

O'Hara inspires Spurs

Football

AFP, London

Tottenham moved within touching distance of defending their League Cup title after super-substitute Jamie O'Hara inspired a 4-1 win over Burnley in Tuesday's semifinal first leg.

When Tottenham boss Harry Redknapp sent on O'Hara at half-time, Tottenham were trailing to Martin Paterson's early goal and had been completely outplayed by Owen Coyle's Championship team.

But O'Hara's arrival sparked a remarkable transformation at White Hart Lane. The England Under-21 midfielder's freekick set up the equaliser for Michael Dawson and he scored Tottenham's second himself before Roman Pavlyuchenko made it three for the Premier League club.

O'Hara wasn't finished there and he laid on the fourth goal with another freekick that Michael Duff headed into his own net.

It was a whirlwind spell that left Burnley bewildered and Spurs on the verge of returning to Wembley on March 1 to defend the trophy they won last year by beating Chelsea.

All Tottenham have to do now is finish the job at Turf Moor in the second leg in two weeks and they will be able to look forward to a final showdown against Manchester United or Derby.

Jermain Defoe received a warm reception when he was paraded to the Tottenham fans before kick-off ahead of his imminent transfer from Portsmouth, but the empty seats around White Hart Lane suggested the home faithful weren't so thrilled by the prospect of more cup success.

Burnley had already claimed three Premier League scalps in the competition this

season and those wins over Chelsea, Arsenal and Fulham made it clear they would be no pushover.

Just two minutes had passed when Claret's winger Chris Eagles burst clear down the right and fired just wide.

Eagles had served notice of his threat and the former Manchester United trainee punished Spurs for failing to heed the warning in the 14th minute.

He surged into the penalty area past Gareth Bale and, as Tottenham's defence stood statuesque, cut a cross back for Paterson to tap into the empty net.

Burnley's 6,000 travelling fans went wild and Spurs almost went into meltdown. Eagles was tormenting Bale and whipped in another teas-

ing cross that Robbie Blake glanced agonisingly past the far post.

Tottenham briefly sparked into life after 25 minutes, only to be thwarted by Burnley keeper Brian Jensen. The giant Dane looked beaten when Pavlyuchenko flicked Jonathan Woodgate's header goalwards but somehow pushed the close-range effort away for a corner.

Yet Burnley won every 50-50 challenge in the first half and Aaron Lennon showed his frustration by thumping the ball into an advertising hoarding after another misplaced pass.

Redknapp responded by sending on O'Hara for David Bentley at half-time and it proved an inspired move.

In the 47th minute, O'Hara swung over a corner and Dawson rose above Clarke Carlisle to looped his ahead into the roof of the net.

Suddenly Tottenham were inspired and they went in front as O'Hara turned from provider to scorer six minutes later. Pavlyuchenko's cross was glanced on by Luka Modric to O'Hara and his low shot crept in under Jensen.

O'Hara wasn't just a thorn in Burnley's side going forward. His presence in front of Bale subdued Eagles for the first time and shutout the visitors' most creative force.

Bale's alert clearance denied Chris McCann midway through the half and moments later Pavlyuchenko put Spurs in complete control.

The Russia forward collected Bale's 65th minute pass, skipped past Clarke and beat Jensen with a fine low strike.

The floodgates were well and truly open now and Spurs added a fourth two minutes later when O'Hara's freekick was headed into his own net by Duff.



Barcelona star Lionel Messi (R) shoots to score a goal against Atletico Madrid during their King's Cup match at the Vicente Calderon Stadium in Madrid on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Becks debuts for Milan

AFP, Dubai

AC Milan capped their winter break training camp in Dubai by beating top German side SV Hamburg in a friendly here on Tuesday.

In a match which saw English football icon David Beckham make his debut for the Italians, Milan drew 1-1 with the Bundesliga title-chasers side before running out 5-4 winners from the penalty spot.

Beckham, who has signed a short-term loan deal and is set to return to American club Los Angeles Galaxy in March, could make his Serie A debut for Milan in a league match away to AS Roma this Sunday.

Former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder Beckham played the first 45 minutes before being replaced by Frenchman Mathieu Flamini for the second half.



