



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (2nd from L) is ecstatic after scoring the all-important goal against Portsmouth during their Premiership encounter at Fratton Park on Tuesday.

Drogba lifts Chelsea

INTERNET, undated



A late winner by Didier Drogba saw Chelsea remain second

ahead of Liverpool in the Barclays Premier League with a 1-0 win at Portsmouth in atrocious conditions at Fratton Park.

Drogba, who had failed to get the better of Sol Campbell all evening, finally managed to settle the contest in the 79th minute.

Jose Bosingwa's low cross eluded the Pompey defense and Drogba sent a curling drive into the bottom corner for the winner.

Liverpool kept up the pressure on the Blues with a 2-0 win over Sunderland at

Anfield.

David Ngog scored his first league goal for the Reds before Yossi Benayoun doubled the lead to go within four points of Manchester United - although the Red Devils have two games in hand.

The Reds went ahead with a well-worked move which saw Albert Riera glide past Tal Ben-Haim on the left and put in a cross, which was met by Steven Gerrard, who headed the ball back across goal for Ngog to head in.

Four minutes later Liverpool got their second. Again, Ngog was involved, hooking the ball back across goal for Marton Fulop to palm away only as far as Benayoun, who clinically punished the error.

Nicklas Bendtner scored twice and hit the post as

Arsenal won 3-1 at West Brom.

Arsenal made a positive start and needed only four minutes to end their recent goal drought through Bendtner.

Denilson found the Dane who easily cut inside Ryan Donk before drilling a low left-footed drive across Scott Carson into the corner of the net for his 10th goal of the season.

Yet, Albion needed only three minutes to draw level through Chris Brunt whose low freekick skidded through the defensive wall and past the dive of Manuel Almunia.

After 38 minutes some dreadful defending allowed Kolo Toure to restore Arsenal's lead from Andrei Arshavin's freekick and a minute before halftime Bendtner struck again.

Becks calls for permanent move

AP, Doha

David Beckham has reiterated his desire to move permanently to AC Milan from the Los Angeles Galaxy.

The 33-year-old midfielder wants to remain with Milan to improve his chances of making England's team for next year's World Cup. He has scored two goals in 11 games for the Italian team, nine of them in the Serie A.

"I want to stay ... I know negotiations are on and, hopefully, I can continue to play with Milan," Beckham said from Doha, where Milan is set to play an exhibition against Al Sadd later Wednesday.

"My experience with AC Milan has been incredible. It is one of the biggest clubs in the world, some of the most famous players in the world are at AC Milan."

Beckham has been on loan at Milan for two months with the Major League Soccer team expecting him back next week. However, Milan chairman Adriano Galliani said on Tuesday a deal allowing David Beckham to extend his stay until the end of the Italian season is close but not yet complete.

Beckham has a five-year contract with the Galaxy worth \$32.5 million. He can opt out of his MLS contract at the end of the season.

Behrami out for season

SOCCERNET

West Ham United midfielder Valon Behrami has confirmed he will be sidelined for the rest of the season with a double injury.

The Swiss international was stretched off in last Sunday's 1-0 win over Manchester City after suffering a twisted knee and a suspected broken ankle.

Wenger backs Bendtner

AFP, West Bromwich

Arsene Wenger believes that Nicklas Bendtner is finally starting to prove his class after the striker inspired a 3-1 rout of West Bromwich Albion.

The Dane has been subjected to stinging criticism from sections of the Arsenal support this season thanks to some lacklustre performances, but the travelling fans at the Hawthorns here on Tuesday were bellowing his name by the end of an evening where he pulled Albion's dreadful defence to pieces.

Bendtner rattled in two first-half goals - one curled into the bottom corner and another crunched past Scott Carson from an acute angle - and was only denied the match-ball when his low shot struck the post in the second period.

That took his season's tally to 11 and Wenger believes the

Juve angry at Jose

AFP, Rome



Juventus reacted with fury on Tuesday after Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho implied the club received favourable treatment from referees.

Mourinho made the comments at a press conference which saw him allude to the controversy which ensued following the Serie A leaders' 3-3 draw with AS Roma - a match in which his men recovered to bag a point with the aid of a contested spotkick.

