

City see off Bolton

AFP, London



Manchester City moved back on to Liverpool's shoulder in the race for a place in next season's Champions League with a 2-0 win over Bolton on Tuesday.

A Carlos Tevez penalty and Emmanuel Adebayor's second-half volley left City level on points with fourth-placed Liverpool with a game in hand, although it was far from being a performance to suggest they deserve a place among Europe's elite.

Tevez's 31st-minute penalty was dispatched after Paul Robinson had needlessly sliced down England under-21 winger Adam Johnson, who made an impressive debut for City following his transfer window move from Middlesbrough.

City were far from dominant however and Bolton were unfortunate not to be awarded a penalty when Kolo Toure appeared to bring down Bolton's Swedish forward Johan Elmander in the area.

The home side made the most of that let-off however with Adebayor chesting down a pass from former Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira, also making his first start in a City shirt, before smashing his finish past Jussi Jaaskelainen with 17 minutes to play.

Basement club Portsmouth enjoyed a rare moment to savour this season when Aruna Dindane headed home in the sixth minute of injury time to salvage a 1-1 draw with Sunderland, who had looked set to claim their first league win since November thanks to Darren Bent's 12th-minute penalty.

Bent slotted the spot-kick past Brighton team-mate David James after being brought

down by Pompey's recent signing Ricardo Rocha, who earned himself a red card in the process.

Sunderland were unable to make their numerical advantage really count and the sides were evened up when Lee Cattermole was given his marching orders after collecting a second yellow card nine minutes after the break.

Steve Bruce's side finished the match with nine men after substitute David Meyler received the third red card of the evening and Dindane's equaliser header saw Portsmouth snatch an far-poster right at the death.

Wigan edged a little further away from the relegation zone after a 1-1 draw with Stoke at the DW Stadium.

Austria international Paul Scharner headed in a Charles N'Zogbia's free-kick in the 14th minute to give Roberto Martinez's side the lead.

That was cancelled out by Tuncay Sanli with quarter of an hour left and Wigan had goalkeeper Chris Kirkland to thank for their point with the former England international providing a fine stoppage-time save from James Beattie.

Burnley's search for a first away win of the season goes on after a 3-0 defeat by Fulham at Craven Cottage.

First-half goals from Danny Murphy and David Elm put Fulham in control while Burnley were frustrated to see a free-kick from Tyrone Mears hit the angle of post and bar.

That might have changed the complexion of the match but Bobby Zamora killed off any chance of a contest nine minutes into the second half, curling a low free kick around the wall to make it 3-0.

Loew buries hatchet

Football

AFP, Berlin

National coach Joachim Loew ended his stand-off with the German Football Federation (DFB) on Tuesday as both parties agreed to plough all their efforts into Germany's 2010 World Cup campaign.

"We have agreed upon a clear strategy right up to the World Cup," Loew said during a televised press conference from the DFB's base in Frankfurt.

"We agree that our mutual interest is tied to the build-up to the World Cup over the coming weeks and months and we will prepare the team so that it can enjoy a good tournament."

Loew confirmed, however, that an extension to his contract, which expires in July this year, will not be discussed until after the World Cup (June 11-July 11).

He added: "We have a very high responsibility, and not just vis-a-vis the DFB for this World Cup, but because we are representing Germany in a competition overseas and behind us there are millions of supporters who want and who of course expect the team to play a good tournament."

DFB president Theo Zwanziger also confirmed that no contract negotiations would take place before the World Cup, but reiterated his faith in Loew.

"The team needs this coach," Zwanziger said. "We want success and I say it here and now, such success at the World Cup is only

possible with this coach."

The DFB suspended negotiations over a two-year extension to Loew's contract, citing wage demands made by Loew and the team's general manager, Oliver Bierhoff.

Loew had been expected to agree to stay on until the 2012 European Championship and on Sunday he declared himself "very angry" with the DFB's decision to publicise details of their negotiations.

Bayern Munich president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge had earlier urged the DFB to find a solution with Loew.

The Bayern chief also criticised Bierhoff for having reportedly demanded the right to veto the appointment of Loew's successor.

"That was not acceptable (but) I think he's prepared to take a step back," said Rummenigge, who added that the DFB had made a "serious mistake -- the biggest mistake possible -- by publicising the contents of the contract".

