

# Gerrard saves L'pool

INTERNET, undated



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez saw his side's home form let them down again on Saturday as the English league leaders were held to a 2-2 draw by Hull City at Anfield. For the third successive home game in the Premier League, Liverpool had to settle for a point, though it could have been worse as they came from 2-0 down to force a draw.

Benitez's side are now two points ahead of Chelsea at the top, but the London side can overtake them on Sunday if they beat West Ham United at Stamford Bridge.

Champions Manchester United remain third, six points behind Liverpool with a game in hand after they were held 0-0 at Tottenham Hotspur, while Arsenal also failed to take advantage, drawing 1-1 at Middlesbrough, dropping to fifth behind Aston Villa.

Anfield was struck dumb inside 22 minutes as Hull took a shock 2-0 lead through a Paul McShane header and a Jamie Carragher own goal.

But Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard then scored twice inside eight minutes to pull Liverpool level with only 32 minutes gone.

The momentum was with Liverpool but they could not break down a resilient Hull side, although Sami Hyypia went closest when he headed against the post in the second half.

"We made too many mistakes," Benitez said. "These are the kind of games that you have to win. We are disappointed, but we cannot change anything."

"The game was a little bit too frenetic and you have to be able to control things a lot more in these games."

United missed the chance to close the gap when they were held to a goalless draw at Tottenham Hotspur.

Dimitar Berbatov, on his first return to White Hart Lane after his summer move to United, was joined with his every touch.

United enjoyed the lion's share of possession, but Edwin van der Sar twice saved well

from David Bentley and once from Aaron Lennon, while Luka Modric headed just over.

In the dying minutes, Ryan Giggs forced a superb save from Heurleho Gomez with a brilliant free-kick that the goalkeeper touched onto the bar.

Aston Villa moved ahead of Arsenal into fourth after a confident 4-2 win over Bolton Wanderers, with Gabriel Agbonlahor scoring twice.

"Gabby was exceptional today," Villa manager Martin O'Neil said.

"I thought he was terrific last week against Everton as well even though he didn't score."

O'Neil's side are one point behind United and one above Arsenal, whose title hopes were dealt another blow when they were held 1-1 at Middlesbrough.

Emmanuel Adebayor headed Arsenal in front on 17 minutes from a Cesc Fabregas corner but former Gunners striker Jeremie Aliadiere scored against his old side on the half-hour mark, heading Tuncay Sanli's fizzing cross past Manuel Almunia.

Almunia saved well from Stewart Downing in the second half while substitute Nicklas Bendtner went close for Arsenal late on, but the two sides had to settle for a point.

"We believe that champions are people who go on when everybody else stops," a defiant Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said.

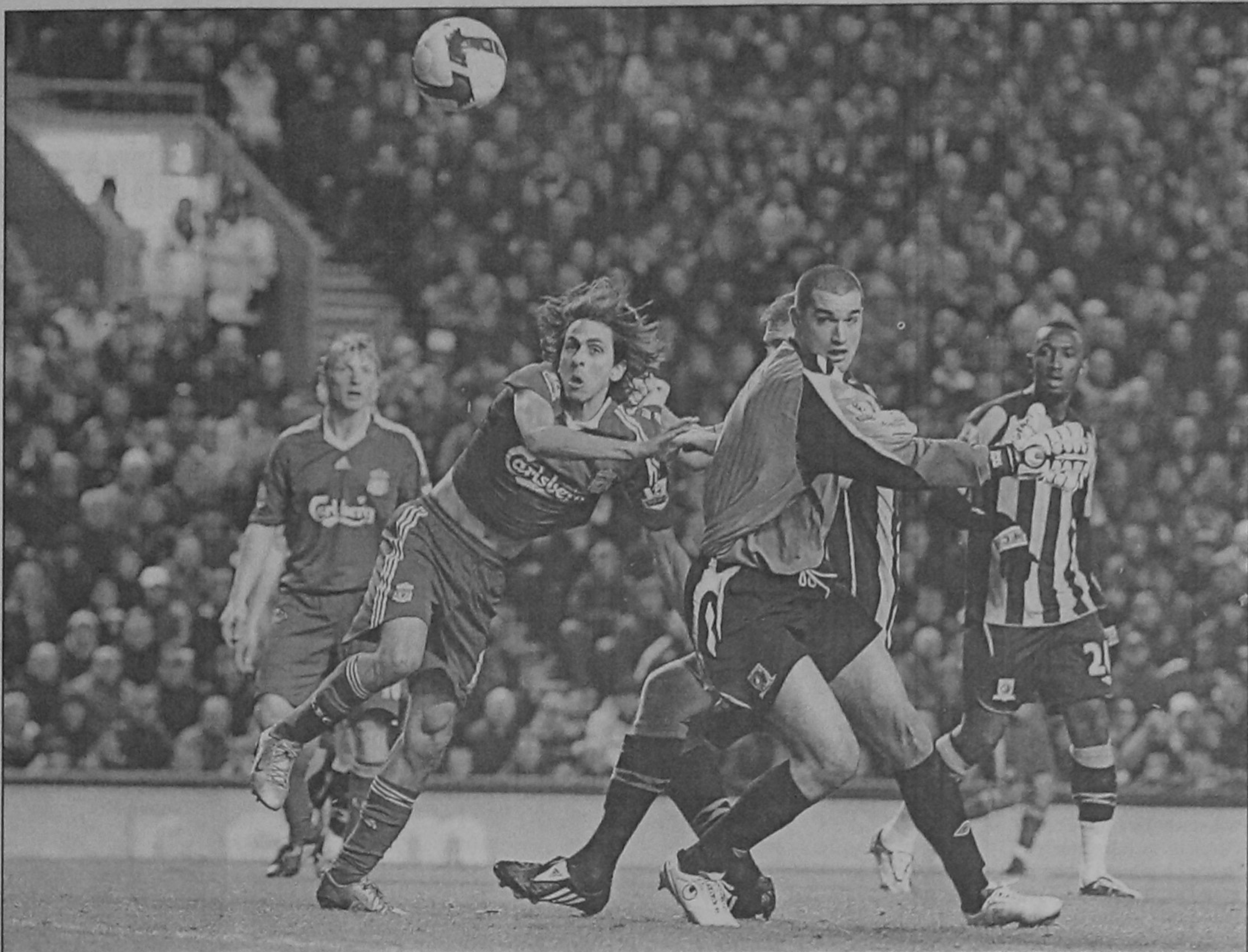
"That's the way we can show it. Nobody believes in us but we can show we still believe and keep going."

"I believe at the moment my team needs encouragement more than anything."

Managerless Sunderland moved out of the bottom three with a 4-0 thumping of bottom side West Bromwich Albion, with Kenwyne Jones getting two of the goals.

Wigan piled more pressure on Blackburn Rovers manager Paul Ince with a 3-0 win over their local rivals at the JJB Stadium.

Tim Cahill headed a late winner for Everton in a 1-0 win at Manchester City, while Stoke City and Fulham drew 0-0 in the day's other game.



Liverpool midfielder Youssi Benayoun (2nd from L) gets to the ball ahead of Hull City goalkeeper Boaz Myhill from a corner during their Premiership match at Anfield on Saturday. The Reds came back from two goals down thanks largely to an inspirational performance from captain Steven Gerrard who netted both goals. PHOTO: AFP

# Pep staying focused

AFP, Madrid



Late goals from Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi helped Barcelona defeat Real Madrid 2-0 in 'El Clasico' at a rain-soaked Camp Nou on Saturday to move 12 points clear of their arch rivals in the title race.

Former Real old boy Eto'o had seen Iker Casillas save his penalty on 70 minutes but picked himself up to break the deadlock seven minutes from time and Messi produced a delicate chip in stoppage time to spark wild celebrations.

It was Barca's first win over Real since November 2005 and was sweet revenge for last season when Real did a league double and Barca had to perform the guard of honour to salute Real as champions at the Santiago Bernabeu before losing 4-1.

"The 12 point cushion over Real is obviously

nice, however, we are not just competing against Real," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola. "There are other teams up there like Villarreal, Valencia and Sevilla who are all dangerous."

"I said it would be difficult against Real and that we wouldn't be scoring goals at will. They are the reigning champions and a great side."

"We really wanted to win this match and kept on going to the final whistle and the goals finally came."

For new Real Madrid coach Juande Ramos, who took over from Bernd Schuster four days ago, it was a bitter pill to swallow and the former Tottenham Hotspur manager has a mammoth task to help Real win a third consecutive title.

"It is certainly difficult to take," said Real captain Raul. "We had chances but then conceded two late goals and have to take it on the chin."

"We are not giving up (in the title race) as it is a long season and there are lots of points to play for. We have to absorb this defeat and carry on."

# Valencia back in the race

AFP, Madrid

Valencia got their title bid back on track coming from behind to defeat ten-man Espanyol 2-1 at home on Saturday as they moved up to second in the table five points off leaders Barcelona.

Substitute Vicente, only on the pitch seven minutes, struck an 81st minute winner for the hosts after Raul Albiol had cancelled out Roman Martinez's opener for the visitors.

Valencia old boy Francisco Rufete, who won two league titles as a Valencia player in 2002 and 2004, had a nightmare return to the Mestalla stadium getting his marching orders shortly before half-time for a deliberate handball.

Valencia had been crushed 4-0 by Barcelona last weekend so the win was much-needed and another boost was the return of Spanish international Daniel Silva after three months out following ankle surgery.

"We deserved to win because of our perseverance," said Valencia coach Unai Emery. "Espanyol deserved their goal and we deserved our two goals."

In the build-up to the match all the talk had centered on Valencia's reported financial crisis with speculation that their prize assets David Villa and Silva would be sold to balance the books.

Confidence was low after the Barcelona humiliation and Espanyol took a 28th minute lead with Martinez's shot taking a huge deflection off the unfortunate Carlos Marchena. However, Valencia were given a way back into the match when old boy Rufete was sent off on 38 minutes.

Albiol levelled 20 minutes later and Vicente scored the decisive goal from an acute angle.

Espanyol stay third from bottom and have now not won in six matches with new manager Mane still waiting for his first win since taking charge last weekend.

# Bordeaux close gap

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux closed the gap on serial champions Lyon to two points in the French league on Saturday with a 3-1 win at Le Mans while Paris Saint Germain also moved into the fray with a 2-1 success at Auxerre.

With Lyon, bidding for an eighth straight title, facing fourth-placed Marseille at the Stade Gerland on Sunday in the top match of the weekend, Bordeaux could not afford to slip up.

And after a goalless first half Fernando Cavenaghi broke the deadlock on the hour before Matthieu Chalmé and Brazilian Jussie Ferreira wrapped things up after Norwegian Thorstein Helstad had first levelled from the spot.

Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc had opined following Champions League elimination in midweek that there is a visible quality gap which has emerged between the French league and its English, Spanish and Italian counterparts - those countries largely monopolising the last 16 of that competition.

But with 32 points from 18 games the Girondins are seemingly at least headed for another shot at Europe's premier club competition next season if they maintain this domestic form, even if the likes of Roma and Chelsea

proved too strong for them. Lyon are the only French name which went into the hat for the Champions League knock-out phase.

Paris, who spent last season dealing not with European glory but rather the potential nightmare of relegation - they ultimately just survived - meanwhile thanked two early strikes from emerging Beninosis talent Stephane Sessegnon for a win at Auxerre which took them level on points with Blanc's men.

Sessegnon, an eight-million-euro signing from Le Mans has turned in a series of fine performances at the Parc des Princes to the extent that PSG fans are hoping they have a potential new Augustin 'Jay Jay' Okocha on their hands.

Nigerian Okocha lit up the PSG side of 1998 to 2002, since when the capital club have rarely challenged for league glory.

Unfashionable Rennes failed to leapfrog both Bordeaux and PSG in the late game and stand level on 31 points with Marseille after Nantes held them to a goalless draw.

Toulouse meanwhile made it into the top six following a 3-1 win over a St Etienne side which had won its past two games after seven straight losses to move out of the drop zone under new coach Alain Perrin.

But Les Verts remain in danger after this latest setback.

# 'Margin of defeat was excessive'

THE GUARDIAN

Real Madrid did not deserve to lose by two goals against leaders Barcelona at the Nou Camp on Saturday and could even have snatched an unlikely victory if they had taken their chances, coach Juande Ramos said.

Late goals from Samuel Eto'o, who earlier had a penalty saved by Iker Casillas, and Lionel Messi condemned Ramos to a 2-0 defeat on his league debut since replacing Bernd Schuster as coach on Tuesday.

Barca's win stretches their advantage over their arch rivals to 12 points after 15 matches and Ramos's injury-plagued side, languishing in fifth place, now face a huge challenge to defend their title.

"The result was excessive considering what happened on the pitch," the former Sevilla and Tottenham Hotspur boss said at a news conference.

"We worked and fought hard and we had chances that we didn't take," he added. "But that's the way it is in football."

Ramos said he was happy with the way his players battled to keep a dominant Barca at bay but conceded that the 12-point gap was considerable.

"But there are a lot of matches left and you have to take each game as it comes," he said.

"Barcelona have played an extremely high level so far but the season is long and we have the return matches to come."

# Kalle wants salary caps

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge wants European football's governing body UEFA to insist on salary caps in the Champions League to prevent the financial crisis having a "domino effect" in football.

"Clubs cannot devote more than 50 percent of their budget to salaries."

"At the moment, the wages are irrationally high."

"If we decide to intervene, the competition would be regulated overnight and clubs would have to work within their means."

"At the moment, each club is driven by the need for success and some make investments which might not be economically viable."

The former West Germany striker is keen to see a licence scheme introduced for Champions League clubs which would mean each team having a limited amount to spend on salaries.

But the Bayern Munich boss says signs of the knock-on effect of the financial crisis are being seen in European football.

"If one looks at football in Europe, there are serious signs of the crisis already in England, Spain and also Italy," said Rummenigge.

# Media bow to Barca

INTERNET, undated



The Spanish media was full of praise for Barcelona on Sunday, after the previous night's 2-0 defeat of historic rivals Real Madrid. Barca won the 'Clasico' 2-0 in front of a capacity 97,000 crowd in the Camp Nou from late goals from Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi in the closing stages.

Almost 20 million Spaniards saw at least some part of the match, which was televised live in more than 50 countries. Catalan newspaper Sport was saluted Barca coach Josep Guardiola, "who has built a team of winners in just five months."

Sport placed special emphasis on the patience of Guardiola's team on Saturday, "waiting until the Madrid defence was exhausted before giving it the fatal blows."

Eto'o, the league top scorer with 15 goals, was singled out, for scoring the first goal just 13 minutes after missing a penalty.

Rival daily Mundo Deportivo said that the late defeat drops Real out of the league title race, since they are now 12 points behind Barca and could finish Sunday in seventh place, if other results went against them.

Madrid sports daily AS went even further, with editor Alfredo Relano saying that "Barca already has the face of the champions."

The influential Relano added in his column that "they are the best team in the championship, and it would be strange if they did not win the title."

But AS also said that Real left the Camp Nou "with their heads high, after a dignified display."

It praised new coach Juande Ramos, who replaced Bernd Schuster on Tuesday, for bringing "order and tactical nuance to the team."

According to AS, Ramos will have to focus on the Champions League, at the same time as making sure that his team finishes in the top four in La Liga to have a Champions League chance again next year.

Radio station Cadena SER suggested that "the interesting thing now will be to see who finishes second, and who gets a Champions League place."

Marca, for its part, said that Barca "were far superior" and that Real "did well to hold out until the 83rd minute," when Eto'o prodded home the first goal.

# Ince set to be sacked?

INTERNET, undated

Paul Ince will be sacked as manager of Blackburn Rovers within the next 48 hours after his team stumbled to their sixth successive Premier League defeat.

The decision to show Ince the door after 175 days in the job, one of the shortest reigns for a Premier League manager, will present former Newcastle and Bolton Wanderers boss Sam Allardyce with a tricky choice.

Allardyce is a candidate for the job at Blackburn and managerless Sunderland and

# Ince set to be sacked?

Football

INTERNET, undated

he would prefer to take over at the latter. But with the team Roy Keane walked out on 10 days ago trouncing West Brom 4-0 yesterday, Sunderland chairman Niall Quinn can now take his time appointing his man.

Jeering Blackburn fans yesterday joined in the chants of Wigan supporters, who taunted Ince with the prediction that he would be 'sacked in the morning' during the 3-0 defeat at the JJB Stadium.

John Williams, the Blackburn chairman, did nothing to dampen speculation over the future of the former Manchester United and England midfielder by declining to give Ince his backing.

Asked if he would comment on Ince's position, Williams said abruptly: 'No.' Asked if there might be an announcement by the end of last night, he answered: 'Unlikely.' Asked if a decision could be expected over the weekend, Williams replied: 'No comment.'

The Blackburn job is Ince's first in the top flight but a run of 11 matches without a win leaves Blackburn staring into the abyss of relegation from the Premier League and renders the manager's position untenable. Ince vowed last night to fight on and appealed for funds to rebuild his struggling side.

# Khedira stops Bayern

AFP, Berlin



Stuttgart midfielder Sami Khedira hit an injury-time equaliser to seal a 2-2 draw with ten-man Bayern Munich on Saturday, but the point was enough to put Jurgen Klinsmann-coached Bayern top of the Bundesliga.

Second-half goals by Tim Borowski and Luca Toni had cancelled out Khedira's header at the end of the first-half, until the 21-year-old hit his second of the game with virtually the last kick of the match.

Bayern had earlier been reduced to ten men when defender Massimo Oddo was shown a straight red for kicking midfielder Christian Traesch in the head with five minutes left.

"It was an exciting derby, I had the feeling we had done enough for victory, but the red card was the turning point," said Bayern coach Klinsmann.

"But I am content with what the team have done in the last three months and we are better prepared for the next round of games in the new year."

Despite the late equaliser, Munich have turned around their league position from

11th at the start of October to lead the table on Saturday night.

But second-placed Hoffenheim have the chance to regain the lead providing they can pick up at least a point against Schalke 04 on Sunday.

Stuttgart, whose coach Markus Babel remains unbeaten after two wins and now a draw having taken over three weeks ago after Armin Veh was sacked, had taken the lead in injury time at the end of the first-half through Khedira.

The Germany Under-21 midfielder stood his ground in the heart of the Munich defence and headed home past Michael Rensing to make it 1-0 at the break.

But Bayern equalised within three minutes of the re-start after Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger drove his shot through the defence and although Jens Lehmann saved, Borowski pounced on the loose ball to score.

Stuttgart squandered an excellent chance to regain the lead when Brazilian striker Cacau pushed his shot wide with only Rensing to beat and Stuttgart were made to pay when Toni turned in Borowski's cross on 66 minutes to make it 2-1.

But Khedira spoiled Bayern's party when he volleyed home his shot with the 90 minutes up as Stuttgart poured forward in an attempt to force the equaliser.

"The team did exactly what I asked them to do," said Babel.

"There was passion and a willing until up to the very last minute."

"But I am not completely happy, because we had our chances to win and we didn't take them."

Third-placed Hertha Berlin kept the pressure on the leaders with a 4-0 win over Karlsruhe at Berlin's Olympic Stadium and the home got an early break through when Maximilian Nicu smashed in a goal on eight minutes after a mistake in the home defence.

Bulgaria's Valeri Domovchiyski, midfielder Fabian Lustenberger and Brazilian Raffael all hit goals in the last 15 minutes to turn the score into a rout.

Hamburg are fourth after their 1-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt as Croatia striker Mladen Petric sealed victory with a second-half header.

Bayer Leverkusen are fifth after they were held 1-1 at home by struggling Energie Cottbus.

Werder Bremen are up to seventh after a 2-1 win over VfL Wolfsburg as an own goal from Wolfsburg's Brazilian midfielder Josue gave the hosts three points.

On Friday night, Borussia Dortmund moved up to sixth in the league after their 2-1 win over the league's bottom side Borussia Moenchengladbach.



Bayern Munich midfielder Tim Borowski celebrates his equalising goal against VfB Stuttgart during their crunch Bundesliga tie at Stuttgart on Saturday. Borowski scored one and made the other as Bayern took the lead before falling behind to a last grasp Sami Khedira strike. The point meant that Bayern made it to the top of the Bundesliga before the traditional winter break sets in. PHOTO: AFP