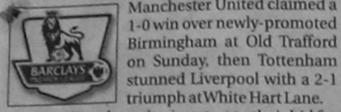


MU ride on Rooney

Liverpool fall to Spurs

AFP, London



Manchester United claimed a 1-0 win over newly-promoted Birmingham at Old Trafford on Sunday, then Tottenham stunned Liverpool with a 2-1 triumph at White Hart Lane.

United made a winning start to their bid for a record fourth successive title thanks to Wayne Rooney's goal and Sir Alex Ferguson insists it was only the start of great things to come now the England forward.

"It gets him on the road to what we hope will be a very significant total for us this season," Ferguson said.

"If you have two or three strikers who can get you 20 it stands you in good stead. Wayne Rooney is well capable of that."

"I know some of our supporters are still worried that I have not bought a megastar to replace Cristiano Ronaldo."

"But I am more than happy with our squad and although we have lost a major player, I believe we are on the threshold of a very exciting era for Manchester United."

Liverpool, regarded by many as United's biggest title rivals, fared less well as Rafael

Benitez's team were beaten by Sebastian Bassong's second half header.

Benoit Assou-Ekotto had put Tottenham ahead before Steven Gerrard equalised from the penalty spot.

But Benitez fumed over referee Phil Dowd's decision not to award two late penalties to his side.

"Everybody could see there was a penalty against Andrey Voronin. It was so clear, it is unbelievable," he said. "With this referee, I knew this (another penalty) was impossible."

Despite scoring an impressive victory over a member of the league's big four, Tottenham boss Harry Redknapp refused to get carried away by talk of challenging for a Champions League place.

Redknapp said: "It was a good performance, but now we need to go to Hull on Wednesday and do it all again. We have to go there and show what we are made of."

Redknapp also insisted reports of a bid for Celtic midfielder Scott Brown were wide of the mark.

"I have read I was at Aberdeen on Saturday looking at Scott Brown but I was at Chelsea because they played Hull," he said. "I like Brown, but we have not made an enquiry for him."



Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney (L) scores the all-important goal past Birmingham City goalkeeper Joe Hart during their Premiership encounter at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Murray Montreal master

Tennis

AFP, Montreal

Andy Murray has seized the momentum a fortnight before the US Open, the Scot exploding into form with his fifth title of the season Sunday at the Montreal Masters.

Besides starting the week with a freshly minted world number two ranking, the only British man to ever lift a trophy in Canada will surely be wired

for his title defence at the Cincinnati Masters.

Murray celebrated his ascent to the second spot, sandwiched in between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, by fighting back in just under three hours to overhaul Juan Martin Del Potro 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 for the Canadian title.

His fifth title of the year pulled him level with Nadal for most in 2009.

While victories mean the world to him, there is no denying that Murray is pondering

the important marker he passed by moving to his best-ever ranking.

"I love winning tournaments, every player will tell you the same," said the Scot. "But I've never been to number two before, that's all new to me."

"I've won a couple of Masters events and that still feels great. But maybe getting the new ranking means a little bit more right now."

Del Potro, winner a week ago in Washington, looked strong to start, but needed treatment on a shoulder problem in the second set and took an off-court injury time out to start the third before fading.

"I was so tired," he said. "I felt my chances in the second set tiebreak, but I didn't take them."

"I was trying until the last but it was so complicated for me," the South American added.

Murray lost a 62-minute opening set, but levelled by winning the tiebreaker in the second, then dominated in the third.

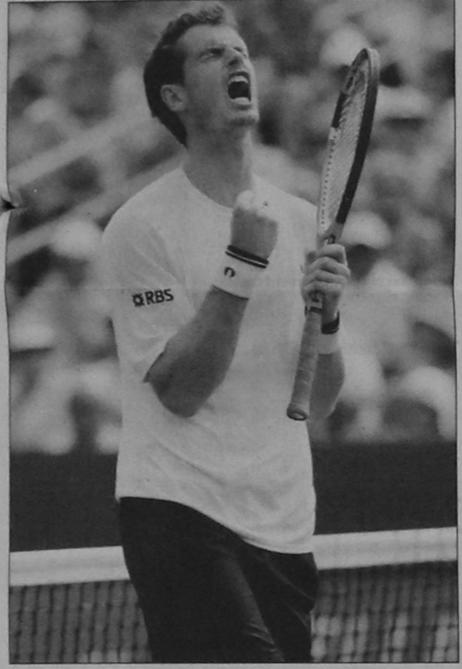
"I had those three aces in the (second set) tiebreaker to get back into it," said Murray. "Juan Martin served unbelievably in the first two sets. I tried to stay in it to the end. It was tough conditions for both of us out here."

