



Liverpool forward Dirk Kuyt (C) kicks the ball to score a last-minute equaliser from a penalty during their Premier League encounter against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Penalty drama at the end

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger's hopes of guiding Arsenal to the Premier League title are in tatters after Dirk Kuyt's last-gasp penalty earned a dramatic 1-1 draw for Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

With new majority shareholder Stan Kroenke watching from the directors' box, Wenger's side appeared to have snatched a stoppage-time victory when Cesc Fabregas was tripped by Jay Sparring in the penalty area.

Robin van Persie scored from the spot but Arsenal couldn't keep their composure and there was more drama to come, with Lucas Leiva bundled over by Emmanuel Eboué in the 12th minute of added time and Kuyt converting the spot-kick.

It leaves Arsenal six points behind leaders Manchester United with six games for each side to play and the Gunners' confidence sure to dip even further after three consecutive draws on their own turf.

But they were unable to rise to the occasion and a season that at one stage could have delivered a quadruple will now almost certainly end up with nothing to celebrate.

The hosts were able to recall Poland goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny after a finger injury, while Switzerland defender Johan Djourou returned from a dislocated shoulder despite being ruled out for the season when he picked up the problem.

Djourou could have given a penalty away in the opening stages of the match when Sparring went over his challenge in the area, but referee Andre Marriner waved play on.

Another goalless draw for Arsenal

appeared unlikely during a burst of goalmouth action which started when Pepe Reina parried Theo Walcott's drive and John Flanagan had to clear desperately when Van Persie hooked the rebound into the danger area.

From the resulting corner from Van Persie, Laurent Koscielny jumped above Jamie Carragher and headed against the crossbar, with Walcott claiming a handball against Lucas when his follow-up shot.

Van Persie also had the ball in the net when he volleyed home Fabregas's long pass over the Liverpool defence, but the Dutch forward had been ruled offside.

Liverpool soaked up the rest of the first-half pressure without conceding, although Flanagan and Skrtel were given yellow cards for rash challenges.

Fabio Aurelio also picked up an injury and needed to be replaced by Jack Robinson, meaning the visitors had youngsters in both full-back positions.

After the break Kenny Dalglish's team threatened to take the lead when Uruguay forward Luis Suarez went on a run and curled his finish just wide. He also tested Szczesny with a long-range effort.

England striker Andy Carroll had looked a threat and Liverpool were breathing a sigh of relief when he went over his ankle but was able to play on.

Carragher, however, needed to be substituted after smacking into Flanagan and getting carried off on a stretcher in need of oxygen and a neck brace.

That accounted for the long period of injury-time, with Van Persie opening the scoring before Kuyt's leveller with the final kick of the game.

Bale scoops PFA award Bayern close in on Neuer

AFP, London



Tottenham winger Gareth Bale capped a memorable season on Sunday evening when he was named the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) Player of the Year.

The 21-year-old Wales international has scored 11 goals in 36 club games this season and becomes the first non-Manchester United player to win the award since Liverpool's Steven Gerrard in 2006.

He is also the fourth Welshman to be honoured, after Ian Rush, Mark Hughes and his former international colleague, Ryan Giggs.

Bale leapt to global prominence by scoring a hat-trick in Spurs' 4-3 Champions League defeat at Inter Milan in October, before producing a man-of-the-match performance in Tottenham's 3-1 win in the return game.

"It is an honour, really, when you look at the names that have won it before and it just makes you go 'wow' really," said Bale.

"I am more than delighted really. It is a massive award and it is a great honour to receive, especially from other fellow professionals."

Bale beat off competition from Arsenal's Samir Nasri, Manchester City's Carlos Tevez, Blackpool's Charlie Adam, Tottenham team-mate Rafael van der Vaart and Manchester United's Nemanja Vidic to win the award.

"There haven't been too many Welshmen to have won the trophy but it is great and it is great for me personally," added Bale.

"And it is not just for me, it is for all my team-mates that have helped me through the season and it is kind of for everyone really."

Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere, 19, was named PFA Young Player of the Year, despite Bale also being nominated in the category.

"It is my first full season and it is a massive award, especially from my fellow players, it is amazing," said Wilshere, who has become a first-choice player for Fabio Capello's England this term.



GARETH BALE

"I am very proud to be the fifth recipient from Arsenal, it is good to keep this history going."

"Arsenal is a good club for bringing youngsters through and they keep proving it so I would like to thank the manager (Arsene Wenger) as well."

