



Manchester United striker Louis Saha (R) edges ahead of the Wigan defence to stab home a goal in their Premiership clash at the JJB Stadium in Wigan on Saturday.

## SS seal United win

REUTERS, London



A superb goal by Manchester United striker Louis Saha helped the Premier League leaders storm back from behind to beat Wigan Athletic 3-1 on Saturday.

Defender Leighton Baines gave Wigan a shock lead after only four minutes with a spectacular 25-metre drive and United needed nearly an hour before turning the game around with two goals in four minutes.

Serbian defender Nemanja Vidic headed home in the 62nd minute and France's Saha fired them in front with a deft control and shot in the 66th before Norwegian Ole Gunnar Solskjaer added a third in stoppage time.

United, who beat Wigan in February's League Cup final, fully

deserved the win and will also be lifted by a fine display from England striker Wayne Rooney, previously struggling for form.

Alex Ferguson's men finished the game at the JJB Stadium three points clear of champions Chelsea, who were playing Reading in the day's late kick-off.

Wigan remain just goal difference above the drop zone.

Ferguson told Sky Sports: "Wigan are a difficult side to play against, they're very committed and they've got good balance to the team -- so I think we've done really well to come out with a victory."

"There's a good momentum about the team at the moment and hopefully we can keep that going."

Delighted with the performance from Rooney, he said: "Over the whole 90 minutes I think he was right back to his best -- he and Saha are a real handful. And of course, with Ryan and (Paul) Scholes' experience behind that, it always

give you a chance."

Asked if it was Rooney's best United performance this season, Ferguson said: "I would think so."

"There were some signs of him coming back and even the two internationals have helped him get the required number of games to bring him to the right pitch."

A disappointed Wigan manager Paul Jewell said: "The first half took a lot out of us, but we can't sit deep. We were too easy to play against in the second half."

The hosts made a dream start when Baines, who scored with a 25-metre pileriver for England's Under 21s against Germany just over a week ago, repeated the feat after being teed up by a free kick.

United shrugged off the setback and Rooney produced a sharp turn and shot which smacked against the Wigan crossbar.

Saha was more successfully shackled by Wigan's defenders, but left back Patrice Evra managed to

find room for a fierce drive just before halftime which keeper Chris Kirkland did well to block.

United kept pressing after the restart, sharpened by the arrival of Ryan Giggs as a substitute, and Saha should have done better than firing wide after getting through on goal.

Vidic headed the equaliser soon afterwards, sandwiched by Wigan defenders but still able to meet Giggs' corner from the right with a powerful header.

Saha soon followed up by superbly controlling a high Rooney cross from the right and whipping the ball past Kirkland and off the left-hand post.

Solskjaer, back in the goals after two injury-plagued years, stroked home his fourth league goal of the season after winning a challenge and finding the bottom right hand corner with a low shot.

## Italy-Turkey for Facchetti

AFP, Rome

AFP, London



World champions Italy will play Turkey in a friendly on November 15 in Bergamo to honour Giacinto Facchetti, the former skipper of the national team who died in September, the Italian football federation (FIGC) said Friday.

Facchetti was born in Bergamo on July 18, 1942, and played for Inter Milan from 1961-1978.

He won 94 caps (70 as captain) and was part of the team which won the 1968 European title and which finished runners-up to Brazil at the 1970 World Cup.

## Barton seeks protection

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City midfielder Joey Barton, who was fined 2,000 pounds for baring his backside at a Premiership match, believes players should be protected from the abuse they face from fans.

The controversial 24-year-old escaped a ban for dropping his shorts at Everton fans after his side's 1-1 draw at Goodison Park two weeks ago.

"What I did was silly, a little bit childish," said Barton in an interview to be broadcast on the BBC on Saturday.

"If I was to walk away and nothing was to happen to me, it conveys what I've done."

"I felt they dealt with it in the right manner and they listened to what I had to say. They accepted there were reasons behind what went on and the matter's been dealt with."

Those reasons were the obscene abuse Barton claims to have endured during the Everton match, with some fans said to have taunted him about brother Michael's 17-year prison sentence for murder.

Barton claims the authorities' failure to take action against his abusers is what allowed him to be pushed to breaking point.

