

# Blues regain edge

AFP, London



Chelsea opened up a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League after Didier Drogba's double inspired a 2-0 win at Wolves and Everton claimed a 3-1 victory over Manchester United on Saturday.

Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea have often dropped points on their travels this season but in-form Drogba, who has six goals in five games since returning from the African Nations Cup, ensured the Blues were able to take advantage of United's slip.

In the day's early kick-off, United looked lethargic after their mid-week victory against AC Milan and slumped to their first defeat in nine league games.

Dimitar Berbatov put Sir Alex Ferguson's team ahead in the 16th minute when he controlled Antonio Valencia's cross perfectly before smashing a close-range shot past Tim Howard.

But United's lead was short-lived as Russian winger Diniyar Bilyaletdinov drove a vicious swerving effort past Edwin van der Sar from 25 yards.

United struggled to find any momentum after that and David Moyes's team took the lead in the 76th minute.

South African midfielder Steven Pienaar whipped over a low cross for substitute Dan Gosling to steer in just his second goal of the season.

Jack Rodwell ensured United would suffer their sixth league defeat of the season in the 90th minute as he surged away from Jonny Evans and drove his shot into the far corner.

"We were well beaten, simple as that," Ferguson said. "We started the game well enough, but their goal galvanised them and gave them the incentive.

"This is a bad result and at this time of the year

we can't afford results like that."

At Molineux, Chelsea struggled in the early stages but finally pieced together an incisive move to take the lead in the 40th minute.

Yuri Zhirkov exchanged passes with Michael Ballack and the Russian crossed for Ivory Coast striker Drogba to slot home.

Drogba took his goal total for the season to 25 in the 67th minute when poor defending from Christophe Berra allowed him to reach Petr Cech's long punt, round goalkeeper Marcus Hahnmann and drive in his 25th goal of the season.

Third placed Arsenal are just two points behind United after a 2-0 win against Sunderland at the Emirates Stadium.

Arsene Wenger's team made the breakthrough in the 27th minute when Denmark striker Nicklas Bendtner tapped-in Emmanuel Ebou'e's cross for his first goal since October.

Sunderland have now gone 11 league matches without a win and Arsenal goalkeeper Manuel Almunia, back in for Lukasz Fabianski after the Pole's midweek blunders against Porto, was rarely tested following Bendtner's strike.

Gunners captain Cesc Fabregas stroked home a 90th minute penalty after the Spaniard was bundled over by Fraizer Campbell.

West Ham boosted their survival bid with a 3-0 win over fellow strugglers Hull at Upton Park.

Gianfranco Zola's team got off to the perfect start as Swiss midfielder Valon Behrami fired home from Guillermo Franco's flick in the third minute.

Hull's task was made even harder when midfielder Craig Fagan was sent off for a second bookable offence after tugging Alessandro Diamanti early in the second half.

And England forward Carlton Cole sealed it in the 59th minute with a clinical finish that moved the Hammers four points clear of the relegation zone.

Julien Faubert had set up Cole's goal and he added West Ham's third himself in the 90th minute.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) thumps the ball past Wolverhampton Wanderers goalkeeper Marcus Hahnmann (L) to score his second goal in their Premier League match at Molineux Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Reds galore as Inter draw

AFP, Rome



Nine-man Inter Milan stretched their lead at the top of Serie A to eight points after a 0-0 draw with 10-man Sampdoria in a nasty, edgy encounter at the San Siro on Saturday.

Sampdoria played around 35 minutes with a two-man advantage and 25 minutes with one extra player and yet never showed either the urgency or ingenuity needed to break down the champions.

Inter lost both centre-backs Walter Samuel and Ivan Cordoba in the first-half while Samp's Giampaolo Pazzini was dismissed 17 minutes from time.

Jose Mourinho's team may not have won but they looked more likely than their visitors to do so.

But the club were so angry with the referee's handling of the game that they refused to send either Mourinho or anyone else to speak to the press.

Sampdoria coach Luigi Delneri was happy with the point despite his team's negative performance.

"No way am I disappointed with the result, I'm satisfied with the point," he said.

"When we had the numerical superiority we tried to move the ball, put in crosses and shoot from distance but they defended well, even with nine."

Chances were at a premium throughout the game but it wasn't the football that dominated the headlines.

Samuel had already been booked when he hauled down Nicola Pozzi on 31 minutes and was red carded.

He had been the last defender and as Pozzi

tried to go round him he lifted his arm to block the Sampdoria frontman as he got his body between man and ball.

