



Liverpool striker Fernando Torres (L) scores the opening goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers during their Premier League encounter at the Molineux Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'MU can stay unbeaten'

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger believes that Manchester United could match his achievement of seven seasons ago by completing a Premier League season unbeaten, but believes the Old Trafford giants have had luck on their side.

"Do you ask me can they still do it?" Wenger is quoted by Saturday's Guardian newspaper.

"Certainly, because they have not been beaten yet. Have they been a bit lucky until now? Certainly, but we'll see.

"You really think about winning the championship but with five games to go, you think about: 'Oh, we can add something to that'. That's what happened with us. But you don't think about that with 16 games to go."

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson admitted his team "stole" a draw at Aston Villa in November, when they fought back from 2-0 down, and the Scot's side have found wins away from home hard to come by, drawing eight of their 10 fixtures on the road.

Wenger added: "What is important is to beat Man United and we will only have the chance, with the run that they are on, if we do exceptionally well until the end of the season.

"So I focus more on that, knowing that they have a difficult schedule as well. If they have five games to go and they are still unbeaten, come back to me and I'll say 'Now, they can do it'."

Benitez lost dressing room: Eto'o

AFP, Rome

Cameroon international striker Samuel Eto'o on Friday revealed that his former Inter Milan coach Rafael Benitez was sacked after losing part of the dressing room.

"What mistake did Benitez make? Until the match against Juventus (a 0-0 draw on October 3) we had been playing well. Then something happened in the dressing room, which I will keep to myself, and things ended up as they did," said Eto'o in allusion to Benitez's sacking just before Christmas despite winning the World Club Cup.

The Spaniard lasted only half a season after his arrival from Liverpool last summer to replace Jose Mourinho, who led Inter to an unprecedented treble of Champions League, Serie A title and Italian Cup.

Eto'o told a television show, to be broadcast later Friday, that he had not been one of those in the anti-Benitez camp.

"No, I wasn't - I have known him since I was 17 and, I had a great relationship with him. But others had it in for him."



What to WATCH

- STAR Sports**
Australian Open
Men & Women's Singles, 4th Round
Live from 6:00am
- STAR Cricket**
Australia v England
Third ODI
Live from 9:20am
- TEN Cricket**
South Africa v India
Fifth ODI
Live from 2:00pm
- ESPN**
English Premier League
Blackburn v West Brom
Live from 9:55pm
- TEN Sports**
Serie A
Fiorentina v Lecce
Live from 7:55pm
- TEN Action**
Primera Liga
Real Madrid v Real Mallorca
Live from 11:55pm

PHOTO: AFP

Petric fires Hamburg

REUTERS, Berlin

Hamburg SV edged past Eintracht Frankfurt 1-0 on Friday thanks to a second half goal from substitute Mladen Petric to move up to sixth place in the Bundesliga.

With all eyes on Hamburg's Ruud van Nistelrooy, eager to rejoin Real Madrid after the Spanish club came calling, Petric slid in to connect with an Anis Ben-Hatira cross in the 65th minute for his fifth goal this season.

Frankfurt, missing half a dozen starting players through injury and suspension, hardly ventured forward and relied exclusively on rare quick breaks with lone striker Fanis Gekas.

The hosts, with Van Nistelrooy putting in a lacklustre performance, were lacking the final touch, despite dominating possession, until Petric came on in the second half.

The 30-year-old came close to adding another 12 minutes from time but his low drive sailed just wide of the post.

The win provided some good news for Hamburg hours after former Germany international Matthias Sammer surprisingly rejected their offer to join as sports director and opted to stay with the German football federation until 2013.

Liverpool win at last

AFP, London



Kenny Dalglish recorded his first win since returning as Liverpool manager on Saturday as the Merseyside giants secured a 3-0 away victory at Wolves.

Two goals from Fernando Torres and a sensational Raul Meireles effort ensured a vital three points for Liverpool, who moved up to 10th in the Premier League table after a dominant display at Molineux.

The win was Liverpool's first away from home since October, and only their second of the season.

Dalglish's first three matches in charge since he replaced Roy Hodgson earlier this month had seen defeats against Manchester United and Blackpool before a hard-fought 2-2 draw with Everton last week.

The result left Wolves, meanwhile, mired in the relegation zone, where they are just one place off bottom club West Ham, who face Everton later Saturday.

Liverpool opened the scoring on 36 minutes after a through ball from Christian Poulsen sprang the Wolves offside trap and released Meireles.

The Portuguese midfielder surged into the penalty area and unselfishly squared to Torres who coolly tucked away his eighth goal of the season.

After withstanding a period of Wolves pressure in the closing stages of the first half, Liverpool quickly took a stranglehold on the game soon after the interval, Meireles making it 2-0 with a superb 25-yard volley on 50 minutes.

Teenager Jonjo Shelvey could have made it 3-0 on 74 minutes, when he was picked out by Meireles as Liverpool broke swiftly on the counter-attack.

Shelvey was unable to find the finish that Meireles' pinpoint pass deserved however, lifting his shot over the bar with a goal begging.