Milan midfielder David Beckham (R) tackles Hamburg defender Marcell Jansen during their friendly tie in Dubai on Tuesday. Italian media were underwhelmed by Beckham's debut although coach Carlo Ancelotti was satisfied.

PHOTO: AFP

Ameobi signs new deal

AFP, London

Nigerian-born striker Shola Ameobi has signed a new three-year contract to stay at St James' Park, the club announced on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old, one of four men to be offered new deals last month, became the first to put pen to paper and will provide a much-needed boost to coach Joe Kinnear.

The former England Under-21 international spent the latter part of last season on loan at Stoke, but he rejected a permanent move to the Midlands side prompting enquiries from Ipswich and Norwich.

"I'm delighted to sign a new deal and commit my future to Newcastle United," Ameobi told the club's website.

Kinnear will now hope for similar responses from key midfielder Nicky Butt and goalkeeper Steve Harper, who also received offers in December, although he will have to wait until the end of the season for a decision from Michael Owen.

Ameobi, who was brought up on Tyneside from the age of five, emerged from the ranks at St James' Park under Sir Bobby Robson, making his senior debut as a substitute against Chelsea in September 2000.

He has 244 appearances to his name, 100 of them as a substitute, and is one short of 50 goals for the club.

Denilson on trial at Bolton

AFP, London

Brazilian 2002 World Cup winner and once the world's most expensive player Denilson is on trial with Premiership side Bolton Wanderers it was revealed on Tuesday.

The 31-year-old -- who also played in the 1998 World Cup final which Brazil lost to France -- has been without a club since being released by Brazilian side Palmeiras.

Denilson, who was capped 68 times, became the world's most expensive player when he moved to Spanish side Real Betis from Sao Paulo in 1998 for 21.5 million pounds.

His European club career never really flourished despite spending seven seasons in Spain followed by a spell at French side Bordeaux, Saudi Arabian outfit Al-Nasr and American team FC Dallas.

Messi fires Barcelona

Football

AFP, Madrid

Argentine forward Lionel Messi scored three times to give Barcelona a 3-1 away win over Atletico Madrid in the Spanish Cup's last 16 first leg on Tuesday.

Messi, who was rested for Barcelona's 3-1 win over Real Mallorca in the league on Saturday, raced up the right wing towards the area, slipped a pass to Daniel Alves who backheeled to him.

The 21-year-old then used his left foot to send the ball past Atletico's French keeper Gregory Coupet in the 11th minute as Argentina's new national coach Diego Maradona watched from the

stands.

Messi scored again in the 58th minute with a penalty kick into the bottom left corner that sent Coupet scrambling in the other direction.

His third goal came just 11 minutes from the final whistle with a clip with his left foot into an empty net after receiving the ball from Spanish international Andres Iniesta.

Czech defender Tomas Ujfalusi contributed Atletico's only goal of the match in the 69th minute as he nodded the ball into the net after Portuguese winger Simao Sabrosa had swung in the corner.

The Madrid side quickly became frustrated at Barcelona's domination of

the game and racked up three yellow cards in a five-minute period as the end of the first-half neared.

Simao got a yellow card in the 37th minute for pushing Messi, followed two minutes later by Simao's compatriot Maniche who got carded for tripping Iniesta. Left back Mariano Pernia got a yellow card in the 41st minute for tripping Alves.

Barcelona, who have won the Cup a record 24 times, were without injured Carles Puyol, Rafael Marquez and Aleksandr Hleb, and they rested Victor Valdes, Xavi and Samuel Eto'o, the top scorer in the Spanish league this season.

Atletico's Argentine striker Sergio "Kun" Aguero was out due to a sore throat and fever.

Juninho nears end

AFP, Lyon

Lyon's former Brazilian international midfielder Juninho admitted on Tuesday that his stellar career was drawing to an end.

The 33-year-old -- who has been the inspiration behind Lyon's seven successive championships since he arrived from Vasco da Gama in 2001 -- said that nevertheless he hoped he broke the century of goals mark at the club, which he is presently six short of.

"I know that I am nearing the exit," conceded Juninho, who was capped 44 times and scored seven goals for Brazil.

