



Arsenal's Thierry Henry (2nd R) watches Newcastle's goalkeeper Shay Given (L) deflecting his attempt on January 23 at Highbury Stadium in London.

PREMIERSHIP

Gunners thank Bergkamp

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal reduced the gap behind Premiership leaders Chelsea to 10 points with a 1-0 win against Newcastle at Highbury here on Sunday thanks to Dennis Bergkamp's first-half strike.

The Dutch attacker, making his first start in a month, scored in the 19th minute with a typically classy finish after fine work by Mathieu Flamini to push the north Londoners past Manchester United into second, albeit by a solitary point.

"The team is back on track," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger told Sky Sports afterwards. And the Frenchman insisted he had not given up on the title. "The best team is always in front but I am convinced we can be the best."

"The potential is there and we are growing again. We want to go from improvement to improvement until the end of the season and see

where we can finish."

After last week's reverse against Bolton Wanderers, the Gunners were well aware that anything less than a victory would have effectively ended the defence of their Premiership title.

And Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira said his side had bounced back in style: "I think we played a good game, showed good desire and the team played fantastically well."

Newcastle boss Graeme Souness, who was involved in a post-match war of words with striker Craig Bellamy over the reasons behind the Wales international's non-selection, added: "We rode our luck at times but at 1-0 we were still very much in the game."

"It would maybe have been hard on Arsenal if we'd taken something from the game but that wasn't to be. They deserved to win."

The Gunners could have been ahead as early as the first minute. Thierry Henry played in Ashley Cole on the left and his cross to the back post was headed back across goal by Robert Pires.

Flamini got a toe to the ball and looked to have scored before Titus Bramble stretched out a leg and cleared the danger.

After Bergkamp's strike, Arsenal played a measured game, content to wait for their chances rather than expose themselves and risk a counter-attack.

Henry turned on the edge of the area and his volley forced a fine save out of Newcastle keeper Shay Given and Robert Pires fired a superb effort just wide from 30 metres.

Without Bellamy's speed to call on, Souness had to rely on the less pacy Alan Shearer and Shola Ameobi, but in truth, they did little to test their hosts.

Even when Arsenal's defenders left Ameobi in space in the penalty area, the England Under-21 forward could not take advantage, twice heading over when he had time to place his efforts.

Despite their clear superiority, the Gunners could not find a second goal to lift the game off.

Newcastle, incapable of mounting any sort of sustained challenge

to the Arsenal defence and their susceptible goalkeeper Manuel Almunia, could do little but repel attack after attack from their hosts.

Henry had the first clear chance of the second half, latching onto Vieira's slide-rule pass and slotting the ball beyond Given. Unfortunately for the Arsenal forward, the ball rebounded off the far post and back into Given's hands.

That spurred Arsenal back into life and Pires will take sometime to forget a glaring miss that could have wrapped the game up.

Jose Antonio Reyes did well down the left and when Henry dummed the Spaniard's low cross, somehow Pires sliced his shot wide of the goal when it seemed easier to score.

Still Arsenal kept coming, Henry missing from Vieira's pass and recovering to present Ashley Cole with a chance from close range that he really should have converted.

There were signs that Arsenal were starting to play the flowing football which characterised much of their unbeaten championship season last year.

The speed and accuracy of some

of the passing was a joy to watch, Pires finding Henry just inside the area before the French forward forced another fine save from Given.

Midway through the second-half Newcastle suffered a blow when 8 million pounds defender Jean-Alain Bounsang limped off with a hamstring injury.

But their day could have ended on a happier note when they came close to stealing an unlikely equaliser with 15 minutes to go.

Shearer, a largely anonymous figure for much of the game, found Lee Bowyer just inside the area but his powerful effort was well saved by Almunia.

TOP SIX

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

Chelsea	24	19	4	1	48	8	61
Arsenal	24	15	6	3	53	25	51
Man United	24	14	8	2	37	14	50
Everton	24	13	5	6	28	25	44
Liverpool	24	11	4	9	36	25	37
Boro	24	10	7	7	39	33	37

PRIMERA LIGA

Real see off Mallorca

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid returned to form after their humiliating mid-week Cup exit by second division Valladolid by beating relegation-threatened Real Mallorca 3-1 on Sunday.

The Spanish giants started in confident form and Luis Figo opened the scoring from the penalty spot on 35 minutes after Roberto Carlos had been felled by a flying tackle from Mallorca's Guillermo Pereyra.

However, the visitors silenced the Santiago Bernabeu when they equalised against the run of play seven minutes later.

Alejandro Campano managed to guide a free kick from 25 yards around the Real wall and past goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

Campano also scored last season when Mallorca beat Real 3-2 in the Bernabeu.

However, Mallorca were reduced to 10 men after 65 minutes when Mark Lulliano got his second yellow card and marching orders after a vicious tackle on Roberto Carlos and the tide turned back in Madrid's favour.

They piled on the pressure and Walter Samuel put Madrid back in front after 76 minutes, with Santiago Solari getting Madrid's third three minutes into injury time.

Real are second with 41 points from 20 games but still seven points behind league leaders and bitter rivals Barcelona, who beat Racing Santander 3-0 on Saturday with goals from Samuel Eto'o, Ronaldinho and Deco.

"We are back to playing at a good level. There was nothing lucky about this victory," said Barca coach Frank Rijkaard.

The odds on third-placed Valencia retaining their Spanish title lengthened on Sunday after the reigning champions went down 3-1 at local rivals Villarreal to leave them 12 points behind Barcelona.

Villarreal's Argentine international Juan Roman Riquelme was the man who did the damage with a hat-trick.

Riquelme got the opener from the

penalty spot after 17 minutes and then added a second a minute before half time, going past two Valencia defenders before finding the net.

Valencia fought back and hit the bar twice from efforts by Pablo Aimar and Stefano Fiore but eventually they got a goal three minutes into injury time. Aimar scoring from the spot after Gonzalo Rodriguez had brought him down.

However, it took just a few seconds for Riquelme to restore Villarreal's two goal advantage with another penalty.

Straight from the kick off Villarreal rushed down the field which caused Carlos Marchena to panic and bring down Santi Cazorla in the box.

"We knew Villarreal were on form and they proved it again," said Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri after his team's first defeat in 11 games.

Sevilla maintained their ambitions of a place in the Champions League with a 2-0 win at struggling Albacete to move them up to fourth.

First half goals from Renato and Antonito Ramiro got Sevilla three valuable away points.

Espanyol slipped back a place to fifth after they were thrashed 4-1 at Deportivo La Coruna.

Deportivo took a 2-1 lead into the break and extended their advantage just after the hour when Diego Tristán scored from the penalty spot, after being hacked down by Mauricio Pochettino.

The challenge earned the veteran Argentine defender a red card and, down to 10 men, Espanyol were on the back foot and Juan Carlos Valeron finished off Deportivo's scoring spree 10 minutes from time.

TOP SIX

Spanish league standings after Sunday's matches, Real Madrid v Real Mallorca (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Barcelona	20	15	3	2	39	14	48
Real	20	13	2	5	35	15	41
Valencia	20	10	6	4	30	16	36
Espanyol	20	10	4	6	24	18	34
Betis	20	9	6	5	28	21	33
Villarreal	20	8	7	5	31	17	31

SERIE A

Milan's rude awakening

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus extended their lead at the top of Serie A to five points on Sunday after they defeated Brescia 2-0 and closest rivals AC Milan lost at Livorno.

David Trezeguet's close range finish and Maurizio D'Amico's own goal ensured three valuable points for Juve whose victory celebrations were tempered by what appeared to be a serious injury to dynamic Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved.

Former AC Milan midfielder Roberto Donadoni masterminded Livorno's shock 1-0 win over the defending champions. Donadoni took over as coach of the Tuscan outfit earlier this month and found himself up against his old club for the first time.

Corrado Colombo scored the only goal in the 28th minute for a gallant Livorno side who held AC Milan to a draw at the San Siro when the teams met on the first day of the season. AC Milan's misery was compounded by the late sending-off of defender Alessandro Nesta.

Juventus have 47 points from their 20 matches played, while AC Milan have 42, eight more than third-placed Udinese who crashed to a 2-0 home defeat to Calabrian side Reggina.

Sampdoria climbed up to fifth place after winning 2-1 in Lazio where the visitors were two goals up after just four minutes. Paolo Di Canio missed a first half penalty for Lazio, who fell to 14th.

