



Bayern Munich midfielder Ze Roberto (C) traps the ball ahead of Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski during their Bundesliga clash at Signal Iduna Park on Sunday.

Hamburg cut Bayern's lead

AFP, Berlin



Hamburg cut Bayern's lead at the top of the Bundesliga back to four points on Sunday after their Belgian defender Denevler struck to give them a 1-0 win over Duisburg.

Bayern were held to a 0-0 draw at Borussia Dortmund, so Hamburg's win at Duisburg shaves two points off Munich's lead at the top of the Bundesliga table.

But Hamburg coach Huub Stevens warned against any ideas of Bayern's domination being broken.

"I am still quite sure Bayern will be champions at the end of the season," said Stevens.

"We are on the right path, but there is still a long way before Bayern are really threatened."

For Dortmund coach Thomas Doll his side's 0-0 draw was a disappointment.

ing result despite Borussia going close to beating Bayern who are chasing their 21st crown as German champions.

"I am a bit annoyed we wasted our chances to win the game," said Doll.

"It is not usual to get so many chances against Bayern, but we can build on that."

"We certainly created our chances in the second half."

Bayern Munich boss Ottmar Hitzfeld said his side were below-par after their 3-2 UEFA Cup win at Red Star Belgrade on Thursday night.

"A point at Dortmund is never bad," said Hitzfeld.

"Particularly since we were very tired, the game in Belgrade took some of our strength out of us and we were only 70 per cent of what we should have been."

Hamburg went second with a win over second-bottom Duisburg after Kompany gave them the lead on 37 minutes.

Their domination finally paid off when Piotr Trochowski floated in a free-kick and Kompany slammed his shot home.

The guests were never really tested

from 30 metres, Klose clipped the bar seconds later.

It was 0-0 at half-time, but Klose had a good chance just after the break, but Dortmund 'keeper Roman Weidenfeller blocked his shot.

The home side raised their game as Dortmund's Croatian midfielder Mladen Petric was left with his head in his hands on the hour mark as his shot flew just over the crossbar.

And moments later Polish midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski went close on 61 minutes as his shot just missed the target and midfielder Florian Kringe also hit the post as Dortmund pressed forward.

They may be the only unbeaten side in the league, but Bayern were lucky to leave Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park with a point.

While Bayern controlled the first half, Dortmund dominated the second and missed a string of chances to win the game.

Bayern's best opportunity came when they hit the crossbar twice on 37 minutes: after Argentinian defender Martin Demichelis lobbed in a shot

by a Duisburg side who have just three wins to their name after 11 games this season.

Werder Bremen are third in the table after their 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 on Saturday.

An early free-kick by Carlos Grossmueller at Schalke's Veltins-Arena was cancelled out by Bremen's defender Naldo heading a first-half goal in an electric game with both sides squandering numerous chances.

Hertha Berlin enjoyed a 2-0 win over VfL Bochum when defender Marcel Maitzert turned the ball into his own net in the first half before striker Marko Pantelic added the second on 50 minutes.

Wolfsburg are up to seventh in the table after their 3-1 home win over German Cup holders Nuremberg.

Bottom side Energie Cottbus drew 1-1 with Arminia Bielefeld thanks to an injury-time equaliser and Hansa Rostock drew 0-0 with fourth-placed Karlsruhe.

On Friday night, midtable Hanover and Eintracht Frankfurt thrashed out a 0-0 draw.

The guests were never really tested

Grant promises 'many' titles

INTERNET, undated

Avram Grant has promised Chelsea a hatful of Premier League titles if they follow the plan he is putting in place.

Jose Mourinho's successor is not talking up their chances this season after the turmoil the club has been through, but insists he will deliver in time.

The Israeli knows that there are still doubters, even after Chelsea's 6-0 demolition of Manchester City on Saturday, but has warned that his side can get better still.

He said: "What we are doing now will affect Chelsea for many years. And if we are successful in what we are trying to achieve, then Chelsea will take many titles."

"We are in the process of trying to play positive football and we are going in the right way."

"Even good players can become better if they move into the right positions at certain times and play quicker because we want to move the ball quicker."

