

Shock loss for Gladbach

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Moenchengladbach missed the chance to go top of the German league on Saturday after a shock defeat at strugglers Augsburg while Werder Bremen got back in the title race with a 4-1 win over Wolfsburg.

With leaders Bayern Munich at VfB Stuttgart on Sunday, Gladbach could have gone two points clear, but instead slumped to a 1-0 loss as Augsburg picked up only their third win of the season.

Only two points now separate the top five teams.

The defeat drops Gladbach to fourth, but still just a point behind Bayern, second-placed Schalke and Dortmund, third, who host Kaiserslautern on Sunday.

Bremen are fifth, but just two points behind Bayern, after their hammering of Wolfsburg with Greek defender Sokratis putting the hosts ahead early on.

On 45 minutes, Peru striker Claudio Pizarro netted the second, to claim his 12th league goal of the season, before Sweden's Markus Rosenberg scored the third after the break.

Austria's Marko Arnautovic came off the bench to hit the fourth with 19 minutes left.



REAL close, but BARCA a cut above

Barcelona players are elated after scoring their final goal in their El Clasico encounter against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona arrived at the Bernabeu under pressure with Real Madrid holding the edge in the title race but the 3-1 victory shows that the balance of power is still yet to change.

Afterwards, Real coach Jose Mourinho played down the importance of the one off match but while there were only three points in play it will have a psychological affect as despite coming into the el clasico on the back of 15 straight wins they were put in their place by the reigning domestic and European champions.

Pep Guardiola has an enviable record at the Bernabeu with Saturday's victory his fourth since becoming Barcelona coach in 2008 and while it was not as convincing as the 6-2 thrashing which

his players gave to their rivals in his first season the result will be equally significant.

Real had the chance to open up a six-point lead with a game in hand going into the winter break which although not being a decisive blow in the championship race would have made it very difficult for Barca to bounce back.

Instead, the Catalan side are level having played a game more as they now fly out directly from Madrid to Japan to play the Club World Cup.

Full of confidence Real took the lead after just 23 seconds with Karim Benzema firing home following an earlier error from Barca keeper Victor Valdes.

Barcelona looked edgy but Real were unable to build on their lead and the visitors struck back after 29 minutes through Alexis Sanchez.

After the break a deflected goal from Xavi Hernandez turned the game in Barcelona's favour and on the break Cesc Fabregas sealed

the win after 65 minutes.

It wasn't a vintage performance from Barca as Real controlled much of the match and will be left ruing their misfortune and poor finishing. In particular it was a disappointing night for Real's key striker Cristiano Ronaldo, who failed to make the most of several excellent chances.

RESULTS

Levante 1 (Ballesteros 57) Sevilla 0
Real Betis 2 (Ruben Castro 90+1, 90+3)
Valencia 1 (Dorado 66-og)
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 1) **Barcelona 3**

"I was expecting it to be more difficult for us to create chances. In the summer (when the two met in the domestic Super Cup) we lacked the necessary rhythm which was a big factor but now after the first goal we began to play with our heads," said Guardiola.

"I thought it was going to be tougher for us although it was a

match in which we were going to need some luck.

"Madrid were always going to create chances, that has always happened when I have come here, but overall I am happy with the way the game went.

"I don't think that this result will cause distress for Madrid, they will recover and continue to be the biggest rival. Nothing is decided now and it wouldn't be either if we had lost."

Barca midfielder Xavi believes the outcome will spur on Barcelona who are looking for their fourth straight league title.

"I think that we were clearly on top after conceding an early goal which was our own fault. We showed our philosophy and we wanted to play like that knowing that we couldn't win doing it any other way," said Xavi.

"There is still a long way to go in the title race and we are still to play them at home but this is a turning point for us and will give

us a big boost."

Mourinho admitted that the result was disappointing, but that it was not a make-or-break game.

"The players are sad but calm. Before the match we said we had our emotions under control and that this would not change if we went six points ahead or ended up level in the table," he said.

"We have only lost a game and if we win our next match then we are leaders."

The Madrid press were not looking for excuses with the sports daily Marca emphasising that once again Barcelona have beaten Real at their own home while As' headline read: "The best won."

In Catalonia a delighted Sport and El Mundo Deportivo both were celebrating.

"Who said this Barca is dead? Who thought that this legendary side would not be able to get a key result at the Bernabeu and open up the championship race," opined Sport.

Jose bemoans lack of luck

REUTERS, Madrid

Jose Mourinho attributed a large part of Barcelona's 3-1 'Clasico' victory at the Bernabeu on Saturday to luck and dismissed the idea that it would damage his side's morale in the La Liga title race.

"It was a game and in many games luck plays a important part," a surprisingly sanguine Mourinho told reporters after Real's early lead from a first minute Karim Benzema goal was overhauled by goals from Alexis Sanchez, Xavi and Cesc Fabregas.

"When we were 1-0 up we had the chance to go two up with an opening which normally with a player as fantastic as Cristiano Ronaldo would have taken, but we didn't.

"Their second came from a deflection, and no one can see it was anything other than luck. We had another chance at 2-2 and almost immediately they scored a third which was a psychological blow.

"Luck played its part but I don't want to take anything away from our opponents."

Although tempers frayed towards the end of the game there were none of the types of scenes that had blighted recent 'Clasicos' while Mourinho, who has had outbursts against Barca, the referees and soccer authorities after previous matches remained calm.

When asked about a possible second yellow card Barcelona's Lionel Messi could have picked up before halftime for a late tackle on Xabi Alonso, he replied: "It was a sending off for me, but the referee was closer and could see better, so maybe it wasn't."

The Portuguese was not worried the defeat that left them level at the top with Barcelona on 37 points, though Barca have played one more game, would affect their league form.

"We are sad but relaxed," he said. "We are level on points with a game to play. As long as we don't lose this against Sevilla we will go in to the Christmas break still leaders."

Loew's spying trip

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew and his assistant Hansi Flick hit the road this weekend to check the form of several key players and keep an eye on possible Euro 2012 opponents.

Loew flew to Spain to watch Real Madrid play Barcelona on Saturday at the Santiago Bernabeu, it was reported on the German Football Federation (DFB) website.

The German boss was keeping an eye on German stars Mesut Ozil and Sami Khedira, who play for Real, and will meet the pair on Sunday, as well as Madrid boss Jose Mourinho to exchange ideas.

Loew's assistant Flick is heading to England to watch Chelsea play Premier League leaders Manchester City on Monday in London. Germany have been drawn in Group B alongside Holland, Portugal and Denmark for Euro 2012, to be hosted by Poland and the Ukraine, which kicks off next year on June 8 and the final will be held in Kiev on July 1.

Anelka heads Far East

AFP, Beijing

Shanghai Shenhua said Sunday that Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka had agreed to join the club, in a major coup for Chinese football.

Club spokesman Ma Yue told AFP the 32-year-old Frenchman could start playing for the team in January, "if all contract details are 100 per cent confirmed." He was unable to reveal the value of the deal.

The former Arsenal and Real Madrid star will be the biggest name to appear in China's Super League, which is growing in stature despite significant corruption problems that have left several officials facing jail.

In July, Argentine midfielder Dario Conca became China's most expensive signing -- and reportedly, one of the world's best paid players -- when he inked a \$10 million deal with Guangzhou Evergrande.

The Chinese champions, who are bankrolled by a leading property company and were relegated two seasons ago for match-fixing, have also splashed out \$7.5 million on Brazilian forwards Cleo and Muriqui, last season's top scorer.

Redemption for United

AFP, London



Manchester United put the pain of their Champions League exit behind them with a 4-1 Premier League win at home to strugglers Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday.

Victory, secured by two goals apiece from Nani and Wayne Rooney, saw the champions close to within two points of leaders Manchester City.

But City -- also knocked out of the Champions League in midweek -- will restore their five-point advantage at the top if they win away to Chelsea on Monday.

Nani gave United a 17th-minute lead at Old Trafford with a low shot from 20 yards out for his first goal in 18 games.

And 10 minutes later before Rooney's shot through a crowd of players gave the England striker his first league goal in nine games.

Steven Fletcher pulled a goal back for Wolves early in the second half but United restored their two-goal lead after Nani turned in Antonio Valencia's cross.

Valencia was also the provider when Rooney made it 4-1. "I always say December is an important month; if we get

to the new year still in the frame we have a great chance," said United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

Elsewhere, Arsenal marked their 125th anniversary with a 1-0 win at home to Everton thanks to a goal from in-form striker Robin van Persie.

The Dutch international broke the deadlock at the Emirates with a brilliant left foot volley 20 minutes from time.

"It's an art Robin has mastered well," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. "We are also grateful for three points against a good Everton side."

Liverpool beat QPR 1-0 at Anfield thanks to Luis Suarez's first goal in six games with the Uruguayan heading home two minutes after half-time.

Norwich held off 10-man Newcastle to win 4-2 at Carrow Road.

Aston Villa took the lead away to struggling Bolton when the unmarked Marc Albrighton turned in a cross from Gabriel Agbonlahor 12 minutes before half-time and more poor defending gave Stiliyan Petrov room for a long-range shot in via a deflection off Gary Cahill.

that went

Klose to the death

AFP, Rome



Miroslav Klose scored three minutes from time to earn Lazio a crucial 3-2 win at rock-bottom Lecce on Saturday and move the Roman club up to second in Serie A.

Later Inter Milan climbed clear of the relegation zone with a 2-0 win over Fiorentina, who were showing some early festive generosity.

Mistakes from Cesare Natali and Manuel Pasqual handed Inter a pair of gift goals for Giampaolo Pazzini and Japan full-back Yuto Nagatomo.

At Lecce, Klose scored a brace and provided the pass for Lorik Cana to add Lazio's other goal while David Di Michele and Stefano Ferrario netted for

the hosts. Klose's brace took him to eight league goals this season and brought him level with AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic in third in the scoring charts.

Lazio could yet lose second place later in the weekend if either AC Milan draw or Udinese win but this result ensured the capital-based club will remain amongst the front-

runners. Lazio coach Edy Reja paid tribute to his German forward but admitted his side had been fortunate to win.

"We know Klose's strength and if you leave him alone for a moment in the area he's unforgiving," Reja told SkySport.

"Today I can say without a problem that we struggled and we were kissed by luck, Lecce deserved at least a draw."

"This isn't the match that reawakens us but I'm satisfied with the way we played," said Inter coach Claudio Ranieri. "It was a match full of desire, everyone was committed."

The win moved Inter from 16th to ninth and a victory in their game in hand away to Genoa on Tuesday could even see them move as high as sixth.

RESULTS

Inter Milan 2 (Pazzini 41, Nagatomo 49) Fiorentina 0
Lecce 2 (Di Michele 13-pen, Ferrario 58) **Lazio 3**
(Klose 28, 87, Cana 47)
Palermo 0 **Cesena 1** (Mutu 63)

What to WATCH

BTV
Bangladesh v Pakistan
First Test, Day 4
Live from 9:30am

STAR Cricket
Australia v New Zealand
Second Test, Day 5
Live from 5:30am (Tuesday)

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
English Premiership
Chelsea v Man City

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Pakistan
First Test, Day 4
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong

National Cricket League: 2nd Phase
(Round 1, Day 2)
Khulna v Rajshahi
Venue: Fatullah Stadium, Narayanganj
Dhaka Metro v Sylhet
Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium



I BOW TO THEE: Arsenal keeper Wojciech Szczesny (L) kisses the left foot of Robin Van Persie at the end of their Premier League game against Everton. PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Who is Bangladesh's sports personality of 2011?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on **twitter**
www.twitter.com/dssport