

Gerrard puts L'pool top

AFP, London



Steven Gerrard fired Liverpool back to the top of the Premier League and then voiced optimism that rivals Manchester United could yet slip up in the final stages of the season.

Two first-half goals from Gerrard and a late strike by substitute Ryan Babel gave Rafael Benitez's side a comfortable 3-0 win at West Ham and lifted them above United on the strength of their superior goal difference.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side, who face Manchester City at Old Trafford on Sunday, remain in the driving seat and will be champions again if they take seven points from their remaining four matches.

With games against Wigan and Arsenal on Wednesday and next Saturday respectively, United could have wrapped up their 18th English title by the time Liverpool next play, at West Brom on May 17.

But Gerrard is refusing to give up hope. "They have got a tough game on Sunday," he said. "Man City have come into a bit of form and derby games are never easy so we wait and hope that Man City can do us a favour."

At the other end of the table, West Brom gave their supporters reason to believe another great escape from relegation could be possible after a 3-1 win over Wigan.

The victory, combined

with Hull's 2-1 home defeat at the hands of Stoke, lifted West Brom to within three points of safety with two matches -- at home to Liverpool and away to Blackburn -- left to play, a situation that has echoes of 2005 when Bryan Robson's side beat the drop from an apparently hopeless position.

On-loan striker Marc-Antoine Fortune was West Brom's hero, scoring the Baggies' first and third goals as well as earning a penalty which Chris Brunt converted on the rebound from his own spot-kick.

Colombian striker Hugo Rodallega had claimed his first goal for Wigan to cancel out Fortune's opener.

Hull's fall continued as a first-half strike from Ricardo Fuller and a stunning long-range effort from Liam Lawrence secured three points which guarantee Stoke, back in the top flight for the first time since 1985, will stay there next season.

Stoke boss Tony Pulis was delighted to see his players confound the pundits who had almost unanimously predicted an immediate return to the Championship. "It means everything and to prove a lot of people wrong is nice," Pulis said. "It's been a tough season for us but we have kept going and the players have always believed."

Andy Dawson scored a stoppage-time consolation goal for Hull, who have won just once in 20 matches and could fall into the drop zone depending on the result of

Monday's meeting between Newcastle and Middlesbrough.

Blackburn are virtually -- if not quite mathematically -- safe after moving to 40 points with a 2-0 win over Portsmouth that was sealed by a second-half penalty by South Africa striker Benni McCarthy.

Norwegian playmaker Morten Gamst Pedersen had opened the scoring before the interval with what was his first goal since the last day of last season and John Utaka missed a late penalty on the rebound from his own completely relax yet but should be safe on 38 points.

Sunderland pulled five points clear of the drop zone after a goalless draw at Bolton but that margin could be cut to two points if either Middlesbrough or Newcastle win Monday's high-stakes encounter at St James' Park.

Fulham inflicted further pain on Aston Villa, who have now won just once in 11 matches after a 3-1 defeat at Craven Cottage.

Ashley Young cancelled out Danny Murphy's early penalty but Fulham were always on top and took the points thanks to Diomansy Kamara's second-half double.

Villa's latest setback meant Everton had a chance to leapfrog them into fifth place but David Moyes's side were unable to overcome Tottenham at Goodison Park in a match overshadowed by news that the remains of Spurs midfielder Wilson Palacios's abducted brother had been found in Honduras.



Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard (L) skips past the despairing dive of West Ham goalkeeper Robert Green to score the opening goal of their Premiership encounter at Upton Park on Saturday.

Derby glory for MU

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United moved three points clear at the top of the English Premier League on Sunday after a convincing 2-0 win over neighbours Manchester City at Old Trafford. Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez scored the goals in the first half to move the champions back above Liverpool and firmly in command as they chase their third straight league title.

United still have a game in hand over Liverpool and with only three games remaining, they need just four points to be assured of the title.

The home side were ahead within 20 minutes when, after

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Button in Brawn 1-2

EUROSPORT

Britain's Jenson Button led a Brawn GP one-two triumph at the Spanish Grand Prix for the Formula One championship leader's fourth victory in five races.

For the ninth year in a row, victory at the Circuit de Catalunya went to the driver starting from pole position with Button taking the chequered flag 13.0 seconds ahead of Brazilian teammate Rubens Barrichello.

Australian Mark Webber was third for Red Bull, his second podium finish of the season, ahead of German teammate Sebastian Vettel.

Spain's Fernando Alonso had the home crowd roaring when he snatched fifth place on the final lap from Ferrari's

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Tevez confirms MU departure

AFP, London

Argentinian striker Carlos Tevez has reaffirmed his wish to leave Manchester United at the end of the season because he feels unwanted and unappreciated at the club.

Tevez has in recent months complained about limited first team opportunities with United, for whom he scored 19 goals in 39 appearances as they won the Premier League and Champions League last season, and hinted last month he was ready to leave Old Trafford.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson responded by saying he was optimistic of holding on to the on-loan Argentinian striker when his contract expires this summer.

However Tevez says he is growing increasingly frustrated with United, claiming a lack of first team appearances has affected his confidence.

He said he is ready to move to another English Premier League club even if it meant a drop in wages.

"It is goodbye," he told The Sunday Telegraph.

"I respect the fans and it

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Gomez 4 Wolfsburg 1

AFP, Berlin



Germany striker Mario Gomez scored all four goals in Stuttgart's 4-1 win over Bundesliga leaders Wolfsburg Saturday to blow the title race wide open.

With Bayern Munich, Hertha Berlin and Stuttgart all picking up three points, there is now just two points separating the top four sides in the German league with only three games left.

It could be five teams just two points apart if Hamburg beat Werder Bremen on Sunday with the title almost certain to be decided on the last day of the season on May 23.

Gomez is now the league's joint top-scorer alongside Wolfsburg's Brazilian striker Grafite with the pair on 23 goals after Gomez's quartet sealed the 4-1 win.

"I am just delighted my goals helped the team and keep us in the hunt," said

Gomez. "As a successful sportsman you always want the most, but we need to make sure we win all our games now."

Stuttgart took the lead after just 30 seconds when Gomez beat Wolfsburg goalkeeper Diego Benaglio with a header into the top left of the net.

The home side doubled their lead on 20 minutes when midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger found striker Cacau with a perfectly-timed long-ball and the Brazilian drew Benaglio to give Gomez a simple tap-in for his second.

Wolfsburg pulled a goal back when Edin Dzeko hit his 20th goal of the season on 36 minutes, but Gomez completed his hat-trick on 63 minutes and could hardly believe his luck when the fourth went in on 76 minutes.

"A big compliment to my team, they were superb today," said Stuttgart coach Markus Babbel.

"The team created several clear chances at the start of the second-half and we kept the pressure on Wolfsburg.

Defending champions Bayern Munich drew level with Wolfsburg on 60 points

and are only second on goal difference after their 3-1 win at Energie Cottbus.

French midfielder star Franck Ribery, who was linked with a move to Manchester United last week, was left on the bench, but Bayern took the lead through Argentina striker Jose Ernesto Sosa on 23 minutes.

Cottbus midfielder Ivica Iliev equalised on 44 minutes, but Bayern went ahead on 62 minutes when Argentina defender Martin Demichelis headed home a Lukas Podolski corner.

A late goal from Podolski sealed the 3-1 win, but in injury time Ribery missed a late penalty.

Hertha Berlin's 2-0 win at home to strugglers Bochum puts them just a point away from the leaders.

They took the lead at Berlin's Olympic Stadium when midfielder Patrick Ebert flicked a cross into Marko Pantelic who headed home on 39 minutes.

Lucien Favre's Berlin kept themselves in the title race when Brazilian striker Raffael slotted home their second on

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Serie A Lazio crash to Udinese

AFP, Rome

Lazio and Sampdoria warmed up for Wednesday's Coppa Italia final in vastly differing fashion on Saturday.

Lazio, who still had an outside chance of qualifying for Europe next season through their league position, were highly disappointing in a 3-1 home defeat to Udinese, who overtook the Romans to close in on a potential UEFA Cup place.

Mid-table Sampdoria, on the other hand, dealt a potentially fatal blow to rock-bottom Reggina in their battle to avoid the drop with a 5-0 thumping in Genoa.

Lazio took the lead 11 minutes into the second half through captain Tommaso Rocchi but Udinese hit straight back on the hour mark through Antonio Floro Flores.

Nine minutes later, Gaetano D'Agostino gave the visitors the lead and when Sebastiano Siviglia was penalised for bringing down Floro Flores in the area, Fabio Quagliarella stroked home the spot-kick four minutes from time.

Lazio then finished with 10 men as Christian Brocchi got himself sent off for protesting the decision.

He was booked for his protests before the penalty was taken and shown a second yellow card when he continued his rant after the goal had been scored.

Daniele Dessena opened the scoring for Sampdoria in the first minute with a rocket strike from outside the area.

But on 19 minutes Reggina had Carlos Valdez sent off for a foul on Giampaolo Pazzini and from then on the 10-men crumbled.

Dessena got his second just past the half-hour and Gennaro Delvecchio made it 3-0 before half-time.

Early second half goals from Guido Marilungo and Pazzini added to Reggina's misery.

FRENCH CUP Guingamp's stunning win

AFP, Paris

Second-division Guingamp produced one of the shocks of the season by coming from behind to beat top-flight Rennes 2-1 in the all-Breton final of the French Cup at the Stade de France here on Saturday.

Brazilian striker Eduardo Dos Santos struck a nerveless winner seven minutes from time, having earlier equalised Carlos Bocanegra's 69th-minute opener for Rennes, to give his side the first French Cup crown in their history.

The victory also erased the heartbreak of Guingamp's last French Cup final appearance, when they lost on penalties to Nice in 1997.

At a national stadium awash with the black and

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Valencia thump Real

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona can win the Spanish league for the 19th time on Sunday after double champions Real Madrid waved the white flag in the title race with a 3-0 loss at Valencia on Saturday.

Real trail Barcelona by seven points and Pep Guardiola's side will be crowned champions with three games to spare if they can beat Villarreal at Camp Nou on Sunday.

Real were still reeling from their 6-2 drubbing by Barcelona last Saturday in 'El Clasico' and they were outclassed again as two goals in three minutes laid the foundations for a comfortable Valencia win.

Juan Mata, a youth product let go by Real in 2007, scored his 11th goal of the season on 29 minutes before David Silva, a Real transfer target, netted a second in the 32nd minute.

Ruben Baraja scored a great second-half volley and it could have been more but for some poor finishing.

It was Real's first away defeat since mid-December when they lost 2-0 at Barcelona who are poised to dethrone them as champions.

Valencia move four points behind Sevilla, 3-1 winners over Real Mallorca on Saturday, and more importantly, open a four-point gap

over Champions League rivals Atletico Madrid and Villarreal who both play Sunday.

"This was a massive win for us and we just have to keep pushing for the Champions League spot," said Silva.

"Atletico and Villarreal are still in the hunt and we will see what they do (on Sunday). We have done our bit."

Real lost French international Lass Diarra to a bout of flu so Javi Garcia, a youth team product back at the club after a season at Osasuna, partnered Fernando Gago in a very defensive-minded midfield.

Valencia were on top early on as Real struggled to shrug off their 'El Clasico' hangover and Iker Casillas pulled off a fine save in the opening minutes to stop Baraja's header.

On 29 minutes, Valencia got the breakthrough they deserved with Mata, capped by Spain for the first time this season, finishing with aplomb after a great lay-off from David Villa.

Real tried to sign Villa for a reputed 40 million euros in the summer and are tipped to bid again at the end of this season.

Three minutes later it was 2-0 as Silva was given too much time to shoot and Casillas couldn't keep out the effort despite getting a hand on the shot.

Real coach Juande Ramos, whose future is looking bleak after recent results, didn't make any changes at half-time and Valencia continued to carve open the best chances.

Baraja hammered in a great left-footed volley to clinch the game and Real couldn't wait to

get off the pitch.

Sevilla still hold a four-point gap over Valencia after a 3-1 comeback win over Mallorca.

Aritz Aduriz put Mallorca ahead but Sevilla responded with a Freddy Kanoute penalty before second-half goals from Luis Fabiano and Jesus Navas sealed a first home win since late March.

"We are close to our objective (third place) and this win guarantees that we will be third until the penultimate weekend of the season," said Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez. "It would be tough on our fans if we didn't finish third."

Athletic Bilbao warmed up for Wednesday's King's Cup final against Barcelona with a 1-0 win over troubled Real Betis.

Ion Velez scored the only goal of the game in the 29th minute to boost Bilbao's hopes for the Barcelona challenge.

Bilbao will start as strong underdogs but have a great record in the domestic cup, winning it on 24 occasions, although this will be their first final since 1985.

"We have to have faith in ourselves and if we are fortunate enough to win we will also have the satisfaction of beating the best team in the world," said Bilbao coach Joaquin Caparros.

For Betis, staying in the league is the only priority with the Sevilla-based club just three points above the relegation zone.



Valencia forward David Silva (R) takes a shot on goal during their 3-0 win over champions Real Madrid in their Primera Liga match at the Mestalla on Saturday.

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