

City go top

AFP, London



Manchester City routed Aston Villa 4-1 to open up a two-point lead at the top of the Premier League table on Saturday after Manchester United were held to a 1-1 draw at Liverpool.

Roberto Mancini left Edin Dzeko, David Silva, Samir Nasri and Sergio Aguero out of his starting line-up but City were still too powerful for Villa, one of only four unbeaten sides in the league prior to the match.

Mario Balotelli's fourth goal in as many games put City head on 28 minutes, the Italian striker hooking in an overhead kick from close range after Villa failed to clear Adam Johnson's corner.

Johnson goalscorer for on 47 minutes. Vincent made it 3-0 later.

Stephen pulled one but City made it through to leave men brim-confidence next week-chester derby.

In other games Saturday, Bolton moved off the bottom of the table with a 3-1 win at fellow strugglers Wigan.

Bolton took the lead after four minutes when a Chris Eagles cross picked out Nigel Reo-Coker. Reo-Coker was awarded the goal but replays appeared to indicate Latics defender Gary Caldwell got the final touch.

Mohamed Diame levelled for Wigan five minutes before the interval but Bolton nosed back in front deep into first half stoppage time with a David Ngog strike. Eagles made it 3-1 two minutes into time added on.

Blackburn fought back to snatch a 1-1 draw with Queens Park Rangers at Loftus Road, but it was not enough to prevent Rovers from slipping to the foot of the standings.

In a battle of the Premier League newcomers, Norwich downed Swansea 3-1 at Carrow Road.

RESULTS

Liverpool 1 (Gerrard 68) Man Utd 1 (Hernandez 81)

Man City 4 (Balotelli 28, Johnson 47, Kompany 52, Milner 71) Aston Villa 1 (Warnock 65)

Norwich 3 (Pilkington 1, 63, Martin 10) Swansea 1 (Graham 12)

QPR 1 (Helguson 16) Blackburn 1 (Samba 24)

Stoke 2 (Walters 80, Delap 87) Fulham 0

Wigan 1 (Diame 40) Bolton 3 (Reo-Coker 1, 63, Martin 10)

turned City's second minutes before Kompany five minutes

Warnock back for Villa it four James Milner Mancini's ming with heading into end's Man-



Manchester United striker Javier Hernandez (C) scores past Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina (L) to make it 1-1 during their Premier League encounter at Anfield yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fenin suffers haemorrhage

AFP, Berlin

Czech international striker Martin Fenin has been hospitalised after suffering a cerebral haemorrhage, his German second division club Energie Cottbus announced Saturday.

The Czech, who has 14 caps for his national side, is being kept under observation to determine the cause of the injury.

Fenin signed a three-year contract with Cottbus on the final day of the summer transfer period having played with Eintracht Frankfurt since 2008.

Giggs seeks new deal

REUTERS, Manchester

Ryan Giggs wants to extend his career at Manchester United until at least the end of next season, the 37-year-old has said.

Giggs, speaking to the Italian soccer website calciomercato.com just before Prince Albert of Monaco gave him the Golden Foot 2011 Award, said he felt fit enough to continue for at least another year after his current one-year deal expires next June.

Asked if he was thinking of playing on, he replied: "Yes, I think so. Nothing interests me but playing with this team.

"After Christmas I will go to Sir Alex Ferguson's office and we will talk about my contract."

Asked what his relationship with his manager was like, Giggs replied: "I have a great rapport with him.

"I have an annual contract with Manchester United and all it needs is that I sit down at the table with him for a few minutes to renew it."

Giggs, who made his league debut for United against Everton in March 1991, has played more matches for the club than anyone else -- 884 -- including 618 in the league after overtaking Bobby Charlton's old record of 606 league appearances last season.

He is the most decorated player in English soccer having won 12 league titles, four FA Cups, three League Cups and the Champions League twice during his 21-year career at Old Trafford.

Dortmund move up

REUTERS, Berlin



Borussia Dortmund's Ivan Perisic scored a fine opening goal but was sent off in a five-minute spell either side of halftime as they won 2-0 at Werder Bremen in the Bundesliga on Friday.

Despite playing nearly the entire second half with 10 men following the Croatia midfielder's dismissal, Dortmund's Patrick Owomoyela netted the second from close range in the 71st minute to give the champions their third league win in a row.

Dortmund have now pulled level on 16 points with Werder and Borussia Moenchengladbach with the trio three points behind leaders Bayern Munich who host Hertha Berlin on Saturday.

"It's a big disappointment," said Werder coach Thomas Schaaf. "We played too badly in the second half, we didn't have any confidence in our game."

Werder dominated the first half with Peru

striker Claudio Pizarro seemingly unaffected by the transatlantic journey after playing away to Chile in a World Cup qualifier only 72 hours earlier.

But Dortmund went ahead three minutes before the break when Perisic confused his marker with a cheeky step over and rifled the ball into the roof of the net for his second Bundesliga goal since joining from Bruges in the close season.

The 22-year-old had already been booked for a wild lunge at Sokratis Papastathopoulos and a late tackle on the same player earned him a sending-off two minutes after the restart.

Lukas Schmitz hit the underside of the crossbar as Werder poured forward, only for the hosts to be undone at a corner.

The defence failed to clear properly and, as Mats Hummels hooked the ball back in, a poorly-executed offside trap left Owomoyela all alone to score from close range in his first league match of the season.

"We defended very well, we had a little bit of luck.... and I think we deserved it," said Dortmund coach Juergen Klopp.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Borussia Dortmund defender Patrick Owomoyela celebrates his goal against Werder Bremen during their Bundesliga clash in Bremen on Friday.

Hernandez denies L'pool

AFP, Liverpool



Javier Hernandez preserved Manchester United's unbeaten start to the season with an 81st-minute equaliser as Liverpool were held 1-1 at Anfield on Saturday.

Steven Gerrard had put Kenny Dalglish's side within sight of victory after marking his first start for seven months by firing his side ahead.

Gerrard had not started since undergoing groin surgery after Liverpool overcame United 3-1 in the corresponding fixture last season.

But Gerrard's fairytale return was ruined when substitute Hernandez rescued a point nine minutes from time for United, who surprisingly started without leading scorer Wayne Rooney.

This was the first league meeting between the two sides since United moved to a record 19 titles ahead of Liverpool's 18.

United manager Ferguson had labelled the fixture as the biggest in world club football yet there was little to excite the crowd during a fast and frantic start in which both sides struggled to retain possession.

Dalglish made one change from the side that had overcome neighbours Everton before the international break, with Andy Carroll, who scored in the 2-0 win at Goodison Park, making way for Gerrard.

Yet even the return of the captain struggled to raise the hosts, who were unfortunate to escape falling behind in the 16th minute when Phil Jones headed wastefully wide from Patrice Evra's fine cross.

Jones was playing in midfield in a United line-up which showed no fewer than six changes from the side that overcame Norwich 2-0 in their last game on October 1.

While the absence of Rooney from the side was the biggest surprise, Ferguson also opted to start with Mexican

striker Hernandez and Portuguese winger Nani on the bench.

Rooney, Hernandez and Nani had scored 14 of United's 24 league goals ahead of this game so it was little surprise that the visitors failed to find the net before half-time.

The best chance of the half fell to Luis Suarez, the Liverpool striker denied by David de Gea in the 34th minute after Charlie Adam's shot had cannoned off United defender Jonny Evans into the Uruguay international's path.

The longer the game remained goalless the louder the chants from United's fans calling for Rooney's introduction became.

Then came the goal that rocked Anfield to its foundations.

Marriner had no hesitation awarding a free-kick after Adam crashed to the floor following a challenge just outside the penalty area by Ferdinand, who had been booked in the first half.

Spotlight on Diego



REUTERS, Dubai

A small corner of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will grab the attention of the soccer world on Sunday night when Diego Maradona's Al Wasl launch their league campaign.

The 50-year-old Argentine great is coach of the Dubai club who face Sharjah in their opening fixture in the 12-team UAE professional league.

Before a ball has even been kicked Maradona, who signed a two-year contract in May, has injected a real buzz in a region hardly known for its footballing traditions.

His six matches so far -- two in pre-season plus four in the region's equivalent of the League Cup -- have seen Al Wasl score 13 goals and concede 12 including a 5-0 humbling by Dubai Club.

That defeat prompted Al Wasl, without a league title since 2007, to hand Maradona a vote of confidence.

"The season is long and this is just one match," the club said in a statement. "We have full faith in our head coach who is working hard to develop a strong team that will be true contenders for the league title."

Patience is a rare commodity among owners in the UAE with only two of the 12 top-flight coaches lasting the whole campaign last season.

"I'm with Al Wasl and I will complete my contract here until the last day and give my best at all times," said Maradona. "After the 5-0 defeat some people might think otherwise but I don't care what they think."

It has all been a bit of a culture shock for the man who won 91 caps for Argentina, including a World Cup winners' medal in 1986, and coached his country at the 2010 finals where they lost to Germany in the quarterfinals.

Pre-season training in August and September was disrupted by Ramadan, with the majority of players fasting between dawn and dusk.

The league campaign is also starting in temperatures which, even at night, rarely drop below 25 degrees Celsius.

Although the league has been professional for four years, many players still hold outside jobs, a further training disruption.

Maradona's news conferences have been a spectacle in themselves. He invariably arrives late despite wearing two watches, one showing local time and the other the time in Buenos Aires where his family live.

Questions to him are a mix of English, Arabic and Spanish but he charms and entertains with wonderfully passionate and expressive answers.

Responding to suggestions that fans have been unsettled by the open nature of Al Wasl matches, he said: "If you are scared then don't come and watch. You can stay at home and watch a comedy on DVD. Football is passion and entertainment."

According to media reports the Argentine's two-year contract is worth \$3.5 million but the club has strenuously denied he is being paid as much as that.

Maradona has already done wonders for the profile of Al Wasl and UAE soccer.

"There's no doubt that ever since the appointment of Diego Maradona as head coach the name of Al Wasl has exploded on the worldwide radar," club chairman Marwan bin Bayat told Reuters.

"In four months our followers on Twitter grew from 50 to 1,600 and we have received over 30,000 visitors to our website which is a 300 per cent increase."

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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2nd T20I

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TEN Action

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La Liga