

Tevez sinks Liverpool

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's hopes of wresting the Premier League title away from Manchester United suffered a major setback on Sunday when they allowed the champions to get away from Anfield with a 1-0 win.

Carlos Tevez's goal just before half-time settled a contest that Liverpool dominated for most of the 90 minutes and could, with better finishing, have had wrapped up by the time the Argentinian claimed his ninth goal of the season.

The defeat means that Rafael Benitez's now trail United by nine points and, while they do have a game in hand, their margin for further error in the title race has been significantly reduced.

For United, who have not lost a league match at the home of their biggest rivals since 2001, the lack-lustre nature of their limited offensive efforts will quickly be forgotten as they savour a win that can only bolster their belief that the Premiership trophy is on its way back to Old Trafford.

From the outset, Liverpool had looked the sharper of the two sides and the predictably robust opening exchanges were punctuated by a couple of decent half-chances for a side that was unchanged from the line-up which started the 4-0 demolition of Marseille in the Champions League last week.

Dirk Kuyt sent a half-volley spinning over the bar after Fernando Torres had hooked a clearance back into the box and the Spanish striker, having got the better of Owen Hargreaves on the left of the box, was a yard off target as he tried to find the far corner of the net.

United's early moments of menace were restricted to a goal-bound strike by Cristiano Ronaldo, which was charged down by John Arne Riise, and with Javier Mascherano increasingly stamping his authority on the midfield battle, Liverpool should have gone ahead just before the half-hour mark.

A weak punch by Edwin van der Sar fell to Harry Kewell ten yards out and although the Australian's shot was blocked on the line by Anderson, the rebound popped up invitingly for Torres, who contrived to nod the ball an inch the wrong side of the post.

United had another let-off three minutes later, when van der Sar charged off his line and clattered into the back of Rio Ferdinand, who inadvertently deflected the ball goalwards. Only a smart intervention by Evra prevented it from trundling into the net.

United's discomfort was reflected in the bookings collected by Evra and Wes Brown for checking the runs of, respectively, Yossi Benayoun and Harry Kewell.

The free-kick awarded Brown's tug on Kewell yielded another good chance for Torres, who volleyed wide after Gerrard's shot was deflected into his path 12 yards out.

But with the half-time whistle approaching, United suddenly found another gear and after Hargreaves had won a corner on

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Robben overeager

REUTERS, Madrid

Dutch winger Arjen Robben's desire to impress his new club Real Madrid is hindering his return to full fitness, their coach Bernd Schuster has said.

He joined the Spanish champions from Chelsea in August, becoming one of their most expensive signings at 36 million euros (\$52.32 million) but has been prevented from establishing himself in the side by a string of physical problems.

The 23-year-old was left out of the squad to face Osasuna in the Primera Liga on Sunday after picking up a muscle strain in his left leg following a substitute appearance in Tuesday's 3-1 Champions League win over Lazio.

"He's had a couple of problems this week, but he trained with the rest of the team today and feels much better," Schuster told a news conference on Saturday.

"All this is simply a result of anxiety. He wants to play and demonstrate why he is here. That anxiety has worked against him. It's nothing serious, but we have to try and control it."

Robben has only made two league starts since he arrived in Spain after struggling to recover from knee surgery he had had earlier in the year.

He was sidelined for five weeks with a torn thigh muscle in mid-October and had just returned to action again before the latest setback.

Argentine defender Gabriel Heinze returned to the squad after recovering from a knee complaint but German defender Christoph Metzelder was left out with a left foot injury.



TURNING ON THE STYLE: Milan offensive players Kaka (R) and Filippo Inzaghi celebrate the latter's goal during their sparkling victory over Boca Juniors in the final of the World Club Cup in Yokohama on Sunday.

Press dissect Capello

Football

AFP, London

Fabio Capello will be unveiled officially as England's new manager on Monday, but he is already proving to be a major talking point here -- and not just for his considerable footballing pedigree.

Britain's Sunday newspapers sought to shed light on the man who will take on what the former partner of the second-to-last incumbent called the country's third most important job.

