

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 Middles-brough 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 Desire 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 triumvirate 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 Middles-brough 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."

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.

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.

"The team continue to improve, though we have some way to go. That is normal for the sort of training we have undergone.

"We are confident because with so many skillful footballers in the squad it is easier to play. We are on the right road," said Veron, who joined Inter Milan from Manchester United on a year's loan in June after an injury-plagued season with the Premiership



PHOTO: AFP

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

Becks' more
settled

AFP, Madrid

David 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.

He complained to Marca that the paparazzi tracked his every move.

"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."

AP, Putras



Iraqi midfielder Salih Sadir scored a goal here on Wednesday night, setting off a rousing celebration among the 1,500 Iraqi soccer supporters at Pampeloponnisiako Stadium. Though Iraq -- the surprise team of the Olympics -- would lose to Morocco 2-1, it hardly mattered as the Iraqis won Group D with a 2-1 record and now face Australia in the quarterfinals on Sunday.

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

latest re-election campaign advertisements.

In those spots, the flags of Iraq and Afghanistan appear as a narrator says, "At this Olympics there will be two more free nations -- and two fewer terrorist regimes."

"Iraq as a team does not want Mr. Bush to use us for the presidential campaign," Sadir told SI.com through a translator, speaking calmly and directly. "He can find another way to advertise himself."

Ahmed Manajid, who played as a midfielder on Wednesday, had an even stronger response when asked about Bush's TV advertisement. "How will he meet his god having slaughtered so many men and women?" Manajid told me. "He has committed so many crimes."

"The ad simply talks about President Bush's optimism and how democracy

has triumphed over terror," said Scott Stanzel, a spokesperson for Bush's campaign. "Twenty-five million people in Iraq are free as a result of the actions of the coalition."

To a man, members of the Iraqi Olympic delegation say they are glad that former Olympic committee head Uday Hussein, who was responsible for the serial torture of Iraqi athletes and was killed four months after the U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003, is no longer in power.

But they also find it offensive that Bush is using Iraq for his own gain when they do not support his administration's actions. "My problems are not with the American people," says Iraqi soccer coach Adnan Hamad. "They are with what America has done in Iraq: destroy everything. The American army has killed so many people in Iraq. What is freedom when I go to the [national]

stadium and there are shootings on the road?"

At a speech in Beaverton, Ore., last Friday, Bush attached himself to the Iraqi soccer team after its opening-game upset of Portugal. "The image of the Iraqi soccer team playing in this Olympics, it's fantastic, isn't it?" Bush said. "It wouldn't have been free if the United States had not acted."

Sadir, Wednesday's goal-scorer, used to be the star player for the professional soccer team in Najaf. In the city in which 20,000 fans used to fill the stadium and chant Sadir's name, U.S. and Iraqi forces have battled loyalists to rebel cleric Moktada al-Sadr for the past two weeks. Najaf lies in ruins.

"I want the violence and the war to go away from the city," says Sadir, 21. "We don't wish for the presence of Americans in our country. We want them to go away."

Manajid, 22, who nearly scored his own goal with a driven header on Wednesday, hails from the city of Fallujah. He says coalition forces killed Manajid's cousin, Omar Jabbar al-Aziz, who was fighting as an insurgent, and several of his friends. In fact, Manajid says, if he were not playing soccer he would "for sure" be fighting as part of the resistance.

"I want to defend my home. If a stranger invades America and the people resist, does that mean they are terrorists?" Manajid says. "Everyone [in Fallujah] has been labeled a terrorist. These are all lies. Fallujah people are some of the best people in Iraq."

Everyone agrees that Iraq's soccer team is one of the Olympics' most remarkable stories. If the Iraqis beat Australia on Saturday -- which is entirely possible, given their performance so far -- they would reach the semifinals. Three of the four semifinalists will earn medals, a prospect that seemed unthinkable for Iraq before this tournament.

When the Games are over, though, Coach Hamad says, they will have to return home to a place where they fear walking the streets. "The war is not secure," says Hamad, 43. "Many people hate America now. The Americans have lost many people around the world -- and that is what is happening in America also."



PHOTO: AFP

THAT'S NOT PUNISHMENT! The Iraqi soccer team stretching during a training session at the Kaftatzoglio stadium in the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki on August 22.

Massu catches a Fish

AFP, Athens



Nicolas Massu of Chile won the Olympic men's singles tennis gold medal when he incredibly beat American Mardy Fish in Sunday's final 16 hours after winning the doubles with Fernando Gonzalez.

He hung in for a 6-3, 3-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 win to cap a tremendous day in Olympic history for Chile. His five-set doubles win was Chile's first ever Olympic gold medal in any sport. It finished at 2:40 on Sunday morning and after the medals ceremony he had to go to doping control and for a massage.

But on Sunday night after hardly any sleep he fought back from two sets-to-one down to win in exactly four hours of momentous tennis.

Gonzalez, who lost to Fish in the semifinals, beat American Taylor Dent for the bronze medal to give Chile three Olympic medals -- two golds and a bronze.

