

Fergie blasts at 'fakers'

SOCCERNET

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson insists players who pretend to be injured in order to cause stoppages in play are "killing the game".

Ferguson's men were involved in a controversial incident during last Sunday's Community Shield at Wembley when defender Patrice Evra went down injured but Chelsea played on and scored, with referee Chris Foy playing the advantage.

The Scot claims referees are finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate between genuine instances when the game needs to be stopped to treat injuries and when players are trying to trick them into blowing the whistle.

A further complication is that the decision to stop play is not entirely in the official's hands, with some players still opting to abide by what Ferguson calls the "unwritten rule" to kick the ball into touch when a player goes down, injured or otherwise.

Ferguson feels if players only went to ground when genuinely injured, the referee's job would be much easier.

"This unwritten rule has come into the game and opportunist players have just overdone it. They have overcooked the whole thing," he said.

"Last week Evra was through and into the last third of the pitch, the referee stops it and (Michael) Ballack gets up. It could have been a serious problem so he stopped the game.

"Then when Evra is fouled, Chelsea don't kick the ball out, the referee plays on and we lose a goal.

"It is a grey area and something has to be done about it.

"The players are killing the game. The players' unprofessionalism is killing the game. Not the referees. The problem is how much the referee can tolerate when the players lie down pretending to be injured.

"There is no doubt that this unwritten rule about players kicking the ball into touch has been exploited to ridiculous degrees now."

'Unity is key for Chelsea'

INTERNET, undated

John Terry believes that keeping the Chelsea squad together over the summer has given them the edge over their rivals.

The Chelsea and England captain helped his side get off to a winning start under new coach Carlo Ancelotti on Saturday - courtesy of two goals from rejuvenated Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba.

Hull debutant Stephen Hunt had given the Tigers the lead in the 27th minute but Drogba equalised 10 minutes later with a stunning free-kick from 25 yards.

Chelsea had to wait until the second minute of added time for Drogba to score a fluke of a winner. His attempted cross bamboozled Boaz Myhill and dropped into the far corner of the net.

Drogba recently signed contract extension with Chelsea that will keep him at the club until 2013.

The striker's decision to stay, plus new deals for Florent Malouda and John Mikel Obi, have convinced Terry that the stability of their squad could be a crucial element of the title race this season.

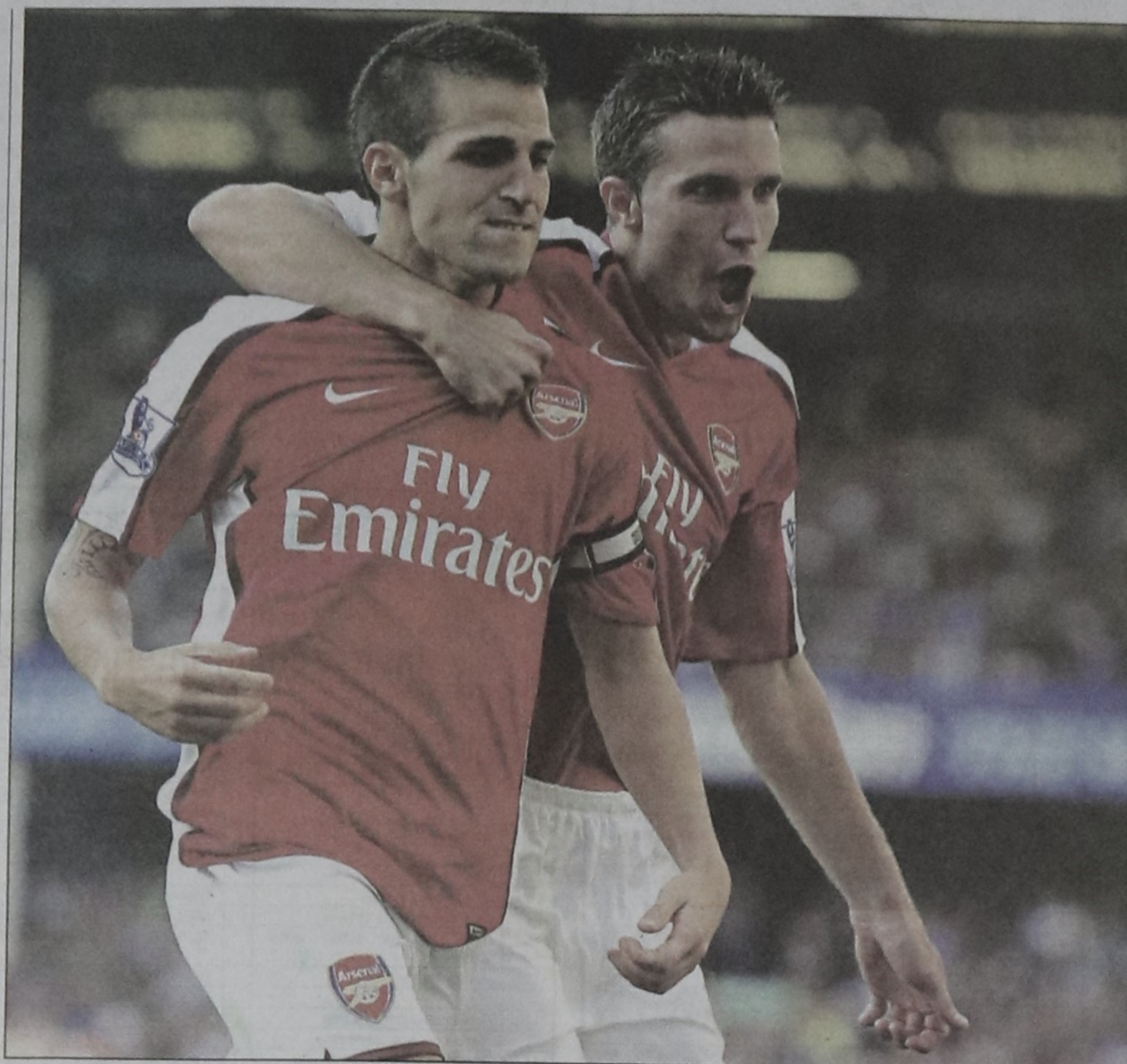
"Manchester United have lost Carlos Tevez and Cristiano Ronaldo, Liverpool have lost Xabi Alonso and Arsenal have lost Emmanuel Adebayor and Kolo Toure," he said.

"We have re-signed Didier, which is massive. He's just brilliant and a winner and that has been important to Chelsea.

"Malouda and Mikel have also re-signed. Flo had a great second half to last season and has started this time where he left off.

"The hunger among the boys this year to win the Premier League is as strong as ever.

"We want that and the Champions League and, with our squad being held together, there are plenty of reasons for optimism."



Arsenal stars Cesc Fabregas (L) and Robin van Persie celebrate the former's first goal during their opening day Premier League clash against Everton at Goodison Park on Saturday. Arsenal were irresistible in their 6-1 rout of the Merseyside opponents.

PHOTO: AFP

Van Gaal fuming

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal was far from pleased after the German giants squandered a string of chances in a 1-1 draw at home to VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday.

Having been also held to a score draw at Hoffenheim on the opening weekend of the season, Bayern had to again settle for the single point as Germany striker Maro Gomez scored a late equaliser to spare the home side's blushes.

"I'm not happy with the result, but I'm pleased enough with the match," said van Gaal after Bayern's first home match of the season at Munich's Allianz Arena.

"We were outstanding in the first 30 minutes, but we failed to score. And then Werder

scored with their first attack.

"That was very disappointing for my players. It was easy for Bremen to defend with ten men after that.

"It's always difficult in that situation, but we still created six or seven chances, and I'm pleased with that.

"However, I'm not happy with the number of chances we missed. I reckon we'd have deserved the win based on our chances in the second half."

Having scored his first Bundesliga goal for his new club since his summer transfer from Stuttgart, Gomez's goal with 20 minutes remaining keeps Bayern unbeaten this season.

"We were totally in command for most of the match, but unfortunately it wasn't enough," said Gomez.

"When Werder Bremen, who are normally an attacking side, pull ten men back behind the ball, it's always going to be tough."

Thigh injury sidelines Ferdinand

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson is unsure how long Rio Ferdinand will be out of action with a thigh injury.

The England international suffered a knock in training on Friday, forcing him to miss United's season-opener against Birmingham.

Ferguson has confirmed Ferdinand is having a scan on Monday that will assess the severity of the knock.

In the meantime, the United boss, who is already without Nemanja Vidic (calf), remains in the dark as to how long he will be sidelined for.

"Ferdinand pulled a muscle in training on Friday afternoon," he told Sky Sports.

"He's out. I don't know how long he's going to be out.

"We're sending him for a scan on Monday."

Barca no go on Fabregas

SOCCERNET

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola has ruled out the possibility of signing Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas this summer.

Barca have long been linked with their former youth player and there were reports they were set to make a mega offer after sporting director Txiki Begiristain admitted the club are interested in the 22-year-old.

Fabregas' value is sure to have increased still further after he scored a brace in Arsenal's 6-1 demolition of Everton and Guardiola believes he will not be returning to the Nou Camp just yet.

"Cesc will not come," said the Barca boss. "He is an important player for Arsenal and they have already sold Kolo (Toure) and (Emmanuel) Adebayor.

"I believe it will not be possible this season. He is a very interesting footballer but now he will play another year in England."

Barca are feeling some pressure to spend from their fans following the spending spree of rivals Real Madrid, who have invested more than 250 million euros on the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Xabi Alonso this summer.

But Guardiola has been impressed by his players and feels they can have another stunning campaign to follow last year's treble-winning season.

He added: "I have been surprised by the behaviour they've come back with and the intensity with which they've been training.

"I didn't need to talk to them too much and I feel we will compete very well this year because of the character they have."

Six-shooter Gunners

AFP, London



Arsenal hammered out an early English Premier League title warning on Saturday when they crushed Everton 6-1 at Goodison Park.

Elsewhere on the opening day of the new season, Chelsea came from behind to defeat Hull 2-1 while moneybags Manchester City beat Blackburn Rovers 2-0.

Arsenal were 3-0 in front before half-time against an Everton side who finished fifth last time out with Brazilian midfielder Denilson putting the Gunners ahead with a 26th-minute curling shot that gave Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard no chance.

Belgian defender Thomas Vermaelen marked his debut by heading in from a Robin van Persie free-kick and it was a similar story when the equally unattended William Gallas nodded in from a Cesc Fabregas set-piece four minutes before the break.

Fabregas made it 4-0 early in the second-half when he crowned a rapid, length of the field, counter-attack with a stylish finish before the Spaniard scored his second after being allowed to run free by the Everton defence.

Eduardo added a sixth two minutes from time after Andrei Arshavin's shot came back off the post before Louis Saha pulled one back for Everton.

"Everything went for us today. We were always in charge and dictated the game," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

But the Frenchman refused to get carried away.

"From not competitive at all before the game, we do not now suddenly become a super-favourite as well."

Everton manager David Moyes was dumbfounded by the defeat.

"The defending was terrible for the set-pieces. We need to do better, I need to do better," he said.

At Stamford Bridge, Didier Drogba sealed all three points for Chelsea when, in the sec-

ond minute of added-on time, his cross-shot floated over Hull City goalkeeper Boaz Myhill at Stamford Bridge.

Drogba admitted his last-gasp winner, in coach Carlo Ancelotti's first taste of Premier League action, was lucky.

"It was a cross but the intention was good," said the Ivory Coast international.

"The belief is strong as always. I think today we showed it, we fight until the end of the game."

Manchester City who, thanks to their Abu Dhabi based owners, spent nearly 100 million pounds during the close season, saw one of their new signings give them the lead at Blackburn when Emmanuel Adebayor, the former Arsenal striker, turned in Shaun Wright Phillips's third-minute cross.

Stephen Ireland added the second in the last minute.

Portsmouth, beset by uncertainty surrounding the proposed takeover of the club by Arab businessman Sulaiman Al-Fahim, were undone by Fulham at Fratton Park when Clint Dempsey's 13th-minute shot deflected off Bobby Zamora and past goalkeeper David James.

Wigan, in Roberto Martinez's first match as a Premier League manager, stunned Aston Villa 2-0 when Hugo Rodallega let fly from long range with a dipping shot that beat Brad Friedel before Jason Koumas made the three points secure the 56th minute.

Former Tottenham striker Darren Bent secured Sunderland's 1-0 victory against Bolton with a fifth-minute header.

It was a bad day for two of the promoted teams.

Mark Noble put West Ham in front at Molineux against Championship winners Wolves with a curling first-half shot before Matthew Upson's header from a corner doubled the Hammers' lead in the 69th minute.