"After the monarchy and the prime minister, being the England coach is the most important job in the country," Sven-Goran Eriksson's glamorous ex Nancy Dell'Olio told The Observer newspaper.

Dell-Olio, almost as much in the limelight as Eriksson, offered advice to her fellow countryman, telling Capello to expect inclement weather, a surprisingly warm welcome but a tough time from the British press.

"People in England are much more obsessed with football than in Italy. It's like a religion and that produces incredible pressure on the England manager," she said.

"The Impossible Job they call it, and you have to take everything which goes with that."

But the author and academic Germaine Greer warned success-starved England fans that Capello might not be all they expect, using a vocabulary rarely, if ever, heard on the terraces.

"The English like to think that Italian men are volatile, fiery and impulsive; in reality they are more

likely to be stolid, pernickety and valetudinarian," she wrote in the Independent on Sunday.

"Capello looks like the kind of Italian man who takes out a clean handkerchief and dusts a seat before he sits on it," she added.

She wished the 61-year-old manager luck but warned that, like making proper pasta, pizza or a cappuccino, "the best of Italian cannot survive transplantation to England".

Valetudinarian concerns from Australian feminists aside, reports suggested Capello was made of strong stuff: a strict disciplinarian who has no truck with prima donnas and under-achievement.

"Tough, ruthless, fearless and famously grumpy... hard as nails," said The Observer in one of many profiles alongside musings on the

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Del Piero's reminder

APP, Rome



Alessandro Del Piero scored a brace of second-half breakaway goals to fire Juventus up to second place in Serie A with a 3-2 win over Lazio at the Stadio Olimpico here on Saturday.

Juve leapfrogged Roma, for a day at least, and closed the gap on

champions Inter Milan to just five points with this clinical away display.

Lazio should have won but Del Piero's goals and a brilliant performance from goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon won the match for Juve.

Despite the victory, Juve coach Claudio Ranieri was far from happy. "We've taken three steps forward because we have won three points, but four backwards because Lazio broke down our defence more than all the other

teams put together," Ranieri told SkySport.

"We didn't play well. We're lucky because tonight we had Buffon and Del Piero."

Del Piero was just happy the team had held on for the win.

"We suffered a lot at the end of the match but we proved good enough to defend our lead," he said.

Despite their lofty position, Del Piero is not getting carried away with a title challenge.

"We're more interested in guarding against those behind us than trying to catch those in front," added the veteran star.

The hosts should have taken the lead after 18 minutes but following a mistake in the Juventus defence, Stefano Mauri blazed over the bar from six yards.

Lazio were made to pay just before the half-hour mark when Serie A top scorer David Trezeguet put Juve in front.

The France forward, currently out of favour with national coach Raymond Domenech, knew little about his goal but it was nonetheless credited to him.

A poked shot from Bosnia midfielder Hassan Salihamidzic was going wide but flicked off Trezeguet's boot and looped up into the top corner.

The lead lasted only seven minutes before Lazio produced the move of the match, when Tommaso Rocchi's flicked header releasing Massimo Mutarelli to cross for Serbian forward Goran Pandev to head home at the far post.

Juve survived a penalty scare late in the first period when Salihamidzic appeared to bring down Aleksandar Kolarov and three minutes after the break they were back in front.

Del Piero beat the offside trap and latched onto a long ball before beating Marco Ballotta in the Lazio goal with a clinical left-foot finish.

Sir Geoff Hurst, whose hat-trick

propelled England to their lone World Cup trophy, believes Fabio Capello is the right man to revitalise the fortunes of the ailing national side.

The Italian is set to give his first news conference as England manager in London on Monday with Football Association chiefs confident they have secured a "world-class" coach to replace Steve

Milan set new title record

APP, Rome

In beating Boca Juniors 4-2 in the Club World Cup final in Tokyo on Sunday, AC Milan set a new record of international titles.

Two goals from veteran Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, one from Ballon d'Or winner Kaka and another from centre-back Alessandro Nesta secured a fourth triumph in the Club World Cup and its predecessor the Intercontinental Cup for Milan.

