

Arsenal's title dream over

AFP, Bolton



Tamir Cohen's dramatic last minute goal ended Arsenal's fading title hopes as Bolton won 2-1 at the Reebok Stadium on Sunday. Robin van Persie had cancelled out Daniel Sturridge's seventh goal in nine league appearances but, despite bombarding the Bolton defence, Arsenal could not find the winner which would have kept their season alive.

Instead, they were caught out at the back in the dying moments as substitute Cohen pounced at the near post to break Arsenal hearts.

Arsene Wenger's side are now nine points behind leaders Manchester United with just four games to play.

And even if they defeat United at the Emirates Stadium next Sunday, Arsenal have given themselves too much to do.

This was a must-win game as far as Arsenal were concerned and Wenger's team started as though they meant business.

A sweeping sixth minute involving Jack Wilshere, playing against the club he turned out for on loan last season, and Theo Walcott provided Cesc Fabregas with an early opportunity.

But the Arsenal captain fired high and wide of the target and the chance was wasted. It was the story of their half.

Jussi Jaaskelainen produced a fine stop to deny Fabregas from 20 yards in the 15th minute, while Matt Taylor was fortunate not to concede a penalty after his late challenge on Walcott.

In a see-saw encounter, Samir Nasri wasted another opportunity when he missed the target from 20 yards after the Bolton defence had opened up.

But the hosts took the lead seven minutes before the end of an entertaining first half.

Moments after Szczesny had spread himself to deny Lee, Sturridge pounced on the resulting corner, the 21-year-old the first to the rebound after Gary Cahill's header had been cleared off the line by Nasri.

With their title hopes rapidly fading, Arsenal responded through Fabregas who hit the woodwork from 25 yards.



Bolton Wanderers midfielder Tamir Cohen (C) points to the heavens to celebrate his winning goal against Arsenal during their Premier League encounter at the Reebok Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Berbatov out of Schalke tie

AFP, London

Manchester United's top scorer Dimitar Berbatov will miss his club's Champions League semifinal against Schalke on Tuesday having failed to recover from a slight groin strain.

The Bulgarian also missed Saturday's Premier League win over Everton and whilst Sir Alex Ferguson claimed that 1-0 triumph had no fitness concerns ahead of the first-leg encounter at the Velins-Arena, Berbatov did not check in with the rest of his team-mates at Manchester Airport on Monday.

Although the former Tottenham man had been unlikely to start anyway, his absence is a blow as it denies Ferguson a useful attacking weapon on the bench should the match not go as planned.

He does have the in-form Javier Hernandez, who bagged his 19th goal of the season at the weekend, and Wayne Rooney, who will not remember his last trip to Gelsenkirchen with any fondness as he was sent off during England's World Cup quarterfinal defeat to Portugal in 2006.

United are overwhelming favourites to book a blockbuster Wembley confrontation with either Real Madrid or Barcelona on May 28.

Sevilla win a thriller

REUTERS, Madrid



Sevilla and Atletico Madrid improved their chances of playing in next season's Europa League when they beat Villarreal and Levante respectively in La Liga on Sunday to open a four-point gap from eighth-placed Espanyol.

Sevilla held on for a 3-2 win over Villarreal in an entertaining match at the Sanchez Pizjuan, while Argentina forward Sergio Aguero struck twice in Atletico's 4-1 win over mid-table Levante at the Calderon.

Both teams have 49 points with five games left. Sevilla are sixth ahead of Atletico thanks to a superior head-to-head record and two behind fifth-placed Athletic Bilbao who won 2-1 at local Basque rivals Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Espanyol's miserable recent run continued when they lost 1-0 at Sporting Gijon and stay eighth on 45 points, while Villarreal, who are through to the semifinals of this season's Europa League, remain fourth on 57.

Ivan Rakitic stroked a free kick into the top corner and Alvaro Negredo caught Villarreal goalkeeper Diego Lopez off his line

to put Sevilla 2-0 ahead inside a quarter of an hour in the Andalusian capital.

Carlos Marchena, who was shown a second yellow card and sent off in the 85th minute, pulled a goal back 11 minutes after halftime before substitute Ndri Romaric restored the home side's two-goal cushion in the 62nd.

Giuseppe Rossi came off the bench to curl in a superb second for the visitors within around 20 minutes left and later hit the post but Sevilla held on during a frantic finale.

At the Calderon in the earlier kickoff, Brazilian midfielder Elias fired Atletico ahead in the 19th minute when he arched a free kick over the Levante wall and into the net off the underside of the crossbar.

Ecuadorian striker Felipe Caicedo levelled from the penalty spot six minutes before the break and Aguero made it 2-1 five minutes into the second half when he pounced on a loose ball and smashed a low shot in off the post from just outside the area.

His second came from another penalty with 20 minutes remaining and Levante goalkeeper Gustavo Munua gifted the home side a fourth in the 84th minute when he fluffed an attempted clearance at a corner and diverted the ball into his own net.

