

# Tevez thrashes Wigan

AFP, Manchester



Carlos Tevez scored a hat-trick as Manchester City moved up to fifth in the Premier League table with a 3-0 victory over 10-man Wigan at Eastlands on Monday.

Wigan were finding it easy to contain the hosts and threatened themselves when Hugo Rodallega broke quickly and pulled back for Paul Scharner, whose shot flew wide from just outside the area.

Rodallega also went close after he was picked out by a cross-field pass from Mario Melchiot.

The Columbian striker cut in from the left and hit a shot that was pushed wide by goalkeeper Shay Given.

Tevez almost broke the deadlock after skipping past a weak challenge from Melchiot and clipping a looping shot that landed just the wrong side of the post.

net after Stojkovic could only fumble from Tevez's powerful shot.

Rodallega should have opened the scoring eight minutes after the restart.

City failed to deal with Caldwell's long, straight clearance, with the ball hitting the back of Pablo Zabaleta's head, but Rodallega dragged wide.

Ten minutes into the second period, Wigan saw Caldwell sent off for a challenge on Tevez.

Still though it was Wigan pressing, with Moreno curling a shot narrowly wide and Rodallega just failing to get a touch to Maynor Figueroa's cross.

Finally City were able to exploit the extra space, with Patrick Vieira hooking over the top for Tevez, whose shot was deflected wide by Bramble.

Vieira himself had a low strike held by Stojkovic as City increased the pressure.

But they finally made the breakthrough thanks to poor goalkeeping from Stojkovic.

Vieira clipped the ball over the top and the Serb rushed out but failed to make any challenge and Tevez rolled the ball into the net.

They doubled the lead soon after when Adam Johnson fired a cross to the far post that was flicked on by Vincent Kompany and Tevez found the corner of the net.

Tevez then completed his hat-trick when he broke clear, beat the challenge of Figueroa and found the corner of the net with a precise shot.

## RESULT

Manchester City 3 (Tevez 72, 74, 84) Wigan 0

behind fourth-placed Tottenham, who still have to travel to Eastlands but it was not a comfortable evening for Roberto Mancini's side.

Wigan began strongly and started particularly well defensively, with Titus Bramble pulling off a fine block from Emmanuel Adebayor after Tevez's cross.

But City carved them open thanks to Maynor Figueroa's slip, which allowed Shaun Wright-Phillips to break into the box and cross.

Tevez's volley was blocked at full stretch by Wigan's goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic, filling in for the ill Chris Kirkland.

Scharner was first to react when a free kick from Wigan's Marcelo Moreno hit the wall but the Austrian's low drive was tipped wide by Given.

Moreno also scooped a shot over the bar as Wigan broke quickly through Rodallega.

Mohamed Diame set up another counter-attack for the visitors, sending Rodallega into space but Scharner shot well over the bar.

Craig Bellamy replaced Wright-Phillips at the break and immediately made a difference.

And as the hosts played with greater intensity, Adebayor had the ball in the



Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez celebrates his third goal against Wigan Athletic during their Premier League encounter at the City of Manchester Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

# The nuclear marriage!

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistani cricket star Shoaib Malik and India's top female tennis player Sania Mirza plan to wed in a unique union bridging the two nations' bitter sporting and political divide.

"The news of me marrying Sania is true," the all-rounder was quoted by the Hindustan Times and other newspapers as saying. "Inshallah [God willing] we will get married in April.

"I fully understand what it takes to be an international sportsperson and I will support Sania in her career as long as she wishes to play."

He said he would be "the

ourselves incompatible as fiances."

The tennis player became an instant nationwide celebrity as an 18-year-old when she became the first female Indian to win a WTA Tour title in 2005.

Malik, who hails from Sialkot in Pakistan's Punjab province, has played 29 Tests, 190 one-day internationals and 30 Twenty20 matches



SANIA MIRZA

SHOAIB MALIK

proudest husband" if Mirza won a medal at the 2012 Olympics, while the tennis player said she was targeting a return to fitness for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games late this year.

Mirza broke off her engagement to childhood friend Sohrab Mirza in January, saying "We were friends for years but found

since his debut in 2001.

In a bizarre twist in 2002, he was accused by the family of another Hyderabad girl, Ayesha Siddiqui, of marrying her over the telephone. The cricketer denied it, but did admit to being engaged.

Ayesha's father threatened to sue Malik for leaving the girl without awarding her a divorce.

# Monaco thwart Auxerre

AFP, Paris



Auxerre's hopes of going top of the French championship were dashed on Monday after they were held 0-0 away at Monaco.

Auxerre moved alongside champions and leaders Bordeaux as well as Montpellier on 56 points, but are third because of a poorer goal difference and like Montpellier have played two more matches than Bordeaux - for Monaco it was their fourth successive match without scoring and they remain in ninth spot.

Auxerre coach Jean Fernandez was far from dismayed at the result as he saw it as another example of his team giving one of the giants of the domestic scene a blackeye.

"We were really good defensively again this evening," said Fernandez.

"That is our strength. Our season has already been a successful one whatever happens now. We have lost just six matches this campaign, including the first three. We are therefore not easy to play against. We take great pleasure from our being so high in the table and that we are gnawing away at the big players in the title race."

His Monaco counterpart Guy Lacombe believed that the exertions of overcoming Sochaux 4-3 after extra-time in the French Cup quarterfinals last week had taken its toll and was not best pleased by the whistles that greeted the team at the final whistle from the paltry 2,500 spectators.

"They (the spectators) have to be more understanding and help us," said the former Rennes, Sochaux and Paris Saint Germain hand.

"We have the same number of points at this stage of the season as we finished with last term.

"Some times it is like that. But these type of matches can lead on to more exalted fare."

While Monaco had most of the possession in the opening quarter of the match they failed to trouble Auxerre goalkeeper and captain Olivier Sorin.

It was the visitors who had the first real chance as unmarked central defender Adama Coulibaly had a free header from a corner in the 20th minute, but while he beat Monaco goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier he failed to hit the target.

Auxerre also had the best chance in the opening exchanges of the second-half as Polish international striker Jelen Ireneusz - scorer of 10 goals this season - was put through one on one with Ruffier in the 50th minute but his first touch let him down and the Monaco 'keeper was able to smother the ball.

The visitors were fortunate to not be reduced to 10 men with just over 20 minutes remaining as Kenyan international Dennis Oliech elbowed Monaco central defender Djimi Traore, but referee Lionel Jaffredo who had already booked Oliech did not see it.

Auxerre did break the stalemate in the 81st minute when Romanian striker Daniel Niculae looked to have been rewarded for a busy night's work but Jaffredo disallowed it for offside.

## Dog bites Maradona

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Diego Maradona has been hospitalized after one of his dogs bit him while he was playing with the animal at home, TV reports said Tuesday.

One report said that the 49-year-old former footballing great had been bitten on his upper lip and would need a minor operation to repair the wound.

Sources at the Los Arcos private clinic, where Maradona spent several weeks in 2007 for treatment after developing serious health problems, confirmed that he had been admitted, but would not say what the problem was.

## 2-match ban on Drogba

SOCCERNET

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba has been handed a two-match European ban after being sent-off during Chelsea's Champions League last-16 second leg defeat to Inter Milan.

Drogba was given his marching orders in the 86th minute of the defeat to Jose Mourinho's side after stamping on Thiago Motta and UEFA's Control and Disciplinary Body have now confirmed the suspension for violent conduct.

But Drogba escaped a further two-game ban, which it had been thought could be issued, in relation to his behaviour in last season's Champions League semifinal.

The Ivory Coast forward was suspended for three matches for his rant at referee Tom Henning Ovrebo during the defeat by Barcelona last May, a penalty which also carried the threat of a further two-game ban if Drogba stepped out of line again.

But despite doing so, UEFA has decided instead to extend Drogba's "probation" period from July 2011 to July 2013, sending a clear message that they will be watching him carefully for any indiscretions over the next three years.

## KFA offers cash rewards

AFP, Seoul

South Korea on Tuesday offered handsome cash rewards to encourage its team to advance to the second round of the World Cup finals in June.

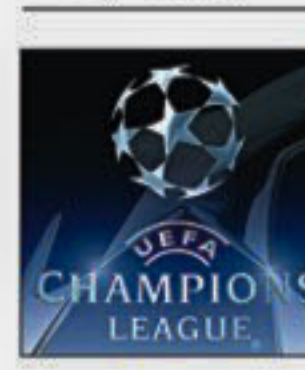
Each player will receive up to 170 million won (150,000 dollars) in accordance with his contribution if the team makes it to the last 16, the Korea Football Association (KFA) said.

The team coach will receive 300 million won if South Korea reaches the quarterfinals.

South Korea gave 300 million won in rewards to each player when they advanced to the semifinals of the 2002 World Cup which it co-hosted with Japan.

# A dream tie for purists

AFP, London



Thierry Henry will make an emotional return to Arsenal for Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal, but the Barcelona striker could be forced to surrender the spotlight at the Emirates Stadium to his team-mate Lionel Messi.

Ever since the reigning European champions were paired with Henry's former club, fans of the beautiful game have been licking their lips in anticipation of a rare meeting between two sides whose commitment to the sport's purist principles is unmatched across the world.

Henry, who joined Barca in 2007, will be one of the most recognisable faces amongst a galaxy of stars in north London and he is guaranteed a rapturous reception from the Arsenal faithful.

But the France star, who won two Premier League titles, three FA Cups and scored a club-record 226 goals in 369 games for Arsenal, is far from certain to start after spending much of his time on the bench recently. It is a prospect that doesn't unduly concern him.

"I'm not saying I won't try to fight or whatever because that's the way the game is. But I don't want to play against Arsenal," Henry said.

"Before the draw I said that I did not want to face Arsenal. To return home is strange and even more so in the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

"I'm very emotional, but also staying calm. It will be different because I spent seven years at Highbury and one at the Emirates and to see the people, the fans and the other employees at the club will be very strange."

Like David Beckham, who struggled to make an impact as AC Milan lost on his reunion with Manchester United in the last round, Henry could find himself relegated to a side-show anyway if Messi maintains his remarkable form during the two matches.

At times over the last eight months, the mesmerising Argentina forward has seemed to be staging his own goal of the season competition.

He already has 34 goals this term, including a recent stunning effort against Real Zaragoza, and he single-handedly destroyed Stuttgart as the holders cruised into the last 16.

As if that wasn't enough to give Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger sleepless nights, Messi believes Arsenal's open style of play will allow him even more space to flourish.

"At this stage of the tournament we're not too concerned who we face, because to be the best you have to beat the best," Messi said.

"If anything it suits us to be playing a side like Arsenal who give their players freedom to play without restric-

tions. I wouldn't expect them to abandon that and employ different tactics to deal with us."

Wenger is also sweating over the fitness of captain Cesc Fabregas after he suffered a knee injury in Saturday's 1-1 draw at Birmingham.

Fabregas, who started his career alongside Messi in Barca's youth academy, hopes to play despite severe bruising to his leg and knee, but his participation remains uncertain.

No matter who takes the field on Wednesday, the quality of play is likely to be the highest in Europe this season.

Barca swept their way to the treble last year with some breath-taking displays and Arsenal are no slouches themselves when it comes to entertaining the neutrals.

"There are similarities there in the way we play, the way we educate young players, the way we rely on young players and in the sense of belonging to the club," Wenger said.

Barca coach Pep Guardiola agrees. "Since I took the job our play has been marked by brave, attacking football. Sometimes we've been bold and I think we've played audaciously," he said.

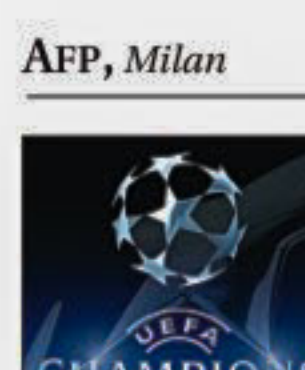
"It's a philosophy of football. Win or lose I want us to show who we are and what kind of football we believe in."

Losing Andres Iniesta to a hamstring injury suffered in Saturday's 1-0 win over Real Mallorca could disturb Barca's midfield equilibrium, but the Catalans will take heart from the expected return of defender Gerard Pique from a knee problem.



# Inter battling fatigue

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan's defeat to AS Roma at the weekend has sparked worries that the Serie A leaders are suffering from fatigue ahead of Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal, first leg at home to CSKA Moscow.

While the rest of Italy's teams crashed out of Europe one after another, Inter remain their country's only flag bearers on the continent and they are also still in the Italian Cup, facing a semifinal, second leg next month.

But while they are still on course for a remarkable treble, their league form has disintegrated over the last month and a half.

Although they beat English Premier League heavyweights Chelsea twice in the last round of the Champions League, at home they have been in crisis.

Two wins in nine matches has seen their once 14-point lead over second-placed AS Roma reduced to a single point.

But top scorer Diego Milito, who netted on Saturday but was denied an injury time equaliser by the post, claims tiredness will not stop his team.

"Are we tired? It's not easy playing in three competitions, you use up a lot of energy but we're going to keep going and

try to do our best," he said.

"All these commitments are in themselves a motivation, not a problem. Our desire to win is stronger than our fatigue."

And that desire to win might just be stronger in Europe than at home as Inter bid to end a dire recent record on the continent and reach their first Champions League semi-final since 2003, when they lost to neighbours AC Milan, who went on to beat another Italian side Juventus in the final.

Coach Jose Mourinho was brought to the club as a replacement for Roberto Mancini, despite the Italian leading the team to three straight Serie A titles, in order to bring European success to the club.

He had an impressive record in the Champions League, winning it with Porto in 2004 and reaching two semifinals with Chelsea.

He was excused last season's second round exit at the hands of then reigning champions Manchester United but the feeling is that a last four appearance is the very least expected of Mourinho this term.

But despite a difficult opening to their group stage campaign, they have since gone from strength to strength.

And they have history with their opponents having met them in the group stages two years ago.

Inter came through those games with a pair of victories but they were not without their difficulties.

They trailed 1-0 in Moscow and 2-0 in Milan before hitting back on both occasions.

They've also had the advantage of a trip to Russia already this season as they faced Rubin Kazan in their pool, earning a 1-1 draw in the cold.

However, if Inter are feeling jaded, their opponents' conditioning will be at the opposite end of the spectrum as they are only three games into their new domestic season.

But 2005 UEFA Cup winners CSKA are not the force they once were in Russia, having failed to win the title since 2006 and finishing only fifth last season, missing out on European qualification altogether.

It means their hopes of becoming the first Russian team to reach the last four of Europe's premier club competition since neighbours Spartak in 1991 are looking thin.

But they have had some encouraging results on their travels this season, drawing 3-3 at Old Trafford against Manchester United and winning at both Besiktas and Sevilla.

Whatever the result on Wednesday the teams will have little time to dwell on it as the second leg takes place just six days later.