That, added to their seven Champions League/European Cup victories, two Cup Winners' Cups and five European Super Cups, took Milan's total of international titles to 18 - one more than their defeated Argentine foes.

Next in the list come Real Madrid and Argentina's Independiente on 15 with Egypt's Al Ahly fifth with 13.

Despite their remarkable success abroad, Milan are well behind Juventus in terms of domestic success.

They have won 17 Italian titles, five Cups and five Super Cups (27 trophies) compared to 27 titles, nine Cups and four Super Cups (40 trophies) for the Old Lady of Turin.

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CLUB WC WINNERS

APP, Yokohama

Winners of the Club World Cup: 2007 - AC Milan (ITA)

They beat Boca Juniors (ARG) 4-2 in the final at Yokohama.

2006 - Internazionale (BRA)

They beat FC Barcelona (ESP) 1-0 in the final at Yokohama.

2005 - Sao Paulo FC (BRA)

They beat Liverpool (ENG) 1-0 in the final at Yokohama.

2000 - Corinthians (BRA)

They beat Vasco da Gama (BRA) 4-3 on penalties after a 0-0 draw at the end of extra time in the final at Rio de Janeiro.

The 2000 tournament was contested as the inaugural FIFA Club World Championship, intended by football governing body FIFA as a replacement for the Intercontinental Cup, an annual contest between the champions of Europe and South America.

After plans to stage a next edition failed, it was revamped as the Club World Cup in 2005 and replaced the Europe-South America championship. On Saturday, FIFA redefined the 2000 event as the first Club World Cup.

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Hurst gives his thumbs-up

APP, London

Sir Geoff Hurst, whose hat-trick

propelled England to their lone

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Capello is the right man to revitalise the fortunes of the ailing

national side.

The Italian is set to give his first

Boca bow to Kaka

AGENCIES, Yokohama



JAPAN 2007

FIFA

CLUB WORLD CUP

TOYOTA

INZAGHI'S PARTNER

Italian giants AC Milan overwhelmed Argentina's Boca Juniors 4-2 in the Club World Cup final on Sunday to win a record fourth intercontinental

crown.

Prolific striker Filippo Inzaghi scored twice either side of goals from Kaka and defender Alessandro Nesta, as Milan added to their 1969, 1989 and 1990 titles.

Boca's Rodrigo Palacio was on target in the first half and Milan's Massimo Ambrosini conceded a late own goal to keep the scoreline respectable for the South American

champions.

"It was really a difficult season, but it was a season I will never forget. Nobody can say we cannot repeat it again. Several players will leave the team, but our main strength will remain the same."

"This trophy gives us a lot of satisfaction, especially as we lost to Boca Juniors when we played them last, and we avenged that loss today."

Record European marksmen Inzaghi opened the scoring from a rebound in the 21st minute. However the strike was cancelled out by Palacio's leaping header a minute later.

"This was the one trophy I hadn't won," Kaka told reporters. "It's

magical to finally get my hands on it. I can't describe how happy I am. I've won everything now -- it's amazing."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said: "I really thank God for this year as we won the trophy which is so hard to get. This is the very end of our long and tough road. We were able to finish the task with the best result. All of my players had believed that we would win."

"It added: "It was really a difficult season, but it was a season I will never forget. Nobody can say we cannot repeat it again. Several players will leave the team, but our main strength will remain the same."

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put Milan ahead, with Kaka doubling their advantage with a superb dribble and shot before Inzaghi's second on 71 minutes.

Palacio and Martin Palermo were confounded by Milan's Brazilian goalkeeper Dida before Ambrosini put one in his own net with five minutes left.

It was Milan's 18th international victory after their seven Champions League and European Cup titles, two Cup Winners' Cups and five European Super Cups.

"It was a close match. After Milan scored the goal, everything changed. We had some chances at the end, but a small difference made a big difference in the final of the 2003 Intercontinental Cup, the Club World Cup's previous incarnation."

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Good year for Asia

Football

APP, Singapore

Asian football can boast of a successful year in 2007 with the staging of an entertaining Asian Cup amid growing interest