Roma moved up to sixth position after coming from behind to win 2-1 at Fiorentina, completing a league double over the Florence club.

Vincenzo Montella's 17th league goal of the season sealed victory after Antonio Cassano had cancelled out Enzo Maresca's opener.

Montella, who is Italy's leading scorer, three ahead of Inter Milan's Adriano, also scored the winner when the teams played in Rome back in September.

Palermo were held to a goalless draw at snowy Siena, while Valeri Bojinov's 13th league goal of the season gave Lecce a 1-0 home win against bottom club Atalanta.

Arturo Di Napoli's header 10 minutes from time sealed a 1-0 home win for Messina against relegation-threatened Parma.

Juventus took the lead in the 12th minute at the Delle Alpi stadium. Zlatan Ibrahimovic drilled a low cross from wide on the right and France international Trezeguet popped up at the back post to stab the ball in off the post.

Brescia found themselves further behind two minutes before half time. Swedish striker Ibrahimovic cut in from the left and his clever cutback intended for Trezeguet was turned into his own net by Domizli.

Sino outrage

AFP, London

China's top football players Monday angrily denounced former Manchester United manager Ron Atkinson for alleged racist statements insulting Chinese women.

Atkinson apparently told an audience in Sheffield last Wednesday that "the Chinese people have the best contraception in the world - but I can't understand why there's so many of them because their women are so ugly."

The remarks have drawn a heated response. "This guy should really have never



RON ATKINSON

said this, he should be condemned and attacked," said veteran national striker Hao Haidong, who has been in contract negotiations with Sheffield Wednesday.

"I heard he is a habitual offender, but this kind of conduct, I think, really doesn't represent the majority, he is a special case."

"What this guy said really shows how unmodern he is, this kind of person should be beaten black and blue and made to thoroughly shut up," Hao told Titan Sports.

Injured Manchester City midfielder Sun Jihai also jumped into the fray, attributing Atkinson's comments to jealousy over China's rising global economic and political status.

"Different races of course have differences, but what does he mean by saying this? ... This guy is no good, does he think that only whites are special?," Sun told Titan Sports.

"This is like the insult to Desailly." Atkinson was forced to resign from his role as ITV's football analyst in April last year after calling Chelsea defender Marcel Desailly a "f***** lazy nigger".

The 65-year-old also lost his job as a pundit for the Guardian newspaper.

A spokesman for football's anti-racism campaign Kick It Out said: "This stuff is poisonous really. Essentially he really doesn't understand what he is doing in making these comments. They are deeply offensive."

Luxemburgo says it

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are seven points behind runaway league leaders and arch rivals Barcelona but their coach Wanderley Luxemburgo insisted Monday the Spanish giants could still finish the season as champions.

Real Madrid have a perfect record in the league since Luxemburgo made his surprise arrival in the Spanish capital on December 30.

"This was one of our best games," said the former Brazil national coach in the wake of Real's 3-1 win over Real Mallorca on Sunday.

"We played 90 intense minutes. The first half I really liked the way that we played tactically. The team worked as a group and in unison."

"We controlled the first half completely, and it was only bad luck that we went into half time at 1-1 thanks to a fluke free kick."

"In the second half we stepped up to win the game. I really liked the poise of the team," said Luxemburgo.

He caused a surprise by naming Denmark midfielder Thomas Gravesen in the starting line-up but the former Everton player, who only joined Real from the Premiership two weeks ago, justified Luxemburgo's faith in him.

"I liked what he did. He played with intensity, like everyone did, and covered everything," reflected Luxemburgo.

Gravesen made his presence felt in the midfield as well as at the back, and his commitment to the Real cause showed as he took just 18 minutes to earn his first yellow card in Spain.

However, Luxemburgo was not quite so pleased with some of his other players. Ronaldo was clearly angry with

Luxemburgo, who can take some credit for discovering and developing the three-times World Player of the Year when he was a teenager back in his native Brazil, after being taken off seven minutes from the whistle.

"If Ronaldo was angry with being substituted, that's his problem. I don't care whether players are angry when they are taken off. If they don't like it, that's their problem, not mine," responded Luxemburgo testily.

Nevertheless, Luxemburgo does have a dilemma ahead of next Sunday's game at Numancia.

Does he stick with his petulant compatriot, who has not been firing on all cylinders this season despite finding the net 11 times in the league, or does he opt for the ever-reliable England striker Michael Owen?

