



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) takes the ball past the flailing dive of Arsenal goalkeeper Lukas Fabianski to score the winner in their FA Cup semifinal at Wembley on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Grafite Wolves on

AFP, Berlin



Brazil striker Grafite kept up his phenomenal scoring record with two goals on Saturday as Bundesliga leaders Wolfsburg stayed three points clear at the top with a 2-1 win over Bayer Leverkusen.

Grafite has now scored 22 league goals in 19 games this season to top the goal-scoring table and keep his side on course for their first Bundesliga title as Wolfsburg coach Felix Magath looks to usurp defending champions Bayern Munich.

Magath was sacked by Bayern in February 2007, but he has forged Wolfsburg into a strong unit who remain unbeaten at home this season.

And his side showed their class with Grafite's late winner when he slotted home the winner with 85 minutes gone.

Their tenth consecutive league win means Wolfsburg have equalled the record for

most wins in a row a single season set by Moenchengladbach in 1987.

"We were lucky to only concede one goal, because Leverkusen started both the first and second half very strongly," said Magath.

"The team showed they are willing to fight, but they are not used to being table leaders.

"We had to work hard for our win last week, here again against Leverkusen and it will probably be the same next week too."

The hosts had opened the scoring when Grafite was brought down by Bayer's Manuel Friedrich, but the Brazilian picked himself off the turf to drill his spot kick past Germany goalkeeper Rene Adler on 23 minutes.

Leverkusen drew level when former Bayern star Toni Kroos slotted home his shot on 54 minutes as the 19-year-old scored his first goal for his club since his January loan move from Munich.

But Grafite had the final word when he broke clear late in the game and showed his usual composure to keep his

side clear of the chasing pack.

Bayern Munich remain three points behind in second after Italy's Luca Toni scored the winning goal for the defending champions to seal a 1-0 victory at Arminia Bielefeld.

Having been dumped out of the Champions League by Barcelona last week, Bayern are back in the hunt for some silverware as the defending champions picked up three much-needed points to take the pressure off coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"We are very content to travel home with three points," said Klinsmann with six games left this season.

"This was very important to keep in touch with Wolfsburg. There are another 18 points up for grabs and we want to get as many as possible to pass them sooner or later."

Bayern were heading for a draw until Franck Ribery swung in a corner and Toni rose above the home defence to drill home his header in the 64th minute.

Germany striker Mario

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A Red Bull 1-2

INTERNET, undated



Germany's Sebastian Vettel clinched a rain-soaked Chinese Formula One Grand Prix in commanding fashion ahead of teammate Mark Webber in a Red Bull one-two in Shanghai on Sunday.

Overall leader Jenson Button, who had won the first two races of the season, had to make do with third place, with Brawn GP team-mate Rubens Barrichello fourth.

It was the second Grand Prix victory for 21-year-old Vettel who last season became the youngest race winner in F1 history when he won the Italian GP in Monza in a Toro Rosso.

Neither of the Red Bull cars are designed with the controversial double-diffuser but Vettel and Webber coped best in the treacherous conditions on the Shanghai International Circuit to give the team its first Grand Prix victory.

Button continues to lead the overall standings on 21 points, ahead of Barrichello on 15.

Vettel, seeking his first points of the season, put in a faultless performance, to win by almost 11 seconds over Webber, with Button almost 45 seconds back.

Vettel led from pole position in a safety-car start in the rain, with cars taken round the circuit for eight laps before racing began.

With drivers struggling to keep their cars on the track, the safety car was out again after 18 laps when Robert Kubica in a BMW Sauber ran heavily into the back of Toyota driver Jarno Trulli.

Vettel was fortunate to survive with his car unharmed when Sebastian Buemi in a Toro Rosso clipped his rear during the safety car phase.

But the German was one of the few in the field not to spin off, and after he squeezed past Button with 15 laps remaining - with the Brawn GP man refuelling two laps later - the race was his to win.

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DROGBA NEUTRALIZES GUNNERS Chelsea in final

AFP, London



Guus Hiddink enhanced his reputation as the Midas man of management by leading Chelsea to the FA Cup final after a nervy 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Saturday.

The Dutchman, appointed on an interim basis at Stamford Bridge following Luiz Felipe Scolari's sacking in February, will now stay in west London until at least 30 May thanks to Didier Drogba's late goal which decided a hard-fought semifinal at Wembley.

Hiddink has injected belief and resolve into a side which was sliding towards mediocrity on his arrival, and it displayed those two qualities in abundance here.

Chelsea fought back superbly from Theo Walcott's early goal, with Florent Malouda levelling before half-time and Drogba capitalising on defensive uncertainty to net an 84th-minute winner.

That comeback ensured a miserable first visit to Wembley for Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. The Frenchman saw his worst fears about the English national stadium's pitch realised - it cut up badly from the first whistle - but of more concern will be the impact this defeat has on a side which had been flooded with confidence following progress to the Champions League semifinals and a long unbeaten league run.

His defence, too, will give him cause for sleepless nights. Already stripped bare by injuries to five players, Wenger was spared another reshuffle after Kieran Gibbs passed a fitness test on a groin problem. That allowed Mikael Silvestre to stay at centre-back, although in the event it was of dubious consolation, as the Frenchman endured a torrid afternoon.

Arsenal gave an early indication of their uncertainty in the fourth minute when goalkeeper Lukas Fabianski dismally failed to reach John Terry's upfield punt and Drogba's header towards the unguarded net was hacked off the line by Gibbs.

No wonder Wenger had suggested that attack

would be Arsenal's best form of defence, and they confirmed as much by taking the lead with their first concerted forward foray.

After Emmanuel Adebayor had set Gibbs clear down the left flank, the defender chipped to the back post. Walcott's first-time, side-footed shot lacked power, but it still beat the wrong-footed Petr Cech, after flicking off Ashley Cole's hand.

Yet Arsenal remained vulnerable. Malouda exposed both Eboue and Fabianski's lack of authority by whipping a cross-shot fractionally wide, but he was not to be denied 11 minutes later.

After being picked out by Frank Lampard's pass, the French winger cut inside Eboue and drilled in a low, right-footed shot at the near post, posing more questions of Fabianski.

Suddenly, it was Chelsea who had the game by the throat. Moments later, more shoddy defending from Denilson and then Diaby allowed Anelka to snaffle possession and clump the post with a curling shot.

Arsenal were ruffled, but the interval seemed to restore their composure. They began to press higher up the pitch, with Walcott the main beneficiary. He was twice set clear down the right but his fizzed crosses just evaded the onrushing Persie and Diaby.

Not that Arsenal had it all their own way. Chelsea played some neat football of their own and almost forged ahead when Lampard's one-two with Drogba ended with the midfielder volleying wide.

As the seconds ticked away, so the tension increased. Chelsea were livid in the 69th minute when Silvestre appeared to handle in the area during a tussle with Drogba, only for referee Martin Atkinson to wave play on, while the striker then wasted a glorious chance by running the ball off the field after he wriggled free of Eboue.

It always looked likely that a mistake would settle matters, and it duly arrived with six minutes to play. There seemed little danger when Lampard chipped a ball over Arsenal's back four, but Drogba showed strength to shrug off Silvestre's challenge, speed to reach the ball just ahead of Fabianski and ice-cool composure to round the goalkeeper and slot into the corner.

Real keep up chase

AFP, Madrid



Double champions Real Madrid kept up the pressure on Barcelona in the Spanish title race defeating Recreativo Huelva 1-0

on Saturday to stay six points behind their archrivals.

Brazilian Marcelo scored three minutes into the second half to sink Recre as Real made it 15 wins from 17 league matches under coach Juande Ramos.

"We are still hanging in there and keep fighting for every three points," said Marcelo.

"We just have to hope Barca drop some points. I think Sevilla could do us a favour this week (the two sides meet on Wednesday) and get at least a draw at Barcelona."

The problem for Real is Barcelona are also winning week-in, week-out and triumphed 1-0 at Getafe on Saturday thanks to Lionel Messi's 20th goal of the season.

Argentine Messi netted on 19 minutes to seal Barcelona's first win at bogey side Getafe since 2005 and the victory means Pep Guardiola's side have now defeated every team in the top-flight this season.

"It is another important win and each one gives us more confidence," said Guardiola. "We have to pick up some silverware this season

and we are working on that.

"The players know what they want to achieve and the way they are approaching things shows they want to win trophies."

Real lost 2-0 at Barcelona in mid-December to fall 12 points behind, but have dropped just two points in 2009 to close that gap to six and the two sides meet at the beginning of May in 'El Clasico' at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Real almost scored in the ninth minute with Arjen Robben showing a great turn of pace to race past several backpedalling Recre players but goalkeeper Asier Riesgo was on hand to stop his shot.

Robben and Riesgo had a personal battle throughout the match with the keeper denying the Dutch international a hat-trick with three point-blank saves.

Raul hit the post in the first half but it was the unlikely figure of Marcelo who found the net racing onto Fernando Gago's diagonal ball before slotting home just after half-time.

Real now face Getafe, four points from safety, on Wednesday while Barcelona host Sevilla.

Barcelona had lost their last two visits to the Coliseum, including a painful 4-0 thrashing in the 2007 Kings Cup semifinal, but Messi's goal, coupled with a sixth consecutive clean sheet for Victor Valdes, who notched up his 300th club appearance, brought that sequence to an end.

After just five minutes Thierry Henry should have put Barcelona in front but Serbian goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic produced a brilliant save to deny him.

Barcelona were on top and the goal arrived in the 19th minute with Messi showing great control to gather a Xavi pass and then kept his cool in the area jinking around two defenders before firing home.

Getafe know all about Messi as they were on the receiving end of his wonder goal in the Kings Cup semifinal when he dribbled from the half way line, dancing around four defenders before rounding the goalkeeper to score a brilliant solo goal.

Stojkovic, on loan from Sporting Lisbon, had an inspired game to keep his side in the match against a rampant Barca.

"It felt like they had more players," admitted Getafe coach Victor Munoz.

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid climbed above Valencia into fourth with Argentine Ever Banega, who is actually on loan from Valencia, on target in a 3-0 win over lowly Numancia.

Valencia, level on points with Atletico, host third-placed Sevilla on Sunday in the stand-out fixture of the weekend.

Villarreal, a point behind both sides, travel to Valladolid aiming to get back to winning ways after losing three out of their last four league matches and exiting the Champions League to Arsenal in mid-week.

Boro look doomed

AFP, London

On the day that Wolves clinched their return to the Premier League, Middlesbrough were left looking doomed to relegation after they failed to beat Fulham at the Riverside.

A goalless draw left Gareth Southgate's second-from-bottom side four points adrift of safety with five games left to play, the first two of which are against Arsenal and Manchester United.

Middlesbrough's woes were compounded by the fact that fellow strugglers Sunderland, Stoke and Portsmouth all claimed precious 1-0 victories which leave them close to securing their top flight status for another season.

It was however another frustrating afternoon for Aston Villa, whose dream of securing a place in next season's Champions League now appears to have died after they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to West Ham.

Emile Heskey's close-range conversion of a James Milner cross after 11 minutes gave Martin O'Neill's side a half-time lead.

But a late header by Diego Tristan earned the visitors a point and left Villa seven points adrift of Arsenal, the side occupying the last Champions League qualifying spot.

Nwankwo Kanu was Portsmouth's hero as the south coast club moved to the brink of securing their top flight status with a 1-0 win over Bolton.

A grimly combative encounter had appeared destined to end in a stalemate before the veteran Nigerian playmaker glanced in a 78th-minute corner to leave Pompey one win away from

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Juventus defender Zdenek Grygera (C) jubilates after heading in an injury time equaliser in their top of the table clash against Inter Milan at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Juve's late salvo

AFP, Turin



Czech full-back Zdenek Grygera scored a dramatic injury-time equaliser to earn 10-man Juventus a 1-1 draw at home to leaders Inter Milan at Turin's Stadio Olimpico on Saturday.

The draw did nothing to help second-placed Juve's slim titles hopes as Inter maintained their 10-point lead with just six matches remaining now.

Teenage striker Mario Balotelli gave Inter the lead on 64 minutes but despite Thiago's sending off, Grygera headed home a last-gasp corner to restore battling Juve's pride.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho claimed the result proved his team are the best in Italy.

"I like to play in the sta-

dium of an historic team, getting a draw and seeing the joy in my players who will go home with a 10-point lead," he told Sky Sport.

"Today we showed why we're top of the league, because we are the best, the strongest."

"Mathematically it's not yet over so we won't claim the title. Juve's joy at the final whistle showed how highly we are thought of."

Juve coach Claudio Ranieri virtually conceded the scudetto.

"We need to win as many points as possible and we'll see where we are at the end," he said. "We want to finish the season in second place."

"I'm satisfied to have drawn the match in this way, scoring at the end with a man down."

Balotelli could have put the leaders ahead on 10 minutes but after turning Juve's centre-

backs inside out and capitalising on Nicola Legrottaglie's slip, his shot squirmed under Gianluigi Buffon only for Thiago to race back to make a last ditched clearance off the line.

However, that was as good as it got until just before the half hour mark when Juve's Pavel Nedved slipped a pass to Vincenzo Iaquinta, only for Walter Samuel to race across and put in a vital block to deflect the ball behind for a corner.

Juventus suddenly stepped up a gear and on 31 minutes Alessandro Del Piero's free-kick fell to the unmarked Grygera at the back post but from eight yards out he skied the ball into the upper tiers of the stadium.

Moments later Marco Marchionni got through but Inter goalkeeper Julio Cesar came rushing out and blocked

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Hiddink hails Drogba

AFP, London

Guus Hiddink hailed Didier Drogba as one of the best strikers in the world after the Ivory Coast forward fired Chelsea into the FA Cup final at the expense of Arsenal on Saturday.

Drogba has been revitalised since Hiddink took over at Chelsea in February and it was his winner that sent the west London club to the final after Florent Malouda had cancelled out Theo Walcott's opener for Arsenal.

"He is so dangerous and very strong," Hiddink said. "He was giving the Arsenal defenders so many problems I think it was only a matter of time before we got the second goal."

Hiddink said the match had been turned around because his side had started to press Arsenal far higher up the pitch than they did at the outset.

"We were very sloppy at the beginning but in the end I think we deserved to win. We were dominant in the second half."

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger admitted his side had paid the price for their own demise.

"It is disappointing to lose the way we did because we have given away two cheap goals, and at that level you cannot afford that," the Frenchman said.

Wenger also reiterated his pre-match criticism of the state of the Wembley pitch, although he stopped short of blaming the surface for the defeat.

"It was also a problem for Chelsea who are also a technical team," he said. "If you want people to pay good money to watch football you have to give them good pitches."

Chelsea will face either Manchester United or Everton, who meet on Sunday, in the final.



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi (L) evades the tackle of Getafe's Eugene Polanski to score in their Primera Liga match at the Alfonso Perez stadium in Madrid on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP