

# Torres sinks Chelsea

AFP, Liverpool



Fernando Torres struck twice in the dying minutes against 10-man Chelsea to keep Liverpool's title dream alive in a dramatic finale at Anfield on Sunday.

Rafa Benitez's side looked to be heading for another frustrating draw as Chelsea held out after Frank Lampard's second half dismissal for a lunge on Xabi Alonso.

But Torres struck in the 89th minute when he latched on to a cross by Fabio Aurelio before cementing the points deep into stoppage time after being teed-up by Yossi Benayoun.

They were the Spanish international's first Premier League goals since October and put Liverpool two points behind leaders Manchester United, who have a game in hand.

More importantly, the result almost certainly ended Chelsea's title challenge for another season as Luiz Felipe Scolari's side self-destructed.

The Blues are five points behind United and have yet to beat any of their 'big four' rivals this season.

While Scolari opted to keep faith with the 11 who started the 2-0 win over Middlesbrough in midweek, Benitez made three changes from the side which stumbled to a 1-1 draw at Wigan.

With Manchester United having pulled five points clear at the summit the previous day, nothing but a win would do for either side.

Yet with the stakes so high, chances were few and far between in a cagey first half which saw Liverpool carve out the better chances without causing any damage.

Alonso marked his return to the side by bringing a scrappy opening to life with a missile of a shot from 25-yard which Petr Cech was forced to turn over his bar in the 12th minute.

Chelsea struggled to create a noteworthy chance and they were fortunate to escape in the 18th minute when Cech spilled Javier Mascherano's long range effort, but there was no red shirt following up.

Mascherano, who has been involved in a

niggling battle with Michael Ballack, became the first player to enter referee Mike Riley's notebook and he was quickly followed by Chelsea defender Ashley Cole during a bruising first half.

The temperature at sub-zero Anfield increased dramatically on the half hour mark as Torres, without a Premier League goal for four months, had a goal-bound effort blocked by Brazilian defender Alex inside the Chelsea area following a super cross by Jamie Carragher.

A tame header by John Terry was all Chelsea could offer in reply yet Liverpool lacked a killer instinct.

The deadlock was almost broken five minutes before half time when Cech, who was having a poor game, spilled another effort, this time from Albert Riera, and the ball cannoned off Cole just past the corner.

If Chelsea had trouble unlocking the Liverpool defence in the first half then their task was made twice as hard when they were reduced to 10 men in the 60th minute following Lampard's crunching challenge on Alonso.

The England midfielder could have few complaints after leaving Alonso in a heap in the centre circle and his team a man short with half an hour to play.

Liverpool spent the final half an hour bombarding the Chelsea defence but to no avail.

The busy Alonso went close with a stinging effort which deflected off Alex, who was out-standing in the visitors defence, and crashed against the bar.

And 11 minutes from time, Cech made amends for his first half spills with a belting save to thwart substitute Benayoun before Torres had the final say.

The Spanish striker was in the right place at the right time to nod Aurelio's cross past Cech and give Liverpool the three points they craved.

Then deep into stoppage time, the Chelsea defence capitulated, Torres cementing the points after being teed-up by Benayoun following a mistake by Cole.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Newcastle rescued a 1-1 draw against local rivals Sunderland at St James' Park.



Liverpool striker Fernando Torres (L) shoots past Chelsea defender Alex during their Premier League encounter at Anfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Given leaves Magpies for City

AFP, Manchester

Goalkeeper Shay Given left Newcastle for cash-rich, but success-starved, Manchester City on Sunday and admitted he was braced for a roller-coaster ride at the Premier League club.

The 32-year-old played 450 times for Newcastle over 11 years and has signed a four-and-a-half-year contract with Mark Hughes's misfiring team.

"The profile of the club has changed dramatically and there are already some fantastic players here," Given told the club's website, mcf.co.uk.

"It looks like some good players will come here in the future as well, and I am sure the fans must be on the edge of their seats to see who comes here."

"There is already the nucleus of a very good team here and I hope I can add to that. I am just delighted that they have chosen me to strengthen their goalkeeping department as well."

"It's exciting times at Manchester City with the new owners and this manager. I have a lot of friends at Newcastle and the supporters are fantastic. They have been great to me for so many years and I thank them for that."

"But I just felt that this was an opportunity for me to come to a club that, in my opinion, is really going to be going places."

Given is City's fourth signing in the transfer window, joining Wayne Bridge, Craig Bellamy and Nigel de Jong at Eastlands.

Manager Mark Hughes added: "I have said for a long time that we need the experience of a keeper like Shay."

"I am delighted that we have been able to acquire such an accomplished keeper, and one so highly-regarded by everyone in the Premier League."

## Arsenal-Cardiff Cup replay postponed

AFP, London

Arsenal's FA Cup fourth round replay with Cardiff City, due to be played at the Emirates here Tuesday, has fallen victim to the cold snap currently affecting Britain and has been postponed.

