



Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney scores with a powerful right-footer against Sheffield United during their Premiership match at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

# MU turn screw on Chelsea

AFP, Manchester



Goals from Michael Carrick and Wayne Rooney allowed Manchester United to turn the screw on Chelsea with a 2-0 win over Sheffield United here on Tuesday.

Jose Mourinho's defending champions still have six games remaining, starting with Wednesday's visit to West Ham, but United's success puts them six points clear and places the pressure firmly back onto Chelsea's shoulders.

Almost implausibly, the match opened with the lowly visitors carving out the first real goal-scoring opportunity after only four minutes, Ryan Giggs's inaccurate back pass being intercepted by Luton Shelton who led the United defence a merry dance until being upended in front of goal by Paul Scholes.

Michael Tonge took the resulting free-kick a few feet outside the home penalty area and struck a well-driven shot through the United wall for deputy keeper Tomasz Kuszczak to make a smothering save.

The moment served as an early warning for United's injury-depleted defence and was as good as things would get for Sheffield as, within seconds, United were in front.

Carrick, scorer of two goals a week ago in the rout of Roma, was again on the mark as Alan Smith and Cristiano Ronaldo engaged in a slick passing exercise and the latter split Sheffield's massed defensive ranks with a telling pass.

The United midfielder rounded the move off by lifting the ball expertly over the advancing Paddy Kenny.

Rooney should have doubled the lead two minutes later after he controlled Carrick's fabulous pass with a deft touch, only to see his shot blocked by the keeper but another shot by Tonge and another energetic burst from Shelton were warnings that, while the lead only stood at one goal, the visitors were still a threat.

Neil Warnock's team, resting five players ahead of the week-end's crucial relegation visit to Charlton, offered another concern for the league leaders with their physical approach, forcing Ferguson to take off Patrice Evra after 20 minutes, following a bad

foul by Colin Kazim-Richards.

Moments earlier, Derek Geary had earned the game's first caution for wrestling Ronaldo to the ground.

Giggs and Rooney had shots blocked by Phil Jagielka and Kenny, respectively, and Rooney placed a header straight into the keeper's arms.

Yet Sheffield's threat on the counter-attack remained and, before the break, Kazim-Richards found the overlapping Shelton who shot into the side-netting.

The visitors' dogged persistence was beginning to frustrate the home team, Rooney in particular, the England forward being booked just before the interval for taking the latest in a series of swipes at opponents' legs, Phil Jagielka his victim on this occasion.

When Jagielka found room to chance his arm with an inaccurate 30-yard shot early after the restart, Sheffield supporters could have been forgiven for dreaming of the impossible.

However, Rooney demonstrated the other side of his football character after just five minutes of the period, surging between two defenders who had been separated by a superb Giggs pass, and

giving Kenny no chance with his 20th goal of the season, a personal best for the England man.

It was not until they were two goals behind that Sheffield carved out their best chance of the game as Matthew Kilgallon played in Shelton for a glorious opportunity which, predictably, the forward wasted with a wayward shot.

Thereafter, the only issue remained to what extent the Premiership leaders would improve their goal difference advantage over the defending champions.

In the space of five minutes, Smith's wicked shot ricocheted off Kenny, Ronaldo was denied by the goalkeeper's expert save and Giggs was far too casual in trying to beat Kenny from a dozen yards, allowing the keeper to save with an outstretched leg.

Any distant hope of a miraculous Sheffield recovery disappeared in the 68th minute when Shelton, yet again demonstrating electrifying speed, chased through on goal only to be dispossessed by Gabriel Heinze - a fair challenge in the view of referee Rob Styles, a foul according to Warnock and his team with the television replays supporting the penalty appeal.

## Italy back on top

AFP, Paris

World champions Italy have moved back to the top of the FIFA world rankings ahead of Argentina and Brazil.

The Italians' win over Scotland in a Euro 2008 qualifier was enough to push them ahead of the two South American countries.

Italy had ended Brazil's four-year reign atop the world rankings in February only to lose it to Argentina last month.

APRIL RANKING		
Pos.	Country	Pts
1	Italy	1604
2	Argentina	1594
3	Brazil	1520
4	France	1496
5	Germany	1393
6	Netherlands	1302
7	Portugal	1292
8	England	1278
9	Spain	1237
10	Czech	1169

## Rimini deny Juve again

INTERNET, undated

Rimini have succeeded in twice emerging unbeaten against Juventus, though there was controversy for Federico Balzaretti's dismissal. The Bianconeri got a nasty introduction to Serie B when they were held 1-1 at Rimini in their opening game, but were now top of the table and brought two tough saves out of Handanovic early on with Nedved's piledriver, a point-blank Del Piero header from a corner and a Camoranesi low effort.

Trezeguet had a golden opportunity to open the scoring on the stroke of half-time, but scuffed his finish. Moments later his header thumped the crossbar and Nedved had penalty appeals waved away.

Balzaretti was furious with that decision and was sent off during the break for insulting the referee in the tunnel.

Despite playing in 10 men, Juventus continued to push forward, but ran a big risk four minutes after the restart with Moscardelli just failing to get on the end of a Valiani cross that needed only the barest touch to turn it in from a yard.

Handanovic continued to impress in the Rimini goal, performing a truly spectacular save to tip Del Piero's free-kick out of the very top corner.

The Bianconeri captain's solo effort was also denied by the former Udinese shot-stopper, while at the other end Valiani volleyed past the near post from six yards.

It was a wide open game right to the end, as substitute Matri was booked for dissent when he wanted a penalty, but Chiellini could be in trouble as he seemed to kick out at the Rimini man when he was on the ground.

Handanovic was giant to the last, performing a fingertip save on Palladino's slalom in stoppages, though Birindelli ballooned the follow-up off target.

## Bayern look to Van der Vaart

AFP, Berlin

German legend Franz Beckenbauer revealed Wednesday Bayern Munich are chasing Hamburg midfielder Rafael van der Vaart to fill the void left by Michael Ballack's departure to Chelsea a year ago.

The Dutchman is seen by Bayern president Beckenbauer as the ideal replacement for Ballack, who left Bayern in May 2006, and could give the German giants a harder edge in midfield.

"Van der Vaart would suit us perfectly," said Beckenbauer, in his weekly column in the magazine Sport-Bild.

"He is the sort of player who can bring us the creativity which we are lacking at the moment."

Bayern were dumped out of the Champions League by AC Milan at the quarter-final stage last week, and coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has singled out Van der Vaart as a potential key piece in the Bayern midfield.

"We need creators in our squad and Van der Vaart would also bring a tougher edge to our defence," said Hitzfeld, whose side are fourth in the Bundesliga.

Having arrived in Hamburg from Dutch giants Ajax in 2005, Van der Vaart, 24, is under contract until 2010. He helped Hamburg finish third in last season's Bundesliga and has Ballack's strong defensive ability and attacking flair.

The player's Danish agent Soeren Lerby, a former Bayern player and close friend of Munich's manager Uli Hoeness, said: "Rafael is enjoying his time in Hamburg, but he also wants to play to earn champion titles."

Hitzfeld has also re-expressed his interest in Werder Bremen striker Miroslav Klose, who was the top scorer at the 2006 World Cup and who is under contract with Bremen until 2008.

"We are always interested in good German players, that's why we are following the Klose case," added Hitzfeld.

Klose, 28, is also being courted by Italian giants Juventus.

# Wenger's Arsenal dream

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger insists Arsenal's fans are right to boo his team when they are below their best because he expects the Gunners to be the Premiership's top entertainers.

Wenger's side had to endure jeers from sections of the Emirates Stadium as they laboured to break down Manchester City on Tuesday before finally securing a 3-1 victory that effectively guaranteed a place in the Champions League.

Arsenal are now third in the Premiership and, more importantly, they have opened up an eight-point gap over fifth-placed Everton.

That would be enough to satisfy supporters of most clubs, but Arsenal's 60,000 regulars are harder to please. They are often infuriated by their team's penchant for over-elaborating when they have opponents under pressure and, after a season that has promised more than has actually been delivered, they are quick to show their frustration.

But Wenger is adamant his players have a responsibility to both entertain and provide the winning football all fans desire.

"The crowd doesn't irritate me," he said. "As a professional you have to deal with that."

"People coming here pay good money and sometimes they let their frustrations out with the team over a bad pass."

"When we can't do what they want they are not happy, but we have to deal with that. I understand

it and in a big city it is different as well.

"It's down to us to transport them to a different world. People are impatient. They want to win. When we don't win as quickly as they want, they get frustrated."

City boss Stuart Pearce knows how it feels to be on the receiving end of criticism from fans after a difficult season at Eastlands.

He said: "After 60 minutes I was sitting there very comfortably. The fans were booing Arsenal and that is a nice feeling when you are away from home."

"That is the nature of the Premiership now. I don't think there is a team this year that hasn't been booed at home at some stage. Probably Manchester United and Chelsea might be exceptions but the rest of us have all experienced it."

"Sometimes there is a bigger picture but people pay good money. The next time I go to the theatre I am going to let some thespians have it. It might make me feel better and then I'll claim I pay their wages when I leave."

At least Arsenal eventually sent their fans home happy. Tomas Rosicky opened the scoring in the 12th minute when he turned in Emmanuel Eboue's cross.

But goalkeeper Jens Lehmann gifted City an equaliser with a weak clearance that fell straight to Joey Barton. The England midfielder found Michael Johnson and he slipped an astute pass to DaMarcus Beasley, who scored with a low shot into the far corner.

For long periods Arsenal were content to zip the ball about with their usual range of flicks and feints

embellishing, and occasionally disrupting, their attacking momentum.

Aided by Arsenal's indulgent streak, City held out until the 73rd minute.

Fabregas started the move that broke their resistance with a pass to Rosicky and, when Nedum Onuoha's clearance rebounded to the Spaniard, he finished it in style with a fierce 25-yard strike.

They grabbed a third in the 79th minute. Alexander Hleb cut in from the right and fed Julio Baptista, who easily beat Andreas Isaksson with a low first-time shot.

Fabregas had gone 47 games without a goal until he hit the winner against Bolton on Saturday but, if his effort here is anything to go by, he finally seems to be getting a taste for goal-scoring at just the right time.

Wenger said: "Fabregas didn't score for a while and when you make an obsession of things it doesn't come naturally. When you are not obsessed by it any more the relief comes. That allowed him to score tonight."

"When you see the chances he has had since the start of the season you are not surprised he scores. You need to score the first once that is the most difficult. He said it was not an obsession but you could see from the way he celebrated on Saturday."

"There is still an injection to come from him. He is just 19. From 19 to 22 you go from young boy to a man. But he can already dominate a game even though he is just a young boy."

# Fergie confident of title

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson is confident his Manchester United squad will hold their nerve to close out the Premiership title battle after watching them edge closer to the finishing line with a clinical win over struggling Sheffield United.

Goals from Michael Carrick and Wayne Rooney early in each half

saw United emerge from Tuesday night's Old Trafford encounter with a 2-0 win, a result that left them six points clear of Chelsea ahead of the champions' game at West Ham on Wednesday evening.

"This was another step closer to the title and we have the right temperament to do it," Ferguson insisted afterwards.

"It doesn't matter what team I play, they are showing they are up for it all the time. We have a six-point lead with five games to go, this was another one on the road for us but

there is still a long way and I'm looking at every game now as a cup final, they are all so important."

"In the first half we had to endure some heavy tackling and we survived that. I said to them at half-time, be sensible, get a goal and save your legs. In the end it was a great scoreline for us."

"Our spirit and camaraderie is terrific, you can see that out on the pitch, they all encourage each other, they dug in and our football was good."

The United manager was unhappy with the challenge by Colin Kazim-Richards that sent Patrice Evra to hospital for a scan on a calf injury although his defence will welcome back John O'Shea and Rio Ferdinand from injury for Saturday's visit of Middlesbrough.

"I thought it looked a bad tackle," said the United manager. "He will have a scan tomorrow so we don't know the extent but we will have a bit more experience and strength at the back on Saturday."

Another plus to emerge from the evening was a 20th goal of the season for Wayne Rooney -- a personal best -- and the opportunity for Ferguson to win back the friendly wager he lost with Cristiano Ronaldo when the Portuguese winger hit the 15th of his 21 goals in the current campaign.

Ferguson joked: "Wayne promised me 20 at the start of the season, in fact he said he'd get 25! So maybe I can make some money out of him, some of the money I lost on Ronaldo!"

United had a number of narrow escapes against a resilient Sheffield team -- notably in the 68th minute when, with the Blades trailing 2-0, Luton Shelton was clearly brought down by Gabriel Heinze although referee Rob Styles failed to give a penalty. "I haven't seen it but people say it could well have been a penalty," said Ferguson. "But we've had that many turned down, maybe we deserve that bit of luck sometimes."



PHOTO: AFP

Nuremberg midfielder Marco Engelhardt (L) celebrates with teammate Jan Kristiansen after scoring against Eintracht Frankfurt during the German Cup semifinal match at the EasyCredit Stadium in Nuremberg on Tuesday. Nuremberg won 4-0.

## Maradona OK to go home

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona has recovered enough from a relapse of hepatitis to possibly allow him to continue his treatment for alcohol abuse at home, doctors for the football great said Tuesday.

"Mr Diego Maradona continues to improve after his stay in the clinic, with laboratory work showing clear improvement," said a statement released by the private Los Arcos clinic a day after it issued a note warning of abnormalities in his liver functions.

"If he continues to improve, the patient will be in shape to check out and to continue his treatment with his personal physician," said the statement.

Maradona, 46, was rushed to Los Arcos in Buenos Aires on Friday complaining of severe abdominal pain, just two days after being discharged from a different clinic after nearly two weeks' treatment for excessive drinking.

Alfredo Cahe, Maradona's personal physician, said on Monday that Maradona was not doing well, but was not in serious condition.

The former captain of Argentina's winning World Cup football team and one of the sport's all-time greats has spent 18 days in hospital.

The ex-star player for Barcelona and Naples has seen his career on and off the football pitch marred by repeated drug and alcohol abuse.

Maradona has suffered from hepatitis B since 1991, when he played for Barcelona.

He was hospitalised in 2000 and 2004 for heart attacks provoked by cocaine overdoses.

# Poles celebrate triumph



AFP, Warsaw

Polish football fans and officials burst into enthusiastic cheers after the announcement from Cardiff that Poland and Ukraine will jointly host the Euro 2012 championships, and said winning the bid would hoist Polish football to new heights.

"White and reds, can't be beat!" shouted a group of ardent fans that had gathered in the shadow of the communist-era Palace of Culture in central Warsaw to watch the announcement, broadcast live on a large television screen.

Poland and its eastern neighbour Ukraine beat Italy and joint bidders Hungary and Croatia to win the right to host the quadrennial tournament involving the continent's top nations.

"This is a huge chance for Poland."

"It will be our chance to show we are capable of organising large sports events like world championships or even the Olympics," Przemyslaw Gosiewski, an aide to Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, said from a gym where he had watched the ceremony from Cardiff with a group of students.

"This is our passport to enter the club of elite countries," added Gosiewski, draped for the occasion in a white and red football scarf, in Poland's national colours.

Pawel Malanowski, a 23-year-old supporter of Warsaw flagship side Legia, said winning the bid would help Polish football better

compete with the continent's top sides like Germany, Italy, France and England.

"This is great," the young fan said outside the Palace of Culture -- a "gift" to Poland from Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin.

"Poland was 'outside' Europe for decades. We've been part of Europe again for 15 years, and that's a really big chance for young people. Thanks to things like Euro 2012, we'll be the equals of countries like England, and that really matters for us," Malanowski told AFP.

"And it's even more important for the Ukrainians. They have more problems there, so I hope it'll be a big opportunity for them to join Europe too."

Poland's national team coach, Dutchman Leo Beenhakker, urged government and sports officials to get down to work in preparing for the prestigious competition.

"It means a lot for Polish football and I am very happy," Beenhakker, who took over as trainer of the Polish national squad after its disastrous World Cup campaign last year, said on TVP 3 public television.

"The government and federation have to start working to create better infrastructure, better stadiums and training facilities. That is the most important task for Polish football at the moment," Beenhakker said.

It will be the first time that either Poland or Ukraine have hosted a major football championship, and the two countries have pledged to do the necessary work to bring their infrastructure up to

scratch.

Polish Transport Minister Jerzy Polaczek last week said that around 26 billion euros (35 billion dollars), including EU financing, have been earmarked to upgrade Poland's infrastructure.

"Road, rail and air projects will get more than 19 billion euros," which will be topped up with Polish government money, Polaczek said at a joint press conference last week with Regional Development Minister Grazyna Gesicka and Lipiec.

Critics of the Polish-Ukrainian bid had pointed to the vast distances between the planned venues in the two countries.

Around 2,000 kilometres (1,240 miles) separate Gdansk, in northern Poland, from Donetsk, in eastern Ukraine, for example.

Only 23 kilometres (14 miles) of that is motorway, and the road journey currently takes around 22 hours.

Some of Poland's biggest hitters, including former president and Nobel Peace prize winner Lech Walesa and current head of state, President Lech Kaczynski, had lobbied UEFA to ensure the championships were awarded to Poland and Ukraine.

Walesa, who founded the Solidarity Union movement in 1980, which took on the then Soviet Union-backed regime, said that choosing the joint bid would clearly signal that the changes that have taken place in eastern Europe over the past 15 years have been appreciated by western Europe.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A MAN FALLS AND CHIPS A TOOTH, I GUESS YOU MIGHT SAY IT HAPPENED ACCIDENTALLY.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: E equals U