Bale and Wilshere, both left-footers, were also named in the PFA Team of the Year.

PFA TEAM OF THE YEAR:

Edwin van der Sar (Manchester United); Bacary Sagna (Arsenal), Ashley Cole (Chelsea), Nemanja Vidic (Manchester United), Vincent Kompany (Manchester City); Nani (Manchester United), Samir Nasri (Arsenal), Jack Wilshere (Arsenal), Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur); Carlos Tevez (Manchester City), Dimitar Berbatov (Manchester United)

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich executives on Monday gave the strongest hints yet that Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer will soon be moving from Schalke 04 to the Bundesliga giants.

"There is a clear tendency," Bayern's director of sport Christian Nerlinger told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily. "Now it's just a question of how quickly we can find a solution."

Club president Uli Hoeness, meanwhile, was reported by several newspapers as having difficulty hiding his optimism that the 25-year-old Neuer will soon be in a Bayern strip.

"I know what his decision is. We will have to see what happens," he said. Neuer said on Saturday he has decided where his future lies -- but refused to say where.

"A decision has been taken. People who need to

know, know. So everything is cleared up," he said.

His contract at Schalke runs until 2012 and unless he signs an extension, the Royal Blues will need to sell him soon or risk losing him on a free transfer in a year's time.

Bayern have struggled to find a suitable replacement since ex-Germany captain Oliver Kahn retired in 2008 and the Munich giants are reported to be ready to pay 20 million euros (\$28.8 million) for Germany's first-choice goalkeeper.



SET Max

Indian Premier League

Delhi v Deccan

Live from 4:30pm

Bangalore v Rajasthan

Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

English Premiership

Newcastle v Man United

Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)



Stoke City striker Jonathan Walters (R) is ecstatic after scoring the fourth goal against Bolton Wanderers during their FA Cup semifinal at the Wembley on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Stoke storm into final

AFP, London



Stoke City stormed into their first ever FA Cup final after a first-half goal spree inspired a 5-0 win against Bolton in Sunday's semifinal at Wembley.

Tony Pulis's side will face Manchester City in the final on May 14 after three goals from Matthew Etherington, Robert Huth and Kenwyne Jones in the space of 19 minutes destroyed Bolton before the match had even reached half-time.

Jonathan Walters capped Stoke's perfect day with two more goals after the interval. With on-loan Chelsea forward Daniel Sturridge cup-tied, Bolton boss Owen Coyle opted for Ivan Klasnic as Kevin Davies's strike-partner, while Pulis recalled Danish goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen in place of Asmir Begovic.

In the opening seconds Bolton goalkeeper Jussi Jaaskelainen was forced to rush off his line to save a Walters shot as the striker burst clear.

Bolton were still struggling to come to terms with the occasion when Stoke took the lead in the 11th minute.

A series of misplaced passes gifted possession to Etherington and the former West

Ham winger was given time and space to shoot past Jaaskelainen from 20 yards.

It got even better for Stoke six minutes later when German defender Huth latched onto Gary Cahill's poor headed clearance and drove in a shot that Jaaskelainen failed to keep out despite getting both hands on the ball.

Stoke had been beaten in successive FA Cup semifinals in 1971 and 1972, but any fears of another letdown were completely banished when Jones punished more poor Bolton defending in the 30th minute.

Jermaine Pennant robbed Martin Petrov in midfield and ran at the Bolton defence before sliding the ball through Cahill's legs for Trinidad striker Jones to slot home with ease.

Stoke went close again when a Bolton clearance was returned to Walters, who was thwarted by Jaaskelainen.

But Walters scored the goal of the game in the 68th minute as he burst forward from the halfway line and curled in a superb strike from 25 yards.

Stoke kept coming forward and when Jones got free down the right nine minutes from time, he crossed for Andy Wilkinson, whose sliced finish fell perfectly for Walters to clip home.

It was the perfect end to arguably the greatest day in Stoke's history as they became the first team for 72 years to win a semifinal by a five-goal margin.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day-4)
Dhaka v Barisal at Bogra
Rajshahi v Sylhet at Rajshahi

Independence Cup

(QUARTERFINALS)

Sheikh Russel v Feni Soccer Club

Time: 5:00pm

Mohammedan v Muktijoddha

Time: 8:00pm

Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa

Kamal Stadium

Bangladesh A v South Africa A

First ODI (D/N)

Venue: Buffalo Park, East London

BCB Academy v SA Academy

(Four-Day Match, Day-3)

Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium