



Wigan Athletic winger Antonio Valencia (L) is tackled by Manchester City's Stephen Jordan during their Premiership clash at the JJB Stadium in Wigan on Saturday.

Wigan invade City

AFP, Wigan



Wigan took advantage of a defensive horror-show to crush Manchester City 4-0 at the JJB Stadium on Saturday. Paul Jewell's side won for only the second time this season as they scored twice in the opening four minutes through Emile Heskey and a Richard Dunne own-goal. And they further piled on the misery for under-pressure City manager Stuart Pearce with second-half strikes from Henri Camara and Luis Antonio Valencia. City have yet to win away from Eastlands this season and this was a fifth loss on the road for Pearce's

men, who slumped to their heaviest defeat of the campaign with a dismal display. If Pearce, who gave first starts to youngsters Matthew Mills and Michael Johnson, thought this would be the day his side ended that poor away run he was quickly given a reality check in an astonishing opening four minutes. With just 67 seconds gone Wigan right-back Emmerson Boyce whipped in a cross that Heskey met with a fierce half-volley past Nicky Weaver from 12 yards. City's large travelling support was still digesting that unpleasant start when Dunne's mistake increased their despair in the fourth minute. Wigan's Australian midfielder

Josip Skoko crossed from the left and City captain Dunne, under no pressure, headed past his own goalkeeper from close range. Pearce's team looked shell-shocked and rarely threatened to mount a comeback. Italian striker Bernardo Corradi directed a header wide from Trevor Sinclair's 35th minute cross in their one moment of attacking menace. Paul Scharner should have put the result beyond doubt just after half-time when Kevin Kilbane picked him out with a precise cross, but the Austrian midfielder headed over from close range. City's defending again left much to be desired in the 65th minute as Wigan extended their lead with a flowing move.

Leighton Baines provided the momentum with a surge down the left and, as the visitors' back-four stood and watched, his cut-back picked out Senegal striker Camara who stole in front of City defender Stephen Jordan to stab in his second goal of the season. It got even worse for woeful City just two minutes later when Ecuador winger Valencia scored his first goal since his pre-season move to Wigan. Heskey's lay-off gave him a sight of goal and the City defence again hardly distinguished themselves as they backed off and allowed Valencia to slam his shot past Weaver.

Fergie sets 90 points barrier

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson admits that Manchester United may be forced to break the 90-point barrier if they are to beat Chelsea to this season's Premiership title. Current leaders United face traditional rivals Liverpool at Old Trafford on Sunday in a game billed by the home side's French defender Patrice Evra as the 'biggest club game in the world.' Despite the recent successes of London clubs Arsenal and Chelsea, United and Liverpool remain the most successful and best supported teams in English football, but both clubs have been forced to watch the championship head to the capital for the past three seasons. While Liverpool's hopes of

claiming their first title since 1990 have been hit by three successive Premiership away defeats, United appear well set to challenge Chelsea's dominance. However, manager Ferguson believes that it will take a huge points haul for United to claim their ninth Premiership title in 14 years this term. Ferguson said: "We've got ourselves in a decent position so far this season, but the name of the game is about not making mistakes and trying to be up there all the time. Chelsea are still the team we want to beat, though, and if we finish ahead of them, we must have a hell of a chance. "It doesn't matter who you are up against, be it Liverpool or Arsenal, you have to do something in these games, just as we did against Wigan and Newcastle in our last two matches. Points are points and we

are going to have to amass something like 90 points this year. "Ninety points is an exceptional tally and it's difficult to say if it will be enough, but we have to aim for a high total to win the league." Liverpool go into the game chasing their 50th league victory against United, but Rafa Benitez's team have failed to win away from home in the Premiership since last May. Another defeat on Sunday would leave them eleven-point adrift of United and Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina fears that will be too great a gap to bridge. He said: "We know we are losing ground. We are too far behind because eight points behind Manchester United is too many points. "We have to keep going and fighting for everything, but if they win on Sunday it will be 11 points

between us and that could be too much. "The players know we have to try and win there, although we know it won't be easy, but we have to react in the right way and win what is a very important game. "You never know, but 11 points at this early point of the season could prove too much to make up. We have to go there and at least try to win that match." Meanwhile, United defender Evra admits that Ferguson's men must prove their ability to beat the big teams after losing their unbeaten record at home to title rivals Arsenal last month. Evra said: "Manchester United against Liverpool is the biggest club game in the world. It is pretty big in France when PSG play Marseille but nothing like this. SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Adriano sent home

INTERNET, undated

In a surprise move, Inter have announced they're putting Adriano on indefinite leave so that he can have "complete rest." The Brazilian has been struggling badly for form and hasn't scored an official goal for his club since March. "The club, in accordance with the Coach and technical staff, has decided to give Adriano a few days of complete rest," read a statement on the Inter website. "Starting from the Udinese match this weekend, he will not be at the disposal of Roberto Mancini. "Adriano will undergo a personalised training programme to recover physically and psychologically, the terms of which will be decided over the next few days." He was dropped for the midweek 2-1 victory over Spartak Moscow in the Champions League, coming on as a substitute. With Julio Ricardo Cruz, Alvaro Recoba and Hernan Crespo now SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Carlos predicts Real win

INTERNET, undated

"We'll win 1-0, with the goal being scored by Robinho", he grinned. "Ronaldinho is suffering without Eto'o by his side. It's absolutely impossible that they get a 0-3 this time. We won't let them catch their breath this year," he stressed. "We've got to suffocate them when they try to play the ball out wide in attack. I've got a feeling that it's going to be one of those to-and-fro games with a lot of stamina needed and I really feel that we've got the edge," he added. As to his future at the White House he put a decision for the New Year. "At the end of December I'll decide if it's a good idea for both me and the club to carry on here or to seek football elsewhere. If I can put on the sort of performance from Bucharest more frequently over the next few games then I'll stay for another two years," explained the player. "This summer I was very close to leaving Real Madrid, but first my kids and then Pedja and Capello convinced me to stay. I must admit that my kids have the upper hand in any decision, above and beyond money", he added with a serious look.

Rijkaard drops Gio

INTERNET, undated

Rijkaard is staying faithful to his policy of resting certain players and has left both Giovanni van Bronckhorst and Santi Ezquerro out of the Real Madrid list. The move puts a fellow ex-Arsenal left-back veteran in pole position to start in the Santiago Bernabeu, Sylvinho. The policy also sees another player, far less used, get the stand-down order from Frank Rijkaard as number 14 Santiago Ezquerro gets a chance to watch the Superclasico on his home TV. The ex-Bilbao player continues on the very edge of the Dutchman's plans. Apart from these two elective absences, there are also the forced absences of Julianio Belletti and Samuel Eto'o, both out with injuries, although many a Cule will take heart to see that Carles Puyol has recovered from the back strain that caused his substitution in London.

'Clasico not the be-all'

INTERNET, undated



Real Madrid's midfield playmaker Guti hasn't made the mistake of claiming a scoreline as he did against Atletico Madrid, preferring to face the Superclasico against eternal rivals FC Barcelona in a lower key manner. "Sunday's match against Barcelona may be important on an emotional front but it's far from definitive. We'll try and do our best to win, as we always do, because we're playing in front of our fans at the Bernabeu and because of last year's events," explained the player. "We need to approach every match as a new challenge to be met, be it against Barcelona or any other team you could name. Both teams

are well-matched this year, they're reigning champions and have been playing well for a couple of years and we've got new faces who want to show themselves in one of the most high-profile matches we play, so it'll be interesting." "There's also our new Coach, whose record speaks for itself, and so we all, together, are raring to put things together in the right way and start to show just what this new Real Madrid can do in the Primera Liga. After three years a win on Sunday would be a great way to announce a new series of triumphs, but, as I said, it's not the be-all or the end-all." Guti also reflected on last year's events. "It was a difficult defeat to digest, for us players and for any Madridista, anybody who was present at the Bernabeu. These are the sort of things that itch forever or get stuck in your throat, so we're also determined to put that image of

Real Madrid behind us and create a better one," stressed the midfielder. He also reflected on his own growing importance under Fabio Capello. "The Superclasico comes at a good time for me as the Coach has put a lot of faith in me and I want to repay that trust. At first it didn't look like I'd enjoy much playing time, but now I'm playing a lot more so I hope to play well and not let down fans, team-mates and the coaching staff," he underlined. He finished off with words about the rival, and Ronaldinho in particular. "The talk about him (Ronaldinho) being off form are just a load of old gossip. He's been playing well for two straight years, plus he's just played a World Cup so there are going to be ups and downs but he's still a dangerous player and we have to keep a close eye on him," concluded the player.



PHOTO: AFP

Roger Federer stretches to the full to make a return against David Nalbandian during their semifinals match of the Madrid Masters at the Rockodromo arena Friday.

Tomas silences Madrid



AFP, Madrid

Tomas Berdych silenced 10,000 Spanish fans with a 6-3, 7-6 upset of defending champion Rafael Nadal in a bad-tempered quarterfinal at the Madrid Masters on Friday. The 11th seeded Czech, who buried Roger Federer's gold medal dream at the 2004 Athens Olympics, was shocked by the screaming sell-out crowd which would have done anything to help their beloved "Rafa" advance. After the tie, both men engaged in a furious war of words. "I can understand that they want for him to win the match and win the tournament," said Berdych, who has now beaten the world No. 2 in three consecutive meetings. "He's second in the world, he's a great player. "They have to understand that there are many, many other players that can beat him. And then when he tells me that (I'm very bad), it's nice that a very bad player can beat him three times." Nadal said he had his reasons for the exchange which took place at

the net as they shook hands. "I said that because in Toronto in August I didn't say anything, but he was constantly giving bad looks and nasty looks to the opponent," said the world number two. "Today it happened again constantly. He looked, and he looked at me with not a very friendly face. "He's a player with an irate attitude, he's not a bad person." Berdych will play Saturday against Chile's Fernando Gonzalez, who defeated Serb Novak Djokovic 7-5, 5-7, 7-5. Nadal said the match was played in a healthy, combative atmosphere. "When I had a double-fault in the Czech Republic in Davis Cup and the crowd cheered, I didn't see him telling them to be quiet," said the Spaniard. "I played last week in Stockholm and lost to (Joachim Jonasson). The crowd also supported him but I didn't say anything. "When you play against any local player it happens, that's good for tennis." The victory was the second tinged with controversy after David Nalbandian confirmed he's still got no respect for "Gentleman" Tim Henman.

The Argentine defended his controversial outburst on Thursday he set up a semifinal showdown with world No. 1 Roger Federer through a 6-4, 6-7, 7-6 defeat of charismatic Russian Marat Safin. The muscular Nalbandian characterised the Briton's gentleman image as "rubbish" after Henman refused to give him another first serve on a disputed point in Thursday's third round match-up. Henman responded: "He questioned my sportsmanship, but if we go down that road there is only going to be one winner." Nalbandian made no apologies Friday for his remarks. "So he's not the sportsman that he looks like or he wants to sell that image." Away from the fray, regal top seed Federer rose above the petty rows, with a dismissal of American Robby Ginepri 6-3, 7-6. Federer calmly won his 80th match of the season against just five defeats as he put out Ginepri. "I've walked off the court 80 times as a winner this season, only SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

ONE FINAL GOODBYE: A combo of photos shows German BMW-Sauber driver Nick Heidfeld's spoiler (L) bearing the inscription "Danke Michael" (Thank You Michael) in honour of the German legend Michael Schumacher (R) racing in his final Grand Prix of an illustrious career at Interlagos in Sao Paulo today.

FORMULA 1 Tension sky high

THE GUARDIAN

Michael Schumacher and Fernando Alonso were increasingly tense expressions as they stalked the paddock at the Rio circuit on Friday, almost as if the penny had suddenly dropped that they faced the season's denouement and -- at long last -- no further opportunities remained to resolve the outcome of their title fight. Up to now there had always been the comforting thought that another race, another opportunity to score points, another chance to steal the unfair advantage, was lurking just another fortnight down the track. But now all those dreams are so much dust in their rear-view mirrors. The moment for the last great push at the Brazilian grand prix has arrived. For Schumacher and Alonso, as for Ferrari and Renault, will see the resolution of a season-long grudge match as well as the final race of Schumacher's long and distinguished career. Yet neither of them are approaching the race any differently from the other 17 events on the calendar. No matter how much optimism Schumacher can bring to bear on the situation, his chances of

clinching a record eighth world championship are remote. Trailing Alonso by 10 points, he must win 71-lap race with the Renault driver finishing out of the paddock at the Rio circuit on Friday, almost as if the penny had suddenly dropped that they faced the season's denouement and -- at long last -- no further opportunities remained to resolve the outcome of their title fight. Up to now there had always been the comforting thought that another race, another opportunity to score points, another chance to steal the unfair advantage, was lurking just another fortnight down the track. But now all those dreams are so much dust in their rear-view mirrors. The moment for the last great push at the Brazilian grand prix has arrived. For Schumacher and Alonso, as for Ferrari and Renault, will see the resolution of a season-long grudge match as well as the final race of Schumacher's long and distinguished career. Yet neither of them are approaching the race any differently from the other 17 events on the calendar. No matter how much optimism Schumacher can bring to bear on the situation, his chances of

are freshly rebuilt for this event. Schumacher's engine suffered a valve failure which caused his retirement from the Japanese grand prix a fortnight ago but, as it was in the second race of a two-race cycle, he has a fresh engine installed this weekend. Alonso, the race winner at Suzuka, had also come to the end of his latest two-race cycle and has a fresh engine to an upgraded specification fitted for this race. Although this latest Renault V8 has minimal extra power, its torque characteristics have been significantly enhanced for this race, partly in anticipation of the new 2007 rules which require teams to "freeze" the specifications of their engines in the interests of cost control. "The most important thing will be to change nothing (about the way in which we approach the race) and not feel pressured to do so," said Bob Bell, the Renault team's chassis technical director. "We go to every race weekend aiming to win, and we will approach Brazil in the same

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