

Premiership Gunners equal history

Cricket

AFP, London

A dramatic come-from-behind victory against Middlesbrough ensured Premiership champions Arsenal equalled the record for most games unbeaten in the English top-flight on Sunday.

Having taken the lead through a fine Thierry Henry effort, Arsenal inexplicably allowed Middlesbrough to storm 3-1 ahead but a rampaging comeback meant the Highbury side reached the magic 42-game mark first set by Nottingham Forest in the 1970's to earn their place in the record books.

Goals from Joseph Desiré Job, Franck Quedrue and Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink stunned the Highbury faithful.

However, Dennis Bergkamp, Robert Pires and Jose Antonio Reyes replied with strikes of their own in a pulsating second-half.

The Gunners started brightly with attacking triumphs of Henry, Bergkamp and Reyes terrorising a Middlesbrough defence shorn of stalwarts Gareth Southgate and Ugo Ehiogu.

It was no surprise then, when after 25 minutes Henry latched onto Ashley Cole's cross 60-yard pass to deftly lift the ball over the onrushing Mark Schwarzer.

With Arsenal playing with their customary confidence and high-tempo it looked as though they would build on Henry's strike.

But instead it was Middlesbrough who struck, just two minutes before the interval, with a sucker punch.

Fullback Quedrue's marauding run saw the Frenchman beat a clutch of Arsenal defenders and play the ball to the unmarked Job. The Cameroonian made no mistake with a crisp strike into the top corner.

Middlesbrough, galvanised by their success before half-time, came out for

the second-half and took the game to their hosts. The positive approach reaped immediate dividends as Steve McClaren's men stormed ahead with quick-fire goals from first Quedrue and then Hasselbaink.

Left-back Quedrue beat the out-of-position Jens Lehmann in the Arsenal goal with a vicious swerving shot, while Hasselbaink got his second of the season after calamitous mistake by error-prone Pascal Cygan let him clean through.

Stung by the double setback, the Premiership champions launched a frenzied assault on the visitors' goal and pulled a goal back with two minutes courtesy of Dennis Bergkamp's low drive.

Then after 63 minutes Arsene Wenger's men were back on terms with Robert Pires finishing at the far post following a flowing Arsenal move.

No sooner had the shell-shocked Teesiders restarted the game, Arsenal scored their match-winning fourth.

The irrepressible Bergkamp slipped a perfect pass in for Reyes to bare down on goal and emphatically drive home.

To put the seal on a much deserved victory, Henry got his second on the stroke of the final whistle with an easy finish after good work by Pires and Bergkamp.

FIXTURES

REUTERS, London

English Premier League fixtures for August 24-25:

Tuesday: Birmingham City v Manchester City (1845), Crystal Palace v Chelsea (1900)

Wednesday (1845 unless stated): Arsenal v Blackburn Rovers, Charlton Athletic v Aston Villa (2000), Fulham v Middlesbrough, Newcastle United v Norwich (2000), Southampton v Bolton, West Bromwich Albion v Tottenham Hotspur

Everton going Russian?

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Everton could follow in the footsteps of fellow Premiership club Chelsea by naming a Russian businessman as a major benefactor on Monday.

However the Merseyside club, who in recent days have been reportedly linked to Boris Zingarevich, are now distancing themselves from the pulp and paper tycoon, whose family has a 362 million pounds fortune.

In a bid not to give fans the impression that they are on the verge of being boosted with the addition of several world class signings, debt-ridden Everton have made significant efforts to distance Zingarevich from the 20 million pounds (36 million USD) shares deal that chairman Bill Kenwright announced a week ago, which in recent

days has been subject to legal checks.

Everton, after a board meeting on Monday, are instead expected to name Zingarevich's son Anton, who club insiders claim is the man behind the deal and who could be announced as a new board member within 24 hours.

That means Everton's debts would likely be all but wiped out, and there would be significant investment in the club.

Kenwright hopes to announce the name of the man who has moved in to save the club from near financial ruin.

A club statement released Sunday said: "Reports naming Boris Zingarevich as the proposed principle new investor in Everton are incorrect.

"As previously announced more details will be issued in the aftermath of tomorrow's meeting of the club's board of directors."

Kenwright complained to Marca that the paparazzi chased him everywhere.

"They follow me everywhere, me, my children, my wife. They're always on my doorstep. I'm used to them now, they're part of my life but there are times when you want to be alone with your wife, your family and you can't live normally."

Despite the unrelenting media attention Beckham says he is enjoying his time in Madrid.

"I'm very taken by the life here...by the food. I'm extremely happy in Madrid and I want to stay here as long as possible."

Beckham has promised to make an effort to improve his Spanish as he prepares for his second season at Real Madrid.

"I'm doing what I can, I'm taking lessons and I want to speak Spanish as soon as possible," the England captain told sports daily Marca on Monday.

Beckham revealed that his wife Victoria and two children had finally made the move from England to live with him in the Spanish capital.

"My whole family are now in Madrid. My children are enrolled at school and my wife is going to work here with my associates," said the Real Madrid midfielder who endured a tricky first season at the Bernabeu.

"Life in Madrid is hard," admitted Beckham whose form slumped in the second half of last season as allegations of an extra-marital affair surfaced.

Afterward, Sadir had a message for U.S. president George W. Bush, who is using the Iraqi Olympic team in his



SHEER MAGIC: Arsenal superstar Thierry Henry celebrates while Middlesbrough heads drop around him after the winning goal at Highbury on August 22.

PHOTO: AFP

An Irish fantasy

UEFA Champs League

AFP, Paris

As the first Irish club to reach the third qualifying round of the Champions League, Shelbourne are hoping to hit the jackpot with a win against Deportivo La Coruna in the second leg of the tie on Tuesday after a scoreless home draw.

Deportivo's vast European experience - they reached the semi-finals last season - means they will start the game as huge favourites to go through.

But Shelbourne boss Pat Fenlon said he saw no reason why his side could not defy the odds once more and claim the 15-million-euro windfall that will come with six guaranteed games against Europe's best.

"It's very important that you don't concede at home," Fenlon said after his side held the Galicians goalless in Ireland in the first leg.

"I don't see any reason why we can't go to Coruna and score. If we do that I don't see why we can't go through. If we do that they have got to win the match."

Liverpool take a 2-0 lead into a home match against AK Graz of Austria, and captain Steven Gerrard said it was time for the Reds to start delivering the goods on the field and become a real force to be reckoned with once again.

"Of course there is immense pressure on us this season. The fans don't want us finishing fourth and getting knocked out of cups."

"They are fed up with it and want us

winning cups and challenging for the title," said Gerrard, who was in imperious form in the first leg win, scoring both of Liverpool's goals.

He played down the departure to Real Madrid of striker Michael Owen, who was left on the bench in Graz and was thus not cup-tied amid the player's negotiations with the Spanish giants.

"Michael's departure has put all of us under increasing pressure, especially the front two because they will be expected to deliver the goals now," Gerrard said.

"It's difficult contemplating life without Michael. Of course it is. But I realise we have to move on and hopefully (coach) Rafael Benitez can turn things round and the future will be bright."

Italian giants Inter Milan face a home tie against Basel of Switzerland. The first leg ended 1-1, and the Italians are confident of progressing against the Swiss team that are standing second in their domestic league.

"We are positive," Argentinian midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron said when asked of Inter's mindset ahead of the Basel game.

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