



PHOTO: INTERNET

COUNT MY FINGERS: Arsenal midfielder Andrei Arshavin celebrates after scoring his fourth goal against Liverpool during their Premiership encounter at Anfield on Tuesday.

Benayoun not giving up

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool midfielder Yossi Benayoun is refusing to throw in the towel in the club's title battle with Manchester United, despite their failure to overcome Arsenal.

A 4-4 thriller at Anfield on Tuesday evening delighted neutrals but was bitterly disappointing for Liverpool, who have granted United extra room for error in their remaining matches.

"It's very difficult," Benayoun acknowledged. "United are a strong side but we won't give up and we will continue to try and do our best."

"We will keep trying, look to win our remaining matches, and hopefully we can still do it. It was a great game for the supporters to watch but not for us because we made too many mistakes. We should have won the game."

Benayoun capped an outstanding performance with two goals, including the stoppage-time equaliser that prevented Andrei Arshavin's fourth goal of the night from giving Arsenal victory.

But the Israel captain was left frustrated at

what he regards as a missed opportunity.

"In the first half we created four or five really good chances but then they scored with their only shot of the half," he added.

"We came back strong in the second half and led 2-1. At that point we were controlling the game but we made more mistakes and then when we had to chase it they punished us."

"We have the best defence in the league and the best goalkeeper too, but I think we didn't defend well as a team against Arsenal."

"We scored four goals and still didn't manage to pick up the three points so I think that shows we should have done better."

Arshavin meanwhile has told Arsenal fans that they have yet to see the best of him -- despite his stunning four-goal display at Anfield.

The Russian found the net with every shot he had to leave Gunners supporters wishing he was not ineligible for the Champions League semifinal clash with Manchester United, the first leg of which takes place next week.

"I am a new player, I have to go through my own pre-season and then everything will be better," the 27-year-old January signing declared.

Leverkusen overcome Mainz

AFP, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen booked their place in the German Cup final on May 30 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium having needed extra-time to beat second-division side Mainz 4-1 in Tuesday's semifinal.

Having last won the competition in 1993, Leverkusen are hunting their second chance to be German Cup winners and although it finished 1-1 in normal time after Mainz forced a late equaliser, Bayer hit three goals in extra time.

With little to choose between the sides in normal time, Germany striker Stefan Kiessling had a goal disallowed with less than 15 minutes left, but Leverkusen made the pressure count.

Bayer's Renato Augusto had his shot saved by Mainz's Dimo Wache on 82 minutes and Greek striker Angelos Charisteas pounced on the rebound to tap the ball home.

But Mainz, who are challenging for promotion from the Second Division, hit back just two minutes from time when striker Aristide Bance headed home to hit the equaliser and take the game into extra-time.

Chile midfielder Arturo Vidal restored the advantage for Leverkusen with an early strike in the first period of stoppage time and Simon Rolfes made the result safe when he tapped a header from Germany defender Manuel Friedrich into the back of the net in the 104th minute.

And Czech defender Michal Kadlec completed the rout with a fourth goal in the 117th minute.

In Wednesday's semifinal, Hamburg host Werder Bremen in the first of four meetings between the sides in the next month - twice in the UEFA Cup and again in the Bundesliga.

Webb's dream comes true

AFP, London

Howard Webb achieved a lifetime's dream on Tuesday when he was appointed referee of the FA Cup final on May 30 between Everton and Chelsea.

The 37-year-old - who last year received death threats from irate Polish fans for awarding Euro 2008 co-hosts Austria a late penalty which they converted to force a 1-1 draw - said it was hard to believe he had been chosen.

"When I started out as a referee 20 years ago the FA Cup final was the absolute pinnacle even though it was a very distant dream," he said.

"It was very unlikely to ever happen, but that it has is the realisation of a dream and I'm thrilled to bits."

Webb - who has handed out just five red cards this season in 39 matches - was fourth official at the 2007 final and took charge of the semifinal between West Brom and Portsmouth last year.

Webb admitted in January he had experienced the lowest moment of his career when during the Birmingham Wolves FA Cup tie he inadvertently deflected a pass by Birmingham's Radhi Jaidi to Wolves striker Andy Keogh which led to Sam Vokes scoring - Wolves won the match 2-0.

"You want the world to swallow you up at that moment," he said at the time.

Arshavin-4 Liverpool-4

AFP, Liverpool



Andrei Arshavin produced a stunning four-goal show to blow a huge hole in Liverpool's title dream as Arsenal secured a 4-4 draw at Anfield on here Tuesday.

The Russia striker - the first player to score four league goals in a single league match at Anfield since Dennis Westcott for Wolves in 1946 - produced a quality display as Rafa Benitez's side committed defensive suicide to leave Manchester United firm favourites to clinch their third successive domestic title.

