



Arsenal midfielder Andrey Arshavin (L) scores the opening goal against Blackburn Rovers during their Premier League encounter at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

Arshavin lifts Gunners

AFP, London



Andrey Arshavin repaid a hefty chunk of his transfer fee as the Russian inspired Arsenal to an impressive 4-0 win over Blackburn on Saturday.

Arshavin capped a dazzling individual display with two goals - his first since his high-profile 15 million-pound move from Zenit St Petersburg in the winter transfer window - to kill off Rovers at the Emirates Stadium.

Arshavin's clinical edge was sorely needed for Arsenal and two late goals from Emmanuel Eboué - a close-range finish and a cool penalty - gave the scoreline some deserved polish.

A convincing win lifted Arsenal - who have not lost in the league since the end of November - back into the top four for the first time in over two months.

The Gunners leapfrogged Aston Villa on goal difference, although Martin O'Neill's team can regain their advantage by avoiding defeat to Tottenham on Sunday.

Blackburn's concerns are rather more prosaic. Sam Allardyce's team are just one point clear of the bottom three and, while the Rovers manager

will not have harboured high hopes of storming the Emirates, this was an unusually meek performance from the Lancashire club.

Arsenal eased any early nerves with a goal after just two minutes. It was a scrappy strike, although the build-up was typically smooth.

Bendtner's through-ball to Theo Walcott was exquisitely judged for the winger to charge to the by-line and cut back to the near post. Arshavin duly met the cross first time and his effort deflected in via the spread eagle Andre Ooijer.

Blackburn were frustrated and their annoyance boiled over in the 21st minute when El Hadji Diouf was hugely fortunate not to be sent off for planting his studs into Manuel Almunia's ankle.

Arsenal's annoyance was compounded by their failure to extend their lead. Samir Nasri might have done just that, and more, in the space of 60 seconds towards the break but moments after his 25-yard freekick crashed against the crossbar, his snap-shot was palmed aside by Paul Robinson.

Rovers were glad to go in trailing by a single goal but half-time did nothing to relieve the siege.

The second period began with a flurry of home pressure,

with Walcott dragging wide of the left-hand post and then teeing up Bendtner with a flashing cross, only for the Dane to somehow slice wide.

Bendtner was having one of those days which stretches the patience of even his staunchest defender, and the home crowd were howling after he spurned three chances in as many minutes just past the hour.

He did little wrong with the first, flashing a header just past the post, but there was no excuse for his failure to convert set-ups from Alexandre Song and Denilson moments later, when he had just Robinson to beat.

Those missed opportunities could have cost Arsenal dear against more ambitious opponents; instead Arshavin sealed the points with aplomb in the 66th minute, cutting inside the hapless left-back Danny Simpson and waiting for Robinson to go to ground before lifting high into the net from a tight angle.

That, effectively, was that, although there was still time for Eboué, on as a late substitute, to enjoy himself.

The Ivory Coast midfielder prodded in from two yards after Robinson had saved Arshavin's drive and then converted from the spot after Carlos Vela was fouled by Martin Olsson.

'King Kazu' still scoring at 42

AFP, Tokyo

Timeless Japanese football star Kazuyoshi Miura, the 1993 Asian Player of the Year and known as "King Kazu" to his fans, has stretched his own record of the oldest scorer in J-League.

The midfielder scored from a penalty kick in the 12th minute in his club Yokohama FC's 2-1 defeat to Kumamoto in a J-League second division match at home on Saturday.

He was 42 years and 16 days.

"I only had to concentrate on kicking," he told reporters. "I didn't think about failing or any other unnecessary things. But it was really scary as the ball hit the goalkeeper's hand."

Miura, who started his professional career at a youth club in Brazil at 15 and returned to Japan in 1990, scored his first J-League goal in 1993.

Saturday's was his 151st goal in J-League, closing on Masashi Nakayama's record of 157 goals.