Murray said his next goal is winning Cincinnati again, where he will begin at mid-week after a first-round bye.

"I wanted to get matches this week, that was important," he said.

"The US Open is still a couple of weeks away, I'll focus on Cincy now and try to play well there. Each week is different."

"I don't want to get too far ahead of myself," added Murray. "Becoming number two didn't distract me, I played well and put it to the back of my mind. I'll enjoy it over the next few days."



Great Britain star Andy Murray is ecstatic after winning a point against Juan Martin Del Potro of Argentina during the Rogers Cup final at the Uniprix Stadium in Montreal on Sunday.

Celtic, Arsenal to battle it out

AFP, Paris



Celtic and Arsenal will battle for a place in the lucrative Champions League group stages on Tuesday in a mouth-watering play-off clash.

Both teams are among the 20 who will be hoping to emerge victorious from a two-legged tie which will allow them to join the 22 automatic qualifiers in the group stage, the draw for which will be held in just over a fortnight.

Scottish Premier League runners-up Celtic warmed up for the hosting of Arsenal Wenger's Arsenal at Parkhead by beating Aberdeen away 3-1 on Saturday while Wenger's men hammered Everton 6-1 in their Premier League opener in Liverpool.

Arsenal go into Tuesday's clash as the overriding favourites.

And, having experienced their ruthless efficiency at close hand, Everton manager David Moyes suggested Celtic will have to perform formidably at the back as well as up front if they are to limit the damage.

"Arsenal have got a real capability of scoring on the counter attack," said the Scot.

"Every time we had a shot at goal and we let it go from the goalkeeper's arms, they nearly scored at the other end. I was

nearly hoping that more shots were going to fly past the post."

Celtic's new manager Tony Mowbray has seen his side show their character at this early stage of the season.

The Hoops fought back from a 1-0 first leg defeat at home in the third round of qualifying to beat Dynamo Moscow 2-0 in Russia, a result which secured their place in the play-off.

Celtic striker Aiden McGeady, who grabbed a brace on Saturday, admits it will be a tough 90 minutes but he believes the hosts should face Spanish ace Cesc Fábregas and co. with plenty of faith in their abilities.

"We know we are the underdogs and they are obviously the favourites but they are definitely beatable," the Republic of Ireland midfielder said.

"A lot of teams in the Premier League beat them last season by getting in and around them and not letting them play and that's something we have to do on Tuesday night."

Sporting Lisbon, who finished runners-up in

Portugal last season, will be looking to be more prolific at home if they are to achieve their aim of appearing in the group stages for a sixth time.

In the first leg of their qualifying round Paulo Bento's side advanced on the away goals rule after a 1-1 draw with Dutch side FC Twente, who had held the Portuguese to a scoreless draw in Lisbon.

VfB Stuttgart are aiming for their third appearance in the group stage but will do so against Champions League newcomers Timisoara of Romania without midfielder Martin Lanig.

He suffered cruciate ligament damage to his right knee in the 4-2 Bundesliga victory against SC Freiburg on Saturday, joining defender Christian Träsch on the injury sidelines after he broke a wrist last week.

Greek side Olympiakos will travel to Sheriff in Moldova in determined mood having failed to reach the group stages last season after being ousted by Cypriot side Anorthosis Famagusta.

Olympiakos are now coached by Anorthosis's former coach Temuri Ketsbaia.

Having taken Anorthosis to the Champions League group stages last year where they finished bottom of Group B, Ketsbaia may look on with a little interest when another Cypriot team, Apoel FC, travel to Denmark to face FC Copenhagen.

