



PHOTO: AFP
Arsenal striker Robin van Persie celebrates with Theo Walcott after scoring his first goal in their Premiership clash against Sunderland at the Emirates stadium on Sunday.

RVP guides Arsenal

AFP, London



Robin van Persie reinforced his importance to Arsenal's prospects this season with the two goals that secured a 2-1 victory over Sunderland at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Van Persie has emerged as the Gunners' most influential figure in the wake of the departures of former skipper Cesc Fabregas and Samir Nasri.

The Holland international has been one of the few Arsenal players to impress during a depressing start to the campaign and was once again the stand-out figure, opening the scoring after 31 seconds and securing the win with a late free kick after Sebastian Larsson had levelled in the 31st minute.

Arsenal's display was hardly convincing but after a difficult two months, it was the result that mattered to boss Arsene Wenger and his players.

For Sunderland there was only more disappointment. Steve Bruce's side have also struggled, leading to growing scrutiny about the manager's future and they are above the relegation zone on goal difference.

Meanwhile, Chelsea remained hot on the heels of Premier League leaders Manchester City after cruising past Everton 3-1 at Stamford Bridge here Saturday.

Goals from Daniel Sturridge, captain John Terry and Brazilian midfielder Ramires secured the points for Chelsea and ensured they ended their six-season wait for a home league win over the Toffees.

The win brought third-place Chelsea to within a point of Manchester United in second and kept them three behind Manchester City.

Everton on the other hand find themselves two points above the relegation zone and four of the seven sides below them are due to play on Sunday.

Neuer inches closer to record

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer extended his clean-sheet record to 748 minutes in Saturday's 4-0 win over Hertha Berlin to close in on the all-time Bundesliga mark of 884 minutes set by Stuttgart's Timo Hildebrand.

The German international is third on the all-time list behind Oliver Kahn who was unbeaten in 802 minutes in 2002-2003 while Hildebrand twice set the high mark in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004.

Neuer, 25, has only conceded one goal since his arrival from Schalke 04 in the summer and that was in the 1-0 defeat to Moenchengladbach on the opening day of the season -- that's just once in 1,100 minutes.

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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Napoli's lost chance

REUTERS, Rome



Napoli missed the chance to top Serie A after a shock 2-1 home defeat by Parma on Saturday as champions AC Milan hit form with a 3-0 win over Palermo and Inter Milan lost at Catania.

Parma's Francesco Modesto struck the winner against Napoli eight minutes from time after Napoli's Giuseppe Mascara had equalised following Massimo Gobbi's 57th-minute opener.

Milan's Antonio Nocerino, scoring against his former club, Robinho and Antonio Cassano were all on target as Milan cruised past a disappointing Palermo.

Napoli remain a point behind leaders Juventus, who visit Chievo Verona on Sunday, with 10 points. Parma are a further point back and 11th placed Milan are three points off top spot.

Earlier, Inter suffered their fourth loss in their six Serie A matches this season, going down 2-1 at Catania.

Napoli, who host Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Tuesday, looked a pale shadow of the side that had stormed the San Siro two weeks ago in defeating Inter Milan 3-0.

After a lacklustre first half Massimo Gobbi put Parma ahead just before the hour mark, swapping passes with Stefano Floccari before slotting the ball past Morgan De Sanctis.

Napoli, who had created little against a well-organised Parma side, equalised with 15 minutes to go when substitute

Giuseppe Mascara slipped the ball under goalkeeper Antonio Mirante after a brilliant flicked pass from Ezequiel Lavezzi.

But Parma silenced the San Paolo faithful with eight minutes left when Modesto tapped in Sebastian Giovinco's enticing cross after a fast counter attack.

Milan welcomed back the fit-again Robinho allowing coach Massimiliano Allegri to play the attacking trident that hit it off so well last season with the Brazilian playing just behind Swede Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Italian Antonio Cassano.

Palermo, starting in fourth position after new coach Devis Mangia had inspired several stirring displays, offered little going forward and had keeper Alexandros Tzorvas to thank after 37 minutes when he twice parried fierce Robinho strikes.

The Greek could do nothing three minutes later though when midfielder Alberto Aquilani nodded Ibrahimovic's cross back across goal for Nocerino to tap into an empty net although he would not celebrate against his former club.

Robinho had no such qualms 10 minutes after halftime when he ran on to Ibrahimovic's pass and coolly flicked the ball past Tzorvas as a rampant Milan side cut the Rosanero defence open again.

After having a goal disallowed, the in-form Cassano made it 3-0 in the 64th by sidefooting home Ignazio Abate's right wing cross to allow Allegri to rest players ahead of Wednesday's Champions League match at home to Belarus side Bate Borisov.

RESULTS

Catania 2 (Almiron 47, Lodi 51-pen)
Inter Milan 1 (Cambiasso 6)
AC Milan 3 (Nocerino 40, Robinho 55, Cassano 64) Palermo 0
Napoli 1 (Mascara 76) **Parma 2** (Gobbi 57, Modesto 82)

Bayern dominant

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich continued their early season charge for the Bundesliga title with a 4-0 rout of Hertha Berlin on Saturday that gave them a five-point lead at the top.

Bayern, who finished a massive 10 points off Borussia Dortmund's pace last season, were quick to extinguish any hopes of an upset by racing 3-0 up thanks to goals from Mario Gomez, Franck Ribery and Bastian Schweinsteiger.

Gomez added his second from a spot-kick in the 69th minute to seal a comprehensive win for Jupp Heynckes' seemingly unstoppable side, whose lead was boosted by results elsewhere.

Borussia Monchengladbach looked set to claim a precious 2-1 win at home to Bayer Leverkusen but had to accept a share of the spoils after Leverkusen striker Andre Schuerle fired home in the 87th minute to level.

Moenchengladbach still moved up one place to second, five points behind Bayern, who now have a six-point cushion on Dortmund, Stuttgart and Bremen -- all of whom have played nine games.

Dortmund had moved temporarily up to second on Friday with a 2-0 away win that ended Werder Bremen's undefeated spell at home.

Elsewhere, Wolfsburg had Mario Mandzukic to thank for a brace in a 2-1 home win against Nuremberg.

The Croatian, who scored a goal against Latvia in their final Euro 2012 qualifier in mid-week, opening his account in the 23rd minute and cancelling out Christian Eigler's 70th-minute leveller with a penalty in the 83rd minute.

Hertha secured promotion to the Bundesliga in May after a season in the German second division but the gulf in class between the sides was evident almost immediately as Bayern opened up a 3-0 lead inside 13 minutes.

French international Franck Ribery was inspirational, providing assists for both Gomez's opener and Schweinsteiger's 13th-minute goal, either side of getting on the scoresheet himself.

He was also instrumental in Bayern's penalty, which Gomez converted to remain the league's top scorer with 10 goals.

RESULTS

M'gladbach 2 (Reus 65, Herrmann 72)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Reinartz 20, Schürle 87)
VfL Wolfsburg 2 (Mandzukic 24, 83-pen) Nuremberg 1 (Eigler 70)
Bayern Munich 4 (Gomez 5, 69-pen, Ribery 7, Schweinsteiger 13) Hertha Berlin 0
VfB Stuttgart 2 (Okazaki 48, Pogrebnyak 77-pen) Hoffenheim 0
Mainz 05 0 **FC Augsburg 1** (Callsen-Bracker 88-pen)
Schalke 04 1 (Huntelaar 62-pen)
Kaiserslautern 2 (Tiffert 30-pen,

Duo continue to set the pace

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi scored twice as Barcelona cruised to a 3-0 win over Racing Santander on Saturday, a victory which preserved the Spanish and European champions' one-point lead over Real Madrid in La Liga.

Messi's Argentinian international teammate Gonzalo Higuain had earlier hit his second hat-trick in a week to lead Real Madrid to a 4-1 mauling of Real Betis as Jose Mourinho's team temporarily dislodged Barcelona from top spot.

At Camp Nou, Messi's brace, which took his league total to 10 this season, and a rare header for captain Xavi Hernandez were enough to seal the points.

The result was never in doubt and Barca were able to take their foot off the pedal towards the end with one eye on Wednesday's Champions League match at home to Czech side Viktoria Plzen.

However, they will be without defender Gerard Pique who limped off with a right thigh injury and will be out for at least two weeks.

Barcelona needed just eight minutes to break through against Racing Santander.

Andres Iniesta, in his first game in a

month after injury, turned cleverly in the area to find Messi who skipped around Santander goalkeeper Antonio Rodriguez 'Tono' to push the ball into an open net.

Barcelona's second came on 27 minutes from the head of Xavi after good work and a fine cross from Pedro Rodriguez on the left wing.

The chances continued to come and Messi was inches away from getting his second on 36 minutes.

Santander defended stoutly and held out until the 67th minute when

RESULTS

Real Madrid 4 (Higuain 46, 69, 73, Kaka 58)
Real Betis 1 (Molina 68)
Real Mallorca 1 (Hemed 90+2-pen)
Valencia 1 (Rami 39)
Getafe 0 Villarreal 0
Barcelona 3 (Messi 11, 68, Xavi 27)
Racing Santander 0

Barca got their third.

Higuain had hit three for Argentina in a World Cup qualifying victory against Chile and his golden streak on Saturday with Real Madrid.

For Madrid, Cristiano Ronaldo started his 100th match and Mourinho's team were quickly into their stride.

Kaka whipped in a dangerous cross from the left which Betis goalkeeper Casto Espinosa was only able to parry out to Mesut Ozil whose shot was charged down by defender Antonio

Amaya.

Just before the break, Ronaldo teed-up Kaka but the Brazilian's shot went narrowly wide and a closely fought first-half finished goalless.

Madrid were ahead with 30 seconds of the restart.

Marcelo's long, raking pass found Ronaldo's attacking run down the left and one touch was all he needed to present Higuain with an open goal.

Casto Espinosa came to Betis' rescue on 56 minutes, blocking acrobatically twice to deny Higuain and then Kaka.

However he could do nothing two minutes later when Kaka placed a curling right-footed shot into the bottom right corner.

Jorge Molina pulled a goal back for Betis from close range on 69 minutes after Ruben Castro fought his way through the Madrid defence, but any hope Betis had of taking anything from the game lasted less than a minute.

Angel Di Maria found Higuain with a beautifully weighted pass from the right wing that left the Argentine to neatly take the ball round Casto and finish into an open net.

On 73 minutes Higuain completed his hat-trick when his compatriot Di Maria again found him with a defence splitting pass that he chipped over the oncoming Casto.

Valencia missed out on joining Madrid on 16 points after drawing 1-1 at Mallorca.



PHOTO: REUTERS

THE TREBLE MAN: Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain exults after completing his hat-trick against Real Betis during their La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Saturday.



NEO Cricket

India v England

Second ODI (D/N)

Live from 3:00pm

TEN Cricket

Zimbabwe v New Zealand

Second T20I

Live from 6:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News



National Cricket League

(Four-Day Match, Day 1)

Rajshahi v Dhaka Metro

Venue: Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium, Rajshahi

Dhaka v Rangpur

Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra

Sylhet v Khulna

Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium

Barisal v Chittagong