



PHOTOS: AFP

It was a day of hattricks across Europe as much maligned forwards repaid the faith their managers had shown in them. Oft-criticised Mario Gomez (L) slammed his third hatrick of the season as Bayern Munich stormed Kaiserslautern at home. Glassman Robin van Persie (C) also hit three as Arsenal brushed away Wigan while Dimitar Berbatov, who divides opinion among the Red Devil faithful, also scored a fantastic treble against Birmingham.

## Day of hattricks Bayern close the gap

AFP, London

Dimitar Berbatov struck a hatrick to cement Manchester United's lead at the top of the Premier League on Saturday as Darren Bent scored on his Aston Villa debut to derail Manchester City's title push.

Berbatov took his goals tally for the season to 18 in all competitions as Birmingham were crushed 5-0 at Old Trafford, evergreen midfielder Ryan Giggs and Nani scoring the other goals for the Red Devils.

In the late kick-off, Villa's 24-million-pound signing Bent struck on 18 minutes against City to give Gerard Houllier's side a precious 1-0 win.

Bent, a surprise departure from Sunderland, has now scored on his debut for three clubs, having struck goals in his first games for Charlton, Sunderland, and now Villa.

The defeat was a blow to big-spending City, who could have gone level on points with United at the top of the table with a win.

Instead, they were elbowed out of second spot by Arsenal, who saw Robin Van Persie score a hatrick -- and miss a penalty -- in a 3-0 win over 10-man Wigan.

With Manchester City dropping down to third, Chelsea remain fourth. The reigning champions play Bolton on Monday.

Elsewhere Saturday, Tottenham scrambled a point at Newcastle after Aaron Lennon scored in injury time to equalise Fabricio Coloccini's 59th-minute strike for the Magpies. The result saw Spurs hold on to fifth spot.

At Bloomfield Road, Sunderland bounced back from this week's disappointing loss of Bent to Aston Villa to record a 2-1 win over Blackpool, Kieran Richardson bagging a brace of goals.

RESULTS	
<b>Arsenal 3</b> (Van Persie 21, 88, 85) <b>Wigan 0</b>	<b>Aston Villa 1</b> (Bent 18) <b>Man City 0</b> (Blackpool 1 (Adam 86-pen))
<b>Sunderland 2</b> (Richardson 15, 36)	<b>Everton 2</b> (Bilyaletdinov 77, Fellaini 90)
<b>West Ham 2</b> (Spector 26, Piquionne 84)	<b>Fulham 2</b> (Dempsey 33, 56-pen) <b>Stoke 0</b>
<b>Man Utd 5</b> (Berbatov 2, 31, 53, Giggs 45, Nani 76) <b>Birmingham 0</b>	<b>Newcastle 1</b> (Coloccini 59)
<b>Tottenham 1</b> (Lennon 90)	<b>Wolves 0</b> <b>Liverpool 3</b> (Torres 36, 90, 85)

The Black Cats took the lead after 15 minutes, breaking swiftly on the counter before Richardson rounded off the move with a deft finish.

Richardson doubled the visitors lead on 36 minutes, burying a first-time shot after fine work down the left flank by Steed Malbranque.

Charlie Adam pulled a goal back from the penalty spot for Blackpool four minutes from time but Sunderland held on for the away win.

Fulham meanwhile pulled themselves further away from the relegation dogfight with a 2-0 win over Stoke at Craven Cottage, American international midfielder Clint Dempsey scoring twice.

Dempsey opened his account on 33 minutes, sliding in to stab home Andy Johnson's low cross from point-blank range before adding his second from the penalty spot on 56 minutes.

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich's Mario Gomez hit a hatrick as the defending champions netted behind after Gomez netted three second-half goals to bring his tally to 15 in 17 league matches this season.

It makes him the league's joint top-scorer with Freiburg's Papiss Cisse Demba.

"When we win 5-1, that is fantastic," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal. "We had lots of problems in the first half, Kaiserslautern were very disciplined and well organised."

Bayern opened the scoring when Dutchman Arjen Robben latched onto a long pass from Germany star Thomas Mueller, held off a defender and beat Stuttgart goalkeeper Sven Ulreich with almost the last kick of the first-half.