RESULTS

Sporting Gijon 1 (Nacho Novo 71) Espanyol 0
Hercules 1 (Gomes 59)
Deportivo La Coruna 0
Racing Santander 1 (Rosenberg 73)
Malaga 2 (Julio Baptista 31, Seba 35)
Real Mallorca 2 (Nunes 25, Ienaga 67) Getafe 0
Atletico Madrid 4 (Elias 19, Aguero 50, 70-pen, Munua 84-og) Levante 1 (Caicedo 39-pen)
Sevilla 3 (Rakitic 9, Negredo 14, Romaric 62) Villarreal 2

MU fear German jinx

AFP, Gelsenkirchen



If Manchester United are to reach a third Champions League final in four years, they must overcome both surprise package Schalke 04 and a

dismal record against German teams. United visit Schalke in their semifinal first leg on Tuesday, bidding to reach the final at Wembley 43 years after they beat Benfica there to become the first English champions of Europe.

Schalke stunned holders Inter Milan 7-3 on aggregate in the quarterfinals though, and they have little to lose ahead of United's trip to the Velins Arena.

It is the first time the Gelsenkirchen club have appeared in the last four of Europe's premier cup competition, but they will take heart from United's historic struggles against German opposition.

Despite having memorably beaten Bayern Munich to win the final of the 1999 tournament, Sir Alex Ferguson's men are yet to win in four two-legged ties against German teams.

Bayern accounted for United at the quarterfinal stage in both 2001 and 2010, but more appropriate comparisons can be made with their semifinal defeats by Borussia Dortmund, in 1997,

and Bayer Leverkusen, in 2002.

On both occasions United were strongly tipped to progress, only to lose 2-0 on aggregate to eventual champions Dortmund in 1997 and go out on away goals against Leverkusen five years later.

Ferguson will be acutely aware of the similarities and he will also be wary of the dangerous have-a-go mentality forged in the Schalke ranks during their astonishing 5-2 first-leg success at Inter in the previous round.

"The German teams have always had that resilience and determination about them and that will be exactly the same on Tuesday night," said Ferguson.

"We're going into this game with far more experience than we have in previous years and our record away from home in the last few years has been terrific."

Whatever happens on Tuesday, something will have to give, as Schalke have a 100 per cent home record in this season's competition while United are yet to concede a goal on their travels.

Manuel Neuer will be the man seeking to keep United at bay and Ferguson is thought to be an admirer of the German goalkeeper, who has announced that he will not extend his Schalke contract when it expires in 2012.

An 83rd-minute header from Javier Hernandez earned United a 1-0 win at

home to Everton on Saturday that preserved their six-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

It was their fourth win in five top-flight games, taking the club to within seven points of a record 19th English title.

In stark contrast, Schalke's 1-0 loss at home to Kaiserslautern left the Royal Blues in mid-table anonymity in the Bundesliga -- 11 points above the relegation zone and 17 points shy of the Champions League places in 10th.

Coach Ralf Rangnick shuffled his pack in a bid to keep key players fresh and he is expected to restore midfielders Jose Jurado, Kyriakos Papadopoulos and Alexander Baumjohann to the starting XI.

Centre-back Benedikt Howedes, who crashed home the winner in the 2-1 second-leg defeat of Inter, is also set to return from injury.

"I selected the team in such a way because I wanted to win both of our games (against Kaiserslautern and United)," explained Rangnick, who took over from Felix Magath last month.

"In the Champions League, we will select a different starting 11 again."

United also made wholesale changes against Everton and captain Nemanja Vidic will return to the heart of the defence after being rested for the Merseysiders' visit.



Sevilla striker Alvaro Negredo (L) is about to score the second goal against Villarreal during their Primera Liga clash at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cordoba gives up hope

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan centre-back Ivan Cordoba has given up on the Serie A title with his side eight points behind leaders AC Milan and just four games to play.

Milan earned a 1-0 victory at Brescia on Saturday and due to their better head-to-head record with Inter, they need only four more points to ensure an 18th league title -- which would move them level with their city rivals.

In fact, Milan would win the title this weekend if Inter fail to win at Cesena and they beat Bologna at home.

And Cordoba admitted to Colombian radio station Caracol that the champions have accepted their five-year reign is over.

"It will be very difficult to hand over the title to Milan but we have to win all the games that remain," he said.

"We have to concentrate on our objectives, which are (qualifying for) the Champions League and (winning) the Italian Cup, which is still an important trophy."

Winning the title was always going to be difficult when Inter lay 13 points adrift at Christmas before Rafael Benitez was fired.

And although they clawed their way back under Leonardo to just two points behind Milan ahead of the derby earlier this month, Cordoba believes that effort cost them in the run-in.

And what really rankles is the meek way they surrendered to Schalke 04 7-3 on aggregate in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"I think we paid for the effort needed to fight back in the championship and in the Champions League we played a team that was physically strong and well organised.

"The five goals we conceded at home was a tough sentence, it was almost impossible to win 4-0 (away) to turn it around."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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