Loew took over as Germany's national coach in 2006 after two years as an assistant to Jurgen Klinsmann.

Under Loew's guidance, in 45 games Germany have recorded 31 victories, eight draws and six defeats.

At this summer's World Cup, Germany have been drawn in Group D with Australia, Ghana and Serbia.

They will enter the competition as one of the favourites, but Loew must resolve problems that include the lack of an obvious first-choice goalkeeper and the poor form of strikers Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski.



Argentina coach Diego Maradona smiles during his arrival at Mar del Plata, ahead of a friendly match against Jamaica, on Tuesday.

Jovanovic joins L'pool

AFP, Brussels

Serbian international attacking midfielder Milan Jovanovic signed for English Premier League giants Liverpool on a free transfer from Standard Liege on Tuesday, his agent confirmed.

The 28-year-old, who will join Liverpool in June this year, signed a three year contract and will earn a reported 3million euros a year.

Jovanovic, who turned down an offer from Spanish side Real Madrid last year because he didn't think he would get enough playing time, had also been a target for Serie A duo AC Milan and Juventus as well as Valencia.

Jovanovic, who impressed as the Serbians reached this year's World Cup finals and in Standard Liege's two successive title wins, was recently named the Belgian league's player of the season.

Ronaldinho not picked

Football

AFP, Brasilia

Ronaldinho's hopes of a Brazil recall received a sizeable blow on Tuesday when he was left out of Dunga's squad for the team's final friendly prior to the World Cup against Ireland on March 2.

The friendly match in London is the squad's last outing before they travel to South Africa for the tournament and Ronaldinho's omission suggests Dunga has been unmoved by the winger's recent return to form with AC Milan.

Robinho, who joined former club Santos on a six-month loan deal from Manchester City last month, has been included in the squad.

Group G. They begin their campaign against North Korea in Johannesburg on June 15.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Julio Cesar (Inter Milan, ITA), Doni (Roma, ITA)

Defenders: Maicon (Inter Milan), Daniel Alves (Barcelona, ESP), Juan (Roma), Lucio (Inter Milan), Luisao (Benfica, POR), Thiago Silva (AC Milan, ITA), Gilberto (Cruzeiro), Michel Bastos (Lyon, FRA)

Midfielders: Gilberto Silva (Panathinaikos, GRE), Josue (Wolfsburg, GER), Felipe Melo (Juventus, ITA), Lucas (Liverpool, ENG), Kaka (Real Madrid, ESP), Ramires (Benfica), Elano (Galatasaray, TUR), Julio Baptista (Roma), Kleber (Flamengo)

Forwards: Robinho (Santos), Adriano (Flamengo), Nilmar (Villarreal, ESP), Luis Fabiano (Sevilla, ESP)

IN BRIEF

Benzema in doubt for Lyon tie

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's French striker Karim Benzema is in danger of missing the first leg of his side's Champions League last-16 tie with former club Lyon due to a muscle problem, his club said on Tuesday.

Medical examinations revealed that Benzema is suffering from "an inflamed left thigh muscle," Real reported on their website.

"He is expected to miss approximately seven days, but his return depends on the progress made over that time span."

Benzema will therefore miss his side's league game at bottom club Xerez on Saturday and is a doubt for the trip to Lyon on February 16.

Emirates to sponsor Milan

AFP, Dubai

Dubai's Emirates Airlines said Wednesday it would sign a sponsorship contract with Italy's AC Milan, without disclosing the value or the duration of the deal.

"Emirates Dealings will officially sign the contract in Milan on Friday", airline spokesman Boutros Boutros told AFP in Dubai.

"We are proud to sponsor a club as prestigious as AC Milan."

Emirates already sponsors English Premiership club Arsenal, German side Hamburg, Paris Saint-Germain in France and Greek side Olympiakos.

Italy gets tough on bad language

AFP, Rome

The Italian Football Federation on Tuesday adopted new measures to stamp out foul language and poor behaviour.

Players can now be shown a straight red card for swearing on the pitch, while video evidence will also be used to catch transgressors.

Authorities have extended the time limit for using TV evidence by four hours, giving them until 4pm rather than midday on the day after a game to collect such evidence.

There will also be fines for players who lift up their jerseys to show T-shirts bearing messages.