He has called for police to crack down on the kind of unsavoury comments he believes anyone would react to in normal life.

"If someone had said what they say to you in a football stadium on the street, you're going to have a major, major altercation," he said.

"It's okay for them to do it in a football stadium. This situation has got to be addressed because I'm not the first footballer to suffer abuse and I won't be the last."

## 'Don't pressure Theo'

AFP, London



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has backed Theo Walcott to hit the big time but warned against billing the teenage star as the saviour of England's bruised and battered football reputation.

In a week which saw England slump to a 2-0 Euro 2008 defeat in Croatia, Walcott gave a glittering illustration of his powers by coming off the bench to score twice as England Under-21s beat Germany in their European Championship play-off on Tuesday.

Wenger believes that the player is starting to show the potential which in January persuaded him to pay Southampton a fee which could rise to 12 million pounds.

But the Frenchman also stressed that desperate fans should not expect too much, too soon.

"Theo Walcott can help -- but as well as it is wrong to think that a boy of 17 has to save a country, that is not right," said Wenger.

"He certainly will be an England player in the future, but

you cannot say now: 'We take a player of 17 and he has to qualify us for the European Championships'."

"He will one day -- but England have not qualified for the World Cup, you have done not as bad as you think at the World Cup. You qualified for the World Cup before, you qualified for the European Championships and just lost against the finalists, Portugal -- so you cannot destroy everybody and say suddenly no-one is good anymore."

Walcott was controversially called-up to the World Cup squad by former coach Sven-Goran Eriksson and then ignored as England struggled into the quarterfinals.

Given that Wenger's jet-lagged stars face three matches in the space of the next eight days, Walcott could be unleashed from the start against Premiership strugglers Watford at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday where the Gunners will be going for a fourth straight league win.

"He can do it for us. He can start for Arsenal -- but he must not only be good enough to start for us, he must be better than the player who starts for us and at the moment, that is where his prob-

lem is," said Wenger.

"Theo was ready to come on at the World Cup, he was maybe not ready to start the games with all the pressure."

"But when the space opens up, it does not matter if you are 17 or 30, if you are quick, you are quick."

Parallels have been drawn between the impact Wayne Rooney had on England when he was 17 and the potential of Walcott to do the same.

Although the Manchester United striker is currently suffering a dip in form with the national team, Wenger is in no doubt of Rooney's class.

The Arsenal boss said: "I think Rooney is a big player. He has a period of his life for one or two months where he is less good -- what is wrong with that?"

"Rooney had a big injury and it takes time to come back to his best level."

"It looked like at the World Cup, the whole World Cup depended on him. As big as you are, it is the team performance."

"He will come back, I am not at all worried about Rooney."

## Fergie hails Rooney revival

AFP, Wigan



Alex Ferguson believes Wayne Rooney is back to his best after the striker helped inspire

Manchester United's 3-1 win at Wigan on Saturday.

Rooney has been struggling to reach his usual high standard of performance in recent weeks and was involved in an altercation with an disgruntled England supporter after his country's defeat in Croatia on Wednesday.

But he laid on a goal and produced an influential display as United recovered from Leighton Baines' early strike to extend their lead at the top of the Premiership.

Nemanja Vidic headed the equaliser in the 62nd minute before Louis Saha scored from Rooney's cross and then Ole

Gunnar Solskjaer grabbed the third in the last minute.

United manager Ferguson said: "Changing the formation at half-time, bringing on Ryan Giggs and getting Wayne (Rooney) through the middle was probably the difference."

"It was Wayne's best performance in a United shirt this season. There have been signs he's getting back to his best and he showed what he's about today."

Ferguson admitted he feared United would struggle to comeback after Wigan had snatched that early lead, but he was delighted with his side's desire to battle back.

"I wasn't confident that we would win at half-time, one goal down away from home with decisions going against us makes it hard. Wigan are a tough team to play, so we've done well to come away with a victory," he said.

"It's a job well done and we

## Pick up the phone!

AFP, Paris

Raymond Domenech took his fellow Frenchman Arsene Wenger to task on Saturday, berating the Arsenal manager for never bothering to return his calls.