Mario Balotelli netted the penalty but Roma boss Luciano Spalletti was livid and accused Balotelli of diving.

Juventus coach Claudio Ranieri - like Mourinho a former Chelsea coach - saw fit to back Spalletti and that angered

the Inter coach, who promptly insinuated that Juve received preferential treatment from referees.

"While Ranieri says he is behind Spalletti, I am on the side of coaches who have dropped points against Juve - and also on the side of those who are going to meet Juve in the coming weeks," Mourino said ahead of Wednesday's Italian Cup semifinal meeting with Sampdoria.

Detecting what he termed an "organised attempt to manipulate public opinion" against his team Mourinho then proceeded to slate his team's rivals, prophesying that "Roma, with their great players, so many players that I'd like to have, will end the season with zero titles."

(AC Milan will finish the season with zero titles when the club has everything it needs to win - as will Juventus, who

have won a lot of points thanks to refereeing errors."

The temperamental Mourinho, accepting that there had been one occasion, in Siena, that Inter might have themselves benefited from a refereeing mistake, then turned on his heel and left the interview room.

Juve later issued a statement expressing the Turin club's "indignation", while calling on Inter "to disassociate itself publicly from such claims."

Juve accused Mourinho of a lack of respect - to Italian football as well as to the club.

Inter, who could only draw last week at home to Manchester United in the Champions League round of 16, currently lead the table by seven points from Juve with 12 games left.

Ronaldo set for comeback

AP, Sao Paulo

Ronaldo's much anticipated comeback could happen earlier than expected.

Ronaldo will be on the bench for Corinthians' Brazilian Cup match against Itumbiara on Wednesday, and his coach said the veteran striker was likely to enter the match some time in the second half.

"He is ready to play 45 minutes and my intention is to start him on the bench," Corinthians coach Mano Menezes said Tuesday. "It's possible he will play some minutes in the second half, depending on how we are doing in the game."

Ronaldo's debut had been scheduled for Sunday against Corinthians' archrival Palmeiras, but the striker's recent performances in practice led Menezes to move it up.

"He felt really good on the field," Menezes said. "We talked and I decided it was time to let him play."

The 32-year-old striker hasn't played in an official match since undergoing left knee surgery in February 2008 while playing for AC Milan.

Ronaldo was trying to come back from a serious knee surgery for the third time in his career. In 1999, he tore up his right knee with Inter Milan and needed surgery, and a year later he twisted the same knee and was sidelined for several months after another surgery.

The striker recovered, however, helping to lead Brazil to its fifth world title in 2002 in South Korea and Japan. He was the tournament's top scorer with eight goals in seven matches -- including two in the final against Germany.

Arshavin's fitness apprehension

SOCCERNET



Arsenal midfielder Andrei Arshavin admits he is struggling to complete a match for his new team and has been surprised by the physicality of the Premier League.

The Russian joined the Gunners in the January transfer window for a fee of around £15m, but has not played regular competitive football since the conclusion of the Russian league season at the end of November.

He has made two starts for Arsene Wenger's side, including a full 90 minutes against Fulham at the weekend, but claims he needs to improve his fitness before he can improve his form.

"Even before the end of the first half I felt as if I had spat my lungs out," said Arshavin. "It was a hard match for me. In the second half my legs simply refused to serve me."

"I am not physically strong enough yet to play the whole of the match. But I think with each coming game I play it will be easier in this sense."

Arshavin has shown glimpses of his talent since his arrival, but has been short of the sparkling form that saw him light up Euro 2008 with Russia; and the midfielder admits he is not yet fully in tune with his new teammates.

"We do not fully understand each other yet," he added. "I need to get used to the new kind of football and to my new team-mates before I begin playing my usual way." Arsenal manager Arsene

Wenger, meanwhile, has declared that he is not concerned with his player's subdued performances as he believes he will have a big impact on the side in the coming games.

The Frenchman said: "You can see his match fitness is not completely there yet. I believe physically it will take him another 10 days."

"I'm convinced he will soon have a tremendous influence on our game because he has a quick brain and is many steps ahead of the game."

"Even on Saturday he set up two great chances for Robin van Persie. They were two great passes and he had two great opportunities too. When you can have that kind of impact on a game, it is very positive."

