarter-finals with a 4-1 win over Sparta Prague.

Juventus' hopes of salvaging something from a disappointing season would now appear to rest on the Italian Cup final in which they face Lazio on Wednesday.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi was magnanimous in defeat and applauded his players despite being hopelessly outclassed in front of their own fans.

"I cannot criticise my players as they gave everything they could, but Milan were excellent in every area of the pitch and played with a great calmness that comes with a long line of positive results," he said.

"We were unfortunate to concede the first goal at a time when we were enjoying a good spell of pressure and then a deflection helped give Milan a 2-0 lead. But even at 3-0 down we never gave up and battled right to the end."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti refused to rule Juventus out of the title race despite outclassing their fierce rivals for their first win in Turin for five years.

"Id say they are far from dead and buried," he said. "Juventus never know when they are beaten."

Ancelotti said Milan's strength owed much to his early season rotation policy.

"Our secret is that we defend well and can turn up the tempo of the match when we need to," he said.

"We've been a bit more careful in spreading out our energies during the first six months and that has allowed us to stay fresh even now."

Lazio kept hold of fourth place despite throwing away a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at home to Udinese.

Roberto Muzzi and Simone Inzaghi scored with headers in the first six minutes before former

Lazio midfielder Lucas Castroman produced one of his own to keep Udinese in the match.

Lazio rarely looked convincing after a blistering start and had to be content with a point after Vincenzo Iaquinta's equaliser in the third minute of stoppage-time.

Parma remain fifth behind Lazio on goal difference after being held by the same scoreline at home to Brescia for whom Roberto Baggio's 200th Serie A goal earned a share of the spoils.

Inter Milan ended a run of four defeats but a disappointing 0-0 draw against Chievo at the San Siro will do little to pacify their irate fans.

Inter's Greek midfielder Giorgios Karagounis went close to breaking the stalemate, his fierce first-half free-kick coming back off the bar.

Perugia remain firmly entrenched in the relegation zone after drawing 1-1 at home to Modena, while Siena greatly improved their chances of staying up with a 3-2 victory over bottom club Ancona.

On Saturday, Sampdoria maintained their push for a place in Europe next season with a 3-2 home victory over Bologna, while relegation-threatened Empoli were held to a goalless draw at home to in-form Lecce.

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Primera Liga

Valencia edge nearer



AFP, Madrid

Two goals from Francisco Rufete helped Valencia close the gap on Spanish league leaders Real Madrid to four points after they won 2-0 at relegation-threatened Celta Vigo on Sunday.

Real Madrid have 61 points from 28 games with Valencia on 57 points.

Rufete opened the scoring six minutes before the break with a stunning volley and added his second three minutes into injury time at the end of the game when he finished off a clever counter-attack initiated by the young Malian midfielder Mohamed Sissoko.

The defeat means that Celta are now in serious trouble, third from bottom with three to go down and five points from safety.

Barcelona's consolidated their bid for a Champions League slot next season when they moved up to third after beating bottom club Murcia 2-0 for their eighth straight victory.

Goals from Javier Saviola and Ronaldinho secured Barca's three points, which saw them move up to

their highest position this season on a day when a minute's silence was observed at all games for the victims of Thursday's train bombings in Madrid.

Barca themselves took the field at Murcia dressed in white T-shirts with the slogan, "No to terrorism, yes to peace," and every player in the Spanish first division wore black armbands.

"It is difficult to even think about playing a game in circumstances like this," Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard said before the game.

Afterwards the Dutchman was equally, and appropriately, restrained.

"This was not our best game of the season but on a day like today victory was all that counted," said Rijkaard, who was an advocate for suspending this weekend's matches.

Saviola opened the scoring for Barcelona after just five minutes when he got a foot to a Gabri Garcia free kick.

Ronaldinho clinched the victory with his 11th goal of the season just after the hour, jiggling his way through the Murcia defence after Marc Overmars cross found its way to his feet.

Deportivo La Coruna's dismal

recent run of form on the domestic front continued when they slumped to a 4-2 defeat at Real Mallorca on Sunday and slipped to fourth.

It was the Galician's third consecutive loss and almost certainly ends Deportivo's interest in the championship race as they are now 11 points adrift of Real Madrid.

Deportivo gifted Mallorca their first goal after Jorge Andrade was robbed on the left wing by Andrija Delibasic, and the Serb centred for Fernando Correa to get the opener after just five minutes.

Former Spanish international Pedro Munitis equalised for the visitors on 23 minutes but from there it was generally downhill for Deportivo.

Teenage defender Ivan Ramis headed Mallorca in front 10 minutes before the break and then Samuel Eto'o added to the lead from the penalty spot after 59 minutes.

Eto'o got his 10th goal of the season after the luckless Andrade was controversially judged brought down.

Djalminha closed the gap 10 minutes before the end, to give Deportivo some glimmer of hope of a late

recovery, but Jesus Perera restored Mallorca's two goal lead

four minutes later.

Deportivo's day went from bad to worse when defender Cesar Martin picked up his second yellow card in injury time.

On election day in Spain, it was appropriate that Salva Ballesta continued his campaign for an international recall, getting his Malaga's winner three minutes into injury time for a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao.

Salva, the Spanish first division's leading scorer four years ago, got his last cap three years ago but his 16th of this season makes him the top Spanish striker in the first division.

Athletic stay in fifth despite the loss but there is only three points between themselves and Malaga in 11th.

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RONALDO

The Brazilian, back home for treatment to his thigh muscle tear, said he hoped to be back for the Spanish league match against Sevilla on March 28.

He said he would not return until he was totally fit.

Oliseh wants to come back

AFP, Berlin

Nigerian international midfielder Sunday Oliseh has told Borussia Dortmund he will be back training with the club for next season even if they deem him surplus to requirements.

Oliseh, 29, was banished from VfL Bochum, where he was on loan from Dortmund, after breaking the nose of Iranian team-mate Vahid Hashemian in what he claimed was a racially fuelled fracas.

"They want to save money, but I am sure I will start training with Dortmund from July 1," Oliseh told Kicker magazine.

"If they do not want me they should pay up as they have to respect my contract."

Cash-strapped Dortmund loaned out Oliseh to Bochum to offload his wages but the 1996 Olympic Games winner's contract runs to 2005.