

Howard halts MU

All Blues final in Wembley

AFP, London



Everton will face Chelsea in the FA Cup final after David Moyes' side secured a 4-2 penalty shoot-out victory over Manchester United following a goalless draw at Wembley on Sunday.

Tim Howard, Everton's former United keeper, was the hero as he saved from Dimitar Berbatov and Rio Ferdinand, allowing defender Phil Jagielka to strike the decisive spot-kick.

That took Everton to their first final since 1995 and ended United's hopes of completing a clean sweep of honours.

"It was a tough game for us," Moyes said. "If they put out their under-14s it would have been a tough game - they are going after every trophy."

"For everyone at Everton it is fantastic. If they keep doing what they are doing now, success will not be too far away."

It was the first time Sir Alex Ferguson had experienced defeat at this stage of the competition, but the United manager was furious his side had been denied a second half penalty appeal when Jagielka clipped Danny Welbeck.

After winning the League Cup and Club World Cup already this season, United now have to focus on retaining the Premier League and Champions League trophies they won last year.

Ferguson had sprung a major surprise by fielding a side packed with youngsters and fringe players in advance of Wednesday's league clash with Portsmouth.

Wayne Rooney, Cristiano Ronaldo and Ryan Giggs were among those missing, and without their big names United looked a shadow of their usual selves.

Carlos Tevez accepted the responsibility of co-ordinating his inexperienced teenage strike-partners Federico Macheda and Welbeck and orchestrated a series of neat passing moves around the edge of the Everton area.

But without Rooney and Ronaldo, United were desperately short of a cutting edge and Everton keeper Tim Howard remained largely untroubled during the opening 45 minutes.

Juve abhor racist chants

AFP, Rome



Juventus have apologised over the racist chanting directed at Inter Milan's teenage striker Mario Balotelli during the pair's clash at Turin's Stadio Olimpico on Saturday.

Balotelli, an Italian under-21 international, was born to Ghanaian immigrant parents but was brought up by an Italian family, whose surname he goes by - his real parents' surname is Barwuah.

The striker is an at times controversial figure who angered home fans in Turin throughout the game, particularly for his role in the sending off of Juve midfielder Thiago.

Balotelli was playing keep ball on the touchline with Muntari Sulley, a Ghana midfielder, when Thiago let his frustrations get the better of him and kicked both of them, earning a straight red card.

Balotelli, who fell down from Thiago's fairly innocuous kick, earned the wrath of a small section of the home fans.

But Juventus president Giovanni Cobolli Gigli condemned the chants.

"On behalf of Juventus and the great majority of our fans I want to strongly condemn the racist chanting against Inter Milan's Mario Balotelli," he said in a statement on Monday.

"There are no excuses or justification for this type of behaviour. Football fans can get hot up but episodes such as this are inexcusable."

"Together we must all try to promote a sporting culture that puts respect for the adversary at its core and fights against racism."

In fact United came closest to scoring when Howard was wrong-footed when teammate Joleon Lescott deflected Park Ji-Sung's right-wing cross and both defender and keeper were relieved to see the ball drift narrowly wide of the near post.

Whether Everton were boosted or insulted by the sight of the United team-sheet, they initially showed few signs of being able to exploit their weakened opponents.

Despite boasting an overwhelming advantage in terms of first-team experience, it was David Moyes' side who looked inhibited in the big stage, although a line-up that left lone striker Louis Saha painfully short of support did nothing to encourage their ambition.

Marouane Fellaini attempted to get close to Saha but the Belgian's aerial threat was nullified by Nemanja Vidic and Everton's only half chance of the first half came when United keeper Ben Foster scuffed a clearance.

It was clear Everton needed to inject more purpose and self-belief into their attacking movements.

And that is exactly what they did after the restart when they pressed United onto the back-foot and finally brought a meaningful save from Foster when Tim Cahill let fly from 30 yards in the 54th minute.

But instead of building on that momentum, Moyes' side again found themselves overrun as United took charge with Park and Darren Gibson both coming close with well-worked shots.

There best opening, though, was denied by referee Mike Riley who adjudged there had been no infringement when Jagielka appeared to trip Welbeck after the United striker had latched onto a loose ball and rounded Howard.

United were adamant it should have been a penalty - and Ferguson remonstrated angrily from the touch-line. It's likely he would have been even more furious had he known his side would struggle to make another chance of note before the tie drifted into extra-time.

Penalties always looked the most likely outcome once the extra half hour had been signalled, although Everton substitute James Vaughan wasted a good opening when he directed a shot straight at Vidic.



Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard saves a penalty from Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov (not in picture) during the shootout of the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley on Sunday. Howard saved two penalties as Everton defeated United 4-2 in the tie-breaker after the match ended goalless.

PHOTO: AFP

Totti shoots into all-time top 10 list

AFP, Rome

AS Roma captain Francesco Totti scored a brace in the club's 3-2 home success over Lecce on Sunday to move into the top 10 list of all-time Serie A goalscorers.

His two goals took the 32-year-old's tally to 175 in the top flight since making his debut for Roma in 1994.

In reaching the top 10, having scored his ninth and 10th league goals this season, Totti replaced former Roma forward Amadeo Amedei (174 goals), who died during the 1940s and is now 87 years old.

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TOP 10 SERIE A GOALSCORERS:

1. Silvio Piola 274
2. Gunnar Nordahl (SWE) 225
3. Giuseppe Meazza 216
4. Jose Altafini 216
5. Roberto Baggio 205
6. Kurt Hamrin (SWE) 190
7. Beppe Signori 188
8. Gabriel Batista (ARG) 184
9. Giampiero Boniperti 178
10. Francesco Totti 175

Pippo still having fun

AFP, Rome

He may be 35 but Filippo Inzaghi has become an increasingly important element in the AC Milan team this season.

The penalty-box predator scored his second hat-trick within two months on Sunday in Milan's 5-1 hammering of Torino to take his tally to nine goals in his last six matches.

He more than anyone else has made the difference in Milan's recent resurgence that has seen them join Juventus in joint second place in Serie A.

But when the season began, Inzaghi looked likely to play no more than a bit part with the likes of Ronaldinho, Andrei Shevchenko, Pato, Kaka and Marco Borriello also competing for forward positions.

In fact, before the turn of the year, most of his starts came in the UEFA Cup, where coach Carlo Ancelotti rotated his squad to give fringe players a game.

But now the veteran revealed he is loving his new lease of life.

"I'm still having fun, especially when I read in the papers that Milan don't have a big strong forward who can score with his head. That motivates me," he said.

Two of Inzaghi's goals against Torino came from close range headers while a third header -- all from David Beckham crosses -- also found the net but was ruled out for offside.

The goals took Inzaghi's Serie A count to 149, putting him second amongst active forwards behind AS Roma's Francesco Totti and Alessandro Del Piero of Juventus.

And his run in the first team -- he has started Milan's last seven matches out of only 10 league starts this season -- looks set to continue.

"Right now he's a vital player for us," said Ancelotti.

Reds' vital Gunners clash

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool head into their vital Premier League clash with Arsenal well-rested but knowing that only a victory will do on Tuesday as they look to maintain the pressure on Manchester United.

The build-up to the game will once again be dominated by the continued bickering between Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez and United's Sir Alex Ferguson.

Their row, which first became public when Benitez publicly criticised his counter-part back in January, escalated once again last week with Ferguson branding the Liverpool manager "arrogant".

But the sparing will be given a new context by the midweek matches that could see the title race take another twist.

Liverpool host Arsene Wenger's side on Tuesday with the opportunity to move two points above the leaders, who will still have two games in hand.

Ferguson's team will then go into Wednesday evening's match with Portsmouth at Old Trafford with their title credentials once again under scrutiny.

If Liverpool lose, United have the chance to move five points clear and will still have a game in hand.

With Liverpool having just six matches left, Benitez accepts his team can simply not afford any more slip-ups.

He will once again be without Steven Gerrard, who is still struggling with a groin problem that has kept him out of Liverpool's past two matches.

Although that absence will be a blow, Benitez is pleased that squad players are hitting form at the right time to boost the Reds' run-in.

In particular, he feels that defenders Daniel Agger and Emilio Insua can make a significant contribution to the run-in.

Benitez said: "Insua is improving and the competition for the left back position is very high with Fabio Aurelio and Andrea Dossena."

"Insua is doing well and the team is doing well. Hopefully we can see Emilio fighting for his position until the end of the season with Fabio and Andrea Dossena."

"Daniel is a centre back who can bring the ball forward and score goals, not just from set pieces. He is doing well and he is working very hard."

Arsenal are still getting over their 2-1 FA Cup semifinal defeat to London rivals

Chelsea on Saturday.

They also have a Champions League tie with Manchester United next week to concern them but Robin van Persie is doubtful for the game at Anfield due to a groin problem picked up at the weekend.

The Gunners sit fourth in the table and are seven points above fifth-placed Aston Villa and six points adrift of third-placed Chelsea.

But both Kolo Toure and Theo Walcott are relieved to be heading to Anfield so soon after their disappointment at Wembley.

England winger Walcott said: "Everyone is down, but we have to forget about this, because we have got a very big game on Tuesday against Liverpool."

"We dominated the first 30 minutes, but then Chelsea came back and took over the midfield a bit. Frank Lampard was the man of the match, and his experience showed."

"They have got a lot of experienced players and they showed that they have some world-class players in the team."

"We will learn from it and bounce back, because that is all we can do. It is another great experience for us all, but we have got to move on."

"It is a busy month for us and we are looking forward to it."

Barcelona up for it

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona travel to Barcelonona on the back of a 3-1 defeat to Valencia who are five points behind Sevilla as they start to cling to third place.

Barcelona thrashed Sevilla 3-0 on their own turf so the Andalucians will be out for revenge but must do without first choice goalkeeper Andres Palop through suspension.

"Third place isn't secure and we need to fight hard to keep it as there are lots of teams that want to be where we are," said manager Manolo Jimenez.

Real host Getafe on Tuesday in a Madrid derby that the champions have found difficult in the past.

Getafe beat Real 3-1 at the Coliseum this season to put one of the final nails in Bernd Schuster's coffin and also won 1-0 at the Bernabeu last season when they scored on the counter attack as Real players were celebrating a disallowed goal.

"Everyone would swap shoes with us because fighting for trophies is just fantastic."

The champions have won 15 out of 17 league games under Juanma Ramos and French midfielder Diarra saluted the achievements of the ex-Sevilla coach.

"We are focussed on winning every match to try and

win the league," said Diarra.

Real have lost Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder for around a month with a torn hamstring that will keep him out of 'El Clasico' against Barcelona at the beginning of May.

Elsewhere Valencia go to Real Betis on Wednesday looking to put the pressure on their Champions League rivals who are all in action on Thursday.

Villarreal lie three points above Atletico Madrid and Villarreal with the Champions League battle set to go down to

FIXTURES

Tuesday (1900GMT)

Real Madrid v Getafe, Numancia v Athletic Bilbao

Wednesday (all 1800 GMT unless stated)

Osasuna v Malaga, Deportivo La Coruna v Almeria, Real Betis v Valencia, Barcelona v Sevilla 2000 GMT

Thursday

Villarreal v Recreativo Huelva 1800 GMT, Sporting Gijon v Espanyol 1800 GMT, Real Mallorca v Valladolid 2000 GMT, Racing Santander v Atletico Madrid 2000 GMT

Rothen (55) and Guillaume Hoarau (90) sewing up the win.

That was Hoarau's 17th goal of the season and it came against his former team-mates.

On Saturday, Nantes gave their hopes of staying off relegation a major shot in the arm with a 2-0 home win over mid-table Nice.

Nantes moved two points clear of the drop zone after first Cameroonian international Christian Bekamenga and then French-born Malian Mamadou Bagayoko earned the club a vital win.

Saint Etienne also did their prospects of staying in the top tier no harm at all with a 2-1 win over fifth-placed Lille.

Marseille extend lead

AFP, Paris



Marseille claimed what could end up being a priceless come-from-behind 2-1 win at Lorient on Sunday to extend their advantage at the top of the French league.

Kevin Gameiro put Lorient into an eighth-minute lead but Argentine defender Renato Civelli pulled Marseille level on the hour mark with Brazilian striker Lorik Cana grabbing the 80th-minute winner.

Lyon were undone by one of their former players, defensive midfielder Alou Diarra, who knocked in at close range in the 43rd minute.

The defeat, Lyon's first at Bordeaux since 1999, pushed the seven-time titleholders

back to third, four points adrift of Marseille, with Bordeaux moving ahead of them with 62 points with six games remaining.

This is the first time Bordeaux have overtaken Lyon this term and the result makes Laurent Blanc's side legitimate contenders for the 2008-2009 title after a worthy win.

Paris Saint Germain, like Marseille knocked out of the UEFA Cup in midweek, saw off bottom club Le Havre 3-0 to remain in fourth spot, one points shy of Lyon.