

Bayern bounce back

AFP, Munich



Coach Louis van Gaal was delighted with his Bayern Munich side's second-half display as the defending champions moved up the Bundesliga table with a morale-boosting 4-2 win over Freiburg.

Friday night's win at Munich's Allianz Arena put Bayern seventh in the league, before this weekend's matches, and narrowed the gap behind leaders Mainz, who face second-placed Dortmund on Sunday.

"I'm happy with the result, but we didn't play well in the first half," said van Gaal after his side's fourth win in ten games.

"We were far better after half-time, but we've conceded goals again. This group of players has played football the way Bayern Munich can - and that's what really matters."

Both Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger and Croatia's Danijel Pranjić created all four goals as Bayern put a poor first-half performance behind them with a strong second 45 minutes.

Defender Martin Demichelis scored the only goal of the first half before Mario Gomez on the hour, Anatolij Timoshchuk and then Toni Kroos completed the rout with Schweinsteiger running Bayern's midfield.

"Bastian made the difference in the second

half: he took over the playmaking duties, he held up the play and distributed possession. He was terrific," said van Gaal.

Having been left out of the first-team at the start of the season to make way for Germany defender Holger Badstuber, Argentina defender Demichelis said he was happy to score his first goal of the season with a 39th-minute header for Bayern.

"It was important for me to prove I'm still around," said the 29-year-old.

"Thankfully, I've been able to help the team with my first goal."

"A professional career has its ups and downs, and I have to learn from the situation."

"I'm glad to be at Bayern, I've been here for eight seasons and I love Bayern."

Freiburg coach Robin Dutt criticised his side for their defensive mistakes and admitted the hosts deserved the win as second-half goals by Stefan Reisinger and an own-goal from Munich's Edson Braafheid flattered the guests.

"I'm angry about us gifting them the opener with a completely unnecessary misplaced pass in central midfield, which led to the corner and in turn to the goal," he said.

"Our attacking efforts weren't bad, but it was never enough to win here."

"In the second half, we ended up lucky that Bayern didn't make the most of a couple of counter-attacks."

"But at the end of the day, it was a deserved win for Bayern."

Inter edge Genoa

AFP, Rome



An embarrassing mistake from Portuguese goalkeeper Eduardo handed champions Inter Milan a 1-0 victory away to Genoa at the Marassi stadium on Friday.

Ghana midfielder Muntari Sulley scored the winner three minutes into first half stoppage time but it was Eduardo's gaffe that proved crucial.

Inter moved second ahead of the weekend games, a point behind leaders Lazio and one above city rivals AC Milan, who host Juventus on Saturday night.

But Rafael Benitez's side will also be counting the cost of this match having lost goalkeeper Julio Cesar and midfielder Esteban Cambiasso to injuries.

Benitez said he was happier with his side than following last week's home draw with Sampdoria.

"It was a different game to the one against Sampdoria against a team that is difficult to play against and played well," he said.

"Our character came shining through, it's true that (Samuel) Eto'o missed an easy chance but after the break we created five or six more."

Genoa coach Gian Piero Gasperini said his team had deserved more.

"I'm very disappointed with the result and for the fans, it should have ended differently because we didn't deserve to lose," he said.

"We played well and created many chances."

"We gave away too many balls but we played with organisation in defence and we counter-attacked with speed."

"At the end we played more physically, we could have got at least a draw."

"I'm disappointed we dropped these points but we played with great spirit."

Inter had the first clear chance of the game on 13 minutes as French winger Jonathan Biabiany went on a mazy run, beating three players and slipping the ball to Wesley Sneijder,

whose shot sent Eduardo plunging to his right to gather at the second attempt.

Genoa threatened next on 21 minutes as Luca Toni ran at the Inter defence, beat Lucio and let fly from just outside the area but Cesar leapt to his left to beat it away.

Giandomenico Mesto was then well placed to shoot on 24 minutes but curled his effort gently into Cesar's arms.

Following 15 goals in 13 games before this one, Serie A top scorer Eto'o proved he was human with an incredible miss on 29 minutes as he ran onto Muntari's inch-perfect pass but spooned his shot from 10 yards high and wide with only Eduardo to beat.

Inter full-back Davide Santon was lucky to stay on the pitch after driving his studs into Chico's head, receiving only a booking.

Marco Rossi should have scored for the hosts on 42 minutes following sustained Genoa pressure as Chico centred from the right but the midfielder scuffed his shot from eight yards and it bobbed wide.

Into first half stoppage time Eduardo handed Inter a gift that had shades of England goalkeeper Robert Green's World Cup howler against USA about it.

