



Everton midfielder Tim Cahill (L) challenges Manchester City star Carlos Tevez during their Premier League encounter at The City of Manchester Stadium on Monday.

Everton trump City

AFP, Manchester



Tim Cahill and Leighton Baines stole the show from Carlos Tevez as 10-man Everton clinched a 2-1 victory over Manchester City at Eastlands on Monday.

David Moyes' side, who had not won in seven matches, took control within the opening 20 minutes through Cahill's early effort and a fine strike from Baines.

After Everton's Victor Anichebe was sent off for a second yellow card just before the hour, City halved the deficit through Phil Jagielka's own goal.

Despite constant pressure, City could not find an equaliser and missed out on the chance to move top of the table at Christmas for the first time in 81 years as their seven-match unbeaten run came to an end.

They also had defender Kolo Toure dismissed in stoppage time to complete a miserable evening that ruined Tevez's return to action just hours after he decided to withdraw a transfer request.

Everton's victory was just their fourth in the league this season and ended a seven-game winless run.

It had been billed as Tevez's big night but Everton took the lead in the fourth minute.

Anichebe failed to turn a header on target from a Baines cross. But Seamus Coleman collected the ball and clipped over a cross that was glanced in at the near post by Australian midfielder Cahill.

As the hosts looked for a response, Yaya Toure's cross-field pass picked out David Silva but the Spanish winger thumped a shot narrowly wide of goal.

The pressure continued and from Aleksander Kolarov's corner, Mario Balotelli had a header saved by Tim Howard.

Pablo Zabaleta was still in the changing rooms getting treatment after a clash of heads with Cahill when Everton scored a second, once again thanks to fine work by Baines.

The full back broke forward and fed Anichebe, whose cross was touched back by Cahill for Baines to sweep a curling shot into the net.

A loose pass from Vincent Kompany almost let Everton in for a third with Leon Osman breaking only for his shot to be deflected straight to Joe Hart by Kolo Toure.

City defender Kolarov had a curling free kick pushed wide by Howard as Everton were forced to withstand a spell of sustained City pressure before half-time.

City faced further disruption at the break when Adam Johnson came on to replace James Milner at the start of the second half. But Howard was soon forced into another scrambling save as he pushed away a powerful strike from Kolarov.

The Serbian also saw a shot from just outside the area fly narrowly wide of the post.

But Kolarov wasted another decent opportunity when he drove a free kick straight into the wall.

Just before the hour, Everton's task was made far harder by Anichebe's dismissal.

Minutes after he was booked for a challenge on Joe Hart, with Moyes about to take him off, Anichebe flew into Pablo Zabaleta and was shown a second yellow card.

After another scramble on the edge of the Everton area, Gareth Barry's dipping shot was too high to test Howard.

But Everton paid the price for being unable to clear when Johnson fed Yaya Toure and the midfielder's shot deflected off Jagielka and crept inside the post.

Johnson curled another shot just over the bar as Rodwell could only knock a clearance to the edge of the area.

They went even closer when Yaya Toure lobbed into space and Balotelli broke clear only to see his shot come back off the post before Howard denied Tevez with the follow up.

But as City desperately pressed forward, Kolo Toure was also shown a second yellow card for a pull on Diniyar Bilyaletdinov.

Tevez not leaving

AFP, London



Manchester City revealed on Monday that star striker and captain Carlos Tevez has withdrawn his transfer request following clear-the-air talks.

Tevez had shocked City by demanding a move earlier this month after claiming his relationship with the Premier League club's hierarchy had deteriorated beyond repair.

When City rejected the Argentine's claims in a strongly-worded statement it appeared certain the former Manchester United player would be on his way out of Eastlands.

However, Tevez met with City boss Roberto Mancini on Friday and, after also speaking to club officials, he has decided to remain with the team he joined from United in 2009.

"Manchester City can confirm to its fans that 'clear the air' talks have been held with Carlos Tevez," a statement on City's website said.

"During the meeting Carlos expressed his absolute commitment to the club and formally withdrew his transfer request."

"Carlos's contract remains unchanged and both Carlos and the football club are keen to focus on the opportunities that lie ahead."

The 26-year-old Tevez scored 29 goals in his first City season and has 10 in 28 appearances this term, having been appointed captain before the season started.

One problem during Tevez's time at City has

been homesickness as he misses his two daughters who are back in Argentina.

It is also believed Tevez's stormy relationship with Mancini and the club's failure to qualify for the Champions League played a role in the forward's discontent.

Tevez rowed with Mancini over the manager's negative tactics at half-time of a match against Newcastle this season and also had a touchline bust-up with the Italian after being substituted in a win over Bolton.

Mancini was still keen to keep his best player and admitted he was delighted to see the situation resolved as he side try to challenge for the Premier League title.

