



Tottenham Hotspurs winger Gareth Bale (L) scores the second goal past Arsenal goalkeeper Manuel Almunia (R) during their Premier League encounter at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

Spurs dent Gunners

AFP, London



Tottenham delivered a hammer blow to Arsenal's Premier League title challenge with a 2-1 win over their north London rivals at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

Harry Redknapp's team claimed only their second win in 29 league games against the Gunners thanks to a stunning 10th minute volley from teenage winger Danny Rose, who was making his Premier League debut, and Gareth Bale's first goal of the season two minutes after half-time.

Inspired by the arrival of Robin van Persie as a second half substitute in his first appearance after a five-month injury lay-off, Arsenal got one back through Nicklas Bendtner in the 85th minute.

But the loss left third placed Arsenal six points behind leaders Chelsea with four games to play and all but ended their hopes of winning the title for the first time since 2004.

Tottenham, who were able to celebrate their first league win over Arsenal since November 1999, remain fifth and are now just one point behind fourth placed Manchester City in the race to snatch the final Champions League spot.

Redknapp, whose side were beaten by Portsmouth in the FA Cup semifinal on Sunday, said: "It was a great result for us on the back of a big down on Sunday. That knocked us all for six. "To play like that after Sunday is fantastic. The

crowd want to beat Arsenal more than anybody. They were right with us.

"We hung in there late on and our keeper Heurelho Gomes made some fantastic saves. He was superb. Everybody worked hard and it was a great result."

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger, who will be without Thomas Vermaelen for three weeks after the defender limped off with a calf injury, added: "It will be difficult to win the title, yes, now of course. We'll continue to fight but it makes it very difficult. As long as it's not mathematically impossible it is not impossible. Our job is to fight and we will do that. But even if they drop points we are far behind."

Elsewhere, Aston Villa rescued a late 2-2 draw against Everton at Villa Park.

Martin O'Neill's team trailed twice as Australian midfielder Tim Cahill struck in the 23rd minute and then again in the 74th minute after Gabby Agbonlahor had equalised for Villa in the 72nd minute.

But Phil Jagielka's 90th minute own goal saved seventh placed Villa and kept them four points ahead of their opponents.

At the DW Stadium, FA Cup finalists Portsmouth, already relegated from the Premier League, managed to hold on for a 0-0 draw against struggling Wigan despite fielding an inexperienced team and naming just four substitutes.

The draw moved Wigan five points clear of the relegation zone.

RESULTS

Aston Villa 2 (Agbonlahor 72, Jagielka 90-og) Everton 2 (Cahill 23, 74)
Tottenham 2 (Rose 10, Bale 47) Arsenal 1 (Bendtner 85)
Wigan 0 Portsmouth 0

Vital clash for Inter

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan host Juventus in a vital Serie A clash on Friday with both sides desperate for three points for very different reasons.

Normally this fixture at this stage of the season - there are five matches remaining in the league - would be billed as a title decider but that is far from the case this time around.

Inter, after four years of domination, find themselves in the unaccustomed position of scudetto chasers, one point and one place behind leaders AS Roma.

They must win this game to put the pressure firmly back on Roma ahead of the Rome derby on Sunday where in-form Lazio will be the nominal hosts at the shared Stadio Olimpico.

But Inter are engaged on three fronts and their resources are stretched to bursting point as they play two matches a week, every week.

Having beaten Chelsea home and away in successive weeks to reach the Champions League semifinals, they beat Fiorentina 1-0 away on Tuesday to qualify for the Italian Cup final with a 2-0 aggregate success.

But next week they are back on Champions League duty as they host

Barcelona in their semifinal, first leg.

That was one reason that coach Jose Mourinho rested the likes of top scorer Diego Milito, defensive midfielder Esteban Cambiasso, centre-back Walter Samuel and playmaker Wesley Sneijder against La Viola.

Every game is a must win game for Inter now according to captain Javier Zanetti and he says they cannot afford to let anything slip right through to the end of the season if they are to become the first Italian team ever to win the treble.

"We always go out onto the pitch to win and that's why from now to the end we will approach every game with determination," said the veteran Argentinian defender.

"We're playing on all three fronts, we won't give an inch, not in the league, not in the Champions League and not in the Cup.

"I repeat, we always take to the pitch with the intention of winning every game, sometimes we manage it and sometimes not.

"We'll approach the next games with the same intentions and then we'll see what happens."

While Inter are on the verge of completing their greatest ever season, Juventus are in the midst of one of their worst of all time.

They crashed out of the Champions League in December following a 4-1

home reverse to Bayern Munich in the group stages and their stay in the Europa League was then also short-lived.

Another 4-1 defeat, this time away to Fulham in the round of 16 in March, saw them lose their 3-1 first-leg advantage and ended their interest in continental competition.

In between they had lost to Inter in the Coppa Italia at the end of January, after which coach Ciro Ferrara was sacked and replaced by Alberto Zaccheroni.

But all those cup disasters have been the least of Juve's worries this season - it is in the league where they have really suffered.

They have already lost 12 times in 33 matches and have leaked a porous 47 goals, three more than Atalanta who are in the relegation zone.

They sit sixth in the table but three points behind Palermo in the crucial fourth place, the last Champions League qualifying position - failure to secure a top four spot would be a crushing blow.

And this is the first of two trips they face to the San Siro as they travel to AC Milan on the final day of the season.

There is reason for Juventus to be optimistic for a victory as Inter have won only three of their last 11 games, allowing Roma to overturn what was once a 14-point deficit in November into a one-point lead.

Ribery to decide in ten days

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's star French international midfielder Franck Ribery said on Wednesday he expects to announce within the next ten days whether he will stay with the German giants or join one of their European rivals.

"In one week or in ten days, if certain conversations take place, I will know how things are," Ribery told German broadcaster Sport 1.

The 27-year-old winger is under contract at Bayern until June 30, 2011, but he has delayed signing a contract extension and Munich could sell the Frenchman this summer rather than risk losing him on a free transfer.

Both Real Madrid and Barcelona have been linked to Ribery in recent months and the Frenchman says he is '50-50' as to whether he will stay in Munich.

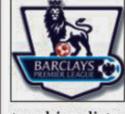
Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has insisted Ribery will stay at the German giants this summer.

"At the moment, I assume he will stay," Rummenigge told Bild.

"Our goal is still to extend his contract, but if that doesn't happen there is no guarantee we will sell Franck this summer."

'League in our hands'

AFP, London



Carlo Ancelotti insists there is no chance Chelsea will lose their nerve as they approach the final furlong of the race for the Premier League title.

Ancelotti's side are within touching distance of winning the league for the first time since 2006 after Tuesday's 1-0 win over Bolton left the Blues four points clear of second placed Manchester United with four games to go.

The leaders looked anxious at times as they laboured to kill off stubborn Bolton and Owen Coyle's struggling team could even have snatched a shock draw if referee Lee Probert had awarded either of two strong penalty claims.

With a trip to London rivals Tottenham next on the agenda and another tricky away game at Liverpool still to come, it seems likely Chelsea will have plenty more opportunities to show their resolve before the champagne corks start popping around west London.

But Ancelotti is adamant his players' ability to grind out wins from tense encounters like the Bolton game shows they are made of the right stuff to end United's three-year reign as champions.

"We have more possibility than Manchester United and Arsenal (to win the title) but we are not sure," Ancelotti said.

"We have to play four tough games. On Saturday we have a derby against Tottenham. We are ready to play and we are excited. We know we have to fight and we are ready to fight."

"We don't want to look at the other teams. The Premier League is in our hands. We have to stay focused and calm and prepare for our games."

"We have to play game by game and we are not interested in the results of the other teams."

"There was pressure on us because we had to improve our position. The players have a very good motivation to finish the season well."

Key to Chelsea's hopes of winning the title for the first time since the Jose Mourinho era is

the form of strikers Nicolas Anelka and Didier Drogba.

Suggestions from Bolton striker Kevin Davies that his former Wanderers team-mate Anelka doesn't like playing with Drogba were made to look wide of the mark as the pair combined for Chelsea's winner on Tuesday.

Yet Anelka's close-range header from Drogba's sublime 43rd minute cross was the French striker's first goal in 14 matches stretching back to January.

Once again Anelka, who started as part of a three-man attack, rarely dovetailed well with Drogba and was replaced midway through the second half.

Publicly at least Ancelotti had no complaint about the relationship between his star strikers, but it would be little surprise if one of them starts on the bench at Tottenham this weekend to make way for Florent Malouda and Joe Cole.

"They worked very well," Ancelotti said. "They changed positions and the goal was fantastic because it was a very good movement by Didier and Nicolas was in the box to score."

Bolton boss Coyle rightly felt aggrieved that his team had not been awarded penalties for Drogba's handball as he tried to clear from Davies in the first half, and then when Terry blocked Lee Chung-Yong's cross with his arm after the interval.

"We didn't need any luck. We only needed the officials to get the big decisions right," Coyle said. "There were two stonewall penalties out there for handballs. The first one when Drogba handballed in the area. He could play world-class volleyball for anybody on that evidence."

"Then there's the second one when John Terry handles it. The assistant referee says it hit his shoulder, but it's a clear penalty. He must have a shoulder that stretches down to his ankles in that case."

"It's hard to take. If it was a game where we'd been rolled over 4-0 or 5-0, fair enough. But we could have taken points had those decisions gone for us. We're fighting for our lives, so that's doubly disappointing."

Barca march six clear

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona followed up their impressive win over Real Madrid five nights ago with a convincing 3-0 home win over Deportivo La Coruna on Wednesday to go six points clear of Real at La Liga summit.

After scoring against Real, winger Pedro Rodriguez was on the scoresheet again with a fantastic second half strike from 45 yards out in the pick of the goals after Bojan Krkic had opened the scoring on the quarter hour mark. Yaya Toure netted the other goal in a comfortable night for the champions.

It was a seventh successive league win for Barca who are six points clear with six games left although Real Madrid can close back to within three points with a win at Almeria on Thursday.

Barca coach Pep Guardiola called for his team not to drop their standards following the dazzling display in the 2-0 'El Clasico' win over Real and the treble winners ran Depor ragged to warm up for Saturday's derby with Espanyol.

There was again no sign of veteran French forward Thierry Henry, who played no part in 'El Clasico' win, in the Barca line-up with teenage Bojan starting while Ivory Coast midfielder Toure came in for Seydou Keita.

Pedro hit the post from close range in the ninth minute and it was a sign of things to come.

On the quarter hour mark Xavi, who set up both goals in the Real win, slid a clever pass to Bojan who produced a cool finish to give the hosts the lead.

Goalkeeper Daniel Aranzubia then produced a fine save from Jefferson Suarez who had collected a terrific pass from Lionel Messi.

Dani Alves saw an acrobatic overhead kick come back off the crossbar as Barca could have been 4-0 up inside the first 20 minutes.

Depor, with one point from the last 15, were packing the midfield allowing Alves a lot of space to roam into and the Brazilian was wreaking havoc with his crosses.

Barca were not as formidable in the second half but Pedro got the second goal the hosts craved on 68 minutes. Aranzubia came out to clear a long ball and his mis-kick fell to Pedro and the 22-year-old had no hesitation in going straight for goal and his 45 yard effort looped in.

Four minutes later Barca struck again with Toure showing good control before dispatching a shot into the bottom corner.

Champions League hopefuls Real Mallorca moved a point above Sevilla into fourth with a 1-1 draw at Real

Zaragoza on Wednesday although the islanders will see it as a missed opportunity to turn the screw on their rivals.

Sevilla lost 2-1 at Valladolid on Tuesday but Mallorca, surprise challengers for the top four, could not punish the slip-up as their dismal away form continues to hinder their push for fourth.

Defender Ruben Rocha put Mallorca into a 13th minute lead but Humberto Suazo equalised on 21 minutes.

Mallorca have just two wins on their travels all season - the same as bottom side Xerez - compared to 13 victories from 15 games at home.

Malaga are one of those and twice came from behind to draw 2-2 at Osasuna on Wednesday as they hover three points above the drop zone.

Malaga lie three points



Barcelona forward Pedro Rodriguez celebrates his goal against Deportivo La Coruna during their Primera Liga clash at Nou Camp on Wednesday.

IN BRIEF

Cameroon to train in Austria

AFP, Vienna

Cameroon will take part in a training camp at altitude in Austria next month ahead of the 2010 World Cup, the Austrian organisers said on Wednesday.

The 'Indomitable Lions' will stay in Linz from May 20-28 and play matches against Georgia on May 26 and Slovakia three days later.

Cameroon are in Group E along with the Netherlands, Japan and Denmark in the tournament which takes place from June 11 to July 11.

WC tickets sale open in SA

AFP, Cape Town

Thousands of South Africans queued outside World Cup ticketing centres on Thursday as the first direct over-the-counter sales for the tournament opened ahead of kick-off in June.

Eleven ticketing centres opened at 0700 GMT in all nine host cities with half a million tickets up for grabs in the final sales phase as fans flocked to centres with flasks of coffee, chairs, pillows and blankets.

Ticket processing got off to a slow start in Cape Town with some fans fearing that desired matches could be sold out at other centres.

Tickets were available at all 64 World Cup matches after FIFA made an additional 300 category three tickets available for the final at Johannesburg's Soccer City stadium on July 11.

Mbia fires Marseille

AFP, Paris



A late goal by Stephane Mbia boosted Marseille's hopes of a first French title since 1992 on Wednesday as they edged Sochaux 1-0.

As Marseille could end up with two trophies this season, Bordeaux, the team they beat in the League Cup final, hopes of retaining their league crown were almost extinguished with a 2-1 defeat by relegation-threatened Le Mans.

Marseille lead second-placed Auxerre by five points with four matches remaining, while Bordeaux - who only a month ago had the possibility of winning three trophies this season - are nine points adrift with a game in hand.

It represents quite a turnaround in fortunes during the course of the season for Marseille coach Didier Deschamps and his Bordeaux counterpart Laurent Blanc - both of whom are seen as candidates to replace Raymond Domenech as national coach after the World Cup finals.

Sochaux had rattled Marseille early on twice having efforts repelled in the seventh minute.

First France Under-19 midfielder Ryad Boudebouz had a shot parried away by Marseille keeper Steve Mandanda and Nigerian striker Ideye Brown having collected the rebound saw his shot cleared off the line by Laurent Bonnart.

Brown wasted another opportunity in the 17th minute as the 21-year-old Nigerian got himself into a one on one with Mandanda but sent his shot wide of the post.

Marseille too were wasteful with their chances as leading scorer Mamadou Niang saw a header clawed away for a corner by Sochaux

keeper Matthieu Dreyer, who was then grateful to Tunisian international defender Yassin Mikari, who headed off his line from Souleymane Diawara's header.

However, the League Cup winners wasted an even better chance in the 56th minute through record signing Lucho, who put together a nicely worked move with Niang, but the former Porto star's lob from inside the area came back off the bar into a grateful Dreyer's hands.

The lively Boudebouz, though, reminded Marseille that they were very much in a tough battle as seeing Mandanda come off his line he chipped over him from long range only to see it clip the bar.

Mbia, though, struck late on getting a second bite of the cherry after his shot from Brandao's downward header was blocked but he tapped home the rebound.

Bordeaux seized the advantage early on as Brazilian defender Carlos Henrique rose to head home his first goal of the campaign from Czech Republic international midfielder Jaroslav Plasil's freekick in the eighth minute.

However, Henrique was involved in a less impressive fashion as Le Mans equalised nine minutes later colliding with goalkeeper Cedric Carrasso at a Le Mans corner which former Liverpool striker Anthony Le Tallec seized on and rifled home a fierce shot.

Carrasso was a little to blame too for Le Mans' second just before half time as he reacted too slowly to an underhit backpass by Benoit Tremoulinas which Mathieu Dossevi seized on gratefully and slotted the ball home.

Bordeaux could make little impact in the second-half but were given a glimmer of hope in the 83rd minute when Le Mans striker Fousseyni Cisse was sent-off for a second bookable offence.

RESULTS

Sochaux 0 Marseille 1 (Mbia 88)
Le Mans 2 (A. Le Tallec 17, Dossevi 45+1) Bordeaux 1 (Henrique 8)

RESULTS

Atletico Madrid 1 (Forlan 12)
Xerez 2 (Bermejo 9, Armenteros 72)
Racing Santander 3 (Tchite 36-pen, 50-pen, Arana 90)
Espanyol 1 (Alonso 32)
Osasuna 2 (Pandiani 10, 48)
Malaga 2 (Caicedo 32, Baha 76)
Real Zaragoza 1 (Suazo 21)
Real Mallorca 1 (Ruben 13)
Barcelona 3 (Bojan 15, Pedro 68, Toure 72) Deportivo La Coruna 0
Valladolid 2 (Costa 41, Manucho 53) Sevilla 1 (Cala 83)
Sporting Gijon 0 Tenerife 2 (Roman 70, Alfaro 87)
Getafe 3 (Miku 56, 86, Mane 72) Villarreal 0