

LEAGUE ONE PSG upset Marseille

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint Germain's thrilling 4-2 victory at Marseille on Sunday night prevented the home side grabbing top spot in the French league in their first victory at the Riviera club for five years.

The 24-year-old striker Guillaume Hoarau scored PSG's first and final goals, with Peguy Luyindula and Jerome Rothen strikes sandwiched in between, though Marseille had been 2-1 ahead with goals from Mamadou Niang and Mathieu Valbuena.

It was PSG's first league victory at the Velodrome stadium since November 30, 2003 and condemned Marseille to their first league defeat of the season.

Marseille looked to have paid the penalty of leaving Hatem Ben Arfa on the bench while PSG's tactic of playing a second-string team in midweek UEFA Cup action paid dividends as their fresh legs dominated the second half.

Champions Lyon, who drew 0-0 at Auxerre on Saturday, top the table with 21 points after 10 matches, with second-placed Marseille on 19, and Le Mans, Bordeaux and Toulouse all on 18 points.

Bordeaux could have sneaked provisionally into second spot with a win at Nice but were held instead 2-2 after throwing away a two-goal lead.

Le Mans also drew 2-2 away, in their case at Rennes, while Toulouse drew 0-0 against Monaco.

Lille are eighth on 16 points after a brace from Ludo Obiaku secured a 2-2 home draw with Caen, who remain in midtable.

Down at the bottom, Le Havre thanked two goals from Jean-Michel Lesage as they recovered from going a goal down inside a minute to win 2-1 against fellow strugglers Valenciennes while Lorient dragged former giants Nantes back down towards the mire with a 3-0 win in their Breton derby.

Napoli aim for UCL

AFP, Rome

Italian high flyers Napoli are aiming at Champions League qualification after a storming start to the season that sees them level on 17 points with champions Inter Milan and Udinese at the top of the table.

Napoli are third on goal difference but at the end of the season it is the head to head record between clubs that matters before the difference between goals scored and conceded -- as they have played neither Udinese nor Inter yet, they are in fact dead level with the pair.

And Sunday's 1-0 victory at Lazio, coming hot on the heels of a 2-1 home success over Juventus, has demonstrated that Napoli, while not quite returning to the glory days yet, are certainly a rising force in the division.

"No-one imagined we would be where we are in the table having played five away matches (out of eight) and come up against Roma and Juventus," beamed Napoli coach Edoardo Reja.

"This team has surprised even me. Lazio played at pace and with rhythm in the first half and then they tired and we profited."

Napoli's re-emergence has been impressive over the last three seasons. They won successive promotions from third and second divisions and then finished eighth last year, qualifying for the Inter-Toto Cup.

It may not quite be a return to the glory years during Diego Maradona's seven year spell at the club, when Napoli won the first division title in 1987 and 1990, but for a team that went bankrupt in 2004 and was relegated to the third division it is tantamount to a Phoenix rising from the flames.

And Reja thinks there is even more to come from this team.

"Last year we did well against the big teams and badly against the smaller ones. We need to improve on this and we could even qualify for the Champions League."

Figc to look into handball goal

AFP, Rome

The Italian Football Federation (Figc) said on Monday it will investigate the controversial goal scored by Fiorentina striker Alberto Gilardino against Palermo on Sunday.

Figc has asked sporting justice authorities to look at television footage of the incident and will make a statement in the afternoon.

Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini earlier called for Gilardino to be suspended for five matches for celebrating the goal.

Real win Bilbao battle

AFP, Madrid



Sunday

Real Madrid moved a point behind leaders Valencia with a hard-fought 3-2 home win over 10-man Athletic Bilbao at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Argentine striker Gonzalo Higuain scored twice, in the 28th and 58th minutes, to down Bilbao who had come back to level at 2-2 through a Jose Etxeberria strike and an Andoni Iraola penalty after Wesley Sneijder had put Real in front in 12 minutes.

Bilbao had Fernando Amorebieta sent off for a crude foul 14 minutes from time while Real's Brazilian defender Marcelo was fortunate to escape a straight red for a brutal tackle at the end of the first half.

Fernando Llorente hit the post for Bilbao late on Real, beaten 2-1 by Juventus in their midweek Champions League match, snatched the points.

"After Champions League games it is always more difficult so this victory is important," said Real coach Bernd Schuster. "It was important to win and be at the top among the leading teams."

Schuster largely answered questions with curt "yes" and "no" answers in the post-match press conference avoiding questions about the competency of the referee.

Real moved above Villarreal into third but are below Barcelona on goal difference while Valencia lead the standings after a 1-1 draw with Recreativo Huelva maintained

their unbeaten start. Villarreal and 10-man Atletico Madrid served up the best game of the season with a thrilling 4-4 draw at El Madrigal on Sunday.

Atletico went two goals up after 22 minutes through Simao and Villarreal old boy Diego Forlan but the dismissal of Argentine Ever Banega after 37 minutes for a second yellow card turned the game on its head.

Villarreal scored three times in the first nine minutes of the second half with a Leo Franco howler allowing Marcos Senna's shot to creep in three minutes after the interval, before Jose Llorente equalised on 51 minutes.

Gonzalo Rodriguez then put the hosts ahead on 57 minutes and Giuseppe Rossi, on 68 minutes, added a fourth as Atletico collapsed.

But there was yet another twist as Simao pulled one back for Atletico with his second goal on 83 minutes and Raul Garcia equalised in the 85th minute to make it 4-4.

"You can never let your guard down and that is a lesson for my team," said Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini. "We played well

for 80 minutes but we relaxed thinking the game was wrapped up."

"It does not usually happen but that is why football is the most popular sport."

Villarreal stay unbeaten and lie two points behind leaders Valencia but will rue their late collapse. Atletico languish in tenth after the draw which brought an end to a run of three successive defeats.

"Football can be like that. You are down and out with the other team strolling and then you get something out of the game," said Atletico coach Javier Aguirre. "At the end of the game Forlan could even have given us the ultimate prize."

Tabletoppers Valencia have made their best ever league start after a 1-1 draw against Huelva on Sunday.

Valencia have collected 20 points with six wins and two draws better than in 2001/02, when they won the title under Rafael Benitez.

David Villa's hot streak continued with his ninth goal of the season cancelling out Javier Camunas's opener.

Barcelona had nudged Valencia, now a point ahead of the Catalan giants, from the top with a resounding 5-0 win over Almeria on Saturday with Samuel Eto'o scoring a hat-trick in their 23 minutes.

Sevilla tasted their first defeat of the season with a surprise 1-0 home loss at the hands of promoted Malaga and they fall three points behind Valencia in fourth. "We didn't deserve to win but we certainly didn't deserve to lose," complained Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez. "We certainly can't afford to get any more injuries at the moment."

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the Spanish first division after the weekend's matches.

9 - Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona), David Villa (Valencia)

5 - Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Alvaro Negredo (Almeria), Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)

4 - Florent Sinama Pongolle (Atletico Madrid), Rafael van der Vaart (Real Madrid), Raul (Real Madrid), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid), Juan Mata (Valencia)

Mourinho fumes at Inter

AFP, Rome



Sunday

Jose Mourinho blasted his players for lacking discipline after the champions failed to beat 10-man Genoa at the San Siro.

The visitors put up stubborn resistance to hold out for a 0-0 draw on Sunday, despite the hosts hitting the bar in the second period.

Mourinho cut an angry and frustrated figure on the sidelines and he wielded the axe at half-time, hauling off Adriano and Ricardo Quaresma to be replaced by Mario Balotelli and Victor Obinna.

He also threw on Argentine striker Julio Cruz for injured midfielder Sulley Muntari 10 minutes into the second period but still his side couldn't fashion a goal.

"This was an Inter without discipline but Genoa did what they had to, at the end I congratulated their

coach and players," said Mourinho.

"I'm not very happy because I always try to win and always want to win, when we don't win things are not good. I will talk to the players."

Yet despite being unhappy with his players, he paid credit to Genoa and said the blame was partly his own.

"Genoa deserve great credit, they played well and took home a very important point. They were very careful at the back."

"I'm always responsible for the results of my team, in the second half some players still hadn't quite understood what they're supposed to do. Tuesday we'll talk with them and clear things up."

"We allowed Genoa to have an easy afternoon and two or three of my players weren't at their best."

Mourinho now has an injury headache in midfield. With Patrick Vieira, Esteban Cambiasso and Luis Jimenez already out, he has now lost Muntari as well.

"He certainly won't be available on Wednesday (away to Fiorentina).

We've got a lot of problems in central midfield at the moment," he added.

Mourinho is set to make some changes on Wednesday, more to make a point to his players than anything else.

"Maybe the Genoa coach has a greater ability to influence his players' mentality than that of Inter, hence I have to show my players that there is only one chief here. I'll leave two of three players at home on Wednesday," he said.