Liverpool are level on points with United at the top of the table, but Sir Alex Ferguson's side now have two games in hand over their nearest title rivals, the first of which is on Wednesday when they host Portsmouth.

Liverpool will be kicking themselves for failing to see off Arsenal in one of the most thrilling matches Anfield has witnessed in many a season.

Arshavin sent the visitors into the lead at half-time against the run of play before two goals in six minutes at the start of the second half from Fernando Torres and Yossi Benayoun put Liverpool in command.

But Arshavin capped a fine display with goals in the 66th and 69th minutes before Torres made it 3-3. Still the drama was not over. After Arshavin had bagged his fourth goal in the final minute, Benayoun levelled in the dying moments.

Both Liverpool and Arsenal were hampered by injuries to key players. The

hosts were once again without 21-goal Steven Gerrard while Arsenal were also handicapped by the absence of Robin van Persie and Emmanuel Adebayor, who have scored 33 times between them this term.

With Theo Walcott also on the bench, there was a suggestion that the Premier League was no longer Wenger's priority.

After all, Wenger and his players have a date with another team that play in red in the Champions League semifinal next Wednesday.

Yet it is safe to assume the Arsenal manager will demand a better start from his team at Manchester United next week than they made at Anfield.

Their Champions League ambitions ended for another season a week earlier by Chelsea, Liverpool were entirely focussed on the pursuit of their first title for 19 years.

Benitez had demanded six wins from the remaining six games and his players certainly looked up to the challenge as Lukasz Fabianski denied Torres and Albert Riera inside the opening 10 minutes.

Dirk Kuyt was next to capitalise on Arsenal's dithering defence as he teed-up Benayoun only for Fabianski to rush off his line and snuff out the danger.

In front of co-owner Tom Hicks, Liverpool continued to press with Torres looking particularly threatening. Javier Mascherano flashed a 14th minute effort narrowly wide before Arsenal's stand-in keeper produced the save of the half to deny Torres his 15th goal of the season, the Polish stopper using his finger-tips to deflect the ball over the bar.

Liverpool were still in the ascendancy. Torres again frustrated by the magnificent Fabianski from long range before Daniel Agger had a glancing header cleared off the line by Samir Nasri.

Not since Tim Cahill scored back in January has an opposition player found the net in the Premier League at Anfield but that ended in the 36th minute after the usually reliable Mascherano conceded possession.

That allowed Nasri to provide a delightful pass for Cesc Fabregas and he cut the ball back for Arshavin to finish off the underside of the bar.

There was a chance for an immediate response after Kuyt played a through-ball to Benayoun as left-back Kieran Gibbs failed to intercept.

But the Israeli curled a left-foot shot towards goal only for Fabianski, having the game of his life, to palm the ball round the post.

But for all his brave efforts, Fabianski found himself fishing the ball out of his net in the 49th minute as Torres powered an unstoppable header in front of the Kop after leaping to connect with Kuyt's cross.

Anfield was in full voice once again. But it was only the beginning of a second half full of twists and turns. Benayoun made it 2-1 when he connected with another inch-perfect cross by Kuyt only for Arshavin to make it 2-2 from 25 yards.

Arshavin then pounced on an error by Fabio Aurelio to complete a stunning hat-trick before Torres made it 3-3. Arsenal thought they had won it when Arshavin slotted his fourth in the 90th minute only for Benayoun to have the last say in a match Anfield will not forget in a hurry.

Higuain rescues Real

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid somehow kept their title hopes alive with Gonzalo Higuain scoring a stoppage time winner as the 10-man hosts defeated derby rivals Getafe 3-2 on Tuesday in a see-saw thriller at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Real rode their luck to move three points behind leaders Barcelona, who host Sevilla on Wednesday, and if they do retain this title this match will undoubtedly be one of the turning points.

"We should have had a penalty, then they got a penalty, missed it and then I scored at the other end. It was an incredible game," said hero Higuain.

"The euphoria is understandable and we have to enjoy it but then we have to put it into perspective and stay calm."

"We are three points behind now and will have to see what Barca do against Sevilla." Substitute Juan Albin looked to have won the game for Getafe putting his side 2-1 up in the 83rd minute but Guti equalised with a brilliant freekick three minutes later.

Pepe was then sent off for conceding a penalty but Francisco Casquero's cheeky chipped spot-kick was saved by Iker Casillas and Higuain went down the other end to net a dramatic winner.

Pepe could be in hot water after kicking the grounded Casquero after pushing him to give away the penalty.

"I have to apologise to the fans and to Casquero," said Pepe. "People who know me will tell you I am not like that. This is the first time something like this has happened to me and I am really sorry."

Old boy Roberto Soldado, let go by Real this summer, put Getafe in front on 10 minutes to stun the home supporters but Higuain equalised seconds before the break after a dreadful defensive mistake.