Instead it was left for Torres to complete the scoring in injury time, sidefooting home from close range after a surging run into the Wolves box.

Inoha Japan's hero



AFP, Doha

Ten-man Japan twice came from behind to battle past hosts Qatar and reach the Asian Cup semifinals on Friday, where they will be joined by a history-making Uzbekistan.

Defender Masahiko Inoha was the hero of the day for Japan, who are chasing their fourth continental crown, snatching a dramatic 3-2 winner in the 90th minute to leave the hosts heartbroken.

"I knew it would be a difficult match and it was a very difficult match," said Japan's Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni, whose side will take on Iran or East Asian arch rivals South Korea for a place in the final.

Zaccheroni added: "With 10 men,

we were one man short, but we still had more possession.

"That our defender scored the winning goal demonstrated what Japanese football is about."

Qatar's French coach Bruno Metsu was proud despite failing to steer the 2022 World Cup hosts to their first ever Asian Cup semifinal.

"The players really caused problems for Japan. Not everyone can do that. It's the best performance they've given," said Metsu.

"The team put in a very good performance, tactically and physically, and showed a great image of football in Qatar.

"The players are disappointed, some of them cried. To lose a match like that is cruel, but that's part of the game."

Sebastian Suria's 12th-minute opener for Qatar was cancelled out by

Shinji Kagawa, who drew Japan level again with 20 minutes to go after Fabio Cesar's free-kick had crept inside Japan goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima's near post.

Japan defender Maya Yoshida was harshly dismissed after receiving a second yellow card in the incident that led to the free-kick, but with the arena set for extra time, Inoha struck a decisive last-gasp blow.

In the later game, Uzbekistan looked to be sailing after striker Ulugbek Bakaev netted a quick-fire second-half brace to put the Central Asians 2-0 up against surprise package Jordan and on their way to a maiden semifinal.

But the Uzbeks were left to weather several nervy moments after Bashar Bani Yaseen struck from close range shortly before the hour to set up a grandstand finish.



Japan defender Masahiko Inoha (L) celebrates scoring the third goal with teammate Shinji Okazaki during their Asian Cup quarterfinal against Qatar at the Al-Gharafa Stadium in Doha on Friday.

IN brief

Kaka warns Benzema

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian star Kaka warned out-of-favour Real Madrid attacker Karim Benzema that he needs to do more to convince coach Jose Mourinho that he is the answer to the Spanish giants' striker crisis.

"Benzema is a great player. During training you can clearly see his qualities. He can be an important player for Real, it all depends on him," said Kaka.

"Sometimes he stays a little out of the game and we believe that he can do a little more."

Benzema's position at the club has come under the spotlight after Argentine striker Gonzalo Higuain was ruled out of action through injury.

"It's the coach who decides," said Kaka. "I am here to help on the pitch."

Chelsea get Terry boost

AFP, London

Key defender John Terry handed Premier League champions Chelsea a fitness boost on Friday when he insisted he will start Monday's crucial clash at Bolton.

Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti had suggested the 30-year-old had been suffering from a back injury, but Terry said he is ready to play.

"On Monday I took a knee to the ribs, which were sore and resulted in me missing the last two days' training with the squad," said Terry.

"I have been able to do some pool work and stepped up training today with the medical team whilst the rest of the squad were off. I will resume full training on Saturday and be available for Monday's game at Bolton."

Indian tycoon buys Racing

AFP, Madrid

Indian tycoon Ahsan Ali Syed has bought indebted Spanish football club Racing Santander, his Bahrain-based company announced Friday.

The deal was confirmed after it was approved by the government of the northern Spanish region of Cantabria and Spain National Sports Council, the company, Western Gulf Advisory Asset and Wealth Management, said in a statement.

The company gave no figures, but El Diario Montanes, a regional paper in Cantabria, has put the price at 30-40 million euros (40-54 million dollars).

"I am excited and proud to be the new owner of Real Racing Club de Santander," the statement quoted Syed as saying.

"I look forward to an active and long term commitment to this great club and will invest all my knowledge and financial strength to elevate the club to the highest level of success in Spain and Europe."

Marchetti joins Genoa

AFP, Rome

Italian international goalkeeper Federico Marchetti, who had fallen out of favour at Cagliari where he hadn't played since the beginning of the season, has signed for Serie A rivals Genoa, the club confirmed on Friday.

Genoa also announced the signing of 22-year-old Swedish central defender Joel Ekstrand from Helsingborg until June 2015 and Franco-Senegalese midfielder Abdoulaye Konko for six million euros.

Marchetti, 23, played in all three of Italy's World Cup matches in South Africa following a herniated disc suffered by first choice stopper Gianluigi Buffon.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Are you satisfied with the Tigers squad for the World Cup?

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DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Feni Soccer Club v Arambagh
Venue: Feni Stadium
Time: 2:30pm
Ctg Abahani v Ctg MSC
Venue: Cox's Bazar Stadium
Time: 2:30pm