The France manager, interviewed about his relations with club managers on 100 percent Foot, a private football channel, said: "When you've been trying to call Arsene 50 times and he doesn't reply, after a bit I get tired."

He complained that he has to contact Arsenal's France internationals Thierry Henry and William Gallas direct, leaving them to pass "the message" on to their manager as "the other line (Wenger's) no longer works".

The France manager was also less than complimentary about another one of his compatriots, Lyon boss Gerard Houllier.

Responding to Houllier's claims that Domenech never contacts him when he picks one of his players the French supremo countered: "What's the objective here, to massage their (club managers') egos or to have an effective France side?"

Domenech, not averse to ruffling feathers, added: "Houllier, Wenger or that other funny man, (Jose) Mourinho, I've got nothing against them."

## Maldini aiming for 'grand' finale

INTERNET, undated

Paolo Maldini insists he wants to play his 1,000th game before retiring and urged Milan to scrap the traditional Italian pre-match ritto.

"If I feel good, then I'll keep on going," the 38-year-old told the 'Gazzetta dello Sport'.

This is his record 23rd Serie A season, all with the Rossoneri, and his contract expires in June, 2007.

"The last problem between Milan and myself is the signature on a bit of paper. Now I am not remotely convinced I'll retire at the end of the term. My only concern is whether I can play consistently, if I can, then I will continue."

Few deserve the title of 'living legend' more than Maldini, who first pulled on this club's jersey in Serie A on January 20, 1985.

He managed only 14 League appearances last season due to a recurring right knee problem, but finally seems to be back on track.

"I am physically fine and the recovery plan we set out after the operation in April has been respected. I won't set a date for a decision over my retirement, as I've no rush. I love Milan and my work, while the club has faith in me. When I got injured I never thought about retiring early, I just focused on recovery and that's what I'm doing now."

The captain has already made history with a record 126 Italy caps and 585 Serie A appearances, but has a new target.

"I have played 962 official games in my career and I'm aiming for the 1,000. It won't be easy to reach it before the end of May, but I'd really like to hit that milestone without having to wait for next season."

## Sheva can match me: Zola

INTERNET, undated

Gianfranco Zola has insisted that Andriy Shevchenko will match his own hero status at Chelsea if he is allowed time to adapt.

"It has been surprising that he has not settled quicker," Zola is quoted as saying in the Daily Mirror. "But only because he is such a talented and brilliant player. They have not seen the best of him yet."

Zola was the driving force behind Chelsea's initial resurgence in the late nineties, winning the FA Cup twice, the League Cup and the European Cup Winner's Cup.

He left the club days before Roman Abramovich's takeover. The new owner immediately begged Zola to go back on his verbal agreement to join Cagliari -- then in Serie B -- of his native Sardinia, but the diminutive forward refused.

"It is an honour for me to be regarded as one of the great players of Chelsea," Zola admitted.

"Andriy can be like that given time. It would have been a dream for me to play with him for Chelsea because he can score great goals and has such pace."

## Lazaridis pours scorn on Hiddink

Football

AFP, Sydney

Another Socceroo player has come out against former national coach Guus Hiddink, saying the Dutch maestro tried to destroy him.

Stan Lazaridis completed a 13-year, 60-game international playing career against Paraguay in Brisbane last week, but he has joined goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer in criticising the methods of Hiddink.

Hiddink was trying to break me mentally and physically at certain training sessions and I was close to breaking point at some stages," Hiddink told The Daily Telegraph Saturday.

"I probably just scraped in if I was being honest. As soon as Guus took over, I wasn't one of his favourites so I was always behind the eight-ball and I only ever played one or two games with Hiddink just as he was about to

fulfil a lifelong ambition of playing in a World Cup.

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Schwarzer has criticised Hiddink's man-management skills in a newly-released diary of the Socceroos' first World Cup campaign in 32 years.

The Middlesbrough keeper revealed his disappointment at being dumped from the make-or-break pool game against Croatia in favour of long-time rival Zeljko Kalac, who went to have a horror match.

Schwarzer said Hiddink could have handled the Australian goading situation "a whole lot better."

The battle for first-choice between Schwarzer and Kalac, fired up by Hiddink's cat-and-mouse selection approach, was the biggest talking point within the Australian team before and during the World Cup