



Wolfsburg striker Diego Kilimowicz (L) falls under the challenge of Stuttgart midfielder Roberto Hilbert during their Bundesliga clash at Stuttgart on Saturday.

Schalke stuttering

AFP, Berlin



• Schalke 04 striker Halli Altintop finally broke his 12-match goal drought as the Bundesliga leaders took their first points in three games on Saturday.

But VfB Stuttgart's push for a Champions League place next season suffered a setback when the league's leading goalscorer Mario Gomez was ruled out for six weeks because of a knee injury picked up in the 0-0 draw with Wolfsburg.

Turkish international Altintop scored his first goal since bagging two against Mainz last November with a volley after just two minutes in the 1-1 draw away to Hanover 96.

Altintop was delighted to find the net again before former Manchester City defender Michael Tarnat put Hanover back on level terms just two minutes later.

And Hanover's Hungarian inter-

national Szabolcs Huszti forced Schalke keeper Manuel Neuer into a good save when he drove his shot goal bound as the home side piled on the pressure in the dying stages.

Schalke coach Mirko Slomka said: "In the first half we had a small advantage. After half-time we fought really well and we had a bit of luck towards the end."

Third-placed Stuttgart suffered a massive setback when Gomez, who has scored 13 Bundesliga goals, damaged knee ligaments.

The injury will keep him out of the Euro 2008 qualifier against the Czech Republic later this month having only made a goal-scoring debut last month in Germany's 3-1 win over Switzerland.

The 21-year-old striker suffered the injury just before half-time, giving Stuttgart coach Armin Veh plenty to worry about.

He said: "I was worried before the game about knocks to several players and now I have more concerns. Mario's injury is a bitter loss for us."

Bottom side Borussia

Moenchengladbach had a rare win in a 2-0 win when midfielder Sergio Pinto stabbed the ball home after a mix-up in the home side's defence.

Mainz, seemingly doomed to relegation before the winter break, have now pulled themselves up to 10th with a 1-0 win at home to Arminia Bielefeld with a 51st minute penalty by Danish defender Leon Andreasen, as they continue their good run with only one defeat in the last nine games.

Bochum's Greek striker Theofanis Gekas bagged two goals in his side's win at home to Borussia Dortmund, who are in danger of falling into the relegation dogfight with seven clubs just one defeat away from the relegation zone.

After Aachen forward Sascha Roesler poached a goal at Cottbus, there was drama when striker Jan Schlaudraff missed a penalty just before half-time only to see Sascha Dumm shown a red card for abusing the referee moments later.

But 10-man Aachen rounded off a 2-0 win when midfielder Sergio Pinto stabbed the ball home after a mix-up in the home side's defence.

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Long layoff for Gomez

AFP, Berlin

The Bundesliga's top scorer this season, VfB Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez, will be out of action for six weeks after injuring knee ligaments in Saturday's goalless draw against VfL Wolfsburg.

Stuttgart coach Armin Veh confirmed that scans had shown the 21-year-old had suffered a serious injury after he was substituted shortly before half-time.

"He will be out for at least six weeks with torn ligaments. It will really affect us. It's a bitter blow," Veh said.

The lanky forward has scored 13 times this season to lift Stuttgart into the top three of the Bundesliga.

Gomez, who scored on his full international debut for Germany in the 3-1 win over Switzerland in February, will be ruled out of the Euro 2008 qualifier against the Czech Republic on March 24.

Chelsea silent on Terry contract

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea chose not to comment today on reports that contract negotiations with captain John Terry have collapsed.

Terry may return from his horror head injury to face Tottenham in the FA Cup quarterfinal at Stamford Bridge tomorrow.

If he is unable to agree a new deal with the Blues Terry could use FIFA rules to buy out the two years left on his current deal, which is worth a reported £90,000-a-week.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho insisted yesterday that the club would do all it could to keep its English stars.

Mourinho said: "We are in a good situation, we don't have players whose contracts end this summer.

"We don't have to make quick decisions about players who are in their last year.

"Everybody knows about the players we want to keep and Chelsea will do everything they can to keep them."

"In the case of John and Frank Lampard and other players, Chelsea will do everything to make them stay."

Meanwhile Kenyon says the club are hopeful that Lampard will re-sign soon.

Kenyon added: "We have had some initial discussions. Clearly he has two years left on his contract and we would expect him to enter into serious negotiations quickly with us and hopefully resign him for the future as we see Frank as a long term player."

Brescia thump Juve

AFP, Rome

Juventus' promotion hopes were dented after a 3-1 defeat against Brescia in the Italian second division on Saturday.

Despite their second loss of the season, Juve held on to top spot in Serie B as second-placed Napoli could only manage a 1-1 draw at Rimini.

