

# Rovers stun Gunners

AFP, Blackburn

Blackburn Rovers came from behind to beat Arsenal 2-1 at Ewood Park on Monday and leave third place in the English Premier League up for grabs.

David Dunn cancelled out Robin van Persie's opener before captain Christopher Samba scored the winner to stun the visitors.

A win for Arsenal would have confirmed third place in the Premier League and direct qualification for the Champions League group stage.

But north London rivals Tottenham can now move to two points behind them if they win at Manchester City on Wednesday, meaning Spurs could pinch third place should they win and Arsenal lose in Sunday's final round of matches.

The win saw Blackburn overtake Fulham, Sunderland and Stoke and move into 10th place in the table.

Netherlands striker van Persie put Arsenal ahead in the 13th minute with his first goal since October 31 following his five-month ankle injury lay-off.

But midfielder Dunn levelled in the 44th minute with a tap-in at the far post as the Gunners failed to deal with a Rovers corner, and Congolese centre-back Samba scored the winner with a 68th-minute header.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said his goalkeeper Lucas Fabianski had been impeded both times.

"Their main purpose every time is to stop the goalkeeper, not go for the ball, and both times for both goals that happened," he said.

"I think he had no chance as a goalkeeper, he was pushed every time."

Rovers manager Sam Allardyce admitted targeting the Poland stopper.

"We know their weakness is balls into the box and certainly the goalkeeper of late, so we did that positively and in the end it has paid off

for us with two goals and we've managed to win the game and finish the season at home with a fantastic victory against Arsenal," he said.

Samba added: "It's very difficult for teams to come and win here, it's been a little bit of a fortress at home and we wanted to have the result against one of the big four."

Carlos Vela wasted an early chance for the visitors, sliding it wide before Fabianski made a good save from a Morten Gamst Pedersen free kick.

Van Persie took an Arsenal corner which was cleared for another corner, this time taken by Samir Nasri.

His set-piece was flicked on by Bacary Sagna at the near post, with van Persie heading the ball into an empty net at the back post.

It was the Dutchman's eighth goal in eight games against Blackburn - more than he has notched against any other Premier League side.

Rovers goalkeeper Paul Robinson kept out a van Persie free kick on the half-hour mark.

And it was from another corner that the hosts equalised.

Pedersen's left-wing set-piece dropped to Ryan Nelsen. The New Zealand defender played a low ball to Keith Andrews, whose cross evaded Armand Traore, allowing Dunn to score with a simple finish at the far post.

Pedersen was at the heart of Blackburn's best attacks and he was downed in the penalty box by Sol Campbell but referee Martin Atkinson gave only a corner.

Wenger sent on Andrey Arshavin for the ineffective Vela in a bid to force a winner but within a minute Rovers were ahead.

Pedersen fired a corner into the box and Fabianski, surrounded by Blackburn players, failed to get to the ball.

The Rovers tactic worked as Samba was able to head in from three yards out.

Both sides then went on the attack but the hosts held out to move themselves into the top half of the table and give the Gunners extra reasons to hope Spurs do not win Wednesday's clash with Manchester City.



Blackburn Rovers midfielder David Dunn celebrates his equalising goal against Arsenal during their Premier League encounter at Ewood Park on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Adler's dream over

AFP, Berlin

Germany goalkeeper Rene Adler was ruled out of next month's World Cup in South Africa as he is set to undergo an operation to repair damaged ribs.

"This was the toughest decision of my life," said the 25-year-old Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper in a statement.

"But it would have been simply irresponsible of me, my club and the national team to have participated in the World Cup.

"Medically speaking, it would have been possible. But the pain is so great that I would not have been able to perform at my best over the longer term both in training and during matches.

"In such a long and intensive tournament, that is unacceptable. You need players who are totally fit."

Having missed the last few weeks with the rib injury, Adler returned on Saturday for Leverkusen in their 1-1 draw with Hertha Berlin in the Bundesliga wearing a special rib protector.

But an examination by Germany team doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt has revealed the injury is worse than first thought.

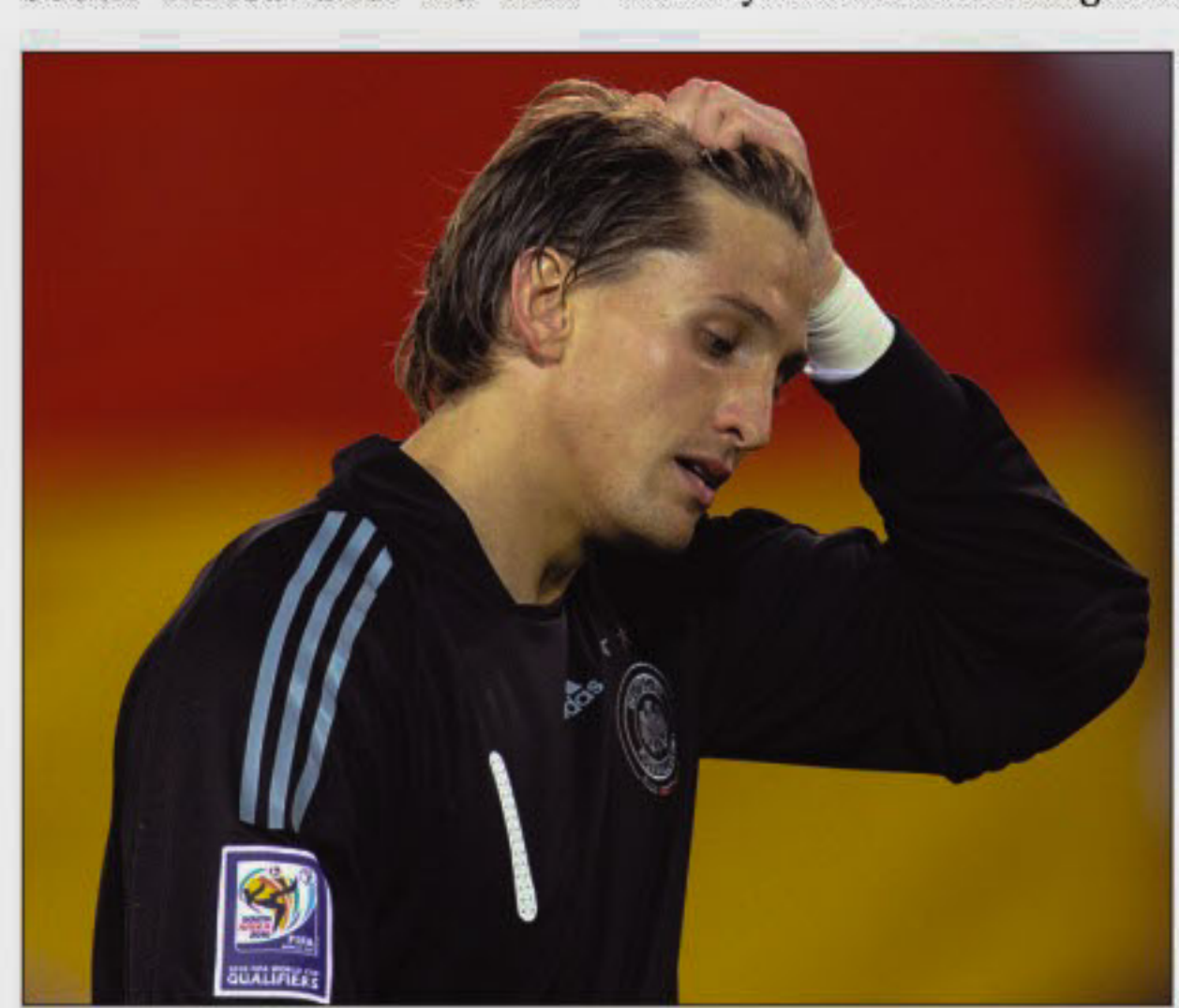
Adler has already suffered a complicated rib injury which needed a titanium plate and four screws to repair in 2006 and nearly ended his career.

Germany coach Joachim

Loew is set to name his World Cup squad on Thursday in Stuttgart and was informed of Adler's situation on Tuesday morning.

"Of course, we are very sorry that Rene will now be operated on, but he has to have the procedure," said Loew.

"The coaching team will now meet to discuss who will replace Rene in travelling to South Africa and we will



RENE ADLER

announce our nomination in Stuttgart on Thursday."

Former Germany striker Rudi Voeller said Adler's injury is a bitter blow for the national team.

"I feel incredibly sorry for Rene," said Leverkusen's director of sport Voeller. "His great World Cup dream has burst, but now we must accept the doctor's decision."

"I hope and firmly believe that Rene will be between the posts for Germany's next major tournament."

last of his three caps for Germany.

Dortmund's Roman Weidenfeller could also be an option.

Germany face warm-up matches against Malta on May 13 in Aachen, Hungary in Budapest on May 29 and Bosnia-Herzegovina in Frankfurt on June 3.

They have drawn Australia, Ghana and Serbia in Group 4 of the World Cup as they bid to win the title for the fourth time.

## IN BRIEF

### Davies loses fitness battle

AFP, Sochaux

US striker Charlie Davies, seriously injured in a car crash in Washington last October, will not be fit to compete in this summer's World Cup, medical staff at his French club Sochaux said Tuesday.

Davies had spoken of his desire to compete in South Africa, months after a deadly car crash seemed to have shattered his World Cup dreams.

The October 13 accident killed one passenger and left the 23-year-old Sochaux star with a broken leg, multiple facial fractures and a lacerated bladder. Doctors said he would be out of action for a year.

### Gallas will be ready

AFP, Paris

Arsenal defender William Gallas, who is recovering from a calf injury, says he will be "ready" should he get the call from France coach Raymond Domenech for the June 11-July 11 World Cup.

"If that hadn't been possible, I would have ruled myself out," said Gallas, who suffered a recurrence of the calf problem which had kept him out for six weeks during the first half of the March 31 Champions League draw against Barcelona.

"At the moment, I feel good and I will be ready for the France team."

"I think that Raymond Domenech must keep himself informed of my personal situation," the 32-year-old who has won 78 caps for the French team told Le Parisien.

The defender refused to comment on his future with Arsenal, saying: "I've got nothing to say. My goal is to take part in the World Cup."

# MANCHESTER CITY v TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR Battle for fourth place

AFP, Manchester



Harry Redknapp is urging Tottenham Hotspur to put the English Premier League's top three on notice that their monopoly is over with victory over Manchester City at Eastlands on Wednesday.

He wants his charges to prove his theory that the stranglehold on Champions League places and the battle for the title is no longer the right of just Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal.

A win for Tottenham would secure them a fourth place finish at the expense of Roberto Mancini's men and a place in next season's Champions League for the first time in the club's history.

But Redknapp is looking beyond the chances of joining European club football's elite and is convinced Tottenham have now closed the gap on the so-called "big three" at the top when it comes to challenging for major honours.

Redknapp, who is hoping goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes (groin) and centre-half Ledley King (knee) will be passed fit to play, says Tottenham will continue to go about their quest quietly.

"We've got closer to Arsenal this year, the points tell you that we're not a million miles away," the Londoner said.

"Last week Arsene Wenger was saying they had to make sure they hung onto third

place because it was getting close. We've closed the gap on all the top teams, I think. But we still have a way to go. We won't get too carried away.

"This lot are the quietest lot of lads you've ever seen. It takes a lot to get them excited. They are very laid back and quiet. You've never met a quieter bunch. They're not going to be getting too excited about it all."

"It's the way they are. The days of having a Tony Adams have gone, they are few and far between now. Everyone would love people like that."

"If you went to Manchester City, apart from Craig Bellamy, they are all probably quiet there. It's the same everywhere."

Redknapp admits he loves to watch his own side play and is expecting them to turn on the style.

"I could watch Luka Modric play all day. I love watching him. I just think he's a pleasure to watch and that's why I do what I do. I love seeing him train, play and see what he can do," he said.

"I love watching good players. Tom Huddlestone is a great passer of the ball."

"If we were a team that just kicked it up the pitch I wouldn't bother. But I enjoy the way we play. They're as good as I've seen when they move the ball about."

"We had a one-touch session and it was fantastic. They zipped the ball about, and you have to be a good player to do that, you have to have awareness of where the ball

will run, your touch has to be fantastic. They were brilliant."

"City have been dangerous though. They have good players. They are always going to be a threat with a forward line of Adam Johnson, Carlos Tevez, Bellamy and Emmanuel Adebayor."

"That is a real potent forward line, but we have good forwards too and can cause them problems, hopefully."

This could prove to be Mancini's moment of destiny. The former Inter Milan boss was drafted in to replace Mark Hughes and handed instructions to lead City into the Champions League.

But despite keeping his side in the hunt for fourth place, Mancini's long term future is far from secure and should he fail then further question marks will be raised.

The significance is not lost on the Italian, who is confident his players can get the win they so badly want and has urged home supporters to play their part to the full.

"We need our fans to be the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth man," he said. "Our supporters have been fantastic and we need them to get behind the team from the first minute to the last."

"This is like a cup final for us. We wanted one and now we've got one. We have good confidence after beating Aston Villa and now we must focus and concentrate on getting the same result against Tottenham. They are a good side and it should be an exciting game."

# No room for error

AFP, Madrid



With just three games left in La Liga, Barcelona are in the pole position to retain their league title

but there is no room for error with eternal rivals Real Madrid breathing down their necks a point behind in second.

Real Madrid are at fourth-placed Real Mallorca on

Wednesday in arguably their toughest remaining fixture while Barcelona still have a testing trip to Sevilla on Saturday.

Following their semifinal Champions League exit to Inter Milan the league title is all that remains for Barca who

have not managed to hit the heights of last season when they won a unique league, Kings Cup and Champions League treble.

Since losing 2-0 to Barcelona in 'El Clasico' Real Madrid have won the subsequent four games to keep their

Bottom side Xerez, five points from safety, could be relegated if they fail to beat Valencia and other results go against them.

A total of nine teams are involved in the relegation battle with 12th placed Osasuna four points above the relegation zone.

Malaga are level on points with third from bottom Tenerife and have a tough trip to San Mames to tackle Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday.

## FIXTURES

Wednesday all 1900 GMT unless stated  
Real Zaragoza v Espanyol, Osasuna v Deportivo La Coruna, Athletic Bilbao v Malaga, Real Mallorca v Real Madrid (2100 GMT)

## Rafa wants to stay

SOCCERNET

Rafael Benitez has not received any offers and wants to stay at Liverpool, according to his agent.

Benitez has been strongly linked with a move to Juventus and it had been believed that the deal was all but done, with the manager seeming to hint at an imminent move ahead of the weekend's crunch clash when he said: "Hopefully I will still be here on Sunday against Chelsea."

However, reports on Tuesday have suggested his move to Juventus could now be in doubt and, as Benitez prepares to meet with new chairman Martin Broughton to discuss the future of the club, his agent has said the Spaniard has no plans to walk away.

"We have not received any offers from any club," Manuel Garcia Quilon said. "Benitez's aim is to remain at Liverpool and try to help the team improve with new owners. He is under contract and his wish is to remain at Liverpool."

Quilon had earlier been less clear about his client's future when he said: "This week Rafa will meet the president of the club. From what I know, he wants to stay on at Liverpool."

# Nistelrooy still in the frame

AFP, The Hague



Dutch coach Bert Van Marwijk insisted Tuesday that veteran striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy could still make the World Cup finals despite being omitted from an initial training squad.

"As for Ruud, I'm giving myself until May 11 to decide," Van Marwijk told the De Telegraaf daily newspaper.

"I'm leaving him until that date to convince me that he is sufficiently in shape to take part in the World Cup."

Van Marwijk on Monday named a 26-strong squad for a first training camp at Hoenderlo from May 10-14 ahead of the June 11-July 11 World Cup in South Africa. A second camp with those players still involved with their clubs will be held in Austria between May 19-31.

"My assistants and I have seen a lot of Ruud playing recently. We don't think it would be useful to call him up at the first step but that does not mean that he's out of the picture," the coach said.



Italy midfielder Mauro Camoranesi (C) kicks the ball surrounded by teammates during a training session at Rome on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

The Dutch - who have yet to win the World Cup despite reaching two finals in 1974 and 1978 - have been drawn with Denmark, Japan and Cameroon for the World Cup.

Van Marwijk will name a 30-man squad on May 11 which will be trimmed to 23 on June 1. There are also friendlies slated against Mexico (May 26), Ghana (June 1) and Hungary (June 5).