Stoke were 2-0 up inside 34 minutes against Burnley, playing their first top-flight match in 33 years, after Ryan Shawcross headed them in front before Stephen Jordan's own-goal.



Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez (R) holds off the challenge of Werder Bremen defender Sebastian Boenisch during their Bundesliga clash at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Martins's debut delight

AFP, Berlin



Wolfsburg's latest recruit Obafemi Martins scored on his debut as the defending

champions came from behind to seal a 3-1 win at Cologne and maintain their 100 per cent record on Saturday.

Cologne's Fabrice Ehret had given his side a first-half lead after pouncing on a rare mistake in the champions' defence, but a 73rd minute strike from Edin Dzeko and an own goal from Cologne's Pierre Wome just a minute later put Wolfsburg ahead before Martins struck.

The 24-year-old former Inter Milan, Newcastle United and Nigeria star, who signed for Wolfsburg only at the end of last month, came off the bench in the 63rd minute and made an almost immediate impact.

His goal in the 87th minute made sure Wolfsburg took another three points after their opening day win over Stuttgart having come from behind to beat Cologne.

Earlier in the day, Germany striker Mario Gomez hit a second-half equaliser as Bayern Munich drew 1-1 with Werder Bremen to leave the German giants still chasing their first Bundesliga win of the season.

Having been held 1-1 by Hoffenheim on the opening weekend, Bayern coach Louis van Gaal is still waiting for his first German league win in charge.

"I am not content with the result, but I am happy with the game," said the Dutchman.

Bayern fans have bad memories of hosting Bremen at the Allianz Arena after

Thomas Schaaf's team cruised to a stunning 5-2 win there last season.

Mesut Ozil, who terrorised Bayern in the last campaign, struck again when Bremen midfielder Richard Hunt set him up in the penalty area. Despite the attention of five defenders, Ozil slotted home on 39 minutes.

Bayern pushed forward after the break and Gomez scored his first league goal for Bayern since his summer switch from Stuttgart to secure a valuable point on 72 minutes after being set up by Germany team-mate Philipp Lahm.

Some much-needed good news for Bayern fans was that French playmaker Franck Ribery made his first appearance of the season when he came off the bench in the second-half.

Hamburg have two wins from two games after sealing a 4-1 win at home to Borussia Dortmund, having raced into a 3-1 lead in just 12 minutes.

The goal rush began when Hamburg's Ivory Coast defender Guy Demel slotted home after three minutes only for Dortmund's Nelson Veldez to head his team level on five minutes.

Hamburg regained the lead when ex-Bayern Munich midfielder Ze Roberto scored on 10 minutes before Jose Paolo Guerrero added another two minutes later to effectively end the game as a contest.

Swedish striker Marcus Berg netted the fourth on 72 minutes.

Stuttgart bounced back from their opening day defeat to Wolfsburg with a 4-2 win over Freiburg as Russian striker Pavel Pogrebnyak scored his first goal in the Bundesliga since joining from Zenit St Petersburg.

The home side went fur-

ther ahead when Brazilian striker Elson converted a 65th minute penalty before Freiburg's Cameroon international Mohamadou Idrissou pulled a goal back for Freiburg.

Elson then bagged his second goal to make it 3-1 on 76 minutes before Idrissou also grabbed his second on 86 minutes. Stuttgart striker Julian Schieber struck with time running out to seal the 4-2 win.

In the day's other matches, Leverkusen enjoyed a 1-0 win over Hoffenheim thanks to a Stefan Kiessling goal, Hanover drew 1-1 with Mainz while Frankfurt were also held 1-1 by Nuremberg.

On Sunday, Borussia Moenchengladbach welcomed Hertha Berlin while Schalke host Bochum in a local derby.

ID cards for Italian away fans

SOCCERNET

Soccer fans in Italy will have to obtain a special supporters card from their club to see their team play away from home next year.

"From January 1, soccer enthusiasts will only be able to follow their team away from home if they have the supporters card," Interior Minister Roberto Maroni told a news conference.

The government believes the initiative will make it easier to police matches and track down trouble makers, as part of their bid to combat hooliganism in Italian soccer.

Authorities already employ a range of measures to prevent trouble, including bans on away fans at high-risk games.



Bordeaux's Moroccan forward Marouane Chamakh (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during their Ligue 1 match against Sochaux at the Auguste Bonal stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP