

# Wolves hold Villa

AFP, Birmingham



Aston Villa salvaged a 2-2 draw against Premier League strugglers Wolves thanks to

John Carew's late equaliser on Saturday.

Martin O'Neill's team looked set for an embarrassing home defeat against their local rivals after James Milner's first half own goal left them trailing until the final minutes at Villa Park.

Carew had given Villa an early lead but Jody Craddock equalised before Milner's mistake put the visitors in front.

Fortunately for Villa, Norway striker Carew was on hand to grab the equaliser with eight minutes to play.

Even the late leveller was hardly a cause for celebration as Champions League hopefuls Villa missed a chance to draw level with fourth-placed Tottenham ahead of Saturday's late matches.

Wolves moved four points

clear of the relegation zone but that gap could be narrowed depending on Burnley and Hull's results this weekend.

O'Neill suffered a pre-match blow when Gabriel Agbonlahor was ruled out with the groin injury suffered during the midweek win at Wigan.

Still, Villa kicked off as the only side unbeaten in the Premier League in 2010 and they were quickly on top.

Carlos Cuellar picked out

**Aston Villa 2 (Carew 16, 82)  
Wolves 2 (Craddock 23,  
Milner 38-og)**

Carew and he turned past Christophe Berra and fired a low shot just past the far post.

Villa's pressure told as Carew put the hosts ahead in the 16th minute with his 12th goal of the season.

Milner found Ashley Young on the left and his low cross was turned home by Carew from close range.

That should have been the signal for a Villa rout but captain Stiliyan Petrov conceded a

free-kick in the 23rd minute with a rash foul on Kevin Doyle and, from the resulting set-piece, Wolves drew level.

David Jones curled an inswinging delivery in the penalty area and, although Ronald Zubar miscued his shot, the ball deflected perfectly for Craddock to shoot past Brad Friedel for his fifth goal of the season.

That setback rocked Villa and they conceded again in the 39th minute as Wolves got another lucky break.

Jones played in Matthew Jarvis down the left edge of the penalty area and carried on his run into the six-yard box. Jarvis tried to find the midfielder with his cross but Milner, stretching to clear, got there first and prodded the ball into his own net.

Villa enjoyed most of the possession after half-time as Wolves tried to hold onto their lead.

Richard Dunne climbed above the Wolves defence to meet a corner from Young but directed his header just past a post.

Wolves goalkeeper Marcus

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Wolverhampton Wanderers defender Jody Craddock (L) celebrates his equalising goal against Aston Villa during their Premier League encounter at Villa Park on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

# Bayern angry at French

Football

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich have hit out at France's national team for their treatment of Franck Ribery, and are set to lodge an official complaint with football's world ruling body FIFA.

Ribery has endured injury woes since before the start of the season and was called up to play for France against Spain in a March 3 friendly despite having injured his ankle playing for his Bundesliga club days earlier.

Bayern chiefs now blame France for helping to aggravate that injury, claiming Ribery received poor medical treatment by doctors of the national team in the days leading to the game.

"We never want to find ourselves in a situation like this again," said Bayern president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge on the club's website.

"The France team has done us no favours at all."

Ribery initially injured his ankle playing against Hamburg on February 28 and spent the

next two days receiving treatment in France before the Spain friendly.

Since the France v Spain match, which he did not finish, Ribery appeared as a substitute against Cologne on March 6, then played in Bayern's Champions League encounter against Fiorentina three days later.

It was in that encounter, which sealed Bayern's passage to the quarter-finals of the competition, that Ribery aggravated his ankle injury.

He will now have to sit on the sidelines for Bayern for the second consecutive week, and Rummenigge blames it all on him being called up for the Spain friendly.

"Before this match he hadn't trained on the Monday or the Tuesday. During those days he was getting treatment (in France) and what's more it wasn't carried out properly," added Rummenigge.

"Now, it's us who gets to pick up the cost."

The 26-year-old Ribery has a Bayern contract until June 2011 but he has recently been linked to European giants Barcelona, Real Madrid and Manchester United.

## IN BRIEF

### Hertha punish 23 fans

AFP, Berlin

Hertha Berlin have banned 23 of their fans from all football stadiums in Germany for three years after supporters rioted at Berlin's Olympic Stadium following last weekend's defeat by Nuremberg.

After Nuremberg scored an injury-time winner in Berlin, around 100 spectators jumped barriers and chased the players off the pitch, threatening them with flagpoles which they then used to vandalise the bench area.

The German Football Federation (DFB) are investigating the violence which saw parts of the stadium damaged before police regained control, but Hertha have identified 23 fans and informed them that they are banned until July 2013.

### Aaron snubs Ryan calls

SOCCERNET

Stoke defender Ryan Shawcross has yet to hear from Aaron Ramsey as he tries to apologise for the tackle which broke the Arsenal midfielder's leg.

Shawcross, who received a three-match ban for the tackle that will rule Ramsey out until early next season, has telephoned the Wales international on several occasions and left messages. But Ramsey has not returned any of his calls as yet.

# MAN UTD V LIVERPOOL Fergie fans the flames

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson has fanned the flames ahead of Sunday's potentially explosive

encounter between Manchester United and Liverpool at Old Trafford by dismissing his arch-rivals as one-season wonders.

Ferguson is still smarting from this fixture last season, when United took the lead only to capitulate to a 4-1 defeat in which Nemanja Vidic was sent off.

Liverpool lost fewer games than United last season and pushed their rivals all the way in the title race. Many expected them to come back even stronger this season but Ferguson insists he always viewed last season's vibrant challenge as a one-off from a side that had reached its peak.

Just to anger Benitez and his players even further, Ferguson has also hinted that the Merseyside club receive preferential treatment from the FA's disciplinary gurus in the wake of Steven Gerrard's escape from punishment despite his controversial challenge on Portsmouth's Michael Brown earlier this week.

As far as his assessment of Liverpool's on-the-field influence goes, history suggests Ferguson was correct, with Benitez's squad now struggling to secure a top four finish and Champions League qualification.

Ferguson, who could welcome back Ryan Giggs from a broken arm, said: "I thought it was an exceptional season and I thought it would be difficult to achieve that again. That was just my opinion."

"Did they over perform? Yes. I think they did very well. When they got that run going they showed form and consistency. That helps."

"I don't know what they are mired in. I think that their challenge last year was obvi-

"I think everyone expected Liverpool to be better but they are not and the challenge for them, along with a few others, is to get that fourth spot, which is a league of its own. I think we can all say with certainty that one of ourselves,

despite footage showing him elbowing Michael Brown

He quipped: "They are lucky like that. Maybe one day we will get lucky."

United can overtake the joint record of 18 titles they share with Liverpool but Ferguson added: "I don't place it in that importance. If we win the 19th title, the most important thing will be the next one, the 20th."

"This club is capable of doing that. But we could win four titles in a row. That's an achievement, no one would do that again in a hurry so that's something to ponder on."

"It's the road hopefully to another title for us. Our form has really picked up in the last few weeks. It would be a major boost to keep being top of the league because being top of the league at this stage of the season would make us difficult to get back out. The important home games are with Liverpool, Chelsea and Tottenham."

"So it's an important game in that respect. It's different from maybe other times we've played Liverpool but very important."

Gerrard, meanwhile, has warned United that the return to full form and fitness of Fernando Torres could have a huge impact on the outcome of the game.

The England midfielder said: "There is lot more to come from Fernando in a Liverpool shirt, believe me."

"Now we have to look at Manchester United. Every time you go to Old Trafford, you expect a tough game but we are going in on the back of two good performances."

"This will be a completely different game. They are the league leaders but we will give it a really good go."



ously championship form but sometimes a team peaks with that particular team and sometimes it's difficult to do again.

"It happened to me and, in my second full season, we ended up middle of the league.

Arsenal or Chelsea are going to win the league. But no one has any certainty about fourth place, it changes every week almost."

Ferguson admits he was not surprised to see Gerrard escape an FA suspension

# Caroline, Jelena in final

Tennis

AFP, Indian Wells

Second-seeded Caroline Wozniacki downed good friend Agnieszka Radwanska 6-2, 6-3 on Friday to book a final showdown with former world number one Jelena Jankovic at the BNP Paribas Open.

By reaching the final, Wozniacki is projected to reach a career-high number two in the world next week, up two spots from her current number four.

"Right now I'm just happy about my result here," the 19-year-old Dane said. "I'm thinking about this tournament, and that's the most important thing for me right now."