"Carlos is a world class player whose contribution since he joined the club has been invaluable," Mancini told the club's website.

"I am pleased that we are now able to focus on pure football matters and to be able to look forward to Carlos continuing to play a significant role in the club's progress."

It was expected that Tevez would receive a hostile reception from City supporters if he featured in Monday's home clash against Everton.

But Mancini clearly bore no grudges as he kept Tevez as City captain for Everton's visit to Eastlands.

There had been several reports that Tevez would be stripped of the armband, yet he was able to lead out City as they looked for the victory that would put them top of the table at Christmas for the first time in 81 years.

Enzo passes away at 83

AFP, Rome

Enzo Bearzot, who coached Italy to their World Cup triumph in 1982, has died after a long illness at the age of 83, the Sky Sport 24 television station reported on Tuesday.

Taking over as national team coach in 1977, Bearzot enjoyed his moment of glory in Spain when an Italian side that featured youthful goalscorer Paolo Rossi and legendary goalkeeper Dino Zoff stunned tournament favourites Brazil 3-2 in the quarterfinals. They then went on to defeat Poland 2-0 in the semifinals and West Germany 3-1 in the final for Italy's third World Cup triumph.

Bearzot's playing career saw him turn out for Inter Milan and Torino before he retired and worked his way through the national coaching system to become head coach in 1977, holding the position until 1986.

"Enzo Bearzot was one of the greatest figures in 20th century Italy," a tearful Rossi told Ansa news agency. "He was like a father to me. I owe everything to him."

Berbatov in seventh heaven

AFP, Sofia

Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov has been voted Bulgaria's best footballer of 2010 for a record seventh time, the Bulgarian Football Union announced on Monday.

Berbatov, 29, who last month scored an amazing five goals in Manchester United's 7-1 win over Premier League rivals Blackburn Rovers, also won in the title in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Bulgarian Litex Lovech captain Ivelin Popov, who recently transferred to Turkey's Gaziantepspor, came second followed by Bulgarian national team and Dutch Twente goalkeeper Nikolay Mihaylov.

Stuttgart after Okazaki

AFP, Tokyo

Bundesliga strugglers Stuttgart have made an offer for Japan and Shimizu S-Pulse striker Shinji Okazaki, press reports said Tuesday.

The 24-year-old's contract expires on January 31, but Shimizu still hope to agree a transfer fee with the German side, the Sports Nippon daily said.

Okazaki, who joined Shimizu in 2005 after leaving school and has scored 13 goals in 31 J-League matches in the 2010 season which ended this month, has always wanted to move abroad, the Nikkan Sports said.

Eto'o Africa's best

Football

AFP, Johannesburg

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o was named African Footballer of the Year a record fourth time at the annual CAF awards ceremony in Cairo Monday.

The 29-year-old native of central town Nkon finished ahead of first-time finalist Asamoah Gyan of Ghana and former winner Didier Drogba of Ivory Coast in a poll among national coaches on the continent.

Eto'o, who won the most prestigious African football individual honour three years in a row from 2003, was voted the best player at the FIFA Club World Cup won by his Italian team Inter Milan last Saturday.

The Cameroonian scored a clinical, close-range second goal in a 3-0 triumph over TP Mazembe from Democratic Republic of Congo, the first African club to reach the final of the 10-year competition.

Inter are now champions of the world, Europe and Italy and the goals of former Real Madrid, Real Mallorca and Barcelona star Eto'o have played a pivotal role in those successes.

However, he had meagre success as captain of the Cameroon 'Indomitable Lions' this year with the team making a meek quarter-finals exit from the African Nations Cup in Angola.

The leading all-time scorer in this competition scored once against Zambia and Tunisia, but the 'Lions' suffered a shock group loss to Gabon and defending champions Egypt outclassed them in the first knockout round.

Cameron then fared disastrously at the first World Cup

hosted by Africa last June, losing all three group matches under the leadership of Eto'o and were the first country eliminated from the competition.

Internal strife bedevilled the squad with some players trying to tell French coach Paul Le Guen who to select and

ners-up to Inter Milan, were named Club of the Year.

Milovan Rajevac, the humble Serb coach who made 2010 such a memorable year for Ghana, took the Coach of the Year award. He resigned after the World Cup to join Saudi Arabian club Al-Ittihad Jeddah.



PHOTO: AFP

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o poses with the African Footballer of the Year trophy which he won for a record fourth time at the annual CAF awards ceremony in Cairo on Monday.

the only consolation for Eto'o was goals against Denmark and the Netherlands.

TP Mazembe, the four-time African Champions League winners who stunned Internacional of Brazil 2-0 in the United Arab Emirates last week before finishing run-

Other award winners included Al-Ahly and Egypt midfielder Ahmed Hassan (Africa-based Player) and Ghana midfielder Kwadwo Asamoah (Most Promising Talent) while Ghana were predictably named best national team.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov delivers a speech after being voted Bulgaria's best footballer for a record seventh time during an official ceremony in Sofia on Monday.

