

Tevez sinks Chelsea

AFP, Manchester



A Carlos Tevez goal handed champions Chelsea their first defeat of the Premier League season here on Saturday as Manchester City scored a 1-0 victory at Eastlands.

Just one day after City manager Roberto Mancini decreed that Carlo Ancelotti's team would repeat as champions, he saw his own club halt the progress of the London club, comfortable winners of their opening five games.

Mancini's pre-match assertion, whether intended as an exercise in "mind games" or not, certainly created a stir with the City manager claiming that the visitors would defend their Premier League title "easily."

The cautious attitude also extended to Mancini's team selection, with Tevez as the solitary striker, and it came as no surprise that the few first half chances that were created predominantly fell to the visitors.

After 20 minutes, Yaya Toure lost the ball in midfield and presented Michael Essien with the chance for the game's first shot which he sent skidding well wide of the City goal.

Only the woodwork, and Joe Hart's customary excellence in goal, rescued City after 27 minutes when Florent Malouda's cross was headed back across goal by Alex and Branislav Ivanovic saw his own header strike the bar.

The Chelsea full-back responded well and followed up, only to be denied by the England goalkeeper.

Chelsea enjoyed a glut of possession there-

after but failed to seriously test Hart again, the best chance falling to Essien just before the interval but, at the end of a promising attack, his shot was woeful and wide.

The second half, however, opened with the promise of more attacking play from both sides and, before the hour was reached, City were in front.

The goal came from a counter-attack and was sprung from a short pass from Yaya Toure which found Tevez on the halfway line.

The Argentinian sped through Chelsea territory -- Chelsea defender Ashley Cole backing away furiously -- before beating Peter Cech with a superb 18-yard strike that flew in off the inside of the left-hand post.

Ancelotti was clearly stunned by the Tevez goal coming, as it had, largely against the run of play but if he was expecting a committed response from his champions, there was none forthcoming.

In fact, Yaya Toure might have doubled the lead as he weaved his way into the Chelsea area, just losing his balance before he could get off a close-range shot, and the visitors were limited by dogged defending to long-range shots.

Essien tried his hand with a couple of pitiful efforts from distance while defender Alex rose well to meet a Malouda corner but his strong header flashed harmlessly across the face of the City goal.

Chelsea substitute Daniel Sturridge, booed by City fans for having left their club for a better contract with the London club, appeared as a substitute and might have slid in to claim a late equaliser but it would have been more than the reigning champions deserved.



Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez (R) attacks Chelsea defender John Terry (C) and midfielder John Obi Mikel during their Premier League encounter at the City of Manchester Stadium yesterday.

Injured Messi selected

Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi was named in Argentina's squad on Thursday for next month's friendly against Japan in Saitama despite being injured.

Messi, who injured right ankle ligaments playing for Barcelona last weekend, was included in coach Sergio Batista's squad because he wants to be with the players even if he is not fit to play, an Argentine Football Association (AFA) spokesman told Reuters.

"Messi has been called up because he wants to be with the squad," Guillermo Tofoni, who arranges the AFA's calendar of friendlies, said. "There are also contractual reasons for him to be present but he's going because he wants to always be there as a figure-head of our national team."

Injured Valencia midfielder Ever Banega, who impressed in Argentina's 4-1 friendly

victory over world champions Spain earlier this month, was not included for the Oct. 8 match.

Real Madrid's Fernando Gago, who missed the Spain match in Buenos Aires through injury after making a comeback in the 1-0 win over Ireland in August, is included in the squad posted on the AFA website (www.afa.org.ar).

Inter Milan's Javier Zanetti and Esteban Cambiasso, who returned against Spain after being controversially left out by former coach Diego Maradona for the World Cup in South Africa where Argentina reached the last eight are also included.

Former Bayern Munich forward Jose Sosa, now with Napoli, who missed Maradona's final cut for the World Cup and Benfica winger Nicolas Gaitan, who won two caps under Maradona last year when he played for Boca Juniors, were also included.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar), Mariano Andujar (Catania), Oscar Ustari (Getafe)

Defenders:

Martin Demichelis (Bayern Munich), Walter Samuel, Javier Zanetti (both Inter Milan), Nicolas Burdisio (AS Roma), Gabriel Heinze (Olympique Marseille), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City), Gabriel Milito (Barcelona)

Midfielders:

Javier Mascherano (Barcelona), Fernando Gago, Angel Di Maria (both Real Madrid), Jose Sosa (Napoli), Esteban Cambiasso (Inter Milan), Mario Bolatti (Fiorentina), Andres D'Alessandro (Internacional), Javier Pastore (Palermo), Nicolas Gaitan (Benfica)

Forwards:

Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid), Carlos Tevez (Manchester City), Sergio Aguero (Atletico Madrid), Lionel Messi

'Teams give up against Barca'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho stepped up the rivalry with bitter rivals Barcelona on Friday by claiming that too many teams simply surrender when they face the reigning champions.