Robinho blow for City

AFP, London



Manchester City's hopes of derailing Aston Villa's drive for Champions

League football have been hit by the loss of Brazilian star Robinho for Wednesday's Premier League match at Eastlands.

Robinho has failed to recover from a knee injury suffered in the defeat at West Ham on Sunday and joins Craig Bellamy on the sidelines, leaving manager Mark Hughes with a major headache in terms of attacking options.

The City boss could be forced to turn to Bulgarian forward Valeri Bojinov, whose appearance as a substitute at West Ham on Sunday was his first since he ruptured an Achilles tendon in August.

"We may well have to play Boj on Wednesday, although it is probably a bit too soon to expect him to play 90 minutes in the Premier League," Hughes admitted.

"I am pleased we got him on at West Ham because he has not had much Premier League experience."

"It was important that he

got a taste of it as soon as possible and we were able to do that, so that was a positive. It is still early in his comeback and we will have to see how he goes. He is a good option for us."

The 1-0 defeat at West Ham epitomised how poor City have been on the road this season but Hughes's squad's home record is bettered only by their crosstown rivals United.

Midfielder Stephen Ireland said the players were determined to be more consistent. "We know what we have to do to get back on track and we're going to set it right against Villa," he said.

"We missed out on a good opportunity to go seventh in the table and now we've big games coming up against top-sides."

"Hopefully we can get out of this cycle of losing away from home, but the big clubs tend to bring out the best in us."

Villa will be looking to consolidate their grip on fourth place in the table and Martin O'Neill's side will be able to give their all at Eastlands, knowing that a weekend off in the Dubai sunshine awaits them thanks to their early exit from the FA Cup.

Having squandered a two-goal lead against Stoke on Sunday, O'Neill's men also have to demonstrate that their nerve is not failing them as the season heads for a tense finale.

"We can give the Manchester City game everything, as we then have a 10-day break," said Villa's Norway striker, John Carew. "We need to get our momentum going again with a victory."

Villa travel north looking for an eighth consecutive away league win but they have now gone five matches without triumphing in the league, FA Cup and UEFA Cup over the last fortnight.

O'Neill could certainly do with Emile Heskey being fit for Wednesday evening but the England forward faces a late test of his troublesome Achilles.

If Heskey does not make it, Carew is likely to make his first league start since returning from a back problem last month.

Dutch defender Wilfred Bouma is not being considered despite playing his first match in eight months, for the reserves earlier this week. Bouma had been out with a dislocated ankle.

Fletcher's family attacker arrested

Football

AFP, Manchester

A man was arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of threatening at knife-point the fiancée of Darren Fletcher, the Manchester United midfielder, and burgling the footballer's house.

Hayley Grice was forced to take off her engagement ring while Fletcher's mother was also forced to hand over watches and jewellery in a raid that took place on February 23, just hours after the player had flown out with the United squad for a Champions League match in Milan.

Fletcher's young twins were also in the house in the upmarket village of Bowdon, south of Manchester.

A statement issued by

Greater Manchester Police on Tuesday said: "A man has been arrested in connection with a robbery at a house in Bowdon, Trafford."

"Shortly before 9pm (2100GMT) on Monday, February 23 2009, police were called to a house following a report of an armed robbery."

"Officers attended and found that robbers had threatened two women. Two young children, twins aged two, were also in the house."

"An engagement ring, jewellery and watches were stolen."

"Today (Tuesday) a 28-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of aggravated burglary and has been bailed until May 14 2009 pending further inquiries."

The Scotland midfielder is the latest in a long line of Premier League players who

have been burgled while away with their clubs, although police said the degree of intimidation involved in the latest attack was exceptional.

At least seven Liverpool players, including club captain Steven Gerrard, have had their homes broken into while they have been away with the club in recent years with thieves making off with expensive jewellery and watches, soccer memorabilia and medals, and, in some cases, sports cars.

And Fletcher is not the only Bowdon-based footballer whose property has come under attack. Robbers armed with a knife carried out a raid on the home of Blackburn Rovers striker Roque Santa Cruz while he was away for a match at Portsmouth in November.



Arsenal striker Nicklas Bendtner (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring his second goal against West Bromwich Albion during their Premiership clash at West Brom on Tuesday.