"Due to adverse weather conditions, the FA Cup fourth round replay against Cardiff City scheduled for February 3 at 7.45pm (1945GMT) has been postponed," an Arsenal statement said Monday.

"A date (for the match to be played) is yet to be determined."

Last month Arsenal were held to a goalless draw by second-tier Championship side Cardiff, who beat the Gunners in the 1927 FA Cup final.

The winners of the tie will face either Premier League strugglers West Brom or Championship Burnley, due to replay on Tuesday, in the last 16.

## Scolari blames referee

AFP, Liverpool



Luiz Felipe Scolari insisted referee Mike Riley was to blame for Chelsea's 2-0 defeat at Liverpool on Sunday after Frank Lampard was sent off for a foul on Xabi Alonso.

A tight game swung Liverpool's way in the 60th minute when Riley ruled that Lampard's sliding tackle on Alonso, which won the ball but also caught the player, was worthy of a straight red card.

Chelsea almost held out for a draw despite their numerical disadvantage but Fernando Torres scored twice in the final moments to leave Chelsea five points behind leaders Manchester United.

Scolari was furious with Riley's decision and called on the official to rescind the card, which would stop Lampard

being banned for three matches.

"After what happened with Lampard it is normal that we lose because they had more possession and chances but before this, no," Scolari told Sky Sports.

"If the referee looks at it on the television maybe he changes the red card for Lampard. As I looked at it, it was a foul by the other player, not Lampard."

"I don't understand (the decision) but maybe now after he looks at it again, if he understands what is wrong, he will change the red card and Lampard can play in the next game."

Scolari conceded that Chelsea had been poor for much of the match but he was adamant they would still have held out for a draw if Lampard had stayed on.

"We were not good. I think Liverpool were better than us for all of the game. But after the red card they are the only team and they scored the goals," he said.

"We are behind two clubs, Manchester and Liverpool so it is more difficult than before. We have many games and need to fight until the last game," he added.

Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez hopes his side's first win in four matches, which moved them within two points of United, will provide the morale boost that gets the Reds back on track after a stuttering spell.

Benitez said: "We were better than them through the game. The question was to create more clear chances to win the game."

"We had to wait until the end even though they were playing with 10 men but I thought we were better than them."

"It is always important to win and play well. We were in a fantastic position before and we are much better now. We have to keep going and have confidence in ourselves."

## Messi fires Barcelona

AFP, Madrid



Supersub Lionel Messi scored twice as nine-man Barcelona, with their 5,000th Spanish league goal, came from behind to beat Racing Santander 2-1 and move 12 points clear of Real

Madrid on Sunday.

A Nikola Zigic penalty had put Racing in front on 56 minutes before Messi changed the game, equalising just five minutes after coming on before scoring an 81st minute winner.

Messi's personal goals tally for the season is now 16 while Barcelona, unbeaten in 20 games, recorded a ninth straight league win.

"You always know that Messi is capable of creating a goal and fortunately for us he created two," Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola said.

"We had dominated but without creating much going forward against a well-organised Racing side."

Valencia did their Champions League qualifying hopes the world of good with a 3-2 victory over Almeria.

David Villa scored twice to notch up his 16th and 17th goals of the campaign as Valencia moved a point behind third-placed Sevilla and three points ahead of Villarreal, who slipped to a 3-0 defeat at Deportivo La Coruna.

Valencia coach Unai Emery praised veteran goalkeeper Cesar Sanchez, a recent signing from Tottenham, for a brilliant late save to deny Almeria an equaliser.

"Cesar Sanchez is going to help us when he

plays and also when he doesn't," said Emery.

Sevilla defeated Valencia to reach the Kings Cup semifinal in midweek but came back down to earth with a 1-0 loss against ten-man Sporting Gijon.

Sporting played with one man less for over an hour after Roberto Canella was sent off but Sevilla could find no way back after Diego Castro's opener and now trail Real by six points.

Barca were below par for a while against Racing who went ahead when Zigic coolly converted a 56th minute spot-kick.

Guardiola responded by throwing on Messi, who had been rested, for Sergi Busquets on the hour mark and it quickly paid dividends.

Five minutes after coming on Messi equalised from close range after Xavi's header had come off the crossbar.

Messi then struck again controlling on his chest before firing in a right-footed shot for Barcelona's 5,000th league goal.

"He (Messi) had two half chances and scored both of them," Racing coach Juan Ramon Muniz said.

Barcelona finished the match with nine men after Rafael Marquez and Gerard Pique were sent off late on for cynical fouls.

Atletico Madrid's miserable year continued as they fell to a 2-1 home defeat against Valladolid on Sunday.

Atletico have yet to win in 2009 and were jeered off the pitch at the Vicente Calderon.

"Am I worried about my job? I have a contract that I signed in front of two others and they haven't told me that it will end before the set date," explained Atletico coach Javier Aguirre.

