



Schalke striker Peter Lovenkrands (L) celebrates his first goal with midfielder Lincoln during their Bundesliga clash against Werder Bremen at the Weser Stadion on Sunday.

LIGUE 1 Lyon crash again

AFP, Paris

A last-gasp goal from Troyes playmaker Benjamin Nivet added to the mini-crisis at French champions Lyon, handing the five-time league winners their third loss of the new year on Sunday.

Nivet struck three minutes into injury time amid confusion following a late corner to hand his side just their fifth win of the season and a potentially key victory as they bid to avoid the drop.

Paris Saint Germain, meanwhile, are still looking for their first win under new coach Paul Le Guen, but nevertheless managed to come away with a 1-1 draw against Marseille in a tense match at the Velodrome.

Lyon still have a comfortable 11-point margin at the top of the table ahead of Lens but are winless in their past five matches from which they have taken just two points.

"We're going through a difficult patch at the moment, where the slightest error proves costly," said Lyon coach Gerard Houllier, whose side looked unstoppable before the three-week winter break, 15 points clear and having only failed to win three times in 19 league matches.

But as the champions stumble, hosts Troyes seem to have got a new lease of life, with just one loss in their last nine games, as they move to fifth from bottom.

Troyes coach Jean-Marc Furlan was jubilant.

"I'm still overcome with emotion at what we did tonight against a rival of such quality," he said.

"We've just bagged seven points out of nine which gives us a little breathing space."

Their success Sunday was mostly thanks to goalkeeper Roman Le Crom who kept out a succession of shots, starting with an effort from Fred, making his comeback from injury, after 10 minutes, followed by decisive saves against Patrick Muller (32) and a Juninho free kick (35).

Le Crom proved solid again after the break, faced with an onslaught from Juninho (56), Fred (67) and Florent Malouda (71, 90), before Nivet made the breakthrough in the last action of the game.

"We're obviously disappointed," said Juninho. "It's hard to swallow this fifth game without a win. We've never been in a situation like this, but there are 15 matches and a lot of points left to play for."

"We've won five titles together, we're not going to let a sixth slip through our fingers."

In a tension-filled game at the Velodrome, where the visiting team's bus was pelted with stones before the game and two PSG fans were arrested outside the stadium, Djibril Cisse opened for the hosts after 69 minutes.

But PSG grabbed the equaliser six minutes later when Pauleta scored his ninth goal of the season. The PSG captain missed the chance to double his account two minutes later as his side remain just one point above the relegation zone.

"We were unlucky," said Cisse. "They came to take the three points. It was hard to manoeuvre but we did our best and deserved more."

England get Rooney boost

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney was on Monday given the all clear to link up with the England squad for Wednesday's friendly against Spain.

The Manchester United striker was originally considered doubtful for the game in Manchester after limping off with an ankle injury in Sunday's 4-0 win at Tottenham.

Lampard quickly hit back at Barton in a similar interview, but Gerrard, 26, has remained tight-lipped about the comments and he insists that there will be no recriminations between the three players this week.

Italy in 'Ultras' grip

AFP, Rome



Italy will need to get tough on its 'ultras' if it is to prevent further disastrous scenes like the ones in Catania which claimed the life of a policeman.

All domestic and international matches have been suspended after Filippo Raciti was killed by a home-made bomb as hooligans went on the rampage at Friday's Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo.

Catania president Antonino Pulvirenti said his club were fighting a losing battle against the mafia-like troublemakers.

"The majority of fans that come to football are respectable people, but unfortunately there is a unsavory minority made up of criminals and thugs who nobody cares about and they unleash their anger in this way," he said.

"They live like barbarians and for three years now we have been held hostage by these people. For us it has become a daily battle, but we can only do so much on our own."

Pulvirenti said he expected the Italian football authorities to come down hard on his club after Friday's riot.

"I fear the worst, but what can we do if one of these delinquents throws a bomb at a policeman

outside the stadium? We're sure to pay a dear price."

Ultras have a much bigger voice in Italy compared to most other leagues in Europe, and in most cases are well known to their clubs.

They often use intimidatory tactics to get free match tickets, travel concessions to away matches and to have the freedom to run their own merchandising rackets.

Often in Italy, scores of ultras will turn up at a training session to barrack their team if they are playing badly, or worse still attack them.

Perhaps the best example of fan power came in March 2004 when the Rome derby between Roma and Lazio was abandoned.

After the match had kicked-off, a rumour went round that a young Roma fan had been knocked over and killed by a police car.

Just before half time three Roma ultras leapt over the barriers and walked towards the pitch to speak to Roma captain Francesco Totti.

After the conversation, Totti returned to his coach Fabio Capello and his words were clearly picked up by television microphones. "If we play on they're going to kill us," he said.

Referee Roberto Rosetti wanted to play on, but Totti and Lazio captain Sinisa Mihajlovic were having none of it, and the game was called off.

The rumour about the dead fan turned out to be false, but Roma denied they had been blackmailed by the ultras. It was a show of strength by the ultras and demonstrated the power they yield in Italian football.

Legislation to try and stop the violence inside the grounds was introduced over a year ago, including named tickets, increased video surveillance, and the banning of flares, fireworks and racist banners.

