

Everton see off Man City

AFP, Manchester

Everton piled the pressure on to Liverpool in the battle for next season's final Champions League spot with a convincing 2-0 win over Manchester City here on Monday.

First-half goals from Aiyegbeni Yakubu and Joleon Lescott ensured David Moyes's side came away from the City of Manchester stadium with three points which lifted them back into the top four at the expense of their Merseyside rivals.

The win also sent Everton six points clear of Manchester City and, on this evidence, Sven Goran Eriksson's side will struggle to get their own bid to join Europe's elite back on track.

City, who finished the match with ten men after Martin Petrov received a late red card, were a pale imitation of the side that beat Manchester United at Old Trafford in their last league outing and Everton could have been ahead after only six minutes.

South African midfielder Steven Pienaar found space on the left and sent in a superb cross towards Yakubu, who was foiled by the close attention of City goalkeeper Joe Hart.

A minute later, referee Rob

Styles waved away Everton claims for a penalty after a shot by Tim Cahill struck the arm of Micah Richards.

Darius Vassell produced City's first shot on target after a one-two with Gelson Fernandes in the 16th minute but it was no surprise when the visitors took the lead on the half hour mark, Yakubu stabbing home his 16th goal of the season after good work by Cahill in the box.

Pienaar had seen a shot come back off the post with Hart beaten just before Yakubu's owner and Everton capitalised on their dominance by doubling their lead seven minutes before the break.

Midfielder Lee Carsley sent in a superb cross to the back post and England defender Lescott got there ahead of Richard Dunne to head

his side into what was to prove an unassailable lead.

Zimbabwean striker Benjani Mwaruwari was making his home debut after an outstanding goalscoring debut at Old Trafford but he struggled to make an impact on this encounter, played in teaming rain under the watchful eye of England boss Fabio Capello. Eriksson introduced Elano in place of Dietmar Hamann at half-time but the Brazilian could not provide the missing spark for City and Everton continued to dominate after the restart.

Phil Neville should at least have hit the target after being teed up by Pienaar in the 47th minute and Everton almost made it 3-0 six minutes later, when Cahill's shot was cleared off the line by Dunne.

Only a fine save from Hart prevented Carsley from capping a superb display at the base of Everton's midfield diamond with a goal from a well-struck free-kick and a miserable night for City was summed up when Petrov was dismissed in stoppage time for aiming a petulant kick at Leon Osman.

The kick carried little risk of causing injury but it will still go down as violent conduct and the Bulgarian winger now faces a three-match ban.

TOP SIX

English Premier League table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	27	19	7	1	56	20	64
Man Utd	27	19	4	4	55	15	61
Chelsea	26	16	7	3	38	17	55
Everton	27	15	5	7	43	23	50
Liverpool	26	12	11	3	43	19	47
Aston Villa	27	13	8	6	50	35	47

Eduardo to make full recovery

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal said on Monday they expect Eduardo da Silva to make a full recovery from his horrendous broken leg this year, as it was revealed the player who caused the injury has received death threats.

The 25-year-old Brazilian-born Croatian striker fractured his left fibula and dislocated his ankle after a studs-up tackle from Martin Taylor which saw the Birmingham defender sent off just minutes into Saturday's Premiership clash.

Eduardo underwent surgery on Saturday in Birmingham before being transferred to a London hospital, where a surgeon and Arsenal's medical staff assessed the injury on Monday.

A statement on Arsenal's website said: "All being well, Eduardo will have his leg in plaster and using crutches for the next six to eight weeks."

"After that time, partial weight-bearing exercises will be scheduled into a slow rehabilitation process."

"It is hoped that Eduardo will be running again in six months' time

and making a full recovery after nine months," the statement added.

Taylor has received death threats after the challenge, especially from Croatian fans furious at Eduardo being ruled out of the Euro 2008 finals.

One website specifically set up after the incident during the 2-2 draw at St Andrews has already received 27,000 messages directed at the former Blackburn player.

Birmingham City's security personnel had to restrain Croatian journalists who ran onto the road and tried to force their way into Taylor's car as he left the club's training ground on Monday.

Birmingham manager Alex McLeish condemned the reaction and said Taylor was "mentally shattered by the whole experience."

"I've heard about the death threats and you are going to ridiculous proportions if that is the case. You've just got to get on with it and dismiss those things. There are some crazy people in the world," McLeish told SkySports.

"I think Martin's wife was upset at the weekend but he has come in this morning and got on with his life again thanks to the support of everyone who knew it wasn't a

challenge with malicious intent to injure a player."

David Busst, the former Coventry defender whose career ended after he broke his leg in a collision with Manchester United defender Denis Irwin in 1996, said he was hopeful Eduardo would regain full fitness.