Chelsea face Leicester in the Carling Cup on Wednesday in a confident mood after goals from Michael Essien, two from Didier Drogba, Joe Cole, Salomon Kalou and Andriy Shevchenko against City moved them into fourth place in the league.

Frank Lampard pulled the strings and he insists it is about players, not managers, at Chelsea, warning Leicester they are coming to Stamford Bridge at the wrong time.

He said: "Teams who come to Chelsea should be worried if we're at our best. When you're missing big players you sometimes struggle to get the results you were getting before but now we're back. We're missing John Terry and Ashley Cole and when they're back we'll be even stronger."

"It's all about players and the players who went out there against City were all doing their stuff."

Lampard has been jeered by England fans recently and fallen behind Steven Gerrard and Gareth Barry in the pecking order.

But he said: "The England thing is not important to me at the moment."

"What's important is playing well for Chelsea. I feel like I'm on the top of my game. I've got no questions to answer. I'm happy with what I've done over the past few years."

"In the past I've dropped below the standards I want to set. What player doesn't? But when you get to the top people are waiting for you to come down. It doesn't bother me. I've got nothing to prove."

Valencia sack Flores

INTERNET, undated

Valencia have parted company with coach Quique Sanchez Flores.

The Valencia board took the decision to release Sanchez Flores following a meeting overnight, just hours after the team's 3-0 Primera Liga defeat at Sevilla.

Reserve-team coach Oscar Fernandez has been put in temporary charge of the team.

Valencia's defeat to Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan came hot on the heels of the team's 2-0 Champions League loss at Rosenborg last week.

In all, Valencia have now lost four of their last five competitive matches, having previously won seven on the trot before seeing that run ended by a 2-1 loss to Chelsea in Europe earlier this month.

A statement issued by the club read: "The Valencia board met and after analysing the technical report by the sporting director (Miguel Angel Ruiz) on the situation of the first team, which was considered irreversible after the latest matches in the league and Champions League, have taken the decision to dismiss the coach Quique

Sanchez Flores and name as provisional coach of the first team Oscar Fernandez, currently in charge of Valencia Mestalla."

Valencia's next match pits them against reigning Spanish champions and current Primera Liga leaders Real Madrid at the Mestalla on Wednesday.

Sanchez Flores leaves with Valencia in fourth spot in La Liga, four points behind pacesetters Real.

At the halfway point of the Champions League group stages, Los Che are third in Group B on three points, a point behind Rosenborg and four adrift of leaders Chelsea.

The 42-year-old Sanchez Flores took charge of Valencia in the summer of 2008 after replacing Claudio Ranieri, and led the team to a third-place finish in his first season and a top-four spot last term.

Sanchez Flores represented Valencia, Real Madrid, Real Zaragoza and Spain as a player before making his mark as a coach with Real Madrid's youth team and then Getafe.

And he believes he can leave Valencia with his 'head held very high'.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Flores declared his belief that Valencia had been on target to achieve their objectives for the season under his guidance, but added that in many ways his dismissal had come as a relief.

It is Alonso, however, who will represent the more significant loss if, as feared, scans confirm an aggravated metatarsal injury that had kept him out for six weeks before yesterday's draw. The Spanish midfielder landed awkwardly after an aerial challenge on the Arsenal goalkeeper, Manuel Almunia, and had to be helped to his feet and from the pitch by the Liverpool club doctor. A repeat of the metatarsal injury would keep him out beyond the six weeks he served for the initial fracture, suffered at Portsmouth on September 15.

An impressive Arsenal team struck the post twice in the second half and squandered both rebounds before Cesc Fabregas' equaliser and Benitez said: "If you analyse the chances that we had then I think you can say we dropped two points, but if you analyse the whole game then you have to say they deserved to score." He insisted the draw or the respective performances would have no bearing on the title race. "We are only six points behind and it is a long race. The commitment of the players really pleased me," he said.

I'd asked Torres if he was OK

before the game and he said he was, but in the end we had to use Crouch who was very good. We were pushing him to play against Besiktas but in the end we decided he wasn't fit and should use him for this game instead. We missed his pace in Istanbul. We knew Arsenal would have a lot of possession and so we would need Torres for the counter-attack."

"It's all about players and the players who went out there against City were all doing their stuff."

The Spanish pair, cited by their manager as integral to any Liverpool revival before kick-off, are facing lengthy absences after recurrences of recent injuries in a game that leaves Benitez's team unbeaten but six points behind the league leaders. Torres was withdrawn at half-time with a repeat of the adductor strain he sustained with Spain a fortnight ago. He is expected to be absent for a similar spell after Benitez admitted the £26.5m striker had been rushed back to help repair Liverpool's falter-

L'pool's injuries mount

Football

Rafael Benitez painted the result as two points dropped by Liverpool, but it is the loss of two players that could have the greater impact on Anfield's

season as Fernando Torres and Xabi Alonso limped back into the treatment room.

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"Maybe it will be less with Torres this time but Xabi has damaged his foot again," confirmed Benitez, who must also await scans today on Javier Mascherano, the Argentinean midfielder who also injured a foot towards the end of the game. "Xabi felt something in his foot and it is clear there is something wrong."

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Referee dropped after blunder

INTERNET, undated

Italian referee Mauro Bergonzi will not officiate in this week's matches and looks set to be dropped for a longer period after wrongly awarding two penalties against Juventus on Saturday.

Juve lost 3-1 at Napoli having been level at 1-1 before Maurizio Domizzi converted both controversial spotkicks.

Bergonzi decided Giorgio Chiellini fouled Ezequiel Lavezzi despite replays showing he won the ball and the official pointed to the spot again after former Juve striker Marcelo Zalayeta dived over keeper Gianluigi Buffon.

The referee has not been selected for any of Tuesday's Serie B games or Wednesday's Serie A matches, the Italian Soccer Federation Web site (www.fff.it) said.

Media reports have said referees' chief Pierluigi Collina could now ban Bergonzi for as much as a month and then keep him in Serie B for longer.

An online petition asking for the referee to be struck off has received thousands of signatures on a well-known Juventus fan Web site.

Zalayeta could also face a suspension for diving when the league's disciplinary committee meets this week.

Juve were stripped of two titles and demoted to the bottom of the table but won promotion straight back to the top flight last term.

"We have already paid for the past, two championships and a relegation. We want to be treated like everyone else," he told Italian media.

"I was pleased with the performance and attitude of the team," Wenger said.

"I thought they showed fantastic quality today to come back after going behind in the first few minutes against a team that is so strong on counter-attack and on set-pieces."

"And they have also shown

INTERNET, undated

AFP, Liverpool

Arsene Wenger believes his Arsenal side are showing the mark of champions

after returning to the head of the Premier League table following the 1-1 draw with Liverpool at Anfield.

Arsenal recovered after falling behind to an early Steve Gerrard strike to equalise through Cesc Fabregas with 10 minutes remaining to move ahead of second-placed Manchester United on the table.

The display demonstrated a level of determination and resolve within Wenger's side that has so far been overlooked during their impressive start to the campaign.

And the manager believes that, with Manchester United due to visit the Emirates Stadium next weekend, the performance against Liverpool will alert others to Arsenal's title credentials.

"I am always confident about our hopes since the beginning of the season. But I hope we have convinced a few more people. In my opinion we have the talent to keep on fighting for the championship."

Arsenal offered flashes of their ability last season but failed to find the consistency needed to sustain a meaningful title challenge. Wenger, though, believes his young side has developed a new-found maturity that means they are a much stronger proposition this season.

"They are growing as a team and getting more mature," he added.

"Last year we were seven points behind the lead after the first three games but are feeling the benefit of a good start this season."

"Now we are going into another big test (against Manchester United) but we will go into it feeling even stronger on the back of today's performance."

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez is facing a growing list of injury problems to add to his disappointment at seeing his side fail to hang onto the lead against the

league leaders.

Record signing Fernando Torres was withdrawn at half-time after suffering a recurrence of a groin problem that forced him to miss last weekend's Merseyside derby and the midweek Champions League clash with Besiktas.

And Xabi Alonso pulled up with a metatarsal problem on his return after a six week absence with the same problem. To add to Benitez's woes, Javier Mascherano finished the game limping and will have a scan this week on his foot.

"We had problems with Torres and Alonso," the manager said.

"Torres is the same injury in his groin area and Alonso had damaged a metatarsal again."