After the two traded breaks in the fifth and sixth games of the second set, Wozniacki gained the upper hand for good with a break in the seventh game courtesy of a forehand cross-court winner.

She saved a break point in the next game, then closed it out with one more service break as Radwanska hooked a forehand wide on match point.

"I thought that I played a really good match," Wozniacki

said. "I played consistent and tried to be aggressive, but there was a fine line between playing over aggressively and too passively."

"You know, we know each other so well," added Wozniacki, who exchanged a big hug with her friend at the net after the match.

"We know each other's strengths and weaknesses."

**Jelena Jankovic (SRB x6)  
beat Samantha Stosur (AUS x8) 6-2, 6-4  
Caroline Wozniacki (DEN x2)  
beat Agnieszka Radwanska (POL x5) 6-2, 6-3**

Agnieszka is a great fighter. She doesn't give up. I knew that I had to fight till the last point to win this match."

The final will be the first of the year for both Wozniacki and Jankovic.

"I feel great. I'm so happy to be in the finals for the first time here," said Jankovic, whose previous best performance in Indian Wells was a semifinal loss to eventual champion Ana Ivanovic in 2008.

"I haven't been doing well the last couple tournaments," added Jankovic,

who fell in the third round at both the Australian Open and the Dubai Open last month, and bowed out in the first round at Sydney and Monterrey.

"I thought the key to today's match was my return," the 25-year-old Serbian said. "Samantha has an unbelievable serve, one of the best serves in the women's game, and I was able to return a lot of her first serves."

"I think she felt uncomfortable, because she really relies on that shot. That's her best weapon."

Stosur, the eighth seed who came into the tournament ranked a career-high 11th in the world, is projected to break into the top 10 on Monday by virtue of reaching the semis.

She saved one match point on her own serve in the ninth game of the second set, and held to make Jankovic serve it out.

Jankovic had to fend off two break points, but finished it off with a serve that Stosur could only swipe out.

"It was a great week, but today I definitely didn't play anywhere close to as well as what I can," Stosur said.



PHOTO: AFP

Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark celebrates her victory against Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Friday.

# Pressure rising on Ancelotti

AFP, Blackburn



Chelsea's Champions League exit at the hands of Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan on Tuesday inevitably led to questions being asked about the future of Carlo Ancelotti and his well-paid players.

Owner Roman Abramovich helped fuel such speculation by making a rare visit to the club's Surrey training ground to address the Italian and an expensively-assembled squad many critics - former Chelsea manager Ruud Gullit included - insist requires a comprehensive overhaul in the summer.

But Ancelotti was adamant that the importance of Sunday's trip to Blackburn Rovers was the only item on the agenda as the Blues attempt to get the better of Manchester United and Arsenal in a three-way fight for the Premier League title.

"Roman spoke with me and with the players," Ancelotti said. "He came to support us because he knows football and

he knows that we are involved in important competitions again. So I think his presence was very good."

"We didn't speak about the future, about the changes for next season, because it's not the right time to speak about this. I said we have important games in the next week and we have to stay focused: all the players and all the club."

Did that mean, therefore, that the Russian was prepared to write off the Inter reverse? Ancelotti was certainly hoping so.

"He was disappointed and he is the owner of a club that is out of the Champions League," he said. "Everyone was disappointed about the last game."

With United's clash with Liverpool likely to be as competitive as usual, Chelsea's coach believes a good result at Ewood Park could be very significant.

"We have a very important trophy again to pursue," said Ancelotti, who may be able to welcome back goalkeeper Petr Cech following three weeks out with a calf injury.

Manchester United but with a game in hand.

"So our destiny is in our own hands. If we win every game, we can do the double. That's very difficult, but we can try to do this. That's very important, to think about this. Only five teams, I think, have won a double in 140 years in England. It's not easy, but we can think about this and do our best. That's our aim."

Blackburn defender Michel Salgado was also thinking about the future, with the 34-year-old former Real Madrid man confident Sam Allardyce's squad could improve enough to qualify for Europe in two seasons' time.

"We are heading the right way," he said. "If we work hard, why not Europe after next season? We have tough games ahead and the most important thing is to get safe first. Two more wins probably, then we will have the confidence to get more and more."

"That can help the future. Maybe not this season for Europe because it is far away but for the next season if we play with the same squad and maybe improve."