"If there are no complications, I'm sure he will be back playing again," Busst told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"It wasn't the break that stopped me playing again but the infections I caught after that."

"I suffered a double compound fracture of the tibia and fibula. The only difference with Eduardo's and mine is I was hit on both sides of my leg, by two players."

"The bottom part of my right shin was in an L-shape. It was hit either side and the bone had nowhere to go so it went through the skin. The bottom part of my leg had folded underneath and came out at the side."

Busst added: "I had 20 operations on my right leg, with 10 operations in the first 12 days. I'd like to reassure Eduardo and tell him not to let people compare his injury to mine because I did have to give up."



Manchester City defender Richard Dunne (top) jumps above Everton midfielder Tim Cahill to head the ball during their Premiership match at The City of Manchester Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kaka hopes to face Gunners

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan playmaker Kaka hopes to be fit to face Arsenal next week after the recurrence of a knee problem in Sunday's 2-1 win over Palermo.

The Brazilian came off at halftime as a precaution and was expected to miss Wednesday's match at Catania and next Saturday's clash with Lazio in order to be ready for the Champions League last 16 second leg at San Siro next Tuesday.

However, Kaka is more injured than first thought and could be a doubt for the crucial match, with the scores level at 0-0.

"It hurts a lot," the world player of the year told TeleLombardia on Monday. "I hope to be fit for the Champions league match with the Arsenal. I definitely won't be there against Catania."

Kaka was reluctant to wade into the big debate in Italy over recent controversial refereeing decisions but did have one message for the officials.

"Something must be done because at the moment I'm taking lots of whacks, not just me but also the other forwards," he said.

SPANISH CUP

Barca aim to extend run

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona attempt to stretch their unbeaten run in all competitions to 15 matches when they face Valencia in the first leg of the King's Cup semifinals on Wednesday.

"We have improved in many areas since January and physically and mentally we are on the up," goalkeeper Victor Valdes told reporters after Barca crushed Levante 5-1 on Sunday.

The win put them two points behind leaders Real Madrid in the Primera Liga and made it 10 goals from three outings.

The return of Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o from the African Nations Cup and Argentina forward Lionel Messi from injury have been central to Barca's resurgence.

Coach Frank Rijkaard has been able to rest players and France

striker Thierry Henry and Portugal midfielder Deco can expect to return to the lineup on Wednesday.

The King's Cup has been one of the few bright spots in coach Ronald Koeman's troubled four-month tenure at Valencia, though his side have shown signs of rediscovering their confidence of late.

The six-times Cup winners have one of the best away records in the league married to one of the worst at home and are ninth in the table.

Saturday's 1-1 draw against lowly Recreativo Huelva was an improvement on recent displays at the Mestalla as they created enough chances to win comfortably.

The other semifinal offers a complete contrast with two of Spain's modest over-achievers meeting at the Coliseum on Thursday as Getafe host Racing Santander.

Getafe made the final for the first time last season, knocking out

Barca in the semis before losing to Sevilla 1-0 in June, but can count themselves experienced when compared to Racing who are making their first appearance in the last four.

Michael Laudrup's Getafe are having a good season and became the first side to beat Real Madrid at home in the league on Sunday with a 1-0 victory at the Bernabeu.

Getafe and Barca, still going strong in the Champions League, are the only two Spanish sides still chasing a cup double. Laudrup's men have also reached the last 16 of the UEFA Cup.

Marcelino's Racing were the revelation of the first half of the league season but have stuttered of late and Sunday's 1-0 victory over Almeria was their first in six.

The league's seventh-placed side have suffered from injuries but have players returning and will be sure to test Getafe's stamina with one of Spain's tightest defences.

Eduardo forgives Taylor

REUTERS, London

Arsenal's Eduardo da Silva has forgiven Birmingham City defender Martin Taylor for the tackle that left him with a fractured left fibula and dislocated ankle.

The Brazilian-born Croatia international faces up to nine months on the sidelines after undergoing surgery on Saturday. He suffered the injury during the weekend's Premier League match that ended in a 2-2 draw.

"I forgive Martin. It hurt like hell but I'm fine now. I know he did not do it on purpose," Eduardo was quoted as saying in Tuesday's Sun newspaper.

"I was horrified when I saw how my leg looked at first and wondered how it would all end. But I will be back."

The striker, who turned 25 on Monday, refused to get too disheartened.

"These things can happen in football. I see this as a risk of professional football," he told the Daily Mail.

"Sometimes you go up, sometimes you go down." Arsenal said he would be released from hospital in a few days.

Iraq sack Olsen

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi Football Federation on Monday reinstated Adnan Hamad as national coach after sacking Norwegian Egil Olsen.

Olsen was sacked because of Iraq's failure to beat China in the two sides' opening 2010 World Cup qualification game earlier this month, federation general secretary Ahmad Abbas said.

The match, held in Dubai, ended in a 1-1 draw with Iraq down to 10 men for the final 20 minutes.

It will be Hamad's fourth period in charge of the national team, the current Asian champions.

The former international striker first coached Iraq in 2000, briefly took up the reins again in 2002 World Cup qualifying, and then guided the Iraq team to fourth place in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Becks will play in Hong Kong

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham and the Los Angeles Galaxy will play an exhibition match March 9 against Hong Kong Union at Hong Kong Stadium, the Major League Soccer club announced Monday.

The match will be the third game of the Galaxy's exhibition tour of Asia which begins next week.

The Hong Kong game will mark the final game of the tour designed to tap into Beckham's huge popularity in Asia.

The game will follow matchups against FC Seoul in Seoul, South Korea on March 1 and Shanghai-Hong Kong United in Shanghai, China on March 5.

Last week, the Galaxy finished third in the inaugural Pan Pacific Championship tournament in Hawaii, losing their opening game 1-0 to Japanese club Gamba Osaka before beating Australia's Sydney FC 2-1 in the third-place game.

The Galaxy were due to leave Hawaii for Seoul on Monday.

Sharapova out of Dubai Open

AFP, Dubai

Maria Sharapova, who won the Qatar Open only two days ago, has pulled out of the Dubai Open here with a virus.

The Australian Open champion from Russia was said to be suffering from the problem last week and complained of losing energy in the second of her three-set win over Vera Zvonareva in Sunday's final in Doha.

"Unfortunately I have been battling a virus for several days and it's reached a point where I'm unable to compete. It's really disappointing," said Sharapova.

Sharapova will be replaced in the Dubai draw by a lucky loser, Akiko Morigami, the world number 50 from Japan.

It's particularly disappointing for the Russian because, having remained unbeaten in 14 matches this year, Sharapova appears to have been in some of the best form of her life.

During this time she has dropped only one set, causing some pundits to suggest she could climb from her current position as world number five and take over at the top of the rankings from Justine Henin at some stage this year.

Instead it will leave Henin, who beat Sharapova in the final here two years ago, as an even stronger favourite to extend her unbeaten record at the Dubai Open for a fourth year.

Her principle rivals are Ana Ivanovic, the world number two from Serbia, provided she recovers from the ankle injury which caused her to withdraw after only one match in Doha last week, Svetlana Kuznetsova, the former US Open champion from Russia, and Jelena Jankovic, the world number four from Serbia - though she has been suffering from stomach problems.

At the weekend the Dubai Open lost another big name, when Serena Williams, the former holder of all four Grand Slam titles, withdrew citing an illness.

Sharapova should next compete at the tier one 11-day tournament at Indian Wells, starting on March 12.

Okocha wants Nigeria job

Football

AFP, Hull

With Nigeria set to name a new manager this week, Jay-Jay Okocha has reiterated his willingness to help the rebuilding process after his country's disappointing display at the African Nations Cup.

Okocha was part of the 'Super Eagles' team that won their sole African Nations Cup crown in 1994, and he believes he could now have a role to play following the resignation of Bert Vogts as national coach.

Former internationals such as Sunday Oliseh and Daniel Amokachi have thrown their hats into the ring to succeed the German, and Okocha is on standby to offer his assistance.

"I said after the last (2006) Nations Cup in Egypt that I wasn't going to play any more for the national team, but that if they needed my help I would be willing to consider it," Okocha told AFP.

"My position has not changed - I would always help my country."

Okocha has regarded the appointment of Vogts as a mistake and welcomed signs that Nigeria are set to turn to a homegrown coach. With Vogts in charge, Okocha says that at the very least a Nigerian go-between to "bridge the gap" should have been on board.

"You would need someone to let them know what the coach wants from them and to encourage them and to get the best out of them," said the veteran midfielder.

"They know what it takes to get the best out of the players instead of getting someone in that treats the players like children because they have given him the impression that they are indiscipline - that is all rubbish."

"It is not a question of talent, we have talent. It is just a question of getting the boys organised and getting them to be at their best for tournaments."

Nigeria scraped through Group B after they won their last match against Benin 2-0 to edge out Mali on goal difference.

The win merely served to gloss over the cracks in their game as they were overwhelmed by 10-man Ghana in the quarterfinals, losing



PHOTO: AFP

England internationals Michael Owen (L) and Steven Gerrard arrive at Chester Crown Court on Tuesday. They are expected to give evidence in the trial of Graeme Walker and Faisal Madani, two men accused of selling forged signatures of sports stars.



PHOTO: AFP

LA Galaxy midfielder David Beckham waves upon his arrival at the Incheon International Airport in Seoul on Tuesday.