"Maybe some people don't know me yet and they will start to on Tuesday when we tell them who's been selected."

"It's easy to understand who will be left out, you just need to watch this match," he added without naming names.

However, he did rule Quaresma out of the guilty group.

"He didn't play well but he at least tried to do what I wanted. Others didn't. And with me those who think only about themselves and not about the team don't play."



Milan star Kaka (R) shoots to score the all-important goal against Atalanta during their Serie A tie at the Azzurri D'Italia Stadium in Bergamo on Sunday.

FifPro team unveiled

Football

Soccernet

Ronaldo is in line to win a series of major individual awards, deservedly so in his own opinion, following his astounding 42-goal contribution to Manchester United's double-winning campaign.

And his presence in a team voted for by thousands of players, spanning more than 40 associations, was virtually guaranteed.

Perhaps more surprising is that Ronaldo is only joined by one more United player, Rio Ferdinand.

The defender may have turned in a shaky display at Everton on Saturday but generally the 29-year-old has been superb throughout 2008.

Indeed, many believe his recent eloquent attack on the WAGS culture around England's abysmal 2006 World Cup campaign bore all

the hallmarks of the captain Fabio Capello should have appointed.

Not that too many can argue with Capello's choice of John Terry as, for the fourth consecutive year, the Chelsea skipper has made the team as well.

Like United, Liverpool provide two members of the FifPro team, including swashbuckling captain Steven Gerrard, who has finally begun to show his club form at international level.

Alongside Gerrard is Fernando Torres, who proved to be such a success in his first year at Anfield following a £20million move from Atletico Madrid.

Having prospered under Rafael Benitez, Torres then helped Spain land Euro 2008 and it is not a shock to discover he is one of five members of that side in FifPro's elite team.

Barcelona's Carles Puyol and Xavi are joined by Real Madrid duo Iker Casillas and Sergio Ramos. The presence of Lionel Messi and

Kaka explains why Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez did not make the final cut.

Kaka has remained loyal to AC Milan, despite a dip in standards for the Serie A side that has forced them into the UEFA Cup this term.

However, there is little debate about the talent of a man who was crowned world footballer of the year in 2007.

The same also goes for Messi, the inspiration behind Barcelona's stunning recent performances, even if the brilliant South American could not guide the Catalans past United in the Champions League semifinal last term.

FIFPRO TEAM: Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), John Terry (Chelsea), Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United), Carles Puyol (Barcelona), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Kaka (AC Milan), Xavi (Barcelona), Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Fernando Torres (Liverpool), Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United).



Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain is ecstatic after scoring against Athletic Bilbao during their Primera Liga encounter at Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

C'Ron picks up FifPro award

Soccernet

Cristiano Ronaldo has been named FifPro World Footballer of the Year.

It is the first in what is expected to be a host of individual honours for the 23-year-old, who scored 42 goals for Manchester United on their way to Champions League and Premier League title glory last term.

Ronaldo had suggested last week he could do no more than he did to be crowned the best player on the planet and peers from over 40 countries are in agreement.

At £12.2million, Ronaldo has proved to be a bargain since his arrival from Sporting Lisbon in 2003, growing steadily into the most influential player in the United team.

It is anticipated Ronaldo will also scoop the Ballon d'Or and the FIFA World Player of the Year award, with the Portugal international - who has also been named in FifPro's world team of the year - keen to remain at Old Trafford for another couple of seasons at least.

"I insist that I am a Manchester United player and now I think that next year I will continue here," Ronaldo told Marca.

Zamparini blasts Gilardino

AFP, Rome

Palermo coach Maurizio Zamparini blasted Fiorentina's Alberto Gilardino after the striker scored a goal with his forearm in his side's 3-1 victory in Sicily.

Fiorentina moved up to fifth in the table following their fourth Serie A win in a row while Palermo dropped down into mid-table.

Gilardino opened the scoring from close range with his forearm before two Adrian Mutu goals were sandwiched by a Palermo consolation from Brazilian midfielder Simplicio.

But Zamparini said Gilardino should be banned for that first goal.

"It's shameful, we're going to ask the authorities to intervene with TV evidence. Gilardino deserves a five-game ban. He even celebrated. Incredible," fumed Zamparini.

"Palermo played very well, but we were robbed. And the referee and linesmen were only too happy to do so."

While Zamparini was right that Gilardino had scored with his arm, it was completely accidental.

"The ball hit me on the arm completely by accident. The action happened so quickly that I didn't realise and that's why I celebrated," said Gilardino.

"Looking back at the images now, I admit that it was a hand-ball."

The former AC Milan frontman was having his shirt pulled by a defender at the time and was dragged to the ground.

He was trying to slide the ball into the net with his foot but as he was dragged down, the ball bounced up and caught him on the arm.

The correct decision would have been to award Fiorentina a penalty and probably the defender should have received a red card as well as his foul denied Gilardino a legitimate goalscoring opportunity.

Palermo goalkeeper Marco Amelia shed some light on the incident when he said: "I complained to the referee and he told me that if the ball hadn't gone in, he would have given a penalty."

Benitez calls for calm

AFP, London



Sunday

Rafa Benitez has told his Liverpool stars their stunning 1-0 victory at title rivals

Chelsea will count for nothing if they slip up against Portsmouth this week.

Benitez's side moved three points clear at the top of the Premier League thanks to Xabi Alonso's deflected winner at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

After four years watching from the sidelines while Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal fought it out for the title, this was the result which announced Liverpool's arrival as serious contenders.

Ending Chelsea's 86-match unbeaten run in home league matches will give Liverpool a huge confidence boost. But Reds manager Benitez knows a win in Wednesday's home clash with managerless Portsmouth is essential to keep the momentum going.

"Clearly I think we have to calm down and start thinking about Portsmouth," Benitez said. "We knew it was important to beat United then we drew with Stoke."

"We prefer to beat Chelsea and see what happens with Portsmouth. If you want to stay top of the table for a long time you have to beat almost everyone because Chelsea and

United will be behind us.

"We have the mentality we need to fight against the top sides. To win here was difficult for every team and our fans have to enjoy it."

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson had dismissed Sunday's showdown as an insignificant match in the context of the title race, but Benitez begs to differ.

Liverpool have already beaten United and Chelsea in the first three months of the season and achieved both wins without star striker Fernando Torres.

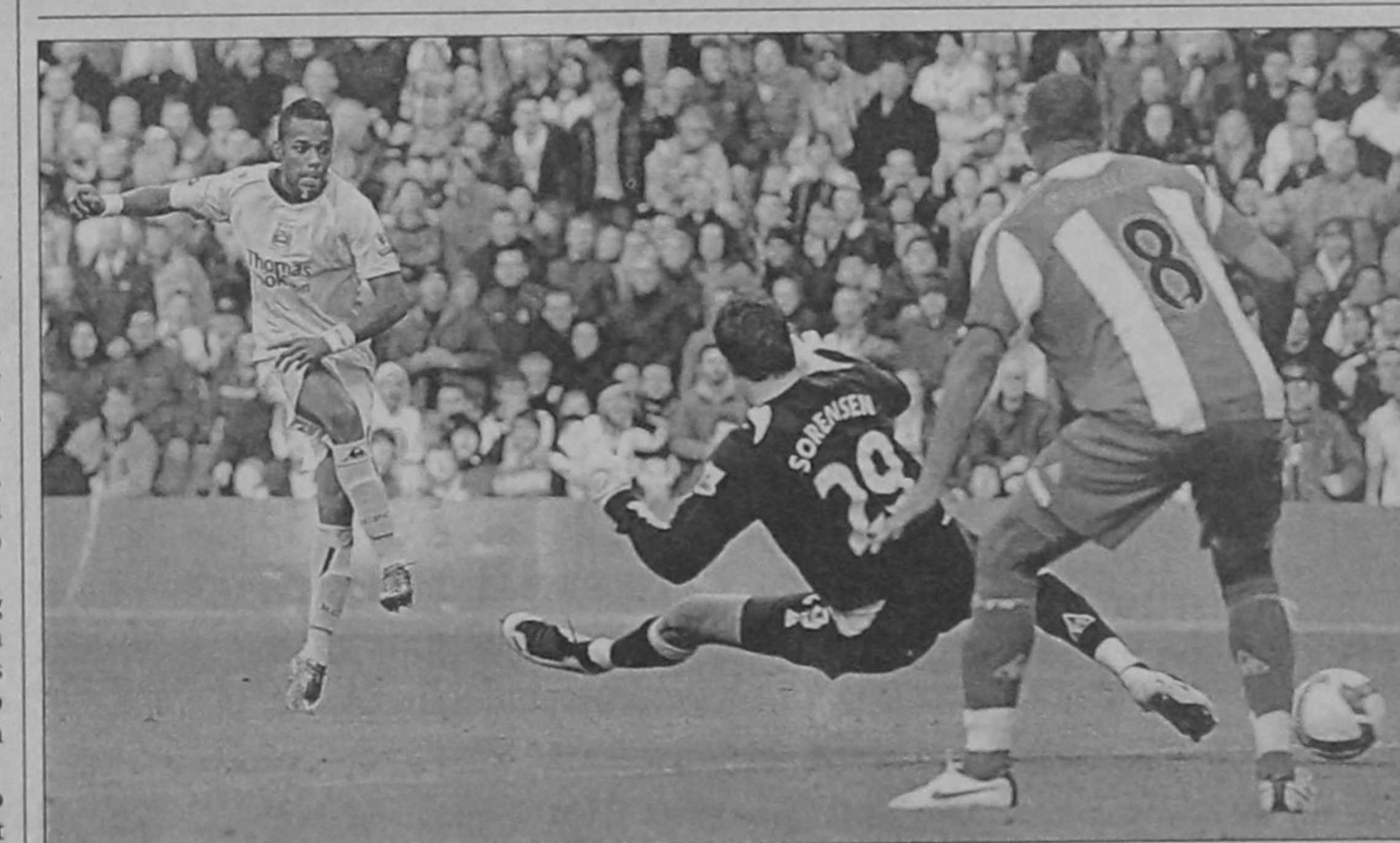
Benitez finally has a squad with enough depth to take on the best and Liverpool are clearly in the mood to end their 18-year wait to be crowned kings of English football.

