

# MU stage late fightback

AFP, London



Manchester United moved five points clear at the top of the Premier League after staging a stunning late fightback to win 3-2 at Blackpool on Wednesday.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side had gone 27 league matches without losing, a run stretching back to their 2-1 defeat against Chelsea in April last season.

But that sequence looked in danger as goals from former United defender Craig Cathcart and striker DJ Campbell put the Seasiders 2-0 up at half-time.

Blackpool could have had a penalty when Luke Varney was bundled over by Rafael da Silva early in the second half.

But United finally got one back when in-form Bulgarian forward Dimitar Berbatov volleyed home Darren Fletcher's cross in the 72nd minute.

## RESULTS

Blackpool 2 (Cathcart 15, Campbell 43)  
Man Utd 3 (Berbatov 72, 88, Hernandez 74)  
Wigan 1 (McCarthy 80) Aston Villa 2 (Agbonlahor 49, Young 62-pen)

Mexican striker Javier Hernandez, on for the lacklustre Wayne Rooney, equalised when he ran onto a Ryan Giggs pass and slotted past Richard Kingson in the 74th minute.

United right-back Rafael was carried off on a stretcher after lengthy treatment on a head injury, but Berbatov stole the points in the 88th minute as he drove beyond Kingson to leave the leaders well ahead of second placed Arsenal.

In Tuesday's other Premier League clash, Aston Villa won 2-1 at third bottom Wigan to move six points away from the relegation zone.

Gabriel Agbonlahor opened the scoring in the 49th minute when he nodded home his first Premier League goal of the season after Ali Al Habsi saved Carlos Cuellar's header.

Gerard Houllier's side, who beat Manchester City on Saturday, wrapped up the points in the 62nd minute when Ashley Young converted a penalty after being fouled by Hendry Thomas.

James McCarthy's deflected effort reduced the deficit in the 80th minute but it was too late for Wigan to salvage a draw.



Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov (L) is challenged by Blackpool defender Craig Cathcart during their Premier League encounter at Bloomfield Road on Tuesday.

PHOTO:  
AFP

# Gunners reach final

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal secured their place in the League Cup final after sweeping aside Ipswich with a 3-0 win in the semifinal second leg at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

Ipswich had an upset in their sights when the Championship side reached half-time at 0-0, but second half goals from Nicklas Bendtner, Laurent Koscielny and Cesc Fabregas sealed a 3-1 aggregate victory.

The Gunners will face West Ham or Birmingham at Wembley and Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is now one win away from ending his six-year run without a trophy.

Looking to reach their first Wembley final since England's national stadium was reopened in 2007, Arsenal were expected to mount immediate pressure on Marton Fulop's goal to cancel out the 1-0 deficit from the first leg at Portman Road.

But Grant Leadbitter almost shocked Arsenal in the first seconds of the match - just clearing the crossbar with a shot from the halfway line as Ipswich kicked off - then the hosts started pouring forward with their attacks.

Fabregas had a drive saved by Fulop, Robin van Persie struck the crossbar with a header and Bendtner had an effort bravely blocked by Ipswich centre-back Damien Delaney.

Fabregas had the final clear chance of the first half when he was sent through by a delicate chip over the Ipswich defence by Jack Wilshere.

The second half started like the first, with Ipswich creating a chance as they looked to extend their aggregate lead.

This time Arsenal failed to clear a corner and defender Darren O'Dea flashed a volley across the face of goal.

Again, they had to repel plenty of Arsenal attacks, although the hosts were guilty of failing to shoot, and passing instead, when they were within sight of goal.

The breakthrough came in the 61st minute when Wilshere swept a ball to Bendtner, who cut inside Carlos Edwards and curled into the bottom corner.

Koscielny edged Arsenal ahead three minutes later when he headed home powerfully from an Andrey Arshavin corner.

Fabregas's goal came when Arshavin played him through and he finished neatly in the 77th minute.



Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas shoots at goal during their League Cup semifinal against Ipswich at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Brazil recall Cesar

Football

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil coach Mano Menezes on Tuesday recalled Inter Milan goalkeeper Julio Cesar into his squad to face France in a February 9 friendly - but there is no room for Real Madrid's Kaka, just returning from injury.

Julio Cesar has not featured for the ariverde since the World Cup but Menezes, who replaced Dunga after the tournament, told the Brazilian Football Confederation's website: "He was already in our plans so it is with pleasure that I call him up for the first time" since taking the job.

Kaka has only just returned to action at Real after more than half a season out following knee surgery in August.

There had been a feeling in France that Paris Saint Germain striker Nene might make the squad after the Brazilian's 13 league goals so far this term but Menezes did not pick him.

In contrast, there are first call-ups for Shakhtar Donetsk midfielder Jadson, 27, and Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Renato Augusto, who turns 23 next week.

Rafael, Manchester United's 20-year-old defender, and Breno, a 21-year-old Bayern Munich prospect, also received the call as Menezes seeks to bring in a raft of new prospects.

With the Brazilian new season yet to start there is no place for home-based players for the French test - meaning the likes of veteran Ronaldinho, who has just joined Flamengo from AC Milan, miss out.

## SPORTS POLL

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

Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on [twitter](https://twitter.com/dssport)  
[www.twitter.com/dssport](http://www.twitter.com/dssport)



What to WATCH

### STAR Sports

Australian Open  
Men's and Women's  
Singles Semifinals  
Live from 8:30am

DAY'S EVENT



Bangladesh League  
Brothers Union v Abahani  
Venue: Kamalapur Stadium

# Real sign Ade

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid confirmed on their website on Tuesday they had signed Manchester City's Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor on loan till the end of the season.

The 26-year-old has been brought in to add urgently needed firepower after Argentinian striker Gonzalo Higuain underwent surgery to fix a slipped disc earlier this month and is expected to be out of action for another four months.

French international Karim Benzema has filled in but while he scored the only goal in last Sunday's win over Real Mallorca he has rarely convinced, leaving Real Madrid to look elsewhere to fill the gap.

"Real Madrid and Manchester City have reached agreement for the loan of the player (Adebayor) till the end of the season," Real announced in a statement.

"We also have an exclusive option to buy him at the end of the loan period."

Real made the move for Adebayor after its efforts to sign Dutch forward Ruud Van Nistelrooy - who left Real one year ago - were blocked by Hamburg's resistance to his departure from the German club.

Higuain, who was signed from River Plate in 2007, normally partners Cristiano Ronaldo in the front line and has been coach Jose Mourinho's choice ahead of Benzema.



EMMANUEL ADEBAYOR

# Japan pip Korea

Socceroos destroy Uzbekistan

Football

AFP, Doha

Japan and Australia, Asia's two top-ranked sides, set up a mouth-watering Asian Cup final showdown after coming through their semifinal matches in starkly contrasting fashion on Tuesday.

Three-time champions Japan beat East Asian rivals South Korea 3-0 on penalties after a tense, even contest that saw the Koreans force a penalty shoot-out by equalising in the last minute of extra-time.

Australia's evening could barely have been more different, as they romped to an embarrassingly one-sided 6-0 demolition of hapless 10-man Uzbekistan to reach their first final in the continental showpiece.

Japan's game at Doha's Al Gharafa Stadium was an electrifying affair in which the momentum swung both ways on numerous occasions before the South Korean youngsters' nerve finally deserted them in the shoot-out.

Centre-back Yasuyuki Konno netted the decisive penalty after Koo Ja-Cheol, Lee Yong-Rae and Hong Jeong-Ho had all failed from 12 yards for South Korea.

Japan led going into the final minute of extra-time but defender Hwang Jae-Won slammed in a sensational equaliser following a scramble inside the Japanese box to make it 2-2 and send the game to penalties.

Hwang had earlier conceded a penalty

from which Japan had taken the lead early in extra-time, with substitute Hajime Hosogai converting a rebound after Keisuke Honda's spot-kick was saved by Jung Sung-Ryong.

Ki Sung-Yueng had put South Korea in front via another penalty mid-way through the first half, with Ryoichi Maeda drawing Japan level nine minutes before half-time.

Australia's nine minutes at the Al Khalifa Stadium was all but over by half-time, as Osieck's experienced side dealt a harsh lesson to a Uzbek team that was also appearing at in first ever Asian Cup semifinal.

Galatasary forward Harry Kewell claimed the opener on five minutes when he rifled into the bottom-right corner and Asian player of the year Sasa Ognjenovski doubled their lead 11 minutes before half-time.

Blackpool's David Carney finished a counter-attack to put the game beyond doubt on 65 minutes and when Uzbek striker Ulugbek Bakaev was sent off after picking up a second caution, the match was effectively over.

Australia started running riot, with Blackburn Rovers' Brett Emerton getting a fourth, Carl Valeri a fifth and Robbie Kruse a sixth as the shell-shocked Uzbeks went to pieces.

Vadim Abramov's side, ranked 82 places below the Socceroos in the FIFA world ranking, must now lift themselves for Friday's third-place play-off against the Koreans, when a place at the 2015 event in Australia will be on the line.

## IN brief

### Juve agree Barzagli fee

REUTERS, Milan

Juventus agreed to bring former Italy defender Andrea Barzagli back to Serie A on Wednesday following a three-year stint at VfL Wolfsburg.

Juve said in a statement the 29-year-old was in Turin to complete his medical and sign an as yet unspecified contract.

The former Palermo player, part of Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning squad, will provide backup for Azzurri centre half pairing Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci at Juve.

His arrival suggests Nicola Legrottaglie may be allowed to leave with Brescia and Cesena interested in the veteran defender.

### Rafael out of Cup tie

AFP, London

Manchester United full-back Rafael will miss Saturday's FA Cup tie against Southampton as a precaution after being stretchered off at Blackpool on Tuesday night with concussion.

The Brazilian defender was involved in a sickening collision with Marlon Harewood and was taken to hospital for X-rays.

He was quickly given the all-clear and was able to return to Manchester with his team-mates following the dramatic 3-2 win.

However, as with all cases of concussion, United will ensure Rafael gets the correct break from physical contact and the 20-year-old will not travel to the south coast for this weekend's fourth-round tie.

### Supersub lifts Schalke

AFP, Berlin

Teenage supersub Julian Draxler on Tuesday put Schalke 04 into the semifinals of the German Cup after scoring an extra-time winner to seal a 3-2 victory over Nuremberg, just minutes after coming off the bench.

The Germany Under-18 midfielder, making only his third Schalke appearance, came off the bench in the 116th minute of the quarterfinal and three minutes later scored from the edge of the penalty area for a fairytale finish.

Draxler only signed a professional contract earlier this month having caught the eye during Schalke's training camp.

### Sky pundit Gray axed

AFP, London

Former Everton and Scotland striker Andy Gray was sacked from his highly-paid role as a television pundit for Sky Sports on Tuesday after his sexist comments about a female assistant referee.

Gray's contract, reported to be worth 1.7 million pounds (2.6 million dollars) a year, was terminated with immediate effect following his involvement in two separate incidents.

Former Aston Villa star Gray and Sky's main presenter Richard Keys, believing their microphones to be switched off, made controversial remarks about lineswoman Sian Massey ahead of a Premier League match between Wolves and Liverpool on Saturday.

They both claimed that female officials did not know the offside rule, while footage was also leaked of Gray making further comments about Massey in a