Munich went 2-0 up straight after the break when Robben beat two defenders down the left wing, squared the ball to Bastian Schweinsteiger who offered his German team-mate Gomez the chance to tap

into an empty net.

Kaiserslautern pulled a goal back when Bayern defender Anatoliy Tymoshchuk made a hash of dealing with a cross and the loose ball fell into the path of Czech midfielder Jan Moravek in the 62nd minute who fired home.

But Gomez showed his class with two late goals before Mueller added the fifth in added time to complete the rout.

Dortmund had to share the points after Stuttgart's Russia striker Pavel Pogrebnyak equalised in the 84th minute to stun the leaders at home.

Borussia had opened the scoring just before the half-time break when midfielder Kevin Grosskreuz slid a pass through the Stuttgart defence for teenager Mario Goetze to beat the goalkeeper on 43 minutes.

Stuttgart fought back for a point but are still 16th in the league, three from bottom, despite the draw.

Hanover are second in the table despite losing 1-0 at home to Schalke.

Ex-England coach Steve McClaren picked up his first win in 10 matches when his Wolfsburg side earned a 1-0 win at Mainz, who drop to fourth.

A header from Wolfsburg defender Simon Kjaer in the 82nd minute after a cross from Brazilian Diego secured the three points.

RESULTS	
<b>Bayern Munich 5</b> (Robben 45+1, Gomez 46, 80, 85, Mueller 90+1)	<b>Kaiserslautern 1</b> (Moravek 62)
<b>Borussia Dortmund 1</b> (Goetze 42) <b>VfB Stuttgart 1</b> (Pogrebnyak 82)	<b>Mainz 0 0</b> <b>VfL Wolfsburg 1</b> (Kjaer 82)
<b>Freiburg 1</b> (Flum 32) <b>Nuremberg 1</b> (Schieber 56)	<b>Hanover 96 0</b> <b>Schalke 04 1</b> (Raúl 33)
<b>Cologne 3</b> (Podolski 6, 83, Matuschych 85)	

## Unstoppable Barcelona

AFP, Madrid



LFP

Champions Barcelona went seven points clear of Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish first division on Saturday as goals from Pedro Rodriguez, Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta sealed a 3-0 home win over Racing Santander.

Barcelona had lost 3-1 to Real Betis in their midweek Kings Cup match - although they reached the semi-finals 6-3 on aggregate - but got off to the perfect start with Spanish winger Pedro netting his 11th league goal after just 90 seconds on Saturday.

Barcelona then coasted to their 14th consecutive league win and maintained their flawless away record with a ninth win on the road.

Barca went ahead after just 90 seconds against Racing with Messi playing a wall pass with Villa before chipping goalwards for Pedro to chest the ball in from close range.

Villa, Adriano and captain Carles Puyol all missed good chances before Villa won a penalty on 33 minutes by tricking Brazilian defender Henrique, who is on loan at Racing from Barcelona, with some quick footwork.

Messi converted the spot-kick for his 19th league goal of the season as Barca went in 2-0 at the interval.

The hosts scored again on 56 minutes with Spain star Iniesta watching his deflected shot swerve in.

Valencia moved a point above Villarreal into third with a 90th minute winner from Aritz Aduriz clinching a thrilling 4-3 win over nine-man Malaga.

Brazilian international forward Luis Fabiano scored a hatrick as Sevilla cruised to a 4-1 home win over Levante to boost their hopes of a top-four finish.

RESULTS	
<b>Sevilla 4</b> (Fabiano 27, 42-pen, 67, Escude 38) <b>Levante 1</b> (Xisco 57)	<b>Barcelona 3</b> (Pedro 2, Messi 33-pen, Iniesta 56) <b>Racing Santander 0</b>
<b>Valencia 4</b> (Mata 16-pen, Soldado 53, Banega 67, Aduriz 90) <b>Malaga 3</b>	

## Roma stay in touching distance

AFP, Rome

Roma kept themselves in the Serie A title hunt as a 3-0 win over Cagliari at the Stadio Olimpico on Saturday took them up to second, for a day at least.

Club captain Francesco Totti scored the opener from the spot and Simone Perrotta was gifted the second after a horror mistake from the Sardinians' goalkeeper Michael Agazzi before Jeremy Menez put the seal on the win in injury time.

The victory put Roma a point ahead of Napoli and city rivals Lazio and three behind leaders AC Milan, although all their fellow front-runners have a game in hand on them.

It was also ample revenge for their 5-1 thrashing in Sardinia earlier in the season.

Earlier, Cesare Bovo scored a late winner to keep Palermo's Champions League qualification hopes alive as the Sicilians beat Brescia 1-0.

## Inter stalled at Udinese

AFP, Rome



Lega Calcio

Udinese ended Leonardo's perfect record since taking over as Inter Milan coach from Rafael Benitez with a 3-1 win over the Italian champions in a lively lunchtime match in Serie A on Sunday.

Inter, aiming for a sixth straight win since the Brazilian's arrival in the San Siro dugout, took the lead after quarter of an hour through Dejan Stankovic.

Udinese then stunned Inter with goals from Cristian Zapata and Antonio Di Natale to go into the break 2-1 up, with Maurizio Domizzi adding a third midway through the second half.

The result left Udinese treading water in eighth, although they made up ground to within one point of seventh-placed Palermo, while Inter remained fifth on 35 points, six adrift of leaders AC Milan.

A sixth win here would have seen Inter climb to second and that looked on the cards when Thiago Motta pulled the ball back for Stankovic to fire past Udinese keeper Samir Handanovic in the 16th minute.

Inter though barely had time to savour their good fortune when the hosts were back on a level footing.

After a failed Inter clearance from a corner the ball fell to Zapata on the edge of the box with the Colombian defender shooting into the top corner of Luca Castellazzi's net.

## IN brief

### Van Gaal gives as good as he gets

AFP, Munich

The war-of-words between Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness and coach Louis van Gaal escalated on Sunday when the Dutchman accused Hoeness of breaking his word.

On Saturday, Hoeness launched a thinly-veiled attack on van Gaal questioning his decision to drop veteran goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt for youngster Thomas Kraft.

But despite Bayern's 5-1 win at home to Kaiserslautern on Saturday, which puts them third in the German league, van Gaal could not hide his irritation.

"Uli Hoeness is the president and an icon of Bayern Munich, I will not contradict an icon, but if I have to tell the truth, that is another matter," van Gaal told Munich newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung.

"We agreed that any criticism should be done in-house, but he has not stuck to that."

### 'Follow Berbatov's example'

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson has urged Manchester United's goal-shy strikers to take inspiration from the performances of Dimitar Berbatov after the Bulgarian centre-forward bagged his third hatrick of the season.

"Dimitar is getting up towards that 20-goal mark which is going to be important for us," Ferguson told Manchester's Key103 radio.

"It does put a certain brand mark on the team and hopefully we will get another one to that level too."

"Once you do that you know it is a substantial season."

Berbatov's hatrick on Saturday saw him equal Ruud van Nistelrooy's club record from the 2002-2003 season by scoring three hattricks in a season.

He is also only two hattricks away from the Premier League record of five scored in a season by Alan Shearer in 1995-1996.

"Dimitar is realising his ability," said Ferguson. "The other players sense it too. They are playing their part in playing with him. He has special qualities. I think we are using them."

### Suarez eyeing England move

AFP, London

Uruguayan World Cup star Luis Suarez is enthusiastic about the possibility of a move to England as speculation mounted of a transfer to Liverpool here Sunday.

Ajax striker Suarez told The Sunday Times in an interview that he had initially believed his style of play would not be suited to the physical rough-and-tumble of the Premier League.

But the 23-year-old told the paper he had been inspired by the success of Carlos Tevez.

"(England) is a league that attracts me, a country where the football is really good," Suarez said.

"Alongside the Spanish league it is the best in the world. In England you have a lot of clubs with aspirations to become champions and they are also very strong in the Champions League at the European level."

"I used to think that English football was not my style. But I saw Tevez play at Boca and Corinthians and I never imagined that he would play in the Premier League."

"When I see the way that Tevez plays there I think I can be a big name in England. It's because of the energy, and the spirit they put into the game in Eng-

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Bangladesh League  
Farashganj v Sheikh Jamal  
Time: 4:00pm  
Venue: Bishreshtha Mostafa Kamal