Massu started like it was a 100 metre sprint, racing away to take the first set 6-3 after winning the first five games, only to hit the wall marathon runners so fear.

Fish won the next two sets and Massu looked like he was a dead man walking.

Somehow, only he knows how, he fought back to pull level at two sets-all and with his adrenalin soaring he critically broke Fish in the fifth game

of the final set after each man had dropped serve.

Fish refused to give up without a fight, either. But Massu held serve in



NICOLAS MASSU

the eighth game to force the American to serve to stay in the match.

He did just that, but Massu brought a stunning Olympics to a close by serving out for his, and Chile's, second gold medal.

Chile have now won two gold, three silver and seven bronze medals since 1896.

World numbers one and two Roger Federer and Andy Roddick failed to survive the early cull, but it was still a remarkable performance by Chile.

Gonzalez beat Roddick while Massu beat third seed Carlos Moya. Massu had not won a match on hardcourt before coming to Athens, but in 24 gruelling hours on court here he won the singles and doubles gold medals.

The crunch
moment

AFP, Athens



Iraq's rootless footballers face Paraguay on Tuesday knowing victory will hand their country only a second ever Olympic Games

medal, an achievement which would have been deemed impossible just two weeks ago.

Having stunned talent-packed Portugal in their opening match and then edged Australia in the quarter-finals, the Iraqi side stand just 90 minutes away from a gold medal showdown against either Argentina or Italy.

"We have been carrying the dreams of a whole nation," said veteran coach Adnan Hamad.

"That puts us in an extremely difficult position. But everyone in Iraq is happy now. Our achievements can make them forget a little about their problems.

"That's why we are twice as happy - we have been successful and we have made our fellow countrymen proud.

"From now on, anything is possible. If we make the final it will be a great honour."

Victory will also boost their hopes of enlisting FIFA's help in reconstructing the sport back home where the national team haven't played since the downfall of Saddam Hussein.

Opponents refuse to travel to Baghdad and Iraq had to play their home Olympic qualifiers on neutral soil in neighbouring Jordan.

"FIFA is willing to help Iraq build venues for games," said Sepp Blatter, the president of the world governing body.

"It's not nice for teams to refuse to play there. Politics is not an issue for us. We have a plan to help Iraq financially to build a small technical centre."

Progress here can only help Iraq's case as they aim to win what would be only their second ever Games medal - Abdul Wahid Aziz's weightlifting bronze in Rome in 1960 remains their only podium appearance.

While they face Paraguay in Saloonika, favourites Argentina take on Italy in Athens with the South Americans boasting a mighty record here having scored 13 goals in their four games so far, without conceding one.

Six of those goals have come from Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez while the Argentinians, who have never won the Olympic tournament, have also been boosted by the availability of Manchester United defender Gabriel Heinze who had been suffering from a hip injury.

"For us every match is difficult," said coach Marcelo Bielsa. "Nothing is easy, especially the road for first place. You have to believe."

Veron back

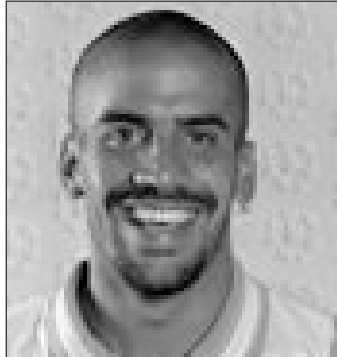
AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa has named a 20-man squad for the upcoming World Cup 2006 qualifier against Peru on September 4 at Lima.

Bielsa said he could still add to the list, and is set to name another goalkeeper.

Midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron, formerly of Manchester United and now with Inter Milan, will make his return to the squad following an operation for a slipped disc in January.

Bielsa however has left out unsettled Barcelona striker Javier Saviola, and Juan Roman Riquelme of another Spanish side, Villarreal.



JUAN SEBASTIAN VERON,

SQUAD

Goalkeeper: Pablo Cavallero (Celta Vigo/SPA)

Defenders: Facundo Quiroga (Wolfsburg/GER), Fabricio Coloccini (AC Milan/ITA), Roberto Ayala (Valencia/SPA), Gabriel Heinze (Manchester United/ENG), Walter Samuel (Real Madrid/SPA)

Midfielders: Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan/ITA), Juan Sebastian Veron (Inter Milan/ITA), Javier Mascherano (River Plate), Juan Pablo Sorin (Cruzeiro/BRA), Diego Placente (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Pablo Aimar (Valencia/SPA), Andres D'Alessandro (Wolfsburg/GER), Lionel Scaloni (Deportivo La Coruna/SPA)

Strikers: Carlos Tevez (Boca Juniors), Mauro Rosales (Newell's Old Boys), Cesar Delgado (Cruz Azul/MEX), Hernan Crespo (AC Milan/ITA), Cristian Gonzalez (Inter Milan/ITA), Mariano Gonzalez (Palermo/ITA)