"I do remember my first goal. I was really feeling strongly about scoring a goal at that time," Miura said. "Now I have to do different things -- defending, crossing and dribbling. They are all as valuable as scoring a goal."

FINA approves changes to swimsuit

AFP, Paris

The International Swimming Federation (FINA) on Saturday approved a series of changes to the revolutionary swimsuits which led to 105 world records being set in 2008 over long-course and short-course distances.

The measures had already been agreed at a meeting in February but were firm up on Saturday at the end of a three-day meeting in Dubai.

In design, a swimsuit shall not cover the neck and shall not extend past the shoulders nor past the ankles while material shall have a maximum thickness of one millimetre.

All swimsuits must be constructed in an identical fashion with no variation or modification for individual swimmers from the samples submitted for approval.

"Any modification before use is prohibited," said a FINA statement which added that all swimsuits to be used during the period of application shall be submitted, even if previously approved.

The measures were introduced after claims that the new hi-tech suits provide unfair advantages and that technology was taking over from sheer individual talent.

"FINA wishes to recall that the main and core principle is that swimming is a sport essentially based on the physical performance of the athlete," added the statement.

"This is the fundament which FINA has and will continue to preserve as its main objective and priority.

"FINA brings together athletes from around the world to compete on equal conditions and thereby decides the winner by the athlete who is physically the best."

Rafa wants to test MU's nerve

AFP, Manchester



Rafael Benitez has challenged his Liverpool squad to test Manchester United's nerve by winning all nine of their remaining matches in the Premier League.

Despite Liverpool's stunning 4-1 win at Old Trafford on Saturday, United remain masters of their own destiny with a four-point lead and a game in hand providing a substantial margin for error over the next two months.

Benitez describes himself as "optimistic but realistic" about the chances of United's stumbling before the finishing line, but a nine-match winning streak down the final stretch certainly does not look beyond his side after what was an unforgettable week for Liverpool fans.

Four days after dishing out a 4-0 thrashing of Real Madrid, the Reds came from behind to complete their biggest win at United since 1936.

"We have played better this season but not against a team of United's quality," the Spaniard said. "To beat Real and United, two of the biggest teams in Europe, in the same week and score four goals against them is fantastic."

"But the best weeks in football are when you win titles. To win games is part of the battle but to win the war, that is the most important thing."

United's fixtures against Aston Villa, Manchester City and Arsenal are the ones which

Benitez will regard as most likely to result in United dropping points, although the fact that they are all at Old Trafford is in the champions' favour, as is the fact that Liverpool still have to entertain both Villa and Arsenal.

Benitez must also hope that his talismen, Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard, remain free of the injuries that have plagued them so far this season.

"Torres and Gerrard are key players for us," he said. "When they are on the pitch the rest of the team has more confidence, because they know either of them can change a game at any moment."

For United, the task of wiping out the memory of what their manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, described ruefully as "one of those days," begins on Saturday at Fulham, who were unable to live with the champions when the two sides met in the FA Cup earlier this month.

Ferguson insisted there was no need to panic. "It was a bad day in terms of the goals we lost but I couldn't argue with the quality of play that much," the Scot argued.

"One or two players were a little bit short in terms of what we expect of them but I do know the football was good, we kept driving on and they showed good energy, even though we only had two and a half days to prepare for the match."

"Now the thing is to respond. It always is at this club -- you lose a game and you respond. We always do."

LEAGUE ONE Bordeaux stay in the hunt

AFP, Paris

Goals from Marouane Chamakh and Carlos Henrique in Bordeaux's 2-1 win against Nice on Saturday enabled Laurent Blanc's men to keep their sights on European action next season.

They jumped from fifth to third, relegating Toulouse, who lost 3-2 at Monaco, down a place to fifth. Leaders Lyon host Auxerre and second-placed Paris Saint Germain meet arch rivals and fourth-placed Marseille at the Parc des Princes on Sunday.

Bordeaux went ahead in the 19th minute when, following a corner, the ball went to Yoann Gourcuff whose powerful initial shot set up Chamakh to score.

