

## MAN UTD FALL TO VILLA Chelsea keep lead

AFP, London



Chelsea extended their lead at the top of the English Premier League table despite a 3-3 draw with Everton on Saturday after champions Manchester United suffered a shock 1-0 loss at home to Aston Villa.

The results left Chelsea three points in front of second-placed United.

Sir Alex Ferguson's men kicked off Saturday's late match knowing Chelsea had already dropped points.

But they were undone when Villa striker Gabriel Agbonlahor headed in a cross from fellow England international Ashley Young in the 21st minute.

United striker Wayne Rooney hit the crossbar and late on visiting goalkeeper Brad Friedel saved from Dimitar Berbatov as Villa, winning at Old Trafford for the first time in 26 years, moved up into third place.

Everton went ahead at Stamford Bridge when Louis Saha's header came off the post and hit Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech for a 12th-minute own goal.

But Didier Drogba, played in by Frank Lampard, levelled for Chelsea in the 18th minute with a shot from the edge of the box.

Fellow forward Nicolas Anelka gave Chelsea, beaten 2-1 by Manchester City last weekend, the lead with a well-taken finish in the 23rd minute.

But Everton fought back when substitute Aiyegbeni Yakubu made it 2-2 on the stroke of half-time.

Ivory Coast striker Drogba restored Chelsea's lead by powering in his 18th goal in 20 games in all competitions this season in the 59th minute.

But minutes later Everton were level again when Drogba's headed clearance hit Saha on the head and looped over Cech.

Wolves climbed out of the relegation zone

with a 1-0 win away to Tottenham, who missed out on the chance to go third.

Manchester City, reduced to 10 men, came back three times in a 3-3 draw with struggling Bolton while Birmingham beat West Ham 1-0.

Younes Kaboul's stoppage-time equaliser gave bottom of the table Portsmouth a 1-1 draw away to Sunderland after Darren Bent had put the hosts ahead.

But the French defender's joy was cut short when he was sent-off for removing his shirt while celebrating the goal, having already been booked.

Elsewhere, Burnley and Fulham drew 1-1. Stoke and Wigan finished all square at 2-2 and Hull and Blackburn shared the points in a goalless draw.

Ivan Klasnic gave relegation-threatened Bolton an 11th minute lead against Manchester City.

Cash-rich City were struggling until Carlos Tevez drew them level in the 28th minute.

Bolton regained the lead with Gary Cahill's curling shot two minutes before the interval but there was still time for City's Micah Richards to make it 2-2 ahead of half-time.

Klasnic scored his second in the 53rd minute strike and things got worse for City when Craig Bellamy was sent-off for diving.

But City equalised when Tevez scored his second goal in the 77th minute.

The in-form Lee Bowyer scored Birmingham's winner in the 52nd minute and West Ham were reduced to 10 men when Mark Noble was sent-off.

Bobby Zamora put Fulham go 1-0 up in the 50th minute before Wade Elliott levelled for Burnley 10 minutes later.

Stoke goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen saved his third penalty in four games to ensure the Potters came away with a point.

At White Hart Lane, Wolves clung on to a third-minute lead secured when Kevin Doyle turned in Nenad Milijas's free-kick.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) volleys home to score his second goal during their Premier League match against Everton at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Gunners set to sue KNVB

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal is to sue the Dutch football federation (KNVB) over the ankle injury sustained by Robin van Persie while on international duty, according to reports on Sunday.

The striker damaged ankle ligaments in a match against Italy on November 14, and is not expected to return until April.

"We are working on this with our lawyers at the moment and we are definitely going for it," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said.

"I expect financial compensation for the damage it can make to the championship and the salary involved. It is especially frustrating to lose your players for the rest of the season in a friendly game."

Wenger is particularly angry because he believes the KVB misdiagnosed the injury.

"Initially, the Dutch FA said it was a small problem and Robin called me to see if he could go and see this Serbian wonder doctor and it was OK."

"It was only when he came back here that we realised there was much more damage. In Holland they have a fight between the national doctor and the guy that did the surgery on Robin."

"We just want to go for it because there are a lot of things that have not been done properly after he was injured."

A previous case in which Charleroi sued over an injury suffered by their player Abdelmajid Oulmers in a international for Morocco was discontinued after the G14 group of clubs, which was backing the case, was superseded by the European Clubs Association.

A agreement exists so that clubs are paid compensation by FIFA for players injured in World Cup finals matches, or by UEFA for European Championship finals matches, while the Football Association is one of a number of associations to take out insurance to cover players in international duty, but there is no universal policy on the issue.

Gomez, the most expensive player in the history of the Bundesliga, opened the scoring on 23 minutes with his fourth in four games.

Then Olic, who has become a fan favourite given the injury

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## Real leave it late

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid closed back to within five points of leaders Barcelona with a late 3-2 win at title rivals Valencia on Saturday with Argentine Ezequiel Garay the unlikely hero with an 83rd minute winner.

All five goals came in a sensational second half with Argentine Gonzalo Higuain twice putting Real ahead only for David Villa and substitute Joaquin, only on the pitch five minutes, to peg Real back at 2-2 with ten minutes left.

However, substitute Garay headed in a Xabi Alonso set-piece on 83 minutes with his first league goal for Real and it was vital.

It was a first home defeat for Valencia who had gone 15 games unbeaten in all competitions and the club fall six points behind Real in third.

Barcelona, who have played one game more, go into 2010 as leaders of the Spanish top-flight after a hard-fought 1-0 derby win over Espanyol at Camp Nou on Saturday.

A questionable first half Zlatan Ibrahimovic penalty secured victory for Barca in their final league match of 2009.

"I took the penalties at Inter Milan and (Lionel) Messi takes them here but I don't mind taking the odd one," said Ibrahimovic.

The win put Real under pressure and they were missing Cristiano Ronaldo through suspension while Kaka was, however, captain Raul was again on the bench.

For Valencia Villa led the line looking to shoot down the club that tried in vain to sign him in the summer.

Valencia had the ball in the

net through Pablo Hernandez on four minutes but the goal was ruled out for a marginal offside.

It was a first half full of offside with Juan Mata having a Valencia goal disallowed for another offside before Real suffered the same fate with Karim Benzema's header chalked off.

## 'Cesc not playing for Catalonia'

THE GUARDIAN

Arsene Wenger will resist any attempts by Johan Cruyff to include the Arsenal captain, Cesc Fàbregas, in his Catalonia representative team to play Argentina in an exhibition match at the Camp Nou later this month.

Fabregas was due to line up alongside Xavi Hernandez and Gerard Pique in the game on 22 December, with Cruyff quoted in Spain as being "90 per cent" sure that the Arsenal midfielder would make the trip to Barcelona. Wenger has tried and failed to make contact with the former Holland international and Barça manager but has said his player will not be involved in the fixture.

"We don't allow the players to play in friendlies because we have too many games," said Wenger, who has seen his squad deprived of players such as Robin van Persie and Abou Diaby in recent weeks after picking up injuries while on more conventional international duty.

"In England we play football through the Christmas period while all the other countries stop and play friendlies and charity matches. There is a demand for Cesc but there is a demand for five or six other [Arsenal] players as well."

Sergio Ramos thundered a header against the post from the resulting corner but Valencia held on.

The goals were more forthcoming in the second half with Higuain netting the opener on 54 minutes although Benzema deserved most of the credit with his run and cross putting the chance on a plate.

Villa equalised six minutes later with a header after Real's central defence went missing but Higuain responded with his second goal on 65 minutes with a clinical finish after a Marcelo pass.

Joaquin came on a substitute and thought he had earned Valencia a point with his 80th minute goal but Garay had the last word with his dramatic header three minutes later.

The result was not what Barcelona wanted but the champions did their job in their final league game of 2009 notching a 1-0 win over Espanyol.

Barca now head to the FIFA World Club Championship in Abu Dhabi, with their first match on Wednesday, looking to win a sixth trophy in a year.

Swede Ibrahimovic made it 11 league goals for the season with an unstoppable penalty on 39 minutes although Espanyol will feel aggrieved at the spot-kick which was awarded for a shirt-tug on Xavi.

With usual penalty taker Lionel Messi out with an ankle injury, Ibrahimovic stepped up and was the paragon of coolness smacking the spot-kick into the corner.

In the second half Barca looked a shadow of themselves and only some last ditch interceptions helped keep Espanyol at bay as they notched another clean sheet to make it a perfect seven home wins at Camp Nou.

It was a fourth straight

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## No way back for Toni

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal has reaffirmed that Luca Toni is no longer part of his plans.

The Italy striker has not figured for the Bavarians since declaring that his relationship with Van Gaal was "as good as over" last month, and the Bayern coach sees it the same way - but claims it is all the player's fault.

"We have rules and we have to work within these rules," said Van Gaal.

"Luca Toni did not stick to the rules. He had to fight for his place along with (Ivica) Olic and (Mario) Gomez."

"Every player, whether they are a world champion or whatever, has got to accept that he doesn't play."

In an interview on Germany's ZDF television on Saturday night, Van Gaal

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## IN BRIEF

### Woods buys island estate

AFP, Stockholm

Scandal-hit golfer Tiger Woods' wife Elin Nordegren has bought a vast beachfront estate on an island near Stockholm that can only be reached by boat, a residents' association said on Sunday.

"Elin Nordegren bought a house on the island, it's true. She's the owner since December 1," Sten-Aake Johansson, head of Faaglaro island's residents association, told AFP.

There are around 140 properties on Faaglaro, which is about 40 kilometres (25 miles) southeast of the Swedish capital.

"The property consists of several houses, it's a renovated farm, on the water with a beach," Johansson said.

According to the Swedish Aftonbladet daily the 24,000-square-metre property with swimming pool was sold for 16 million euros (1.5 million dollars, 2.2 million dollars).

Johansson could not confirm the selling price or say whether billionaire golfer Woods himself was involved in the transaction.

Faaglaro, part of the archipelago of thousands of islands that lies between Stockholm and the Baltic, is reached by boat from the port of Vaxholm, where former model Nordegren grew up.

Woods announced Friday he was taking a hiatus from professional golf and admitted he had cheated on Nordegren after reports that 10 women had claimed to have had sexual relationships with the 14-time major champion.

World number one Woods, who has a son and daughter with Elin, said he wanted to work on being a better husband, father and person.

Women such as a show club hostess, pancake restaurant waitress, porn star and cocktail waitress have alleged affairs with Woods, whose squeaky-clean image was shattered.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich players (L-R) Phillip Lahm, Ivica Olic and Mario Gomez celebrate after the latter scored his goal during their Bundesliga match against VfL Bochum in Bochum on Saturday.

## Bayern go goal crazy

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich and Schalke moved firmly into the German title race on Saturday with impressive away victories.

Bayern produced a 5-1 romp at struggling Bochum while Schalke won 2-0 at fellow title hopefuls Werder Bremen to edge the Bavarians into third spot.

Bayern's win, coming hot on the heels of a four-goal Champions League success at Juventus, gave them 30 points from 16 games, two adrift of leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who just preserved their

unbeaten league record this season with a 2-2 draw on Friday at tallenders Hertha Berlin.

With a week to go until the winter break Louis van Gaal's men are finally firing on all cylinders just six weeks after they languished in eighth place, eight points off the summit.

A win over Mainz next week and the four-times European champions could just go into the Christmas break top of the heap.

But they lie third for now with Schalke muscling past Bremen into second thanks to goals from Kevin Kuranyi - a left-footed strike two minutes after the break - and then Jan Moravek, who fired in after Kuranyi set him up with 18 minutes remaining.

Czech star Moravek had

only come on two minutes earlier for Croatian Ivan Rakitic in what proved to be an inspired substitution by coach Felix Magath, whose men are just a point off Leverkusen.

Bayern, meanwhile, cannot stop scoring.

Fourteen goals in four games for two conceded tells its own story and strike tandem Mario Gomez and Ivica Olic have been leading rivals a merry dance - leaving Germany international Miroslav Klose and World Cup winner Luca Toni on the first team fringes.

Gomez, the most expensive player in the history of the Bundesliga, opened the scoring on 23 minutes with his fourth in four games.

Then Olic, who has become a fan favourite given the injury

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## Juve in free-fall

AFP, Rome



Dumped out of the Champions League in midweek, Juventus saw their Serie A title hopes suffer a hammer blow Saturday as they slumped to a 3-1 defeat at Bari to miss a chance to go second.

Ciro Ferrara's side looked every bit a side suffering a Euro hangover as they struggled to find any rhythm on a heavy pitch and after just seven minutes the zebras were behind, Riccardo Meggiorini slamming home after eluding a curiously sluggish backline. After 23 minutes it was all square as French veteran David Trezeguet levelled from close range after Diego's effort was half scrambled clear by keeper Jean-Francois Gillet.

But World Cup-winning

defender Fabio Cannavaro then clumsily fouled Paulo Vitor Barreto and he dusted himself off to strike his penalty past keeper Gianluigi Buffon to send the home fans at the Stadio San Nicola wild.

Five minutes after the restart Gillet did superbly to block an effort from Trezeguet before Tiago fired a great chance wide as Juve tried to respond.

Sergio Almiron then looked to have inadvertently handed the Old Lady a lifeline when he fouled Fabio Grosso in the penalty area but Diego, seemingly distracted by a laser light in the crowd, fired his spotkick over the bar.

Juve seemed flattened by that miss and Bari then sealed the points when, from a Pedro Kamata corner, Jose Martin Caceres could only clear as far as Almiron, who completed the shock result with a low drive which

eluded everyone including a stock still Buffon.

Having last week beaten leaders Inter, Juve thus undid much of that good work as they stay stuck on 30 points from 16 games, five behind Inter - away to lowly Atalanta on Sunday - and one behind AC Milan, who Sunday host Palermo.

Parma can move within two points of the Turin giants, now beaten four times in the league, on Sunday if they beat Bologna at home.

In Saturday's other game there was likewise no shortage of goals as Cagliari and Napoli shared six goals after the visitors threw away a two-goal lead and then snatched a point with a Mariano Bogliacino goal six minutes into injury time.

The draw left Napoli seventh - one of six clubs on 24 points - with Cagliari a point further back.

## Assou-Ekotto in hot water

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham Hotspur full-back Benoit Assou-Ekotto could be facing a police investigation after seemingly clashing with a fan following his side's 1-0 home defeat to Wolverhampton Wanderers. Spurs suffered a deeply disappointing 1-0 defeat, seriously impinging on their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League.

The alleged incident occurred near the players' tunnel as Assou-Ekotto left the field.

The Cameroon international was pulled away by Spurs assistant manager Joe Jordan, with suggestions that he had raised his hands to a fan's neck after being verbally abused.

"We are aware of the incident and we are investigating," said a Spurs spokesperson. "The police are speaking to everyone involved."



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid goalscorers Ezequiel Garay and Gonzalo Higuain celebrate after the former scored a late winner in their Primera Liga match against Valencia at the Mestalla on Saturday.