"We will probably need to take many points to win the league," said Mourinho.

"Especially if some teams give up against Barcelona; they may believe they can't win anyway and simply give up. That would make it harder for us."

Real Madrid lead La Liga with Barcelona trailing by a point.

Houllier pens three-year Villa deal

AFP, London

Gerard Houllier formally signed a three-year deal with Aston Villa on Friday, two weeks after agreeing to succeed Martin O'Neill as coach.

He revealed at his press conference ahead of Wednesday's League Cup tie with Blackburn that he had shaken hands with club owner Randy Lerner on the contract.

Former Liverpool manager Houllier, 63, will take charge of his first Premier League game for more than six years when Villa face Wolves at Molineux on Sunday.

Spurs close to signing Khumalo

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp said on Friday that the English Premier League side were hopeful of concluding a 1.5 million pound deal for South African World Cup defender Bongani Khumalo.

The 23-year-old had a trial at White Hart Lane and is expected to move from South African league side Supersports when the transfer window opens in January.

"We're in the process of doing a deal for him. He's not expensive. We had him over on trial and we like him. He's got potential and we've got a tie up with the club Supersports so we've taken him on," said Redknapp.

Khumalo, who was born in Swaziland, scored during this summer's World Cup win over France.

His arrival will be a significant boost to Redknapp, who has seen Michael Dawson join fellow centre-back Jonathan Woodgate on the long-term injury list.

Redknapp added: "It will be a great chance for him. He comes from a poor background and he's desperate for a chance and we're going to give him a chance."

Rooney concerns Fergie

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson will take his Manchester United side to the Reebok Stadium on Sunday concerned about how Wayne Rooney's personal life is starting to affect his form.

The United and England striker has been hit hard by recent revelations that have seen media scrutiny into his life increase tenfold.

Rooney has scored just twice so far this season, whereas last term he already had six goals to his name by this point and there seems little doubt that he is struggling to cope with his new-found infamy.

"I don't believe he has a confidence problem," Ferguson said.

"But the boy is starting to realise finally, without any question, what kind of focus is on him as a human being."

"He is realising what it means to be at the centre of media attention for non-football-related questions. I don't think the boy can turn a corner at the moment without a camera on him."

United make the short trip to Bolton Wanderers looking to build on last weekend's exciting 3-2 victory over arch-rivals Liverpool.

Yet it is Rooney's form and the attention he is currently receiving that appears to be dominating the United manager's thoughts.

"He can't move without the paparazzi

being on him and, for a young person, that is not what you want," Ferguson added.

"You want to play and enjoy your football without that attention on you, because that can be quite exhausting."

"He would like to keep playing with freedom, but the siege of the tabloids can wear out anyone."

Ferguson also revealed that Owen Hargreaves looks to be finally winning his two-year battle with tendinitis.

The midfielder's career has been hugely hindered by a problem that has forced him to undergo double surgery on his knees and has restricted him to just one minute's first-team football in two seasons.

But after watching him in training this week, the United manager believes that good news is around the corner.

"Owen Hargreaves has come back training and has looked very good," said Ferguson.

"After having watched him in training yesterday, if he continues that way he's going to give me another selection problem, no question about that."

United will go into the contest against Bolton as favourites and history strengthens the idea that they should win comfortably at the Reebok.

They have only lost once there since the advent of the Premier League, with Nicolas Anelka scoring the winner for a side managed by Gary Megson in 2007.

Megson was replaced by Owen Coyle

last season but despite the weight of history and the apparent gulf in class between the two outfits, the Bolton boss is refusing to be overawed by the task in hand.

"To beat Manchester United, a number of factors have to come together -- the biggest being that our players have to play well," he said.

"I will be looking to get the maximum out of my group. Ultimately, if they then beat us fair and square I can accept that."

"My disappointment will be if we don't get to our maximum because I know that if we do, we have a real chance of getting points from this game."

"We will be positive like we have in every game this season."

Coyle singled out Dimitar Berbatov as United's main threat in the contest, particularly after his stunning hat-trick against Liverpool last weekend.

"Berbatov is in terrific form at the moment," Coyle added.

"But they are a team full of quality players. If you start to go through their team individually, and look at who you have to stop, we will be here all day. It's a very tough game, a local derby, against some of the very best players in world football. But that's exactly why we're in the job."

United will be without Hargreaves, Michael Carrick (Achilles) and Antonio Valencia (ankle), while the home side's Andy O'Brien is their only casualty as he nurses a torn thigh muscle.



Cologne striker Lukas Podolski is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Hoffenheim during their Bundesliga clash in Cologne on Friday.

Hoffenheim earn draw

SOCCERNET



Hoffenheim came from behind to earn a draw at the RheinEnergieStadion but are now without a Bundesliga win in three games.

Cologne dominated the first half but had only Lukas Podolski's fine goal to show for their efforts.

And the visitors, after two half-time substitutions, emerged looking a different team and deservedly levelled through Demba Ba.

Cologne's Martin Lanig had an early opportunity as he ran on to the ball in the box at the end of a good move involving Misso Brecko and Podolski. The midfielder was played inside by Isaac Vorsah but the dozing Ghana defender's blushes were spared as goalkeeper Tom Starke stood up well to save.

Hoffenheim's first sight of goal saw Sebastian Rudy's drive curl wide and Sejad Salihovic then fired over from long range - but it was Cologne who found the net in the 17th minute through Podolski.

Mato Jajalo threaded a pass between Andreas Beck and Josip Simunic and the Germany forward hit an immediate and powerful left-footed drive through the grasp of the diving Starke.

afterwards, but Starke gathered.

Starke held Matuschky's low drive before Hoffenheim had a lucky escape. Jajalo's cross was deflected by Simunic and struck the near post and Starke's elbow before Christian Eichner cleared.

Hoffenheim introduced Peniel Kokou Mlapa and Gylfi Sigurdsson for Simunic and Tobias Weis at half-time and began the second period more promisingly as Ba was denied by Pedro Geromel's superb saving challenge, having miscontrolled to end another promising attack.

Salihovic's low drive was fumbled by Faryd Mondragon and the visitors then levelled in the 54th minute as Ba turned inside Geromel on the left of the penalty area and curled beyond Mondragon.

And it should have been 2-1 as Vedad Ibisevic did well to keep an attack alive and find Ba, but then sidefooted his strike partner's cross straight at Mondragon.

Petit headed narrowly across goal from Jajalo's corner before Cologne captain Youssef Mohamad somehow failed to turn in Podolski's dangerous free-kick at the back post.

Mlapa's pace created an opportunity for Hoffenheim, but Ba delayed his shot too long and allowed Mohamad to block, and Ibisevic's superb header from Sigurdsson's corner was saved.

Petit and Jajalo threatened from distance and Matuschky headed Taner Yalcin's free-kick wide as Cologne searched in vain for a late winner.

Beckham lasts the distance

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham threw caution to the wind Friday playing a full 90 minutes in his first start of the 2010 season for the Los Angeles Galaxy.

Beckham, who has been anointed as the player to take the MLS from a football backwater to international status, was just as surprised as his teammates that he stayed in for the entire game in the Galaxy's 2-0 loss to the New York Red Bulls.

"It was good to get 90 minutes," Beckham said.

And in an ironic twist, Beckham was forced to put his surgically-repaired foot to a full test and go the distance against the Red Bulls because of substitutions and injuries to his teammates Friday.

"We had to do that," said Beckham. "I discussed with Bruce (coach Arena) during the week that I would play 65 to 70 minutes and I felt pretty good."

The 35-year-old, ex-England captain created scoring chances, took a free kick, survived a hard tackle early that tested his injury and received a yellow card late in the match for a hard tackle of his own in front of a crowd of 27,000 at The Home Depot Center.

"At some stages I felt tired but we had a few players pull up with injuries so I had to stay on," he said.

Beckham suffered the injury in mid-March while on loan to AC Milan. The injury

kept Beckham, England's most-capped outfield player, from playing in his fourth World Cup as he missed the 2010 finals in South Africa.

"David felt he could play 90 minutes," Arena said. "In a perfect world he should not have played that long. He showed tremendous character and quality in last 20 minutes when by all rights he should have been

off the field."

Beckham, who had played just 57 minutes as a substitute in his first two games this season, wasn't complaining Friday. He just wished his Galaxy had gotten off to a better start.

Los Angeles didn't get their first shot on goal until the 66th minute but then rallied to control the offence late in the game.



LA Galaxy star David Beckham hurdles past New York Red Bulls' Tony Tchani (on the ground) during their Major League Soccer tie at the Home Depot Stadium on Friday.

"The first half sets the tone of the game and the first half wasn't good for us," Beckham said. "We didn't start well. They kept the ball and we didn't pressure them. When you start games like that it is tough going on from there."

Friday's contest was the first start for Beckham since last year's MLS final.

He made his first appearance of this season on September 11, coming off the bench for 20 minutes against the Columbus Crew. He followed that up with 37 minutes as a substitute against DC United last weekend. Unlike Friday's campaign, both those games resulted in Galaxy wins.

Friday's match was billed as Beckham versus Thierry Henry, the French star who recently signed a 5.6 million dollar contract to join the Red Bulls.

Henry was ruled out of the match because of a nagging strained right knee that he suffered three weeks ago in a 1-0 loss to Real Salt Lake.

Beckham said he enjoyed stepping back into the spotlight against the Red Bulls in what could be a preview of the MLS Cup in November.

"Obviously there was a bit more hype and buzz around this game because it was New York and the rivalry," Beckham said.

"The players they brought in with (Rafael) Marquez and Thierry. There was more hype around the game and it was a full stadium. There was a buzz leading up to it but once you start the game it is just like any other game."