Muntari shot from distance but straight at the Portuguese, only for the ball to bounce in front of the keeper and bounce over his shoulder and in.

Sneijder created a glorious chance for Biabiany seven minutes after the restart with a flicked ball over the defence but Eduardo came out to block and make amends for his earlier error.

Sneijder had a pair of chances from free-kicks but fired both over the bar before Cesar was forced off with a hamstring problem, replaced by Luca Castellazzi, who saved comfortably from a Luca Toni header.

Genoa substitute Mattia Destro lost his balance as he shot from the edge of the area but then 11 minutes from time Domenico Criscito brilliantly took the ball on his chest only to send a volley arrowing just past Castellazzi's left-hand post.



Bayern Munich midfielder Anatolij Tymoshchuk (L) celebrates his goal with teammate Philipp Lahm during their Bundesliga encounter against Freiburg in Munich on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

C'Ron backs Rooney

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney is right to have elected to stay put at Manchester United, former clubmate Cristiano Ronaldo indicated Friday.

Rooney seemed set to leave Old Trafford after revealing he had turned down a contract offer amid concerns he felt the club no longer had the spending power to attract top names.

However, he ultimately performed a u-turn and signed a new five-year deal.

Ronaldo did, in contrast, leave United for Real Madrid last year in an 80 million pound deal and Real were reportedly interested in a potential bid had England striker Rooney become available.

Ronaldo, however, said: "Rooney knows what's best for his career so we have to respect his decisions."

"I think the best club for him is in Manchester, of course," the Portugal star told Sky Sports News.

Maradona's saddest b'day

AP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona turned 50 Saturday with little fanfare, calling it the "saddest birthday" because of Argentina's loss in the World Cup.

The former Argentina coach said he intended to spend the day quietly at his home in the Buenos Aires suburb of Ezeiza.

"It is the saddest birthday of my life," Maradona said in an interview with the sports daily Ole. "One that I don't wish to celebrate."

It's been three months since the Argentina Football Association declined to renew Maradona's contract.

"The best gift would have been (continuing with) the national team," Maradona said. "When we were knocked out of the World Cup, I began my mourning period."

MU, Gunners kept apart

AFP, London

Manchester United and Arsenal were kept apart as the League Cup quarterfinal draw was made here Saturday with Aston Villa pitted against bitter rivals Birmingham in the tie of the round.

United, bidding to win the trophy for the third year in a row, will travel to Upton Park to take on West Ham for a place in the last four while Arsenal face Wigan at home.

The pick of the last-eight matches will be when Gerard Houllier's Villa face local rivals Birmingham at St Andrews.

Birmingham squeezed into the quarterfinals after beating League One side Brentford on penalties.

Villa, who reached the final of the competition last season, needed extra-time to defeat Burnley in midweek.

In the other tie of the round, in-form West Bromwich Albion face Championship side Ipswich, the only team from outside the Premier League left in the competition.

'Difficult to drop Hernandez'

Football

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson admits Wayne Rooney could struggle to win back his Manchester United place when he returns to fitness.

Rooney has always been one of the first names down on Ferguson's team-sheet at Old Trafford, but he is currently sidelined with an ankle problem and Ferguson has hinted that the emergence of Javier Hernandez is threatened the England striker's position.

With Rooney recovering from his injury in Dubai, young Mexican forward Hernandez has seized his chance to such an extent that United's star striker may not walk straight back into the side.

Hernandez struck late winners at Stoke last weekend and in the League Cup victory over Wolves in midweek. And United manager Ferguson is impressed by his new signing's exploits.

"Of course it will be difficult - I'm not even suggesting he (Hernandez) will be left out," Ferguson said. "He's keeping his place in the team because he deserves to keep his place in the team."

"We had a feeling he would break through, we had a good feeling about that. Therefore it gives you a problem, but the right kind of problem."

"There is plenty of evidence the boy has got something. He's young and he wants to learn."

"He comes from a really good football pedigree, everything is in his favour."

"He's first in before 9am and he's last to leave. So you get your rewards for your efforts and at the moment that's been the case."

"Javier's enjoying it here, his family are with him, he speaks the language. It's all good for him at the moment."

Ferguson looks to have pulled another

rabbit out of the hat with the seven million pounds capture of Hernandez from Mexican side Chivas.

His scouting system has already seen him pick out the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Nemanja Vidic and Peter Schmeichel down the years.

Ferguson said: "I get satisfaction from anyone that does well here. Your judgement is always on the line - it doesn't matter if you pay 2p (pence) or two million pounds. You just hope he's successful."