It wasn't clear whether he was dismissed for an elbow or for a professional foul.

From the free-kick Cordoba was booked for encroachment and just seven minutes later he received a second yellow card after arriving late on Pozzi.

Mourinho was incredulous on the touchline, making a sign that he was in handcuffs and he laughed in bemusement 12 minutes into the second period when Samuel Eto'o was justly booked for a dive in the box.

In all this time there had hardly been a chance of note and Inter's nine men were holding out without too many alarms.

Everyone was walking a tightrope and sure enough Pazzini was given his marching orders for a second booking for what barely even seemed a foul on Dejan Stankovic.

With only 19 players on the pitch Inter finally fashioned a chance as Goran Pandev fed Eto'o whose shot was too close to Samp goalkeeper Marco Storari, who parried.

Sampdoria may have had far more of the ball but Inter had always looked the more dangerous on the counter while Julio Cesar had a trouble free night in the hosts' goal.

The point did at least move Samp up to fourth ahead of Sunday's matches.

Earlier in the day Robert Acquafresca scored a brace as Genoa boosted their Champions League hopes with a comprehensive 3-0 rout of lowly 10-man Udinese.

Rodrigo Palacio added the third after

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

# 'I'm better than Mourinho'

AFP, Rome

Napoli coach Walter Mazzarri on Saturday claimed that, pound for pound, he is doing a better job than Jose Mourinho at champions Inter Milan.

Inter sit eight points clear at the top of the table while Napoli are fourth, in the last Champions League qualification position, and 15 points behind the leaders.

The two sides drew 0-0 in Naples last week, since when a war of words has developed between the rival coaches.

And as he prepares his side for Sunday's clash against rock-bottom Siena, Mazzarri showed no signs of letting up.

"If you compare the players we've each got at our disposal, my results are better," he said.

"He talks a lot but as for the rest, with the team that Inter have they would win even without a coach."

# Udinese sack de Biasi

AFP, Rome

Italian Serie A side Udinese sacked coach Gianni de Biasi on Sunday, replacing him with Pasquale Marino, a former coach who was fired to make way for de Biasi just two months ago.

De Biasi is paying the price for Udinese's poor form this year. Despite having the most prolific striker in the Italian division -- Italian international Antonio Di Natale -- Udinese are in 16th place after winning just once under de Biasi who took over in December.

After Saturday's 3-0 defeat to seventh-placed Genoa he became the 14th Serie A coach to lose his job this season.

# 'We can keep Rodwell'

SOCCERNET

David Moyes believes Everton can keep their youngsters Jack Rodwell and Dan Gosling out of the clutches of the big boys.

"They don't let you down," he said. "They came in and both of them got a good goal."

"There's been quite a lot of attention towards Jack Rodwell for a while but, strangely enough, it was Wayne that worried me a lot more. It doesn't worry me quite so much with Jack because we've been through it before.

"I don't think we were quite ready for Wayne when Wayne came on the scene but we're certainly ready for Jack Rodwell and our team is good enough to carry a Jack Rodwell and keep him and keep bigger suitors away.

"The boy is going to be a good player in time but at this present time it's potential and we have to bring it along at the right pace."

# Carlo happy at boost

AFP, Wolverhampton



Carlo Ancelotti believes Chelsea's vital Premier League win at Wolves was the perfect boost ahead of Wednesday's Champions League encounter with their former manager Jose Mourinho and his Inter Milan team.

After collecting just six points from their previous six away games, Ancelotti felt it was crucial to improve at Molineux on Saturday and take full advantage of Manchester United's defeat at Goodison Park.

Ancelotti was happy to let his players know United's result prior to kick-off and they responded with a 2-0 win, secured by two Didier Drogba goals, that stretched their lead at the top of the Premier League to four points before taking on Mourinho in the San Siro.

"It will be a fantastic game and it is a very important game," Ancelotti said.

"Inter and Chelsea are very good teams and I am looking forward to playing the game. I will not play the game myself, but we are going there to play."

"I don't know whether we will have to be better than we were against Wolves. I do not know what is going to happen in the game."

"Now we can go to Milan for a big game. It is very

important and the Champions League is another aim of ours this season. We would like to win that competition, but it is not going to be easy."

There is little love lost between former AC Milan boss Ancelotti and Mourinho as both have stated they are not friends in recent weeks and the Inter manager has been taunting his old club, suggesting they made a mistake in sacking him four seasons ago.

Since then, after winning two Premier League titles and two FA Cups with Mourinho, they have had four managers and only have the FA Cup won by Guus Hiddink to show for it, but they have the look of champions again.