But many clubs have failed to meet the criteria set by the government, leaving the ultras to do as they please inside the stadiums.

Clubs bear the burden of their misbehaving ultras and are normally hit with a fine or a stadium closure, while fans who are arrested often escape with a caution and are free to cause havoc the following weekend.

Outside the stadium there is little the clubs can do, with the problem then coming under the jurisdiction of the police.

Nowadays it seems the police are the primary target for the ultras rather than rival fans.

"They're our nemesis," an Inter ultra told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

The Italian government are holding a meeting on Monday to discuss ways of tackling the problem, and unless they come down heavy on the ultras once and for all, hooliganism could prove fatal yet again.

Lovenkrands sinks Bremen

AFP, Berlin

Former Glasgow Rangers star Peter Lovenkrands hit both goals as Schalke 04 knocked Werder Bremen off the top of the German league in a 2-0 win on Sunday.

The Gelsenkirchen side now have 45 points, three ahead of Werder, while Stuttgart remain third, seven points behind the leaders after a 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund.

Danish striker Lovenkrands opened the scoring in the 20th minute with an acrobatic volley after being set-up by Brazilian Lincoln.

He almost had a second in the 38th minute but his rasping 25m drive was well-saved by Werder keeper Andreas Reinke.

But an unimpressive Werder

side were finished off by Lovenkrands in the 71st minute when he scored from a pass by Kevin Kuranyi.

Stuttgart's three points were guaranteed by Mario Gomez hitting his 11th goal of the campaign, the perfect way to celebrate his first call-up to the national team.

Stuttgart are four points ahead of Bayern Munich who slumped to a 3-0 defeat against Nuremberg on Friday in Ottmar Hitzfeld's first game back in charge at the start of his second spell with the Munich giants.

New Hamburg coach Huub Stevens failed to reinvigorate rock-bottom SV Hamburg on Saturday as the struggling side surrendered a one goal lead to lose 2-1 at his former club Hertha Berlin.

Alexander Laas gave Stevens, who replaced the sacked Thomas Doll in midweek, the perfect start with a 2-0 success at Arminia Bielefeld for the club's

a ninth-minute penalty, levelled when international defender Arne Friedrich scored in the 78th minute.

Brazilian striker Mineiro, who was brought in during the transfer window, then hit the winner with a thundering strike in the second minute of injury time.

The defeat left Hamburg firmly rooted to the foot of the table with just one win and 15 points to their name and facing the prospect of losing their top flight status after 43 years.

It was their seventh defeat of the season and left them four points from safety.

Hertha stay in fifth place, a point behind Bayern Munich.

Eightth-placed Hanover, who beat Hertha 5-0 last week, were in the goals again with a 4-1 trouncing of Alemannia Aachen.

Borussia Monchengladbach gave their new coach Jos Luhukay, who has replaced Jupp Heynckes, a winning start with a 2-0 success at Arminia Bielefeld for the club's

first win since October 14.

On Friday, Hitzfeld endured a nightmare return to the Bayern hotseat.

Having led Bayern to the German title in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2003 as well as the 2001 Champions League crown, he replaced the sacked Felix Magath in midweek.

Hitzfeld admitted he viewed a video tape of the game on Saturday and he didn't like what he saw.

"It wasn't pleasant viewing. It was a disgrace to the name of Bayern Munich," raged the coach.

"I knew I'd taken on a tough task, but I'm slightly surprised at how tough it's going to be. We caved in at the end."

Even the return to the side of England midfielder Owen Hargreaves after four months out with a broken leg couldn't save Bayern from defeat in this Munich derby.

Ronaldo's low cross set up Scholes for a third in the 54th minute and Ryan Giggs completed the rout with a fine finish in the 77th minute.

Ferguson admitted United had needed to step up their tempo to get the points and he said: "I thought our pace to the game was too slow in the first half and we didn't play with proper width."

"I was glad to get in at half-time one up I must admit. We made the points about what the players needed to do in the second half and they did it."

"We got off to a really good start in the second half, playing with great purpose and speed. We played the way we normally play and that made the difference."

Tottenham were unable to recover from that blow and Nemanja Vidic headed United's second from a Ryan Giggs corner in the 48th minute.

"He was fantastic today and the boy has come on great. He has the courage to play and always wants the ball."

Fergie pays up to C'Ron

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson is ready to pay his debt to Cristiano Ronaldo after the Manchester United winger inspired his side's 4-0 win at Tottenham.

Ronaldo played a decisive role as he won and then converted the controversial penalty that gave United the lead just before half-time.

Ferguson said: "I'll need to go to the bank, although I don't think penalties count!"

"He was fantastic today and the boy has come on great. He has the courage to play and always wants the ball."

"I thought in the early part of the match he was a bit careless. But once he got more of the ball he improved. He is that type of player. You have to service him and get the ball to him and get him working."

"He is not the kind of player that can be on the fringes. He has to be involved all the time."

After a cautious start, United moved through the gears in an impressive fashion and took the lead in the 45th minute when referee Mark Clattenburg ruled that Steed Malbranque had tripped Ronaldo.

Tottenham were unable to recover from that blow and Nemanja Vidic headed United's second from a Ryan Giggs corner in the 48th minute.

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