"The idea is to improve the levels of behaviour," explained federation president Giancarlo Abete.

Guingamp reign end

Football

AFP, Paris

French Second Division side Guingamp's reign as French Cup holders ended on Tuesday when they were beaten 1-0 by First Division strugglers Boulogne-sur-Mer in their last 16 match.

A fine 25 yard strike by midfielder Alexandre Cuvillier on the hour mark was enough to separate the sides and book Boulogne's place in the last eight - a feat they last achieved in 2005 when they were a mere fourth division side.

Elsewhere the upset of the round thus far came as fourth division Quevilly - finalists in 1927 and semifinalists in 1968 - ousted in-form First Division side Rennes 1-0.

It was even more of a shock as Rennes had been scoring goals for fun of late, hitting four in three successive matches.

Quevilly coach Regis Brouard said his side had prevailed because they had used their heads and not relied on a muscular approach.

"I take my hat off to my players for having played as we had decided to," said Brouard, whose side are ninth in the Fourth Division.

"We won this match intellectually... the guys played with their heads. It is not sufficient enough to run and to jump."

Ailing French giants Paris Saint Germain kept their hopes alive of rescuing something from another disastrous season, though, a 1-0 away win over unheralded Fourth Division outfit Vesoul reflects how low they have sunk.

However, PSG coach Antoine Kombouare was pleased enough that former France international Ludovic Giuly's goal had got them through to the last eight.

"Yes, that is an enormous relief," said the former PSG defender, who was lured from Valenciennes to take over.

"We have qualified, that is very important, and in difficult conditions."

"It is a win which allows us to regain some

confidence, to smile and be happy again in the changing rooms."

Both starting line-ups for the Boulogne and Guingamp clash reflected where their priorities lie as several normal first choice players were either left out of the squad completely or were on the substitutes bench.

Guingamp coach Victor Zvunka - whose side are a lowly 18th in the Second Division - was philosophical in defeat, though, he conceded that he had targeted reaching the last eight.

"I fixed as my objective to get to at least the quarterfinals," said Zvunka.

"One has to be realistic, for a second division team to reach the final two seasons in a row, one has to be dreaming."

His Boulogne counterpart Guyot was delighted to have received a welcome psychological boost ahead of several crucial league matches - starting with Lille on Saturday - as they battle to avoid an immediate return to the Second Division, which sees them presently seven points adrift of fourth from bottom Le Mans.

"We are very happy to have qualified," said Guyot, who heard calls for his resignation for the first time this season following the 2-0 defeat by Montpellier last Saturday.

"Still one has to be calm as this means we are only in the last eight."

"Without actually making a comment about the present situation in the championship, it is in any case an achievement to have gone so far in this competition."

"We await the draw to know who we will face, but whoever it is we will play that match with a certain liberated feeling with the target of making the last four."

There was to be no upset either in another last 16 tie as mid-table First Division outfit Sochaux - the team mainly made up of second string players - disposed of third division Beauvais 4-1.

Sochaux' stroll saw them reach their first quarterfinal since 2007, and their fans will see that as a good omen as they went on to win the trophy.

Pompey breathe easy

AFP, London



Portsmouth won a temporary stay of execution on Wednesday when England's High Court gave the club seven days to outline how it plans to pay a 7.5-million-pound tax bill.

Despite the judge in the case expressing concern that the club is insolvent, she agreed to delay the implementation of a winding-up petition tabled by the British tax authorities, removing the immediate threat of the club being put into administration.

Portsmouth's lawyers were given seven days to present the court with a detailed statement of the club's financial position in order to give the court a basis for deciding whether, as lawyers for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) argued, it is incapable of meeting its obligations to creditors.

Portsmouth disputes the HMRC's bill for 7.5 million pounds in Value Added Tax and requested 21 days to provide the statement requested by the court.

That was rejected by the judge, who expressed grave concerns over the state of the south coast club's finances.

"It seems to me there's a very real risk that this company is undoubtedly trading while it is insolvent," Registrar Christine Derrett said.

If Portsmouth fail in their fight against the winding-up petition, they will become the first Premier League club to be placed in administration, a move that would lead to a nine-point penalty being imposed and effectively condemn Pompey to relegation.

That is looking very likely in any case. Portsmouth, who have lost 17 of their 25 matches this season, are currently bottom of the table and six points adrift of Bolton, the club occupying the last survival spot.