"It was very important to win this game after the defeat of Manchester United. We had a chance to improve our position in the league and we have done that," said Ancelotti.

"I knew and the players knew that Manchester United had lost and I think that was an important factor for us, for sure. We had prepared very well for the game."

"We did not play so well, but we had the spirit to battle for every ball and I think we deserved to win the game. It is important when you do not play so well that you can win the game."

"Our position in the table is better, but we still have to pay attention. There is a lot of games to play and nothing is decided yet and we wanted to improve our form away."

# C'Ron shocked at Maderia disaster

AFP, Funchal

Football star Cristiano Ronaldo said Sunday he had been left "incredulous" and "shocked" by the mudslide disaster which hit his native Madeira and promised help for relief efforts.

"It is a huge catastrophe, a tragedy without precedent," said the world's most expensive footballer, who was born in a poor district of Funchal, capital of Madeira, where at least 40 people died in storms which unleashed torrents of mud on Saturday.

"No-one can remain indifferent to a calamity of such huge proportions, least of all me who was born and grew up in Madeira, an island which clearly I think about a lot," he was quoted as saying on the website of his agent, Gestifute.

"It is for this reason that I want to express my availability to help the organisations and official entities, in the limit of what is possible, to alleviate and overcome the consequences of this great devastation," declared Ronaldo, who cost a record 94 million euros when he was transferred from Manchester United to Madrid.

# Rooney hails 'scary' Capello

SOCCERNET

England fans can feel even more secure with their national team in the hands of Fabio Capello after star player Wayne Rooney gave the Italian's thorough style a glowing appraisal in comparison to his predecessors.

Manchester United striker Rooney revealed he found Capello "really intimidating" when he took over as England manager in 2007 because of the extremely high standards he demanded on the training pitch.

"It's heartening for England fans, then, that the other key man in the equation is singing from the manager's hymn sheet. Quoted in several Sunday newspapers, Rooney said: "When Capello came in on the first day, he was scary."

"It was mad. On the training pitch, you'd be training for about three seconds and then he'd stop you and put you in position and say that's where you should be. He'd physically move you. It was really intimidating."

Comparing the Capello era to the previous regime, Rooney added: "He's changed everything. You need to watch yourself if you make a mistake in training. He records everything and he once had Glen Johnson going over a tape because he wasn't happy with one of his throw-ins."

"Everything has to be right. But he's done a fantastic job and we're very happy to have him. He's restored our confidence as a team and he's given me the freedom to play."

# Bayern's streak ends

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal said he was chasing trophies, not records, as the German giants' 13-game winning streak came to a shock end on Saturday with a 1-1 draw against local rivals Nuremberg.

The result propelled Bayern to the top of the Bundesliga, one point ahead of unbeaten Bayer Leverkusen, who could yet overhaul van Gaal's men when they take on sixth-placed Werder Bremen on Sunday.

The 21-times German champions failed to secure a 10th straight league win that would equal a Bundesliga record but van Gaal dismissed this as irrelevant.

"This is not decisive. What is important is what happens at the end of the season, not what happens this weekend," said the autocratic Dutch coach.

A visibly furious van Gaal defended his side, saying: "I think this was one of our best performances of the season. We created several chances. We just didn't score a second goal."

Nuremberg had one chance. They then played with all 11 players in their own half. We were very dominant and did everything well for 90 minutes, except for five seconds."



Bayern Munich starlet Thomas Mueller is ecstatic after netting in their Bundesliga match against local rivals Nuremberg on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Barca outclass Racing

AFP, Barcelona



Spanish league leaders Barcelona put their injury concerns to one side as they cruised to a 4-0 win over Racing Santander on Saturday.

The Catalan side had seen their lead at the top reduced to two points following their first league defeat last weekend against Atletico Madrid but they were comfortably in charge from the start against Racing.

Despite missing several key players including Dani Alves, Xavi Hernandez and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Barca went ahead after seven minutes through Andres Iniesta who latched onto a loose ball in the penalty area.

Racing went further behind through a tame goal when a Thierry Henry free-kick went straight through their wall, but then minutes later another from almost exactly the same spot was struck

perfectly by veteran Mexican international defender Rafa Marquez and went in off the post.

Racing offered few moments of danger on the counter-attack and their newly discovered prodigy Sergio Canales had a quiet game.