"Over the years we've had some fantastic buys at all varying money. Money has increased in the last decade to different levels."

"Twenty years ago we brought players like (Steve) Bruce and (Brian) McClair for 800,000 pounds. What would they cost now?"

It has been a turbulent time at Old Trafford of late. From dropping precious late points to the Rooney contract saga, it's not been plain sailing for Ferguson.

Now with Rooney's future being solved, the Scot wants the focus to switch back to his team as they bid to wrestle the title away from Chelsea, who sit five points clear of United at the top of the table.

Ferguson said: "It's all over, it's all in the past. Rooney's signed a five year contract. We're happy and we kick on."

"The future is exactly as it was a few weeks ago. No-one has left the club, we have the same squad of players, we have issues with injuries so we're no different to everyone else."

"There have been plenty of issues over the years. You could say it was a big one last week. But only in the sense it was a top player."

"Plenty of players come to a situation with their contracts that you have to deal with. The difference is that they are normally done very quickly and unnoticed."

"But it's our job now to kick on. We've got important issues and that is chasing Chelsea. That's our aim - to catch them up."

Mancini lashes out at drink culture

AFP, London

Manchester City coach Roberto Mancini has lashed out at the "drinking culture" of British football after a video of a boozy night out involving members of his squad appeared on the Internet.

Rainy footage showing City stars Adam Johnson, Gareth Barry, Joe Hart and Shay Given at a student house party appeared online shortly after the quartet went on a trip to Scotland earlier this week.

Mancini had recently warned his players to curb their drinking habits to prolong their careers, after separate newspaper reports showed England goalkeeper Hart dancing on a bar in the Spanish resort of Marbella.

Speaking about the latest revelations, Mancini declined to confirm whether any disciplinary action would be taken but admitted he was baffled by his players' activities.

"I have not seen this video but I told them my opinion about this situation 10 days ago," Mancini said.

"I don't understand this. The video was on Monday, and Monday was a day off. Some players can do what they want, but I don't understand why."

"I am unhappy about this, but for them. We play every three days and it is difficult to recover."

"I think this problem is not only for us, it is for many players. For British players, it is part of the culture."

UEFA punishes Chelsea

AFP, Marseille

UEFA have fined Chelsea 10,000 euros after Marseille security officials were not allowed into the Blues' stadium at a Champions League game between the clubs, the French club said on Friday.

The light fine follows "disciplinary proceedings" opened against Chelsea by UEFA due to the "incorrect behaviour" of their stewards during the group stage encounter on September 28.

The Chelsea stewards prevented their Marseille counterparts from accompanying the 2,700 away supporters into Stamford Bridge, which contravened security arrangements that had been agreed upon prior to the match.

Marseille's director of security, Guy Cazadamont, was physically restrained as he attempted to make his way into the stands to enable the 22 stewards who had travelled with the French champions to carry out their work.

Marseille also received testimonials from several OM supporters who claimed their tickets had been ripped up by the Chelsea stewards.

Chelsea won the game 2-0 and currently lead Group F by three points from Spartak Moscow, who are a further three points above Marseille.



Inter Milan midfielder Sulley Muntari celebrates his all-important goal against Genoa during their Serie A clash at the Marassi Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Micho hints at exit

AFP, Munich



Argentina defender Martin Demichelis has hinted he may leave Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich during January's winter break despite scoring on his first start for the German giants this season.

The 29-year-old centre-back scored a 39th-minute header in Friday's 4-2 win over Freiburg in the Bundesliga, his first league start in ten games.

But the 33-times capped Argentina star is out of favour at Bayern, despite having made 171 appearances and scored 13 goals.

Demichelis has played for Munich since 2003, but found himself on the bench for the opening game of the season against Wolfsburg in August to make way for Germany defender Holger Badstuber.

The Argentina star stormed out of the stadium in frustration on hearing the news from coach Louis van Gaal and Demichelis has

always said he needs regular first-team football.

"The game against Freiburg was my first start this season, but maybe it was also my last game for Bayern," he said.

"At least I have shown I am not dead."

His first realistic opportunity to leave Bayern is in January's winter break.

"I am not happy when I'm not playing," he said simply after just one 90 minute spell of his agent in the coming weeks.

"I love this club and I have been here eight years, which is a long time in a football career," he said.

"If I go, I would rather it was in a different situation."

Demichelis' performance on Friday earned him rare praise from coach van Gaal.

"He has again shown that he is an excellent defender," said van Gaal.

But the Dutchman would not be drawn on whether the defender has a future at Bayern.

"We'll discuss this when the time is right and that time is not there yet," he said.