Owen has been on the bench for the last four games but the former Liverpool player has quickly become a favourite with Real fans for his 100 per cent commitment.

The Real squad made a joint promise to club president Florentino Perez, in the wake of last week's humiliating Cup exit to second division Valladolid, that they would be leaders by the end of March.

However, Luxemburgo still has to resolve who is going to score the goals that is going to get them back into pole position.

Critics have also been quick to point out that although Luxemburgo has notched up victories over Real Sociedad, Atletico Madrid, Real Zaragoza and now Real Mallorca, all four teams are in the bottom half of the table.

Champions League contenders like Valencia and Sevilla, as well as league leaders Barcelona, also have to be overcome in the coming months if Real are to stand a realistic chance of lifting a record 30th Spanish league title.

Toppmoller points at naughty ref

AFP, Berlin

Former SV Hamburg manager Klaus Toppmoller has blamed referee Robert Hoyzer for his dismissal by the Bundesliga club insisting he knew right away there was something suspicious about the official.

The German Football Federation (DFB) are investigating 25-year-old Hoyzer with regard to claims that he helped fix a cup match for financial gain.

The match concerned took place on August 21 2004 and saw regional side SC Paderborn defeat Toppmoller's Hamburg 4-2.

"The referee (Hoyzer) cost me my job as we were doing fine until the Paderborn game," raged Toppmoller in Bild am Sonntag. "After that it all went downhill."

Hamburg sacked Toppmoller less than two months later and the former Bayer Leverkusen coach reacted angrily to the revelation that the official, who has since resigned from his post, is now being probed by the DFB.

"I knew something was not right and I even told the referee's assistant at the time," revealed Toppmoller. "But what can you do? If you say there is cheating going on a ban awaits."

Hoyzer awarded two dubious penalty kicks to Paderborn and sent off Hamburg's Belgian striker Emile Mpenza for complaining.

"I thought football was clean but now we have to start questioning whether it is," added a bitter Toppmoller.

Nedved out again

AFP, Prague

Juventus midfielder Pavel Nedved will be out for three weeks after suffering an injury to his left knee against Brescia at the weekend, the Czech player's agent Zdenek Nehoda said Monday.

BUNDESLIGA

The ghost of Ailton

Football

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04's Brazilian marksman Ailton came back to haunt former club Werder Bremen by scoring a controversial 67th minute winner to clinch a 2-1 win at the Arena Auf Schalke on Saturday.

Ailton scored 28 goals to help Bremen lift the German title last season but he all but ended their hopes of repeating that feat with his strike in Gelsenkirchen.

German international Gerald Asamoah rolled the ball to Ailton to top home but, in truth, the Brazilian was fortunate not to be flagged for offside.

Schalke move level on points with Bayern Munich at the summit with the win while Bremen languish nine points adrift of the top two.

Bayern underlined their determination to lift a 19th German championship with a comfortable 3-0 win over SV Hamburg at the Olympic Stadium on Friday.

VB Stuttgart remain three points behind the leading duo in third spot after a 3-2 comeback win at Mainz 05.

Schalke forced the early pace in front of the 61,000 capacity crowd but it was Bremen who had the clear cut chances with Croat Ivan Klasnic hitting the post.

At half-time just one goal had been scored in the six Bundesliga matches on Saturday but that changed dramatically with seven goals coming in the first ten minutes of the second period.

Schalke took a 47th minute lead through Asamoah after Frenchman Johan Micoud failed to make a routine clearance.

Four minutes later the hosts pressed the self-destruct button with Christian Poulsen pulling back Klasnic to concede a penalty that Valerien Ismael converted with aplomb.

But Ailton was to have the final say once again showing there is no room for sentiment in football. The defeat sees Bremen slip down

TOP SIX

German football league table after the weekend's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Bayern	18	11	4	3	36	20	37
Schalke	18	12	1	5	28	22	37
Stuttgart	18	10	4	4	35	21	34
Wolfsburg	18	10	0	8	33	30	30
Berlin	18	7	8	3	30	17	29
Leverkusen	18	8	5	5	31	25	29



Livorno players are jubilant after Corrado Colombo (R) scored the winning goal against AC Milan at Armando Picchi stadium in Livorno on January 23.

PHOTO: AFP