The joy at the Chaban-Delmas stadium was short-lived however as Bordeaux keeper Ulrich Rame committed a foul in the box and the subsequent penalty was scored by Habib Bamogo just five minutes later.

Three minutes after the break, Bordeaux got the winner thanks to a near-post header by Henrique following a Wendel cross.

Toulouse coach Alain Casanova was in despondent mood after their defeat to Monaco.

"It was a pity to lose this match. We were never really in danger in open play and then conceded three goals from freekicks," Casanova said.

"We are defending very badly in these situations. This defeat means we will have to re-evaluate things and get back to work. We should have calmly defended our lead in

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Klose's season in doubt

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich could be without striker Miroslav Klose for the rest of the season after he suffered a possible broken ankle in the 3-0 win at Bochum.

The Germany international limped from the field in agony in the 31st minute after "getting his foot caught in a hole", according to a notice on the Bavarian club's website.

"Something is kaput," said Klose.

He will undergo tests in Munich today to discover the extent of the injury, although it is not looking promising.

"We hope that it is not so bad because we don't have much cover at the moment, but that is the way things are and we will have to cope with it," said coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

Klinsmann is already without his other first-choice striker Luca Toni due to injury while number three forward Lukas Podolski is struggling with his form and missed a penalty.

Landon Donovan's loan spell from the Los Angeles Galaxy ended last weekend.

Youth team player Thomas Muller was again on the bench at the Ruhr Stadium and, after scoring on his debut in the Champions League midweek he may be thrown into the

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Juve bounce back

AFP, Rome



Juventus showed no hangover from their midweek Champions League exit as they closed the gap on leaders Inter Milan to four points with a 4-1 home win over Bologna on Saturday.

Claudio Ranieri's team were knocked out of Europe after drawing 2-2 at home to Chelsea on Tuesday, seeing them beaten 3-2 on aggregate.

But goals from Hasan Salihamidzic, Sebastian Giovinco and an Alessandro Del Piero brace saw them come back from a goal down at half-time.

Ranieri said his team had not been their normal selves in the first period.

"We were too passive in the first half and didn't get into our rhythm," he said. "But in the second half we started to accelerate."

The coach added that the

players need to stand up and be counted if the club is to regain its past glories both at home and abroad.

"We're reconstructing Juventus and we need to know who wants to take on this responsibility because the coach and the club cannot do it on their own."

Despite Juve closing the gap at the top, Inter can re-establish a seven-point advantage on Sunday when they entertain Fiorentina.

Juventus took some time to get into their stride and it was Bologna who took the lead following some clever play on 24 minutes.

Marco Di Vaio cut in from the left and ran across the box, drawing two defenders before slipping the ball into the path of Massimo Mutarelli, whose angled run between two defenders saw him close in on goal before sliding the ball under goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Juventus took their time to react but on 37 minutes

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Juventus forward Alessandro Del Piero (R) is ecstatic after scoring against Bologna during their Serie A tie at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Saturday.

Real crush Bilbao

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid bounced back from their Champions League heartbreak by crushing 10-man Athletic Bilbao 5-2 on Saturday to cut Barcelona's lead at the top in Spain to just three points.

Real saw their Champions League dreams go up in smoke on Tuesday at Anfield as Liverpool overran them in a humiliating 4-0 win and they let out their frustration at San Mames.

Arjen Robben put Real ahead before Argentine centre-back Gabriel Heinze added another heading in a 34th minute freekick.

Heinze scored an own goal minutes later and Fernando Llorente levelled despite Bilbao being reduced to 10 men with Francisco Yeste harshly sent off for pushing goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

"It was a tough game but we are on Barcelona's heels now and we just have to see what they do against Almeria," explained Casillas.

"It was a good response (to the Liverpool defeat) at a very difficult ground to play at."

Huntelaar then took centre stage with a second half brace before substitute Gonzalo Higuain completed the scoring from the penalty spot.