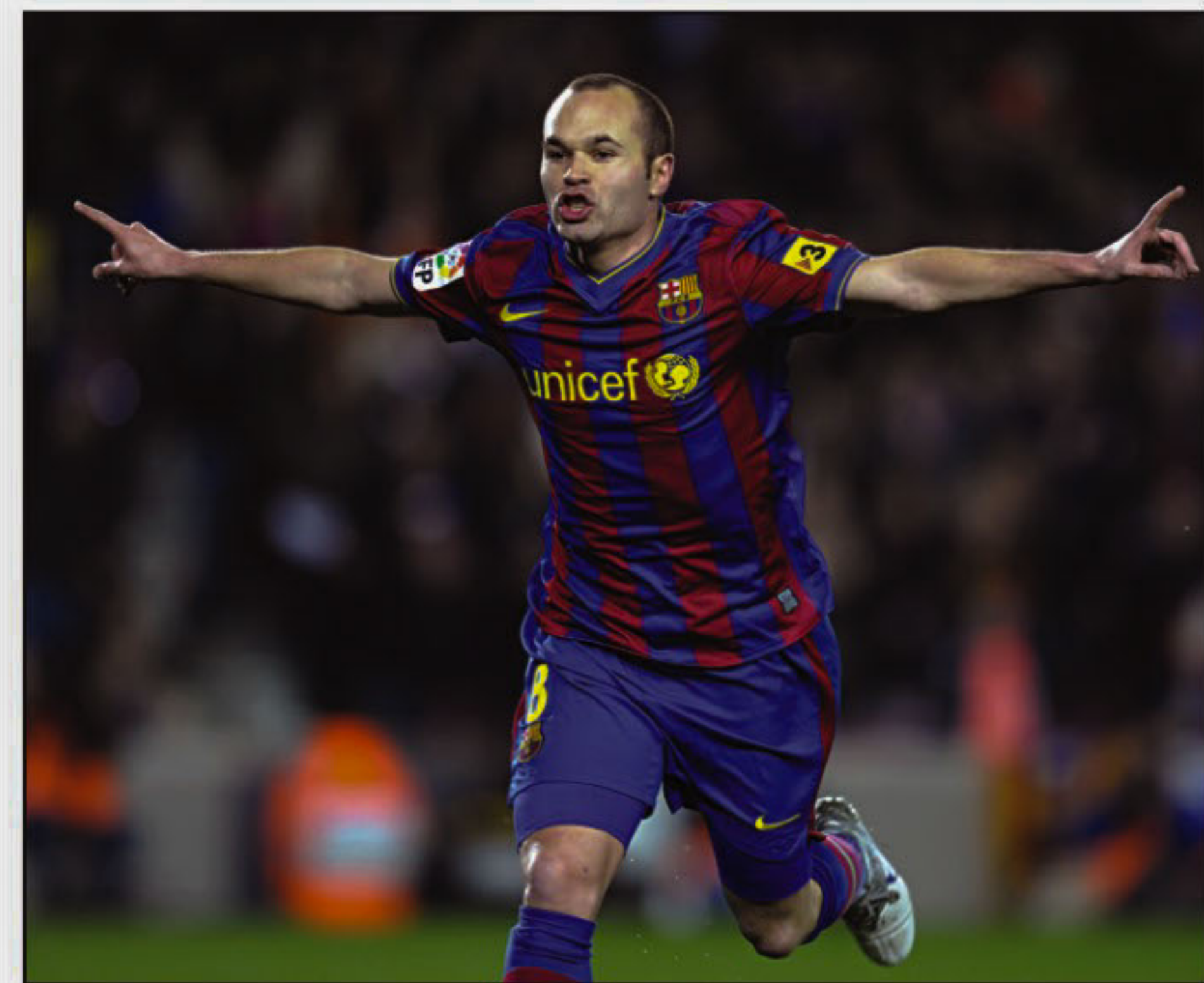
There were fewer clear-cut chances in the second half but substitute Thiago Alcantara made Barca's win more emphatic with a deflected goal six minutes from the end.

Later on Saturday Sevilla condemned Mallorca to their first home defeat of the season as they ran out 3-1 winners and took a crucial advantage in the fight for a Champions League place.

The result means that Sevilla have now gone four points clear of fifth placed Deportivo la Coruna while Mallorca, who have been enjoying one of the best seasons in their history, suffered their second successive defeat.

Mallorca went ahead through Mario Suarez but Sevilla were well worth their equaliser when Jesus Navas beat the Mallorca defence to the ball and then slotted home.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Barcelona star Andres Iniesta celebrates after scoring in their Primera Liga match against Racing Santander at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP