



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United forward Wayne Rooney (L) is all smiles alongside celebrating teammates after securing a comeback 4-2 victory over Everton in their Premiership clash at Goodison Park on Sunday.

United smelling title

AFP, London



Manchester United moved to the brink of reclaiming the Premiership title after fighting back from two goals down to beat Everton 4-2 on a day of rollercoaster drama on Saturday.

Wayne Rooney's 79th-minute strike and a stoppage time goal from Chris Eagles capped a remarkable fightback and ensured that Sir Alex Ferguson's side moved five points clear at the top of the table after Chelsea were held to a 2-2 draw by Bolton at Stamford Bridge.

The results mean that United, thanks to their superior goal difference, only need to take four points from their remaining three games to be sure of winning the title, and they could have wrapped it up before they travel to Chelsea for their penultimate match of the season on May 9.

If Sir Alex Ferguson's side beat local rivals Manchester City next Saturday and Chelsea fail to beat Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium the

following day, United will be champions for the first time since 2003.

"Obviously the momentum is with us now," Ferguson said. "Five points clear and with a superior goal difference gives us a marvellous chance with three games left."

The United boss cautioned however that the lunchtime trip to City would come in the wake of a gruelling trip to Italy for Wednesday's Champions League semifinal second leg against AC Milan.

"We know what that can do to the players. It will be very difficult and we can't count any chickens yet. But there is marvellous spirit in the camp and I think that is going to play for us."

A lacklustre United had looked doomed to defeat at Goodison Park when Portuguese midfielder Manuel Fernandes hammered an stoppable 25-yarder past Edwin van der Sar, five minutes after half-time, to double the lead established by Alan Stubbs's deflected free-kick.

But a howler by Everton's stand-in goalkeeper, Iain Turner, allowed United back into the contest.

The Scot, only playing because

Tim Howard was prevented from doing so under the terms of his season-long loan from United, dropped a cross to leave John O'Shea with a simple finish.

That was the cue for Ferguson to throw Cristiano Ronaldo, who was carrying an injury according to Ferguson and had started on the bench with next week's Champions League semifinal second leg in Milan in mind, into the fray.

The Portuguese winger had an immediate impact, rising to meet a corner with a powerful downward header that former United player Phil Neville sliced into his own net.

That set the stage for Rooney to effectively settle the contest with 11 minutes left and, with news of the Chelsea result filtering through, Eagles finished off a breakaway move with a nicely curled finish for United's fourth.

At Stamford Bridge, Bolton grabbed the lead after the Chelsea back four made a hash of dealing with a 19th-minute corner, the ball falling to Lubomir Michalik, who lashed it home from close range.

The champions were level inside three minutes, Salomon Kalou heading in a Wayne Bridge cross, and went ahead when Kalou's header ricocheted off the bar, a Bolton defender and finally goalkeeper Jussi Jaaskelainen before ending up in the back of the net.

Bolton refused to give up the fight however and, nine minutes after the interval, Kevin Davies grabbed an equaliser with a close-range header and Sam Allardyce's side held out for a draw under the inevitable late barrage from Jose Mourinho's men.

The Chelsea manager put on a brave face even when conceding that Manchester United are in pole position after the Blues fell five points adrift of the leaders.

"It is not over because mathematically there is a chance," said Mourinho.

"When the chance is there, we have to believe. But it is almost lost, almost. They have to lose two games and we have to win all three. They are very close."

Carvalho, Ballack out with injury

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack and defender Ricardo Carvalho will both miss next Tuesday's Champions League semifinal second leg against Liverpool and could be out of action until next season.

Ballack has had an ankle operation after being injured during last Sunday's Premier League 0-0 draw against Newcastle.

He missed the 1-0 first leg win against Liverpool last Wednesday and had an operation on Friday, the club said.

Portugal defender Carvalho went down after a tackle by Bolton's Kevin Davies in the first half of Chelsea's 2-2 draw on Saturday and was substituted by Frank Lampard.

"It's bad...it's his knee," Mourinho said of Carvalho. "He's been our best defender the whole season. It's as simple as that," the Portuguese coach said. "We lost in Liverpool in the Premiership without him."

Chelsea's last Premier League defeat was by Liverpool in January.

Fergie over the moon

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson promised he would treat Sam Allardyce to a

hug and a kiss after Bolton held Chelsea to a draw that leaves Manchester United on the brink of reclaiming the Premiership title.

After watching United come from two goals down to beat Everton 4-2 and pull five points clear at the top of the table, Ferguson acknowledged that Allardyce's men had done him a huge favour by holding the champions to a 2-2 draw at Stamford Bridge.

"Sam will be getting a hug and a kiss," the Scot said with a smile. "Maybe two kisses!"

The results mean that United, thanks to their superior goal difference, need to take four points from their remaining three games to be sure of winning the title, and they could have wrapped it up before they travel to Chelsea for their penultimate match of the season

on May 9.

If Ferguson's side beat local rivals Manchester City next Saturday and Chelsea fail to beat Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium the following day, United will be champions for the first time since 2003.

"Obviously the momentum is with us now," Ferguson said. "Five points clear and with a superior goal difference gives us a marvellous chance with three games left."

The United boss cautioned however that the lunchtime trip to City would come in the wake of a gruelling trip to Italy for Wednesday's Champions League semi-final second leg against AC Milan.

"We know what that can do to the players. It will be very difficult and we can't count any chickens yet. But there is marvellous spirit in the camp and I think that is going to play for us."

Initially lacklustre, United had looked doomed to defeat at Goodison Park when Portuguese midfielder Manuel Fernandes hammered an stoppable 25-yarder

past Edwin van der Sar, five minutes after half-time, to double the lead established by Alan Stubbs's first-half free-kick.

But a howler by Everton's stand-in goalkeeper, Iain Turner, allowed United back into the contest.

The Scot, only playing because Tim Howard was prevented from doing so under the terms of his season-long loan from United, dropped a cross to leave John O'Shea with a simple finish.

"That was a break for us," admitted Ferguson, who reacted to the goal by gambling on the introduction of Cristiano Ronaldo, despite his star winger carrying a minor injury.

The Portuguese winger had an immediate impact, rising to meet a corner with a powerful downward header that former United player Phil Neville sliced into his own net.

That set the stage for Wayne Rooney to effectively settle the contest with 11 minutes left and, with news of the Chelsea result filtering through, substitute Chris Eagles curled in United's fourth.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Pigeon's secrets!

Cricket

STEVE WAUGH

Everyone knows what a great bowler Glenn McGrath is and how he lived in a caravan when he came to play grade cricket then went on to be one of Australia's greatest ever bowlers and play 100 Tests.

Having had the honour of being best man at his wedding to Jane I think I know him better than most and I'd like to share a few of the lesser known facts on this very down to earth, decent country boy with a caring nature.

1. The nickname Pigeon came from NSW teammate Brad McNamara who, upon first laying eyes on his lily-white pins, said, "You've stolen a pigeon's legs McGrath". Other nicknames he's answered to are Rhino, Ninger and Nuff Nuff.

2. His first cricket team was aptly named Backwater Cricket Club and, a bit like Don Bradman, he used to bowl at a fuel drum that sat against his dad's machinery shed in Narromine to improve his accuracy. He completed a carpentry course at Tech College but has never put it to use (thankfully).

3. Glenn has always been comfortable in his own company and doesn't really go for the social

scene, preferring the isolation of the outback, a fiction novel or the escapism of a good movie. His favourite all time flicks are The Lord Of The Rings Trilogy and he gives the choc-top ice creams a real touch-up.

4. Borders on being obsessive compulsive. Knows every Test wicket he's ever taken, how the batsman was out and what number victim they were. Eats the same breakfast each morning on tour. He places his two fried eggs on separate pieces of white toast before making sure the yolk is perfectly positioned in the middle, before trimming the overhanging egg white edges with surgical precision. The contents are then cut into quarters after being doused with a three-second barrage of salt. It's a real shame to see him eat it such is the masterpiece he creates.

5. Always buys a copy of Guns And Game at the airport before a tour and dreams of killing a pig with record-breaking sized tusks so he can have it stuffed and mounted on one of his walls at home.

6. Was once so bored and cooped up in his caravan at the Woronora Caravan Park (Sydney's south) that he just decided he wanted to walk into the city. He had no idea how far it was and six hours later made the return trip a satisfied and tired man.

7. Owns a 13,000-plus hectare property that runs through the Cuttaburra River, 12 hours from Brisbane and 11 hours from Sydney. It is literally out the back of Bourke. His brother runs a predominantly sheep and lesser extent cattle operation on the land and Glenn loves to get out there on the quad bikes and terrorise the wild pigs.

8. Loves to get out and sight-see on tour and terrorised me at the Kaiteira Falls in Guyana, which is the largest single waterfall in the world at more than 300 metres. He has no fear of heights and sat on the edge continually grabbing then letting me go as I sat very nervously next to him.

9. Loves any type of creepy crawlies and doesn't hesitate to drop them down your shirt or leave them resting on your head.

10. Has a fully equipped gym at his home so he can religiously maintain his strict regimen on his weights that give him a deceptively strong upper body strength that helps his pace and stamina when bowling.

11. Regularly wears cricket whites that are short in length prompting Allan Border to say to him in one of his first games, "What are you waiting for pal, the floods?"

(The author is the former Australia captain and wrote this one for the Daily Telegraph)

Luca Toni Bayern's?

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich have signed Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni from AC Fiorentina in a deal worth 18 million euros, it was reported on Saturday.

The 29-year-old striker, who has scored 12 goals in 27 internationals, has signed a five-contract and will reportedly earn 5.5 million euros per season according to German magazine Sport-Bild.

The forward is believed to have made his decision on Friday evening and chosen the German giants over European rivals AC Milan, Juventus Turin and Inter Milan, who were also bidding for his signature.

Having been part of Italy's 2006 World Cup squad, Toni scored two goals in the quarterfinals win over the Ukraine and scored both goals in Italy's 2-0 victory against Scotland in last month's Euro 2008 qualifier.

With Fiorentina still involved in the battle for a place in Europe next season, Toni's agent, Tullio Tinti, was keen to play down the report. "The news of an agreement between Toni and Bayern is without any substance," he told Italian news agency ANSA in Rome.

"No decision will be taken before the end of the season, when representatives from both clubs can meet."



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea forward Salomon Kalou (L) jumps highest to head in Chelsea's second goal in their Premiership encounter against Bolton at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.