

Hangeland holds Man United

AFP, London

Brede Hangeland salvaged a point for Fulham against Manchester United in a 2-2 draw at Craven Cottage when the defender headed a 90th minute equaliser after scoring an own goal just moments earlier.

United had only themselves to blame for dropping two points on Sunday after Nani missed an 86th minute penalty that would have given the visitors a 3-1 lead and almost certainly guaranteed victory.

Earlier Sir Alex Ferguson's team had appeared to be in complete control of the game when Paul Scholes confirmed his excellent early season form by scoring his 150th goal for United in the 12th minute.

But Simon Davies levelled for the home side in 57th minute and Hangeland managed to cancel out his own goal to ensure Mark Hughes avoided defeat in his first home game as Fulham boss.

It was a result which will leave Ferguson rueing the concession of early ground to reigning champions Chelsea, who have begun their defence of the title with successive 6-0 victories.

Wayne Rooney was missing from the United line-up having been forced to withdraw because of illness, prompting Ferguson to pair Dimitar Berbatov and Javier Hernandez up front.

And, while United missed Rooney's more direct approach, the forward duo initially linked effectively during an opening period that should have seen the visitors establish a more commanding lead.

As it was, Ferguson's side had only one goal to show for their early efforts, a typically outstanding long range effort from Scholes.

The goal came immediately after Berbatov had conjured the first real chance when he leapt acrobatically to volley from 12 yards only to see his effort tipped over by home keeper David Stockdale.

Fulham's reprieve lasted less than a minute as,

from the resulting corner, Valencia picked out Berbatov with a low cross.

The Bulgarian's first touch laid the ball back into the path of Scholes and the midfielder struck first time with a low drive from 25 yards that arrowed into the bottom corner.

Fulham's response had been limited and for 25 minutes last season's thrilling journey to the Europa League final seemed a very distant memory as Hughes's side fought to establish a foothold in the game.

However, there was evidence of the threat they would pose in the second period when Dickson Etuhu forced an outstanding double save from United's former Fulham keeper Edwin van der Sar.

Etuhu played a neat one-two with Bobby Zamora before forcing his way into the box and after blocking the midfielder's first effort, van der Sar reacted superbly to tip the follow-up over the bar.

Fulham began to dominate midfield after the restart, negating the influence of Scholes and Darren Fletcher in the central areas and finding more space down either flank.

And the 57th minute equaliser came when Damien Duff tricked his way past Patrice Evra and played in Zamora whose pull back was crashed home by Davies.

An apparently comfortable victory had turned into a desperate fight to avoid defeat for Ferguson's side but they stood firm and eventually restored their lead thanks to Hangeland's error.

The Fulham defender was unable to pull his shin out of the way as Nani's corner swung into the home area and the ball dribbled agonisingly over the lead with six minutes remaining.

Two minutes later United should have made sure of the points when Duff handled, only for Nani to fire the resulting spot-kick too close to Stockdale.

The miss proved costly with Hangeland making up for his earlier mistake by heading the equaliser in the final minute of normal time.



Fulham defender Brede Hangeland (3rd from R) is the toast of his teammates after scoring the equalising goal against Manchester United during their Premiership encounter at Craven Cottage on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Borussia Dortmund midfielder Nuri Sahin (L) tackles Bayer Leverkusen captain Michael Ballack (C) during their Bundesliga tie in Dortmund on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ballack inspires Bayer

AFP, Berlin

Midfield star Michael Ballack made his return to the Bundesliga on Sunday to help Bayer Leverkusen open their season with a 2-0 win at Dortmund, but admitted he is playing for his Germany place.

The 33-year-old is back in the Bundesliga after four years in the Premier League with Chelsea after an ankle injury ruled him out of last month's World Cup, where Germany finished third.

Having lost the captaincy to Philipp Lahm, Ballack admits he is not sure he will be included in the Germany squad for next month's Euro 2012 qualifiers with national coach Joachim Loew set to name his squad on Friday.

"I'm still not 100 per cent, but I think I will be part of the team," said Ballack after his Bundesliga return.

Despite running Leverkusen's midfield, he played no hand in the two goals by Swiss midfielder Tranquillo Barnetta and Brazil's Renato Augusto.

Leverkusen struck early as Barnetta netted in the 19th-minute before Renato Augusto struck the second just three minutes later to give Leverkusen the three points.

Earlier, VfB Stuttgart suffered a shock defeat by Mainz when their Tunisia striker Sami Allagui, who was making his debut, opened the scoring in the 26th-minute as he planted his shot in the left corner to stun Stuttgart.

Fellow debutant and striker Morten Rasmussen of Denmark then scored the second just two minutes after the half-time break as the home side took the three points.

RESULTS

Mainz 05 2 (Allagui 26, Rasmussen 47) VfB Stuttgart 0
Borussia Dortmund 0 Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Barnetta 19,

Sevilla agree to part with Squillaci

REUTERS, Madrid

Sevilla have agreed to sell France defender Sebastien Squillaci to Arsenal subject to a medical, the Spanish club said on Sunday.

The 30-year-old, who was a member of the France squad at the World Cup finals in South Africa, has been given permission to travel to London on Monday, the Sevilla club said in a statement on their website (www.sevillafc.es).

Squillaci joined Sevilla from Olympique Lyon two years ago for a fee of around 6.5 million euros.

Sevilla said the defender had requested to be left out of his side's squad to play Braga in the Champions League play-off first leg last week after receiving an offer from Arsenal.

Do or die for Samp

AFP, Paris



Sampdoria and Sheriff Tiraspol stand to make a little bit of history for themselves should they progress to the Champions League group stages after their respective play-off matches on Tuesday.

Sampdoria have never appeared in the group stages and have not competed in European club football's top competition since they lost to Barcelona in the 1992 European Cup final.

While they trail German opponents Werder Bremen 3-1 they can take heart that they have an away goal and their rivals were thrashed 4-1 in their opening Bundesliga match on Saturday by Hoffenheim.

Certainly Sampdoria goalkeeper Ginaluca Curci has not given up hope that aided by an inspiring performance from talented forward Antonio Cassano they can stun their German opponents.

"The away goal has given us heart and a lot of hope and our fans will be like having an extra man on the pitch," said the 25-year-old.

"We matched Werder in the first leg but just didn't take our chances so morale wise we are going into this match in good shape."

Sheriff for their part also trail but only 1-0 to unglamorous Swiss outfit Basel and with a vociferous home support guaranteed can have genuine cause to be optimistic that after 10 previous failures to reach the lucrative group stage they can become the first side from their country to do so.

FIXTURES

Hapoel Tel-Aviv (ISR) v FC Salzburg (AUT), Sheriff Tiraspol (MDA) v Basel (SUI), Anderlecht (BEL) v Partizan Belgrade (SRB), FC Sevilla (ESP) v Sporting Braga (POR), Sampdoria (ITA)

The encounter promises to be a high octane one if the first one is anything to go by as six players were booked, five from Sheriff, who also had Aleksandr Erokhin sent off for a second bookable offence.

Israeli side Hapoel Tel Aviv will also be out to reach the group stage for the first time as they host Austrian outfit Salzburg holding a 3-2 lead and the 2002 UEFA Cup quarter-finalists will be hoping their Nigerian international goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama is in the form he showed at the World Cup finals.

Salzburg by contrast are looking to expunge the sour memory of last year's edition when they went out at this stage beaten by Israeli opposition in the shape of Maccabi Haifa.

However, Salzburg's veteran coach Huub Stevens is none too confident of being able to overturn the tables on their opponents.

"After losing 3-2 our chances have been reduced of course," said Stevens.

"I reckon they stand at around 30 percent," added the 56-year-old Dutchman, who guided Bundesliga side Schalke 04 to the 1997 UEFA Cup.

Portuguese debutants Sporting Braga have already put out Scottish giants Celtic and are on the brink of claiming an even bigger scalp in that of Spanish side Sevilla as they travel to Spain with a 1-0 lead.

It is a long time since two-time Cup Winners Cup winners Anderlecht had a good run in Europe but they have a real chance of making the group stage as they start all square at home to Partizan Belgrade with the first leg ending 2-2.

Ibra going to Milan?

Football

AFP, Rome

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's agent all but ruled out any hope AC Milan have of prising the big Swedish forward from Barcelona, claiming on Monday he was "99.9 per cent" sure to stay in Spain.

Mino Raiola was speaking to Sky Sport 24 in answer to Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani's previous assertion that he was still hopeful of signing the former Inter Milan fan-favourite.

"Ibra is very happy about the interest from Milan and other teams but Barcelona won't sell him, (coach Pep) Guardiola doesn't want to sell him, hence I think such a deal is impossible," said Raiola.

"Barcelona don't want him to leave and 99.9 per cent sure he will stay in Spain."

However, speculation grew about Ibrahimovic's future when Guardiola left him on

the bench for the Spanish Supercup, picking new signing David Villa instead.

But Raiola said nothing should be read into that.

"In a big club no-one has a guaranteed place, Zlatan is used to fighting but newspapers want to make a mountain out of a molehill."

"He wants to stay and fight, Guardiola doesn't want to sell him and he's the boss."

Galliani had earlier insisted the seven-time European champions were interested in bringing the 28-year-old back to Italy.

"We will try, even if it's difficult," he said.

However, Galliani claimed he has faith in the team even if there are no new additions.

"I don't want to talk about technical or tactical aspects, the team seems in good shape, we'll see at the start of the championship, I'm quite optimistic," he added.

Milan lost on penalties to Juventus in a pre-season friendly on Sunday night following a 0-0 draw.



Juventus players celebrate with the Berlusconi Trophy after their victory over AC Milan at San Siro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Panucci calls it quits

AFP, Rome

Former Italy international Christian Panucci has announced his retirement from football at the age of 37.

In a glorious 20-year career the right back, who could also play in the middle of defence, represented AC Milan, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and Chelsea, amongst other teams.

He won the Champion League with both Milan and Madrid and lifted titles in Italy and Spain.

"I had other offers from the United States but I don't have the same desire as before, it's right to say enough," he told Sky Sport 24.

Panucci reserved special thanks for England coach Fabio Capello, with whom he worked at Milan, Madrid and AS Roma.

"Being the first Italian at Real Madrid and having won the Champions League was one of the best moments," he added about his three years in Spain.

However, one man against whom Panucci still bares a grudge is World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi.

Despite representing Italy over a 14-year period, Panucci was not selected by Lippi for the 2006 World Cup.

The pair had fallen out when Lippi was coach and Panucci player at Inter.

"I spoke badly about him when I was a player so go figure what I'd say now I've finished. I wouldn't go to dinner with him," he said.

Following eight seasons at Roma, Panucci, who began his career with Genoa, spent his last season at Parma.

Allegri extols defence

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri believes the future is bright for the club's defence.

The back four has always been a traditional strength among Milan teams over the last 20 years, dating back to the days of Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Costacurta but in the last couple of seasons, Milan have struggled, not least due to the often injury-induced unavailability of Alessandro Nesta.

However, following the penalty defeat after a 0-0 draw with Juventus in the Berlusconi Trophy at the San Siro on Sunday night, Allegri paid tribute to Thiago Silva, 25, and new Greek signing from Genoa Sokratis Papastathopoulos, 22.

"In central defence Thiago Silva and Papastathopoulos did well but also the rest of the defence played well," he said before also expressing his satisfaction with Ronaldinho's condition.

"Ronaldinho is a player who has all the physical qualities to do well and (Sunday night) he showed he can have a positive effect on our season."

Big guns rebound

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux and Marseille, league champions these past two seasons in France, put poor starts to this campaign behind them at the weekend as the southern outfits secured their first league win at the third time of asking.

After Marseille defeated Lorient at the Stade Velodrome on Saturday, on Sunday it was Bordeaux's turn to kick off the summer dust - though it took a goal five minutes into stoppage time from Michael Ziani to see off a stubborn Paris Saint German at the Parc des Princes.

After a goalless opening period, Alou Diarra headed Bordeaux ahead midway through the second half, only for Ludovic Giuly to set up Guillaume Hoarau for a Parisian equaliser eight minutes later.

Paris, persistent under-achievers in the league over the past decade and a half, had begun the season brightly

enough with a win and a draw but they were undone when Bordeaux played their ace card - possibly for the final time.

Tigana had left highly-rated playmaker Yoann Gourcuff on the bench to begin with but sent him on for the final quarter-hour and it was from his corner that Ciani headed past veteran PSG keeper Gregory Coupet.

Gourcuff, who joined

Bordeaux in 2008 after a profitable two-year spell at AC Milan, told broadcaster Canal + that "we shall see" when asked if he might be on his way - possibly to Lyon.

With their win, Bordeaux move out of the drop zone as did Didier Deschamps' Marseille after Gabriel Heinze and Nigerian Taye Taiwo saw off Lorient.

Lyon also got their first win under their belts with a Jean II Makoun goal edging out Brest at the Stade Gerland on Saturday.

Other Sunday action saw promoted Caen, who stunned Marseille away from home on the opening day and then saw off Lyon, settle for a point at likewise unbeaten Montpellier to leave the Normandy-based side two points adrift of early pace-setters Toulouse.

Toulouse secured their third win in three games Saturday, beating promoted Arles 2-1 with Norwegian star Daniel Braaten netting his third goal of the season before Etienne Didot made it two ahead of Franck Dja Djedje's consolation.

Also Sunday, Sochaux parted goalless with Lille.

RESULTS

Paris SG 1 (Hoarau 76) Bordeaux 2 (Diarra 68, Ciani 90+5)

Sochaux 0 Lille 0

Montpellier 0 Caen 0

Lens 2 (Adriano 74-og, Roulet 84)

Monaco 2 (D. Niculae 19, Aubameyang 70)

Marseille 2 (Heinze 6, Taiwo 72)

Lorient 0

Rennes 0 Saint-Etienne 0

Nice 1 (Fae 27) Nancy 1 (Efulou 85)

Lyon 1 (Makoun 19) Brest 0

Toulouse 2 (Braaten 36, Didot 62)

Arles-Avignon 1 (Dja Djedje 64)

Auxerre 1 (Jelen 69) Valenciennes 1

FIFA sizes up English bid

Football

AFP, London

FIFA inspectors began a four-day visit to inspect England's 2018 World Cup bid on Monday with the campaign boosted by encouraging words from FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

A six-man FIFA inspection team was to be greeted by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg at Downing Street and also meet England manager Fabio Capello before taking a tour of Wembley Stadium.

The team will also assess facilities and stadiums in Manchester, Sunderland and Newcastle this week.

England face a tough battle in the bid to stage football's premier tournament for the first time since 1966 with Russia considered to

be the frontrunner.

England's hopes of staging the tournament were boosted when Blatter, who has already praised Russia's bid, said it would be "easy" to hold the competition in England.

He told the eastworldfootball website from Singapore: "The easiest way to organise the World Cup is to go to England."

"Everything is there -- fans, stadiums, infrastructure -- it's easy."

The absence of British Prime Minister David Cameron from the greeting committee has raised eyebrows -- he is on a family holiday.

But Cameron has spoken by telephone to Blatter, who urged him to take his holiday, Sports Minister Hugh Robertson said.

The chief executive of the England 2018 bid team, Andy Anson, said: "We believe our Bid Book represents a strong proposal to FIFA that will focus on what it can do for football all over the world."