"To win here and stay top of the table unbeaten is a massive message for the other teams," Benitez said.

"It was a massive game and to come here with the mentality we had and with the players showing the character they did, it was a big boost for the rest of the season."

"We have belief, we have quality and we have shown by coming from behind in other games this season, that we have character. At least this is enough to be top of the table for now."

"But we need three points in our next game against Portsmouth if we are going to keep this mentality."



Manchester City forward Robinho (L) scores the opening goal against Stoke City during their Premier League match at the City of Manchester Stadium on Sunday. Robinho scored a hat-trick as Man City won 3-0.

Harry couldn't turn it down

AFP, London



Sunday

Harry Redknapp watched Tottenham win his first game in charge, and their first Premier League match this season, before revealing how he would have "regretted it for the rest of his life" if he'd turned them down.

Redknapp left his position as manager of top-flight Portsmouth on Saturday to replace Spanish coach Juande Ramos at White Hart Lane, who was sacked after the club made their worst start to a season.

Under Ramos, Tottenham took two points from their opening eight league games this term.

In one match alone Redknapp surpassed that total with goals from Roman Pavlyuchenko and Darren Bent securing a 2-0 win over Bolton at White Hart Lane.

Last season, Redknapp was linked with a high-profile move to Spurs's fellow strugglers Newcastle before deciding to remain on the south coast.

But the 61-year-old London-born Redknapp didn't think twice about returning to the capital with Tottenham who, even after Sunday's win, remained bottom.

"Tottenham is a big club, even though they are bottom of the

league, you see the stadium and set up," Redknapp said.

"I never went to Newcastle and people said maybe I didn't fancy the pressure of a big club," the former West Ham manager, who last season guided Portsmouth to FA Cup glory, added.

"But I could not really have turned this offer down. I would have regretted it for the rest of my life."

Explaining his decision to quit Fratton Park, where he achieved heroic status among Pompey fans, Redknapp said: "I just feel at the moment things are going to get a little bit tighter at Portsmouth. The ground can only hold 20,000 people and they need a new stadium and training ground."

Redknapp has been assured he will be given complete control of his players at Tottenham and that he will not suffer the same level of interference from the White Hart Lane hierarchy which cost Ramos his job.

Ramos's position at the club was undermined by former sporting director Damien Comolli, who also lost his job in the huge backroom shake-up instituted by chairman Daniel Levy.

The club have since scrapped the idea of a sporting director and Redknapp insists he is in complete control of first-team affairs.

Aston Villa, fresh from their UEFA Cup victory over Ajax, defeated Wigan 4-0 while Brazil star and British record signing Robinho grabbed his first hat-trick in English football as Manchester City beat Stoke 3-0.

But the actual development of how quickly this happened, sometimes these things go on and on, but this happened over just 24 hours," the former Scotland striker added.

Arsenal, Spurs's next opponents in Wednesday's north London derby, moved to within four points of Liverpool after a 2-0 win away to West Ham.