

Manchester toasts Tevez

AFP, Manchester



Carlos Tevez did his old side Manchester United a favour by scoring the winner as Manchester City beat leaders Chelsea 2-1 in the English Premier League on Saturday.

City's win, which followed a run of seven straight league draws, cut fellow big-spenders Chelsea's lead over second-placed United, the reigning champions, to just two points.

Chelsea, knocked out of the League Cup in a shoot-out on Wednesday by Blackburn, suffered further penalty misery when, at 2-1 down with eight minutes left, England midfielder Frank Lampard saw his spot-kick saved by Shay Given.

For Given, who recently suffered the agony of the Republic of Ireland's controversial World Cup playoff loss to France, this was a special win.

"It's been seven or eight games since a victory in the league," he told ESPN. "It's especially nice against Chelsea, a top team with great players."

"We have only lost one game all season, and that was very late (against Manchester United) at Old Trafford, so I think we are doing all right."

Chelsea took an eighth-minute lead at a rain-drenched Eastlands when, from a debatable corner, the ball eventually fell to Nicolas Anelka, whose shot was saved by Given only for the rebound to hit Emmanuel Adebayor and go in for an own-goal.

But Adebayor scored at the right end seven minutes before half-time when he struck from close range although Chelsea were con-

vinced Micah Richards had handled in the build-up.

"We were unlucky for the first goal, the handball against Micah Richards. It was not a good day for the referee (Howard Webb)," said Carlo Ancelotti, the Chelsea manager.

But delighted City boss and ex-Chelsea forward Mark Hughes said: "Not many teams can come back against Chelsea. To show the character and quality that we did was

56th-minute free-kick that wrongfooted Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech.

United had earlier kept the pressure on with a 4-0 victory away to West Ham.

They went ahead on the stroke of half-time at Upton Park when veteran midfielder Paul Scholes unleashed a ferocious 20-yard shot.

Midfielder Darron Gibson, who scored both United's goals in their mid-week League Cup quarter-final win



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez is congratulated by teammate Robinho after scoring the winning goal against Chelsea in their Premier League clash at the City of Manchester Stadium on Saturday. Tevez's direct free-kick goal meant that Chelsea's lead at the top is now only down to two.

a fantastic effort by everybody."

Argentina striker Tevez then delighted both Manchester clubs by firing in a

over Tottenham, added a second with a right-footed shot into the top corner.

Antonio Valencia put the

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Spain made favourites

INTERNET, undated

Bookmakers cut the odds on Spain winning the World Cup to 4-1 (5.0) following Friday's World Cup draw, making them favourites ahead of Brazil. Brazil are 5-1 (6.0) with the London betting firm Coral's, after being grouped with Portugal, Ivory Coast and North Korea.

Spain are seen as having an easy task of making it to the last 16 after they drew Switzerland, Honduras and Chile.

England, meanwhile, were cut from 6-1 (7.0) to 11-2 (6.5) after drawing USA, Algeria and Slovenia.

"Patriotic punters will be delighted with the draw as, on paper at least, England should have few problems qualifying from their group," said Coral's spokesman Davis Stevens.

"Although they will then face tougher tasks if they are to progress further, we regard Fabio Capello's men as leading contenders for glory in South Africa, an outcome that would cost the bookies millions."

Argentina, who drew Nigeria, South Korea and Greece are fourth favourites to win the trophy at 11-1 (12.0), with holders Italy moved in to 13-1 (14.0) after being placed in a seemingly simple group with Paraguay, New Zealand and Slovakia.

Germany are 14-1 (15.0), with the Netherlands and France both 16-1 (17.0).

Ivory Coast are the shortest priced African team at 31-1 (32.0), while hosts South Africa are 120-1 (121.0).

Paddy Power installed Spain's David Villa as favourite for top-scorer at 9-1 (10.0), with Luis Fabiano of Brazil at 10-1 (11.0).

Becks doesn't fear axe

AFP, London

David Beckham does not fear being left in the cold when England boss Fabio Capello picks his World Cup squad next summer.

The 34-year-old is set for a return to Serie A side AC Milan next month in a bid to prove his form and fitness at the highest level but he accepts that move does not rubber-stamp his World Cup spot.

"I do not fear being axed for the World Cup. If I don't make the squad it's not going to stop me supporting the team," he said.

"Nothing is guaranteed, I have discovered that is true in my career. But if I can be part of it then it will be amazing."

"Everybody knows how much I love playing for my country but the manager will pick a squad he thinks will win the competition. That has to be the way."

Lippi unexcited

INTERNET, undated

Italy coach Marcello Lippi said he was only partly pleased about a 2010 World Cup draw that most observers considered fairly easy for his title-holding squad. Italian media Saturday quoted Lippi as saying that he was not wary nor satisfied for having to face Paraguay, New Zealand and Slovakia in the group phase of the tournament taking place in South Africa next summer.

"We must be realist," Lippi said. "Verify the worth and characteristics of our opponents and get ready to tackle them. An opponent gets tougher if you consider it easy."