Talks on a negotiated settlement with HMRC broke down on Tuesday but, on the pitch, there was a glimmer of hope for the club's long-suffering fans as their side snatched a 96th-minute equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Sunderland.

Afterwards, Portsmouth manager Avram Grant said a football club could not be treated like

any other business.

"It is not a normal business, it is not like an apartment you buy without feelings," the former Chelsea and Israel manager said. "The club is 112 years old, it belongs to 250,000 people. It needs to stay alive."

But Registrar Derrett said Portsmouth, which employs 600 people, could not expect any special treatment.

"I'm obviously conscious that, by making a winding-up order, it would have very severe consequences not only for the company as a business but for the supporters themselves, but that's not a consideration that I strictly take into account," she said.

Hong Kong-based businessman Balam Chainrai took a controlling interest in the financially-stricken club last week after exercising provisions linked to a 17-million-pound loan his company made to the former owner, from Ali Al-Faraj, a Saudi Arabian national based in the British Virgin Islands.

Chainrai, Portsmouth's fourth owner this season, is hoping to stabilise the club before selling it on to new owners.

Portsmouth's financial difficulties have been underlined by the club's failure to pay staff and players on time on four occasions since August and former owner Alexandre Gaysdamak claims he is still owed 28 million pounds.

The club's precarious financial position -- the result of overspending on players and an unsustainable wage bill -- became evident towards the end of 2008 and resulted in the dismantling of the squad which won the FA Cup that year.

Star striker Jermain Defoe and midfielder Lasanna Diarra were sold in January 2009, Defoe's England team-mates Peter Crouch and Glen Johnson followed at the end of last season and Bosnia goalkeeper Asmir Begovic and key defender Younes Kaboul were offloaded last month.

Cardiff City, the club Portsmouth beat in the 2008 Cup final, and League One club Southend also faced winding-up orders from HMRC on Wednesday. Cardiff were given 28 days to clear an outstanding bill of 1.5 million pounds while Southend's case was adjourned for the same period to allow for further legal arguments.



Manchester City striker Emmanuel Adebayor swivels to volley home the second goal against Bolton Wanderers during their Premier League encounter at the City of Manchester Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Barca deny Cesc deal

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Barcelona denied Wednesday they had struck an agreement with Arsenal's star midfielder and captain Cesc Fabregas to return to the Champions League holders next season.

"Given the extraordinary impact of reports in different media about an accord with the Arsenal player Cesc Fabregas, Barcelona categorically denies negotiations or accords of any kind with the player," the club said in a statement on its website.

On Tuesday Spanish radio station Cadena Ser said the club and the player had reached a verbal agreement and all that remained was for a fee to be agreed with Arsenal.

Fabregas, a 22-year-old Spanish international, is Arsenal's top scorer with 14 goals in all competitions this season and is under contract with the Gunners until 2014.

But his future has once again been the subject of much speculation this season and media reports have consistently linked him with a return to La Liga.

Those reports said Fabregas will move to either Real Madrid or his boyhood club Barcelona, who he left to join the Gunners in September 2003.

Britain's Daily Mirror reported on Tuesday the London club have written to Nou Camp officials warning them not to publicly express their interest in securing the player's signature.

However Barcelona denied receiving any such letter.

"Barcelona would like to state that we maintain excellent relations with Arsenal," the statement said.

Cicinho back at Sao Paulo

AFP, Sao Paulo

In-form Serie A sider AS Roma's Brazilian defender Cicinho has joined his former club Sao Paulo on loan until the end of the season, the Brazilian club said on Tuesday.

"Cicinho has agreed to return to the club where he made his name in world football," a Sao Paulo spokesman said.

The 29-year-old international - a member of the 2006 World Cup finals squad - will stay with the six-time Brazilian champions until June 30 with an option for a three-month extension if Sao Paulo qualify for the Copa Libertadores.

His 97,000-euro-a-month salary will be shared between Roma and the Brazilian team.

Cicinho moved from Sao Paulo to Spanish giants Real Madrid in December 2005.

He suffered an injury-plagued two years with 'The Meringues' before joining Roma for 11 million euros in August 2007.

Cicinho has not appeared for the second-placed Italian side for over a month and recently expressed his desire to leave.