BUNDESLIGA Schalke down Bochum

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04 beat neighbours Bochum 3-0 on Sunday to join defending champions Wolfsburg at the top of the Bundesliga as the only sides with 100 per cent records after two games.

Germany defender Heiko Westermann scored in first-half injury time at Schalke's Veltins Arena to leave the hosts 2-0 up at the break after Christoph Moritz had put the home side ahead.

Schalke's Peru striker Jefferson Farfan added the third as the Royal Blues added a second victory to last weekend's success at Nuremberg which leaves them top alongside Wolfsburg.

"I would never have thought we'd have won this game as clearly as 3-0," said Schalke coach Felix Magath.

"Especially as things didn't go very smoothly in training last week. I am very pleased we have won our first two games, but there is a long way to go this season."

Borussia Moenchengladbach secured their first win of the season which leaves them fourth when they beat Hertha Berlin 2-1 thanks to goals by Dutch defender Roel Brouwers and Algerian striker Karim Matmour.

Having drawn 3-3 with Bochum on the opening weekend, Gladbach raced into a 2-0 lead when Brouwers headed his side in front with their first real chance after 23 minutes.

They extended their lead when Borussia's Germany striker Oliver Neuville set up Matmour who drilled home his shot from close range on 52 minutes, but Hertha's Serbian midfielder Gojko Karac hit a late consolation goal for Berlin.

"We made sure we were very compact in defence and took our chances when they came," said veteran star Neuville as Gladbach coach Michael Frontzeck picked up his first win since taking over during the summer.

Marseille keep pace

AFP, Paris



Brazilian striker Brandao made sure Marseille kept pace with their fellow French league title contenders with the game's only goal in an entertaining 1-0 win over Lille Sunday.

Brandao failed to get on the scoresheet when Marseille opened their campaign with a 2-0 away win at Grenoble last week.

But the big Brazilian made no mistake when he rose superbly in the 11th minute to smash a header past Ludovic Butelle in the Lille goal from Hatem Ben Arfa's perfectly-delivered corner.

Marseille are now third in the league behind Nancy and Bordeaux, the trio alone in winning both their games so far.

By virtue of Didier Deschamps arriving as coach, and fresh investment in the squad, Marseille are being tipped to end their 17-year wait for the French league crown this season.

In this match, being played in Montpellier after the Stade Velodrome was closed following a fatal accident at a concert, Marseille certainly put their ambitions on display.

The hosts dominated the first half, forcing Lille to rethink their approach at the half-time break.

However, while Marseille had an unremarkable start to the second half Rudy Garcia's men had little in response and became increasingly frustrated with the hosts' superior play.

Just after the hour mark Mathieu Debuchy

got his head to a Yohan Cabaye free kick and that was flicked on by Adil Rami but that effort sailed past the upright of Marseille 'keeper Steve Mandanda.

A minute later Debuchy got his marching orders when he was cautioned a second time, rather harshly, for a foul on the edge of the Lille area.

Lille coach Garcia meanwhile refused to buckle, replacing Tulio De Melo with another striker in Gervinho.

But Bruno Cheyrou then almost doubled Marseille's lead when he drove, after a good chest-down by Brandao, shaved the left upright of Butelle, and then Marseille defender Taiwo put pressure on the visitors' keeper with a long-range drive.

Deschamps replaced Brandao with Spaniard Fernando Morientes for the remaining 12 minutes, during which 10-man Lille defiantly pegged Marseille back while remaining resolute in defence.

In the 84th minute second-half substitute Eden Hazard almost delivered for Lille when he capped a fine individual run down the left with a powerful shot which forced Mandanda to parry.

Another second half substitute, Bakary Kone, then saw his well-driven left-foot shot parried by Butelle on the stroke of full time.

In the fourth minute of injury time Lille won a free kick 30 yards out, but Hazard could only fire it into the wall.

When he lobbed the rebound back into the Marseille area the hosts defence were at sixes and sevens, but two of the Lille players who tried to scramble the loose ball into the net looked even worse off as Mandanda fell to the floor to smother the ball.

IN BRIEF

Flamengo outselling Real

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian side Flamengo are selling their shirts at a faster rate than Spanish giants Real Madrid, according to the club's marketing department.

