

Roy stands by duo

SOCCERNET



Liverpool boss Roy Hodgson has backed Joe Cole and Jose Reina after the pair's red card and goalkeeping blunder conspired to allow Arsenal to snatch a point from their season opener

at Anfield on Sunday. Cole's Premier League debut for Liverpool ended shortly before half-time as he was dismissed for a lunging challenge on Arsenal new boy Laurent Koscielny but the Reds managed to take the lead early in the second half through David Ngog.

Liverpool looked like holding on for victory with resolute defending until late in the match when Reina first mis-handled a cross onto the post under pressure from Arsenal striker Marouane Chamakh and then fumbled the rebound into his own net.

Hodgson refused to blame either player for the result, insisting that Cole was unlucky to have seen red for his challenge. Cole launched with two feet in attempt to block Koscielny's clearance but the block became a dangerous tangle of legs on the accidental follow through.

"(Cole) will be a big loss if he is suspended," said Hodgson, facing up to the fact his big-name summer signing now faces a three-game ban. "We will look at the video again, maybe try to find out from the referee and experts if we do

have a case for appeal. I don't want a frivolous appeal but Joe Cole has an unblemished record in his career. He has never been sent off and has very few yellow cards. Anyone who has watched Joe play will realise he is not the guy that goes in for blood-curdling tackles. Replays suggest he was a little bit unlucky."

Reina's howler came minutes after he had produced a fine fingertip save to keep out a brilliant Tomas Rosicky shot.

Hodgson said: "I thought he played well considering he didn't have an awful lot to do, but what he did came spasmodically. There were an enormous number of positives but the unfortunate negative was that he let in a goal which under normal circumstances he would have kept out."

The loss of Cole loss didn't detract from Liverpool's defensive shape, although it gifted Arsenal the lion's share of possession, allowing the visitors to build the pressure that led to the equaliser. Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger praised Liverpool's defensive effort and said Cole's dismissal proved frustrating to the overall pattern of the match.

"When we were playing against 10 men it became very difficult as they defended very deep," Wenger said. "In fairness to them, they defended very well and took some fluency out of the game. But I give credit to my team because we kept going and kept going and in the end we got the equaliser. Considering we are at Liverpool, it is a decent result."

Real pushing for Ozil

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid plan to make a new offer to Werder Bremen for German World Cup sensation Mesut Ozil after an earlier bid was rejected, Spanish sports newspapers said Monday.

Real, under new coach Jose Mourinho, plan to offer 14 million euros for the 21-year-old midfielder, five million more than previously, the daily Marca reported.

Another sports daily, AS, said "the idea is to reach a figure of between the 10 million offered by Real and the 16 (million) which the German team is demanding."

Werder sports director Klaus Allofs said on Friday that the club had rejected an offer from Real as "unacceptable".

Financial details of that bid were not disclosed but German media reported that a 16-million-euro price tag had been placed on Ozil whose contract with Werder expires in June

2011.

Ozil has also been the recent target of clubs such as Arsenal and Manchester United.

The player, who joined Bremen in January 2008 for 4.25 million euros, impressed during the World Cup this summer in which Germany finished third.

Ozil himself told the two Spanish sports papers that he could move to Real this season.

The deadline for any such transfer could be Wednesday, when Bremen takes on Italy's Sampdoria in the Champions League. If Ozil plays, he would be ineligible to take the field for Real in the same competition.

Since taking over at the Spanish club last month, Mourinho has already recruited Spanish midfielders Sergio Canales and Pedro Leon, German midfielder Sami Khedira and Argentine striker Angel Di Maria.

Real, who finished second in the Liga last season behind champions Barcelona, opens the new season with a match at Real Mallorca on August 29.

Toulouse fell Bordeaux

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux replaced fellow strugglers Marseille at the bottom of the French league table Sunday after suffering a 2-1 home defeat to a spirited Toulouse, their second defeat in as many games.

Champions two years ago, and Champions League quarterfinalists last season, Bordeaux went into the campaign hoping to recover from the departure of Laurent Blanc, who is now coach of France.

"We're obviously gutted. It's a real shame to concede a goal right at the end," said Bordeaux defender Benoit Tremoulinas, after Etienne Didot had hit an 83rd minute winner for Toulouse.

"We had problems getting into the game in the first half, but we had more chances in the second-half and we moved it around a bit more."

"The goals we conceded tonight were avoidable and the next time up we'll have to

be more careful."

Elsewhere on Sunday plucky Caen, who beat Marseille in the league opener last week, produced another giant-killing display to beat former seven-time champions Lyon 3-2 in Normandy.

Caen coach Franck Dumas admitted that in his heart of hearts he had not held out much hope for his team's opening couple of games, but

compared their high-flying position as "utopia".

"Up against Marseille and then Lyon, I can't hide from you that we'd counted on no points," he said. "It's reward for the energy of the players."

Dumas, however, refused to get carried away, saying: "What interests me is the points and keeping a certain quality of game."

"As for my points objective, it's to finish with one more than the team in 18th spot," he said in reference to teams finishing in 18th, 19th and 20th place who will be relegated at season's end.

Lyon coach Claude Puel was left lamenting his side's defensive frailties, saying they had "allowed Caen to win the match".

"We cannot be happy," he said. "We got back into the game to score the two goals but we lacked the most elementary defensive rigor and even more on the third goal."

Toulouse lead the table on goal difference from Caen while PSG were unable to take top spot after a disappointing 0-0 draw at Lille.

RESULTS	
Caen 3 (El Arabi 2, Yatabare 17, Ndiaye 76)	Lyon 2 (Gomis 5, 22)
Bordeaux 1 (Plasil 48)	Toulouse 2 (Braaten 45+3, Didot 83)
Saint-Etienne 3 (Sanogo 6, Perrin 57, 64)	Sochaux 2 (Boudebouz 66, Martin 67)
Lorient 1 (Jouffre 11)	Nice 2 (Gace 12, Remy 70)
Nancy 0	Rennes 3 (Montano 49, Brahimi 58, Bangoura 87)
Valenciennes 3 (Danic 47, Pujol 53, 62)	Marseille 2 (Taiwo 82-pen, Ayew 85)
Brest 1 (Roux 26)	Auxerre 1 (Pedretti 83)



Liverpool striker David Ngog celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Arsenal during their Premier League clash at Anfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Hoeness hits out at Dutch, French FA

INTERNET

Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness has criticised the French and Dutch federations over the handling of the club's international stars Frank Ribery and Arjen Robben.

Hoeness accused the French federation in an interview published Monday of a lack of "manners" and the Dutch of "gross negligence" in a continuing row concerning both players.

Bayern have refused to release Ribery for a French federation hearing Tuesday over a player training boycott at the World Cup.

The Bundesliga champions also continue to seek compensation from the Dutch over Robben's hamstring injury.

"Who do they think we are?" Hoeness told Bild newspaper of the French federation's request for midfielder Ribery.

"We are not sending the French our players in the middle of (pre-season) preparations, as if they are the lords of the manner."

"They haven't got any manners at all. If they want that then they should come here. The club (Bayern) has behaved admirably. The decision not to send him to France is something I can only welcome."

Bayern meanwhile insist Dutch winger should not have played at the World Cup because of a hamstring injury suffered in a friendly just before the tournament in South Africa. Robben is now sidelined for up to two months.

"It was gross negligence of the Dutch to allow Arjen Robben to play a single second at the World Cup," Hoeness said.

"He played while injured at the tournament and we are the ones who are now suffering."

Bremen facing Italian job

INTERNET



Mesut Ozil is the biggest question mark as Werder Bremen take on Sampdoria Wednesday in a bid to reach the group stage of the Champions League.

Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf insists he will field his strongest team in the first-leg qualifying play-off match against the Italians - and that could have ramifications for any Ozil transfer.

Bremen have rejected as "unacceptable" an official offer from Real Madrid for the 21-year-old Germany international.

But the signs are the Bundesliga club will not stand in the way of the player, who has another year on his contract at Bremen but admits that playing for the Spanish giants would be a dream.

Real's interest could nevertheless cool if Ozil takes the pitch at the Weser Stadium, as he would then be cup-tied for the group stage of the Champions League.

Bremen can also hardly afford to leave out the creative midfielder as they attempt to reach the competition's lucrative group stage, guaranteeing between 15 and 20 million euros in income.

Progress would also be important for the Bundesliga, who are neck-and-neck with the Serie A in UEFA's five-year coefficient ranking which decides on an extra Champions League place.

No Italian side has ever won in Bremen who have seven wins and six draws in their 13 previous matches against Serie A visitors.

Sampdoria have sold all their tickets for the return leg next week as the club from Genoa experiences Champions League fever.

Samp were losing European Cup finalists to

Barcelona in 1992 but have never reached the group stage of the Champions League, which succeeded the European Cup the following season.

Experienced striker Antonio Cassano says he is confident Sampdoria, coached by European competition newcomer Domenico Di Carlo, can overcome the more experienced Germans who enjoyed five consecutive group-stage appearances between 2004 and 2009. "They are a good team but we have a pretty good chance," he said.

Meanwhile Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur are also hoping to make a group-stage debut in a first foray in Europe's premier club competition since a European Cup appearance in the 1961-62 season.

Tottenham will have to cope with an artificial pitch at the Stade de Suisse when they take on Bernese side Young Boys on Tuesday

Keeper Heurelho Gomes, who played 41 games in the Champions League for PSV Eindhoven between 2004 and 2008, told the club's website: "It's great to be in the Champions League again."

"I played in it for four years at PSV and I know how good it is, it's amazing to play Champions League with Tottenham now."

"We deserve it. We showed a lot of quality last season, improved a lot and now we'll see how good it is. It's the most important club competition in the world."

Among other highlights, Ukraine's Dynamo Kiev come up against 1995 winners Ajax on Tuesday while Spain's Sevilla and Portugal's Sporting Braga face off Wednesday in an Iberian derby.

The 10 winners go through to the Champions League group stage, with the 10 defeated sides entering the Europa League. The Champions League group-stage draw is on August 26.

L'pool won't appeal Cole's red card

AFP, London

Liverpool star Joe Cole will serve a three-match suspension after his club decided not to appeal against the England midfielder's red card against Arsenal.

Cole was shown a straight red card by referee Martin Atkinson on his debut following a lunging challenge on Arsenal defender Laurent Koscielny in first-half injury-time of the 1-1 draw at Anfield on Sunday.

Liverpool boss Roy Hodgson hinted after the match that the Reds might launch an appeal because he felt the tackle was not malicious.

But the 1200GMT deadline for appeals passed on Monday without Liverpool lodging a protest, meaning Cole will be sidelined for three matches.

Cole, who left Chelsea on a free-transfer in the close-season, will miss league games against Manchester City, West Brom and Birmingham.

However, the former West Ham player will be available for Thursday's Europa League play-off round first leg with Trabzonspor and the second leg the following week.

Harry counts City out

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp believes Manchester City will struggle to challenge for the Premier League title despite their massive spending spree.

City boss Roberto Mancini splashed out over 100 million pounds on five new signings as the club's Abu Dhabi-based owners attempt to turn their team into a Premier League superpower.

But, despite the arrivals of the likes of David Silva and Yaya Toure, City were forced to settle for a 0-0 draw at Tottenham in their opening league game on Saturday and Redknapp wasn't overly impressed with Mancini's men.

"I wouldn't tip City from what I've seen," Redknapp said. "I wouldn't say they'll win the championship. They have a long way to go. Chelsea are a team, Man United are a team."

"They are fantastic teams with people who have been there, done it all and won everything, Champions League winners. So I wouldn't see City finishing above them."

Redknapp believes City will face a battle just to secure Champions League qualification unless they play a more positive style than they showed at White Hart Lane.

"They'll find it more difficult to win games if they set up as defensively as they did against us," he said. "I was more concerned when Adebayor came on late in the game."

"If they spend enough they'll get there in the end but certainly this year, I wouldn't see them being champions."



PHOTO: AFP

Bordeaux playmaker Yoan Gourcuff (C) is challenged by Toulouse midfielder Fode Mansare during their League One encounter at the Chaban-Delmas Stadium on Sunday.