Lippi said he considers Paraguay, which open their campaign with Italy on June 14 in Cape Town, a strong opponent.

"They were for two years at the top in the South American qualifications. We have already seen New Zealand (beaten 4-3 in a friendly earlier this year) and we know them. Slovakia have grown. They have interesting players."

"You have to tackle everyone with your maximum attention, then if we'll be good enough to pass the group phase we'll start to think about other things."



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus midfielder Claudio Marchisio is jubilant after scoring a brilliant goal in their top-of-the-table Serie A clash with Inter Milan at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Saturday. Marchisio's delicate chip over the 'keeper proved to be the winning goal in a match where Jose Mourinho was sent-off.

Juve edge past Inter

AFP, Turin



Claudio Marchisio scored the winner as Juventus beat champions Inter Milan 2-1 in a bad-tempered clash at the Stadio Olimpico here on Saturday to breathe new life into the Serie A title race.

Inter's lead at the top of the table is now just four points following AC Milan's comfortable 3-0 cruise against Sampdoria earlier in the day.

But the high-profile, top-of-the-table clash here lived up to its star billing with incident aplenty as Juve finished with 10 men following Brazilian Felipe Melo's late sending off, while Inter coach Jose Mourinho was also dismissed in the first half.

Juve coach Piero Ferrarini said his team had proved a point following two straight defeats, one in the Champions League.

"These type of games are very close, you can win them or lose them but during the week we were well focused despite the fact that clearly there were some difficult days given we had just lost twice," he said.

"This was a great reply. We approached this game in a way that could beat the champions of Italy and we deservedly managed to do that."

Mourinho, unsurprisingly, refused to come out and meet the press.

After all the pre-match hype about racism Inter substitute Mario Balotelli received buckets of abuse but none of it

could be described as racial.

Juve began well and on five minutes had a good chance as Amauri chested the ball back to Mohamed Sissoko who got just enough of a push in the back from Muntari Sulley as he shot to ensure goalkeeper Julio Cesar wasn't troubled.

On nine minutes Diego Milito tried to tee up Dejan Stankovic for the champions but Martin Caceres slid in to clear.

Juve were ahead on 20 minutes as Giorgio Chiellini's header from a Diego free-kick was turned forward by Alessandro Del Piero and off Felipe Melo's thigh, wrong-footing Julio Cesar as it dribbled over the line.

Mourinho was sent off for protesting the award of the free-kick in the first place after a fairly clear Del Piero dive.

The lead did not last long, though, as Inter came storming back. On 25 minutes Gianluigi Buffon beat out a Walter Samuel header from Esteban Cambiasso's free-kick but only a minute later Samuel Eto'o headed home a simple right-wing cross from Stankovic.

The game then settled into a stalemate until Diego tried to inject some life into it with a fizzing low shot on 54 minutes that Julio Cesar got down to and held.

Inter then broke quickly with Thiago Motta's long ball picking out Milito who crossed to the back post where Stankovic's low shot was blocked.

Juve, though, went straight up the other end and retook the lead after Julio Cesar couldn't hold Sissoko's low shot and Marchisio swept home the rebound.

Balotelli's introduction straight afterwards ensured the atmosphere was turned up a notch and he was loudly jeered every time he touched the ball while there were sporadic individual chants directed at him.

The end of the game descended into farce with Balotelli at the centre of it after going down clutching his face following minimal contact with Felipe Melo.

That sparked a bout of pushing and shoving that saw Sissoko also go down clutching his face, again after almost no contact, this time after he and Cristian Chivu gently touched foreheads.

The result was Felipe Melo picking up a second yellow card and being dismissed but Balotelli further incurred the home fans' wrath as he flung himself to the ground theatrically in the box in injury time as well.

Earlier in the day Milan had enjoyed a cake-walk against hapless Sampdoria, ending the game as a contest inside 23 minutes.

Marco Borriello opened the scoring from Ronaldinho's cross with just one minute on the clock.

The Brazilian star then set up Clarence Seedorf to rifle home a left-footer from the edge of the area into the roof of the net on 21 minutes.

Just two minutes after that it was all over as Pato picked up Borriello's header and although goalkeeper Luca Castellazzi saved his first effort, he sent his second into the empty net as Milan consolidated their second place.

Bayer held to draw

AFP, Berlin



Bundesliga leaders Leverkusen dropped another point when they were held to a goalless draw at Hanover 96 on Saturday, but remain four points clear as Bayern Munich continued their rise up the table.

Jupp Heynckes' undefeated Leverkusen have now drawn five of their last seven games and second-placed Werder Bremen have a chance to cut the lead at the top of the table to a single point if they win at Cologne on Sunday.

"We were missing something today," said Heynckes.

"We lacked precision in our passing and we were not so certain in midfield."

"We missed some good chances to score and the result is fair for both sides."

Bayern Munich's 2-1 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Friday leaves them third in the table.

"I'm very pleased, but we had to work extremely hard," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal.

"The luckier of the teams won in the end, Gladbach were the better team in the first half and made a lot of chances, but it was a great display from our goalkeeper Joerg Butt."