Casillas was hoping for a quieter evening after being overworked against Liverpool and was called into action early on to punch away a Yeste freekick.

Real looked fragile in defence but Robben shot them into a 22nd minute lead showing a terrific burst of speed to get behind the Bilbao defence before smashing

home off the underside of the crossbar.

Heinze headed Real 2-0 up after 33 minutes and celebrated wildly. However, his joy was short-lived as he scored an own goal three minutes later as he tried to intercept a cross.

It summed up an eventful week for the former Manchester United man who conceded a dubious handball penalty in the Liverpool game.

Moments later, Yeste was red-carded for pushing over Casillas who made the most of the shove.

Bilbao were furious about the decision believing a yellow was punishment enough and Casillas was jeered throughout the match.

Lorente equalised close to half-time for Bilbao with Casillas at fault for not keeping out his header.

Huntelaar then showed why Real paid Ajax 20 million euros for his services with two

clinical finishes - especially his first which was a clever chip on the run - to keep Real on Barcelona's heels.

Earlier, a superb individual goal from substitute Pablo Hernandez saved 10-man Valencia from defeat against Recreativo Huelva although the 1-1 draw does little to aid their Champions League push.

Cash-strapped Valencia, who have collected just seven points from the last 30, are now five points behind fourth-placed Villarreal who have played one game less.

Valencia fell behind to a Javier Camunas goal in the 54th minute and then had centre-back Carlos Marchena sent off for two bookable offences.

However, Hernandez netted an 82nd minute equaliser with a delightful chip to salvage a point at the Mestalla Stadium.



Real Madrid striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (R) shoots to score one of his two goals against Athletic Bilbao during their Primera Liga clash at the San Mames Stadium in Bilbao on Saturday.

Hertha remain atop

AFP, Berlin



Hot-shot striker Andrei Voronin scored his eighth goal in six games to keep Hertha Berlin

four points clear at the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday with a 1-0 win over Bayer Leverkusen.

The 29-year-old is on loan from Premier League side Liverpool, but Hertha will be in no hurry to give the Ukrainian back after he followed up last week's hat-trick against Energie Cottbus with the goal which claimed three points.

His goal after 50 minutes contained some good fortune after Leverkusen's Germany goalkeeper Rene Adler went to kick the ball away, but the ball rebounded off Voronin's chest into the net to claim his 11th goal in 20 games.

Hertha's recent run has

boosted attendance at Berlin's Olympic Stadium and a crowd of 58,753 saw the win over Leverkusen.

"We are very pleased with the 1-0 against Leverkusen - they are one of the best teams in Germany," said Hertha coach Lucien Favre.

"They were better than us in the first half, we tried more after the break, but it was still very tight at the end."

After their Champions League heroics in midweek, when they sealed a 12-1 aggregate win over Sporting Lisbon, Bayern Munich are second as they had few problems beating ten-man Bochum 3-0 away from home.

After an excellent first-half strike by Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto after 34 minutes, things got worse for Bochum when French defender Marc Pfertzel was shown a straight red card for hauling down Bayern's Argentina striker Jose Ernesto Sosa when he was clean through on goal.

Lukas Podolski missed the resulting penalty on 48 minutes.

But Bayern extended their lead through a top-class goal from Germany defender Philipp Lahm on 60 minutes after some good work from midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger and then Martin Demichelis scored the third on 90 minutes.

Hoffenheim have now gone six games without a win after they were held to a 1-1 draw at midtable Eintracht Frankfurt.

An early goal by Brazilian Carlos Eduardo after ten minutes was cancelled out by a header from Frankfurt's Michael Fink to leave Hoffenheim fourth but now six points off leaders Hertha.

There was a battle royal at Hanover as the home side drew 4-4 with Borussia Dortmund while Borussia Moechengladbach picked up their third win in four games to ease their relegation worries with a 4-2 win at Cologne.

And Karlsruhe are now three points off the pace at the foot of the table after they were beaten 1-0 at home by Arminia Bielefeld.