Juve's defeat took place on neutral ground at Mantova - the stadium where they suffered their first league defeat - as Brescia's stadium is not yet in line with security regulations.

Matteo Serafini scored a first-half hat-trick for Brescia, while Alessandro Del Piero was on target for Juve. Juve coach Didier Deschamps refused to make excuses for his team's lacklustre performance.

"We weren't really there today and we had problems both physically and psychologically," said the Frenchman.

"It wasn't down to individuals, the whole team played badly. We prepared for the match like all the others, but we were too slow and too predictable."

"Thankfully we play again on Tuesday, and that gives us the chance to put things right."

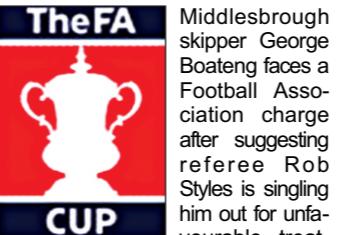
Juve keeper Gianluigi Buffon took some consolation from Napoli's failure to fully capitalise on his team's loss.

"The only positive to come out of today is that we are still top," said the Italian World Cup winner.

Juventus were demoted from Serie A last season and given a nine-point penalty for their role in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

Boateng faces action

AFP, Middlesbrough



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Styles refused to respond to Boateng's criticism but Boro manager Gareth Southgate simply added fuel to the fire when he added: "You tend to get those decisions given against you when you play the big sides."

"At the time I saw the incident I thought it was harsh. He was only a few yards away when the ball was flicked against his hands but we don't complain about referee's decisions."

"It's unfortunate that George has suffered in that way (with the same referee) twice. But there's nothing that we can do about it and we go to Old Trafford in high spirits. We've won there twice in the last two years."

For United what promises to be another successful season at home and abroad is still very much alive on three fronts.

A place in the quarterfinal of this season's Champions League, a healthy domestic lead over Chelsea in the race for the Premiership title and a home replay against Middlesbrough for an FA Cup semi-final place fills the club's manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, with confidence.

"The display against Middlesbrough was one of our best performances for weeks," he said.

"The rhythm was back, the pitch was good and we just clicked."

"We have a chance to win the replay and the name of the game is to keep

winning. That's the best recipe for any team and the best energy enhancer of all time."

United, like Middlesbrough, now face the prospect of two domestic fixtures in three days before this month's break for international fixtures and Ferguson, in particular, if promising the full use of a squad fighting for success on three fronts.

"We will utilise the full pool of players just like we did against Reading in the previous round of the FA Cup," he added.

"We have a game at Bolton on Saturday and there'll be one or two changes for that match. There will be one or two more for the replay a week on Monday."

England international Wayne Rooney fired Manchester United the second half penalty which ultimately earned the Premiership leaders a 2-2 draw on Saturday and an FA Cup quarterfinal replay at Old Trafford on March 19.

Boateng, who claimed he was simply defending his face as a Ryan Giggs corner struck both his hands, was the player penalised and it is not the first time he has fallen foul of the official.

Earlier this season Styles dismissed the Middlesbrough midfielder at Arsenal, while he lay lying on the touchline nursing a serious knee injury.

For Boateng, Saturday's subsequent punishment was no coincidence.

"I am disappointed in the referee,"

said the scorer of the 46th minute goal which gave Middlesbrough a 2-1 lead in a thrilling encounter on Teesside.

"He sends me off at Arsenal for getting injured and then he gives a bad decision again. I was out of action for

seven eight weeks."

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Henry vows strong return

Football

AFP, London

Thierry Henry admitted he was devastated to be ruled out for the rest of the season, but the Arsenal captain is determined to return better than ever.

Henry will be out of action for up to three months after damaging stomach and groin muscles in Wednesday's Champions League exit to PSV

"But I hope to get back to full fitness soon and will look forward to having a great season with Arsenal next year."

"This setback will make me even



THIERRY HENRY

Villareal beat Levante

Villareal beat Levante

REUTERS, Madrid

Goals from Uruguay striker Diego Forlan and Denmark international Jon Dahl Tomasson handed Villareal a 2-0 Primera Liga win at struggling Levante on Saturday.

Fornal put Villareal in front after nine minutes, curling a superb right-foot shot round keeper Jose Molina.

Levante put Villareal under heavy pressure for long periods and had several good chances but the visitors secured the victory when Tomasson fired a shot under Molina 17 minutes from time.

Forlan went off midway through the second half with a leg injury.

Villareal's fourth away win of the season pushed them up to 11th place. Levante are two points above the relegation zone with all their immediate rivals yet to play this weekend. Barcelona host arch-rivals Real Madrid at the Nou Camp in Saturday's late match.

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