A thrilling 15 minutes finale followed with two goals, a sending off and a penalty miss before Higuain became the hero.

Getafe, who had beaten Real 3-1 earlier in the season, were shell-shocked and lie four points above the relegation zone despite a brilliant display.

With French midfielder Lassana Diarra suspended and Wesley Sneijder out for a month

with a torn hamstring coach Juande Ramos was forced to start two out-of-favour players in Guti and Rafael van der Vaart.

Guti, 32, has been a regular in the Real side for over a decade but had a spat with Ramos earlier this season and has been on the substitutes bench ever since.

With Arjen Robben rested, compatriot van der Vaart, a fringe player under Ramos, had a rare chance to impress.

Soldado, 23, had a glorious chance to open the scoring in the third minute after Real failed to deal with a ball in from the left but the forward fired high over the crossbar from close to the penalty spot.

However, Soldado made amends in the 10th minute with Real leaving him unmarked in the area to head past Casillas.

Getafe were fired up and rather than sitting on the goal they took the game to the champions with Esteban Granero, another ex-Real youth product, shining in the Getafe midfield.

A defensive lapse let Real back into the game with Higuain pouncing on a mistake from Cata Diaz to equalise.

Robben replaced the ineffective van der Vaart in the second half and injected some much-needed urgency into the hosts.

Robben didn't last long being subbed off 20 minutes later with an apparent muscular injury.

Albin thought he was the hero with an 83rd minute goal but Guti equalised and Higuain had the final say after Casquero missed a vital spot-kick.

At the other end of the table 10-man Athletic Bilbao moved seven points clear of the drop zone with a 2-1 win over Numancia. Spanish international Fernando Llorente scored the winner early in the second half.

Along with Barca and Real, eight-time league champions Bilbao are the only side never to be relegated from the Spanish top-flight and should now maintain that record.

The Kings Cup finalists had to play over three quarters of the match with 10 men after Aitor Ocio was sent off in the 19 minute with Numancia leading 1-0.

Bilbao levelled through Gaizka Toquero on the half hour and Llorente scored the winner early in the second half as Athletic won for the first time in 11 games.

Promoted Numancia look to be heading straight back down lying bottom, five points from safety.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayer Leverkusen striker Angelos Charisteas (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening goal against Mainz during their German Cup match at the LTU Arena in Duesseldorf on Tuesday.

Pepe in hot water

SOCCERNET



Real Madrid defender Pepe faces a lengthy spell on the sidelines after the referee reported him for kicking and punching two Getafe players in Tuesday night's Primera Liga match.

The Portuguese international was shown a straight red card for kicking midfielder Javier Casquero as he lay on the ground and in the ensuing melee he struck another Getafe player, Juan Albin, in the face.

"The home player (Pepe) kicked the fouled player and punched an opponent in the face," referee Carlos Delgado Ferreiro said in his report.

"The said player then directed the following phrase at the fourth official as he was leaving the pitch: 'You are all sons of whores,'" the referee wrote.

Delgado added that Pepe also broke the rules by coming back on to the pitch to celebrate Gonzalo Higuain's winner with his teammates.

The centre-back immediately apologised for his actions following Los Blancos' 3-2 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu, but Real coach Juande Ramos attempted to rationalise his player's actions.

"Pepe lost his cool but he did not mean to attack Casquero," Ramos explained. "He was more upset with himself and he only wanted to kick at the air in anger but at no moment did he

intend to hurt his opponent.

"I am sure that he is very sorry and in these situations, we should forgive him for losing his temper because a lot was at stake."

With title-chasing Real being held 2-2 at home with three minutes to go, Pepe pushed Casquero in the back as he surged into the area, and gave away a penalty. The defender then kicked out and raked his studs over the midfielder's back and was sent off.

"People know this is not my style," Pepe said after the match. "They didn't give a penalty when (Real Madrid striker) Gonzalo Higuain was fouled, then later Casquero was free in the area, I arrived late, and gave away the penalty. It all happened very quickly and I lost my head. I can't explain it."

Defeated Getafe president Angel Torres was not too happy after the match and called for a more severe punishment for Pepe than just the standard three-game suspension that accompanies his sending off.

"Pepe must be banned for at least 10 games," Torres told Canal Plus. "You cannot kick an opponent like that in any way! That kind of behaviour cannot be tolerated and he should not have lost his temper."

It seems that Pepe can indeed expect and increased suspension given the content of the referee's report and the club may also take a dim view of the defender's unsavoury actions.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas, who saved Casquero's penalty, said: "You cannot do what Pepe did while wearing the Real Madrid shirt."



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain shoots to score the winning goal against Getafe in stoppage time during their Primera Liga clash at Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.