"I feel it is the moment to prepare for the future with my family.

"The younger players could probably express themselves better without my presence.

"I am under contract till 2010 and don't dare ask for an extension," he added in an interview given to regional newspaper Le Progres.

However, Juninho, who had already intimated last October that he wanted to retire soon, refused to be explicit about when he would eventually call it a day.

"I have my ideas but I don't want to divulge them," said Juninho.

"But the club doesn't know what date I have set and I hope they are understanding about it," added Juninho, who has two readymade replacements waiting in the wings in the shape of Miralem Pjanic and Honorato Ederson.

Juninho admitted he had played less often this term but believed he had lost none of his ability and confessed he still had targets.

"When I see the applause when Steven Gerrard scored his 100th goal for Liverpool, I think to myself that is a nice thing to achieve."

Buffon back in action

AFP, Rome

Italy World Cup winning goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon made his long awaited return from injury on Tuesday as his side Juventus drew 1-1 with French outfit Monaco but lost 6-5 on penalties in a friendly in Messina.

Buffon, widely regarded prior to his absence as the best goalkeeper in the world, had been out since the beginning of October, only playing in four out of Juve's 16 league matches, because of a back injury.

Former Arsenal goalkeeper Alex Manninger had stepped in impressively for him.

Buffon played for a full half of the match against the once proud but now modest French league side.

Rafa won't buy new players

AFP, Liverpool

Rafael Benitez has suggested he will resist the temptation to add to his squad this month by emphasising his belief that his current squad can deliver a first league title in 19 years.

The Spanish manager has been linked with a move to bring former Liverpool striker Emile Heskey back to Anfield but there has been no movement on that front since the transfer window opened at the start of January.

With Fernando Torres, Martin Skrtel, Fabio Aurelio

and Alvaro Arbeloa all back from injury, Benitez believes Liverpool are in good shape for the battle with Manchester United and Chelsea over the second half of the season.

"We finished 2008 very well, we played with style and have scored a lot of goals," Benitez said. "I am very pleased and happy with the situation and hope it will be the same in the New Year."

"We have other players apart from Torres coming back from injury. There is Skrtel, Aurelio and Arbeloa all fit now. It will be like signing three new players."

"We do not need to go into the transfer market, we are certainly not desperate to do

so. "If we find we need something we will try, but it is always hard in this window and very expensive."

"But we are in a good position and I am happy to use the players we have now plus the ones returning from injury."

The only departure from Anfield is likely to be out-of-favour winger Jermaine Pennant, who is reportedly a target for AC Milan.

Benitez will however be without defender Emiliano Insua until February 8 after the Argentinian, who has recently broken into the first team, was called up by his country for the South American Under-20 Championships.

Martins in hot water

Football

AFP, London

Road safety campaigners vented their anger on Tuesday after Newcastle United's Nigerian international striker Obafemi Martins was not banned from driving despite being caught speeding well over the limit.

The 24-year-old was driving at 106 miles (171 kilometres) per hour in his Porsche on a 70 mph (113 kph) road.

Newcastle Magistrates' Court in northeast England heard on Monday that Martins broke the speed limit last May for fear of missing a flight to see his sick son in Italy.

The former Inter Milan player was fined 550 pounds

(810 dollars, 605 euros) and ordered to pay 400 pounds costs. He also had six points put on his driving licence.

District judge Stephen Earl gave Martins credit for his guilty plea and unblemished driving record.

But Cathy Keeler, deputy chief executive of the road safety charity Brake, said drivers going faster than 100 mph should automatically lose their licence.

"Going so much over the speed limit is taking a blatant risk with lives on the road," she said.

"There is absolutely no excuse."

"For someone who is a role model in the community, this sends out a terrible message that road safety does not matter."

"A fine of a few hundred

pounds for someone who earns thousands a week is not really a deterrent."

"The courts need to find a better way of dealing with incidents like this that does provide a real deterrent."

"We would like to see anyone going so significantly over the speed limit to be treated as committing a much more serious offence and prosecuted for careless or dangerous driving, rather than speeding, and face an automatic ban."

Andrew Howard, head of road safety for the Automobile Association, said: "Driving at over 100 mph does not mean an automatic ban, but the guidelines suggest that it should."

"The only guideline laid down for the courts for speeding offences is a maximum fine."

BRITISH FOOTBALL RICH LIST

INTERNET, undated

Manchester City's hugely wealthy owner Sheik Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan has topped Roman Abramovich to head British football's rich list.

Sheik Mansour, a member of the royal family of Abu Dhabi, has a personal fortune of 15 billion pounds according to the Football Rich List, researched and published by FourFourTwo magazine.

The 38-year-old bought City in the summer, while Abramovich, Chelsea's Russian owner, has slipped to third in the list - his wealth is estimated at 7bn pounds and

coach Fabio Capello is at No 73 worth an estimated 25m pounds with a 6 million-pound-a-year contract and a 10m pound private art collection.

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson is at No 78 in the list (22m pound) and Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger at No 92 (14m pound).

Celtic shareholder Dermot Desmond, the Irish entrepreneur, is the richest person in Scottish football - he is eighth on the list and said to be worth 1.2bn pounds. Rangers chairman Sir David Murray is 19th on the list, worth 600m pounds. Despite the huge fortunes

of the wealthiest owners, football finance experts fear British football's bubble may be about to burst.

Professor Tom Cannon told the magazine: "Season-ticket numbers will probably be down by about 10 per cent but renewals will be down by at least 15 or 20 per cent. That's where the problems will be as you go down the divisions."

TOP 20 PLAYERS

(overall position in the main list in brackets)

- 1 David Beckham (LA Galaxy, No 38 overall) £125m
 - 2 Michael Owen (Newcastle, 56) £40m
 - 3 Wayne Rooney (Man United, 61) £35m
 - 4 Rio Ferdinand (Man United, 69) £28m
 - =4 Robbie Fowler (Unattached, =69) £28m
 - =4 Sol Campbell (Portsmouth, =69) £28m
 - 7 Ryan Giggs (Man United, 77) £23m
 - 8 Michael Ballack (Chelsea, 80) £20m
 - =8 Frank Lampard (Chelsea, =80) £20m
 - 10 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool, 86) £19m
 - 11 Cristiano Ronaldo (Man United, 87) £18m
 - 12 John Terry (Chelsea, 88) £17m
 - 13 Didier Drogba (Chelsea, 89) £15m
 - 14 Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea, 92) £14m
 - =14 Damien Duff (Newcastle, =92) £14m
 - 16 Dimitar Berbatov (Man United, 96) £13m
 - =16 Ashley and Cheryl Cole (Chelsea, =96) £13m
 - =16 Fernando Torres (Liverpool, =96) £13m
 - 19 Emile Heskey (Wigan, 100) £12m
 - 20 Gary Neville (Man United, 101) £11.75m
- (courtesy of FourFourTwo magazine)



he has been said to have lost over 3bn pounds in the economic downturn.

He has also been overtaken in the list by Lakshmi Mittal, the 58-year-old Indian industrialist worth 12.5bn pounds who joined Formula One's Bernie Ecclestone and Flavio Briatore investing in Queen's Park Rangers.

David Beckham remains the richest player associated with British football - his personal fortune of 125 million pounds being streets ahead of his closest rivals Michael Owen (40m pounds) and Wayne Rooney (35m pounds).

Beckham is 38th in the overall list, while England head

RICH LIST TOP 10

- 1 Sheik Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan (Man City) £15 billion
 - 2 Lakshmi Mittal and family (QPR) £12.5bn
 - 3 Roman Abramovich (Chelsea) £7bn
 - 4 Joe Lewis (Tottenham) £2.5bn
 - 5 Bernie and Slavica Ecclestone (QPR) £2.4bn
 - 6 Stanley Kroenke (Arsenal) £2.245bn
 - 7 Alisher Usmanov (Arsenal) £1.5bn
 - 8 Lord Grantham & the Moores Family (Everton) £1.2bn
 - =8 Dermot Desmond (Celtic) £1.2bn
 - 10 Lord Ashcroft (Watford) £1.1bn
 - 10 Malcolm Glazer and family (Man Utd) £1.1bn
- (courtesy of FourFourTwo magazine)