## Black Cats sign Ben Haim

AFP, Newcastle

Sunderland manager Ricky Sbragia confirmed on Sunday that he had signed Manchester City defender Tal Ben Haim on loan until the end of the season.

The 26-year-old Israeli international completed his move just hours after the 1-1 draw in the Tyne-Wear derby against Newcastle.

Sbragia told Sunderland's official website, www.safc.com: "It's a position we have been short in so I'm delighted that Tal has joined us."

"I know all about him from his days at Bolton. He's got a lot of top-flight experience and he will be a great addition to our squad."

Ben Haim started his career in England at Sbragia's former club Bolton before moving to Chelsea in July 2007 on a free transfer.

Earlier, Newcastle striker Shola Ameobi's second-half spot-kick cancelled out Djibril Cisse's opener at St James' Park and Sbragia admitted his team didn't deserve to win the derby because they weren't deadly enough in front of goal.

"With the pressure they put on us in the second half we crumbled a little bit," Sbragia said.

"I think (Steven) Taylor's done the five-card trick and won the penalty though. I think more than likely the linesman is the closest man to it and he's not given it, and the referee is further away and given it after three or four seconds."

## Tymoshchuk going to Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Ukrainian international Anatoliy Tymoshchuk will join Bayern Munich from Russian champions Zenit St Petersburg in a deal worth 11 million euros (14 million US dollars), claim Bild on Sunday.

The German tabloid claims the 29-year-old, who has won more than 80 caps for the Ukraine, will join Bayern this summer in time for the 2009/10 season.

According to Bild, Tymoshchuk was in Munich last month to meet with Bayern bosses to discuss the deal.



Milan striker Alexandre Pato celebrates after scoring against Lazio during their Serie A tie at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Milan move to second

AFP, Rome



David Beckham created two goals as AC Milan thrashed Lazio 3-0 at Rome's Stadio Olimpico on Sunday to move into second place in Serie A.

The victory allowed Milan to cut Inter Milan's lead at the top to six points after their bitter city rivals were held to a 1-1 draw at home to lowly Torino.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said the difference between the two teams was merely quality.

"Lazio had a lot of pressure and maybe the only thing they lacked was a clinical finish but we held onto the ball well," he said.

"We're still in the title race but we're playing catch up and Inter are still the favourites."

Milan demonstrated their attacking intent on seven minutes when Marek Jankulovski took a pass from Kaka at pace into the box but Fernando Muslera was equal to his stinging shot.

On 35 minutes Lazio had the first of two chances in quick succession as Goran Pandev curled his effort just past the angle of post and bar.

Moments later he released Mauro Zarate who tried to round Christian Abbiati only to be stopped by the goalkeeper before Pandev poked the rebound into the side-netting.

The hosts were made to pay as Beckham

escaped down the right and crossed perfectly for Pato to steer home, although there was more than a hint that the former England captain was off-side.

Only three minutes into the second period, Beckham punished Lazio's shoddy marking once again with a sumptuous delivery from a freekick that Massimo Ambrosini gleefully headed home.

Thereafter Milan repeatedly beat Lazio's hapless offside trap but both Pato and Kaka overran the ball before the latter then hit the outside of the post on his next escape.

Lazio didn't learn their lessons though and once again Kaka got in behind the hosts' defence on 83 minutes before slotting home from an angle.

After Juventus's shock 3-2 home defeat to

Cagliari on Saturday, Inter could have gone nine points clear with victory but they missed a glut of chances.

Coach Jose Mourinho was not pleased with the dropped points but praised Torino for their fighting spirit.

"I never like drawing at home but I accept it. We created many chances. Torino defended for their lives and I prefer to talk about the team that played the game of their lives."

Inter endured a frustrating first 45 minutes as they struggled to break down stubborn opponents.

They only had one clear sight of goal when Julio Cruz brought a fine save out of Matteo Sereni on 35 minutes from a firm header.

Mourinho's team fell behind on 47 minutes when Davide Santon failed to close down Blerim Dzemaili on Torino's right.

The Swiss midfielder crossed into the box where Ivan Cordoba was left flat-footed and former Manchester City forward Rolando Bianchi arched backwards and steered a header past Julio Cesar.

On 38 minutes, Sereni was at fault as he failed to reach a corner, allowing Nicolas Burdisso to head home from little more than six yards out.

The hosts hit the post twice late on through Hernan Crespo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic but failed to muster a winner.

AS Roma's charge up the table was blunted at Reggina despite a brace from Chile midfielder Claudio Pizarro as they were held to a 2-2 draw.

### TOP SIX

Italian Serie A table on Sunday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Inter Milan	22	15	5	2	36	17	50		
AC Milan	22	13	5	4	39	22	44		
Juventus	22	13	4	5	36	19	43		
Genoa	22	11	7	4	32	19	40		
AS Roma	22	11	4	7	33	28	37		
Fiorentina	21	11	2	8	28	19	35		