"According to the most recent figures available we have sold 435,000 shirts in a little less than 60 days. That's one every 13.5 seconds. By way of example, Real Madrid, since buying Kaka (in June) and (Cristiano) Ronaldo (in July) have sold a shirt every 16 seconds," Ricardo Hinrichsen claimed on the Globoesporte website.

Flamengo, whose squad includes veteran striker Adriano, who quit Inter Milan citing personal problems last season, is Brazil's most popular club.

Kaka finds it 'very easy'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian signing Kaka said he finds it "very easy" playing alongside the other new world stars at the club.

"It's very easy to play in a team with people of such quality around," he said following his Spanish debut with the side, a 2-0 win over Real Sociedad in a pre-season friendly on Saturday.

He had special praise for another of Real's 'new Galaticos', Spain international Xabi Alonso, signed from Liverpool this month.

"Xabi Alonso has brought us a lot of security and fluidity. Now the most important thing is to look for balance and we are getting that," the Spanish sporting press quoted him as saying.

"We understand each other and I believe we can do great things together. I have noticed that the team gains possession with Xabi Alonso and that is very important," said the midfielder, signed from AC Milan for 65 million euros in June.

Riise appears in court

AFP, Oslo

Roma defender John Arne Riise appeared in court here Monday to give evidence against his former agent Einar Baardsen, who is accused of swindling 22 million kroner (2.5 million euros, 3.5 million dollars) from the ex-Liverpool star.

"Baardsen was my best friend and advisor. I had total confidence in him," the Norwegian international was quoted as saying in court by the Verdens Gang newspaper.

"I only wanted to play football and I was happy," he told the court in Stavanger, southwest Norway.

Baardsen, who represented Riise between 2001 and 2005, is accused of fraud and embezzlement. Prosecutors claimed he duped 22 million kroner out of the Roma defender.

Negredo to stay in Spain

AFP, Madrid

English Premier League outfit Hull City appear to have failed in their bid to sign Real Madrid striker Alvaro Negredo, who is set to join Spanish side Zaragoza, a Spanish sports daily said Monday.

The 23-year-old wants to remain in Spain, and Real are ready to let him, AS reported.

This is despite the fact that Hull has agreed to Real's terms of an 18 million euro transfer fee plus a two-year buy-back clause worth 25 million euros - an offer Zaragoza cannot match, the paper said.

It said the newly promoted outfit is ready to pay a fee "very far" from the amount sought by Real, but the Madrid club would have an option to buy

Barca edge Bilbao

AFP, Bilbao

European champions Barcelona beat Athletic Bilbao 2-1 in the first leg of the Spanish Supercup on Sunday with second-half goals by Xavi and reserve forward Pedro Rodriguez.

Athletic striker Oscar de Marcos opened the scoring in the 44th minute as he evaded both Gerard Pique and Daniel Alves before seeing his shot clip off Carles Puyol and fly over Barcelona keeper Victor Valdes into the corner of the net.

Barcelona levelled in the 58th minute as Eric Abidal sent a cross to the far post where Rodriguez rolled it back for Xavi who slotted it into the

corner from close range at Bilbao's San Mames stadium.

Rodriguez scored the winner nine minutes later when he stepped past Athletic Bilbao midfielder Markel Susaeta and hammered a shot inside the near post from 25 yards.

Barcelona, who have won the Spanish Supercup seven times, will host the return leg on August 23.

The tournament is contested each year between the league champions and the winners of the King's Cup but as Barcelona won both competitions they are facing beaten Cup finalists Athletic.

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola was without a number of players with attacking midfielder Andres Iniesta and striker Lionel Messi still struggling with thigh injuries.



Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez (R) celebrates his goal against Athletic Bilbao during their Supercup clash at the San Mames Stadium in Bilbao on Sunday.

FIXTURES

Tuesday
Celtic (SCO) v Arsenal (ENG)
Sporting Lisbon (POR) v Fiorentina (ITA)
Timisoara (ROM) v Stuttgart (GER)
Sheriff (MDA) v Olympiakos (GRE)
Copenhagen (DEN) v Apoel (CYP)