Cassano set for Milan

Football

AFP, Rome

Controversial Italian forward Antonio Cassano has reached agreement to join AC Milan after falling out of favour at Sampdoria and will sign for his new club on Tuesday, the ANSA news agency reported.

The five-million euro clause due to Real Madrid, Cassano's club from 2006-2007, which had been holding up the deal, will be jointly paid by Sampdoria, AC Milan and the player himself, according to Gazzetta dello sport.

The contract will not be filed before the official opening of the transfer market on January 2, but agreement has been reached allowing the player to rejoin his new team's winter training camp in Dubai on December 27.

Cassano's arrival could herald the exit of Brazilian Ronaldinho, whose appearances for the team have become increasingly rare and could be sold to Los Angeles Galaxy.

Cassano, 28, joined Sampdoria from Real in 2007. But he has been frozen out of the club since insulting president Riccardo Garrone during an argument in October.

Sampdoria had applied to have his contract unilaterally terminated for gross misconduct, but an Italian league arbitration board ruled last week that his salary should be cut by 50 percent, but that his contract could not be cancelled.

Cassano has 20 international caps and had looked set to become a first-choice player under new Italy coach Cesare Prandelli.

The former Real Madrid and Roma star has attracted controversy throughout his career for on-pitch tantrums and disputes off it with coaches, presidents and team-mates.

Rafa denies sack rumours

Football

AFP, Rome

Rafael Benitez on Monday brushed aside speculation about his future, the Spaniard stating that he still "feels like the Inter Milan coach" despite media reports here that he is set to be fired by the Italian giants.

Benitez looked ever closer to the exit door Sunday after his club president Massimo Moratti blasted the former Liverpool boss for his post-Club World Cup outburst.

Having seen his side beat Congolese outfit Tout Pissant Mazembe 3-0 to win their fifth trophy of the year, Benitez launched a tirade against the powers that be at Inter.

He accused his bosses of failing to support him in the transfer market and accused the players of taking their own decisions.

He said: "Now there are three roads:

either the club starts a project and buys four players right now in January or we continue like this with the coach who is the only person to blame or otherwise the president speaks to my agent and we find a solution." But Benitez, who is spending the winter break on holiday in Liverpool, insisted Monday that he still maintained "good relations" with Moratti.

"I still feel like the Inter coach," Benitez told Spanish Radio Onda Cero in an interview broadcast on Italy's Sky Sport 24.

"Inter is the strongest team. I want to stay here and to continue to win. I don't know what's going to happen. It's up to the president to decide."

"I have not been sacked. Many people that read the newspapers have called me up to ask me if I had been dismissed."

"It's not true, I am surprised that it has been reported as a done thing."

"I am currently on holiday to rest and then to begin again."

"For months I have heard and read things that are not true."

The Spaniard, who took over the European champions after Jose Mourinho left for Real Madrid, reiterated his desire for financial backing.

"The president (Moratti), with whom I had spoken prior to that press conference, had already left Abu Dhabi, and the only possibility was to publicly say something which was evident," said Benitez.

"I don't want to put the president under pressure, but I had spoken to him in the past about my project."

"My project was to include a series of useful players immediately as well as young players for the future."

"Moratti, with whom I have a correct and respectful relationship, liked it."

"The president has to take a decision regarding the line we want to follow."

"While I am here (at Inter) I will work in the best possible way in order for the team to continue to win."

"But in order to win and to do well it is necessary to bring in reinforcements."

"Injuries have hindered us and I don't want this to happen again."

Speed wants Giggs

AFP, London

Wales manager Gary Speed admitted on Monday that he has spoken to Ryan Giggs about taking a place on his coaching staff.

Speed was appointed as John Toshack's successor last week and the former Sheffield United boss is in the process of forming his back-room team.

Manchester United midfielder Giggs, who won 64 Wales caps, is believed to be keen to go into coaching and Speed made it clear he would like to involve the 37-year-old.

Speed told BBC Sport: "It would be great to get him involved in some respect. I spoke to him last week and we'll have to wait and see."

Retirement not on Fergie's mind

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson insists he will put any thoughts of retirement on the back-burner for as long as he remains in good health.

Ferguson became the longest-serving manager in United's history on Sunday and, although he celebrates his 69th birthday later this month, the Scot has no intention of calling time on his 24-year reign at Old Trafford in the immediate future.

It is almost nine years since Ferguson famously reversed a long-standing plan to quit and he has never had cause to regret that decision.

His hunger for success is as strong as ever and, with United on course for a record 19th English title and among the favourites for the Champions League, Ferguson is determined to savour every moment of his time at Old Trafford.