Stuttgart coach Markus Babbel was robbed of his first league win since September by a stunning goal from Bochum on Saturday.

The home side were denied their chance to escape the bottom three and grab only their third Bundesliga win of the season after Bochum's Austria defender Christian Fuchs beat Jens Lehmann with a stunning free-kick.

The ex-Germany goalkeeper was left red-faced when Fuchs curled his effort over the Stuttgart wall and into the back of the net to leave the home side third from bottom.

Germany defender Serdar Tasci's second-half header looked to have lifted Stuttgart out of the bottom three and seal their first league win since September 26 to ease some of the pressure on Babbel.

His side must beat Romania's Unirea Urziceni at home on Wednesday to progress from Group G in the

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Ronaldo, hero and villain

AFP, Madrid



Ballon D'Or winner Lionel Messi scored a brace as Barcelona won 3-1 at Deportivo La Coruna

on Saturday to restore their five-point advantage over Real Madrid at the summit.

Four days after collecting the award for European Player of the Year Messi turned on the style scoring a brilliant opener and then heading a crucial 80th minute goal after Depor had equalised.

It took Messi's goals tally to nine alongside Zlatan Ibrahimovic who scored Barca's third goal in the closing stages.

"It was a really important win," said Messi. "We have won all three matches this week but there are plenty of games still to go and it is difficult to retain this title."

It was Barca's first win at the Riazor Stadium since 2005 and the champions now lead Real, 4-2 winners over Almeria, by five points having played one game more.

It was the third league win inside a week for Barca but there is no respite as they travel to Dinamo Kiev on Wednesday with the holders needing a point to reach the knockout stage of the Champions League.

Cristiano Ronaldo was the hero and villain for Real Madrid playing a pivotal role in their 4-2 comeback win over Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday, only to be sent off late on for violent conduct.

"I am human and make mistakes too," said Ronaldo. "It was an instinctive reaction and I have apologised to my team-mates."

After starting the previous two games on the substitutes' bench due to a slight knock Ibrahimovic returning to the Barcelona starting line-up while Sergi Busquets returned

from his suspension.

Ibrahimovic attempted an ambitious overhead kick on 23 minutes before the ball ran through to Thierry Henry who missed a great chance at the backpost.

It was left to Messi to show them how to do it with the Argentine collecting a Dani Alves pass before turning neatly and hammering a left-footed shot into the corner.

However, Depor equalised against the run of play with Busquets failing to clear a long ball and Adrian anticipated well to head past Victor Valdes on 38 minutes.

Barca coach Pep Guardiola threw on the tricky Pedro in an attempt to change things and his cross set up Messi for his second headed goal ten minutes from time.

Ibrahimovic scored for the third successive game to cap a hard-earned but vital victory.

Real bounced back from their Barcelona setback with a

4-2 win over Almeria but it was far from easy as Real came from 2-1 down to maintain their perfect home record.

Ronaldo was the heart of everything, winning a dubious 82nd minute penalty, which he subsequently missed, before substitute Karim Benzema rammed in the rebound.

Almeria were furious about the penalty, awarded automatically by the referee despite goalkeeper Diego Alves appearing to get a hand on the ball to push it away from Ronaldo.

"It wasn't a penalty and it had a major impact on the scoreline," bemoaned Almeria coach Hugo Sanchez.

Former Manchester United man Ronaldo then scored his sixth goal of the season two minutes later to make it 4-2, after Gonzalo Higuain had equalised, before pressing the self-destruct button four

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IN BRIEF

1 million tickets on general sale

INTERNET, undated

The third ticketing phase for the 2010 World Cup was launched by FIFA Saturday with another 1 million tickets for next year's finals in South Africa going on general sale. Approximately 680,000 tickets have so far been sold to the general public for the 64 matches in the 10 World Cup venues situated in nine host cities.

"This is a huge amount," Horst Schmidt, chairman of the FIFA's ticketing sub-committee told a press conference in Cape Town, a day after the draw for the 2010 finals.

"We are confident that our promotional activities will be a huge success."

Fans have until January 22 to apply for individual match tickets or team-specific series but a fourth sales phase will commence on February 9, followed by a final "last-minute" offer.

However, Schmidt warned fans against waiting until the final moment to purchase tickets.

"There are tickets also available last-minute but the question is what tickets and for what matches," he said.

Prices for group matches range from 20 dollars to 160 dollars for the opening match on June 11 between South Africa and Mexico at Soccer City in Johannesburg.

Tickets for the final on July 11 at the same venue will range from 100 to 600 dollars.

Category 4 tickets, the most affordable, have been exclusively set aside for South African residents.

There are approximately 3.7 million tickets for the tournament but almost a third will be snapped up by sponsors and FIFA members.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi displays his trophy after receiving the European footballer of the year award, the "Ballon d'Or" (Golden ball) in Boulogne-Billancourt on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo is distraught at missing a chance during their Primera Liga clash against Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday. Ronaldo scored, missed a penalty and was later sent-off as Real won 4-2.