

# Silva sinks Gunners

AFP, London

Manchester City were left two points in front of champions Manchester United at the top of the English Premier League after a 1-0 win at home to Arsenal on Sunday.

David Silva scored the only goal of a high-quality contest in the 53rd minute after Mario Balotelli cut in from the left and let fly with a powerful low shot that Arsenal keeper Wojciech Szczesny did well to save but could not hold.

Sergio Aguero followed up and, as the ball came loose on the right, Silva pounced to score from close range.

City missed several chances to double their lead and were almost made to pay when in-form Arsenal striker Robin van Persie received the ball just eight yards out only to shoot weakly at England goalkeeper Joe Hart.

Then Argentina defender Pablo Zabaleta nearly made it 2-0 to the hosts when his shot beat Szczesny only to bounce off the keeper's right post.

Hart then preserved City's lead in the 90th minute when he tipped over a shot from Thomas Vermaelen that came through a crowd of players. In stoppage time, another Vermaelen strike curled just wide.

Defeat meant Arsenal, beaten for the first time in nine games, stayed fifth in the table, 12 points behind City.

Earlier on Sunday, United returned to the summit for a couple of hours after a 2-0 win away to Queens Park Rangers.

Wayne Rooney needed fewer than 60

seconds to open the scoring at Loftus Road before Michael Carrick made the game safe for the visitors in the 56th minute.

United went ahead when England striker Rooney headed home a cross from Antonio Valencia after releasing the Ecuadorian down the right.

The champions doubled their lead early in the second half when Carrick intercepted a loose square ball from Rangers midfielder Joey Barton.

England international Carrick was allowed to advance by the Londoners' retreating defence and then beat Radek Cerny at the goalkeeper's near post with a shot from the edge of the box for what was his first Premier League goal in nearly two years.

Meanwhile Tottenham moved up into third place, leapfrogging Chelsea to become London's top club, with a 1-0 win at home to strugglers Sunderland.

Russia striker Roman Pavlyuchenko scored the only goal of the game at White Hart Lane just after the hour mark.

A stray ball from Sunderland's Wes Brown found its way to Rafael van der Vaart, whose clever reverse pass allowed Pavlyuchenko to fire home the winner.

Liverpool went above Newcastle and into sixth spot with a 2-0 win away to Aston Villa.

Both their goals came from corners, with Craig Bellamy forcing the ball home from close range in the 11th minute.

And four minutes later, the unmarked Martin Skrtel rose highest to head in past American keeper Brad Guzan before Liverpool striker Luis Suarez was twice denied by the woodwork.

## RESULTS

Aston Villa 0 **Liverpool 2**  
(Bellamy 11, Skrtel 15)  
**Manchester City 1** (Silva 53) **Arsenal 0**  
QPR 0 **Manchester United 2**  
(Rooney 1, Carrick 56)  
**Tottenham 1** (Pavlyuchenko 61)



Manchester City playmaker David Silva (C) celebrates his all-important goal with teammates Sergio Aguero (L) and Samir Nasri during their Premier League encounter against Arsenal at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 17 times unlucky

AFP, Birmingham

Kenny Dalglish has laughed off Liverpool's record of having hit the woodwork 17 times in their 16 Premier League matches this season.

Luis Suarez was denied by the post and crossbar in Sunday's 2-0 win at Aston Villa, leaving Dalglish to ponder what might have been.

"We can solve that problem if we can shave a couple of inches off the post," joked the Liverpool coach.

"We'll keep trying because the harder you try, the luckier you become. Maybe one day we'll hit the bar and it will end up going in.

"We've got a really good spirit in the dressing room and it shows on the pitch. We've had a shut-out, scored two goals to increase our goals and points tally, and increased the number of times we've hit the woodwork as well."

## Skibbe to replace Babel

AFP, Berlin

Hertha Berlin could name Michael Skibbe as the successor to sacked coach Markus Babel as early as Thursday, according to reports in the German media on Monday.

Skibbe, 46, is currently in charge of Turkish side Eskisehirspor, having been sacked by Eintracht Frankfurt in March, but German daily Bild reported that he could sign a contract with Hertha until 2014.

Skibbe became the youngest coach in Bundesliga history when he took over Borussia Dortmund in 1998 at the age of 32.

He spent three years at Bayer Leverkusen between 2005 and 2008, and then spent several months at Turkish giants Galatasaray before joining Frankfurt two years ago.

Former Bayern Munich and Liverpool defender Babel, 39, was sacked by Hertha on Sunday.

## SPORTS POLL

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# Juve back to summit

AFP, Rome



Juventus returned to the top of Serie A following a 2-0 victory at home to Novara on Sunday, while Inter Milan's revival continued as they won 1-0 at Cesena to climb to fifth place.

Juve's win enabled them to leapfrog AC Milan, who had taken over at the top by beating Siena 2-0 on Saturday.

Udinese missed the chance to draw level with Antonio Conte's side when they were held to a 2-2 draw at Lazio and remain in third place, two points off the pace.

Juve laboured to impose themselves against their Piedmont rivals Novara, promoted from Serie B at the end of last season after a 55-year absence from the top flight.

Novara defended valiantly but were always chasing the game after Simone Pepe converted a low cross in the fourth minute to claim his fifth goal of the season.

Fabio Quagliarella, preferred in attack to Alessandro Matri, made the game safe with Juve's second goal in the 75th minute.

"We're good at creating chances, but less good at taking them," reflected Juve coach Conte. "Playing like that means we take risks with the coronar-

ies of the man on the bench!"

Defending champions Milan had enjoyed a straightforward outing against Siena, prevailing through goals from Antonio Nocerino and a contentious Zlatan Ibrahimovic penalty -- his 10th goal of the season.

Udinese were in front against Lazio after 28 minutes thanks to a diving header from Antonio Floro Flores but Lazio drew level two minutes before the interval when Slovenia interna-

## RESULTS

Catania 2 (Lodi 32, Maxi Lopez 61-pen) Palermo 0  
**Juventus 2** (Pepe 4, Quagliarella 75) Novara 0  
(Cesena 0 Inter Milan 1 (Ranocchia 63)  
**Genoa 2** (Rossi 39, Pratto 84) Bologna 1 (Ramirez 51)  
Parma 3 (Flocari 18-pen, Pelle 86, Galloppa 90+3)  
Lecce 3 (Di Michele 58, 61, Cuadrado 77)  
Napoli 1 (Hamsik 82) **Roma 3** (De Sanctis 3-og, Osvaldo 59, Fabio Simplicio 90)  
Lazio 2 (Lulic 43, Klose 51) Udinese 2

tional Senad Lulic found the net.

Veteran German striker Miroslav Klose then put Lazio ahead with a crisp volley in the 51st minute for his ninth goal of the season.

But Udinese were rewarded for their positive approach when Giampiero Pinzi equalised in the 73rd minute.

Inter may be outside the title picture, but they appear to have put their early-season miseries behind them

following their third straight victory.

A solitary headed goal from Andrea Ranocchia was enough to take the 2010 champions into the European places, but they are still 10 points off Juve's pace.

"I've never seen my team misplace as many passes as they did today," Inter coach Claudio Ranieri told Sky Sport.

"The only thing we'll take from this match is the points. If you wanted spectacle, you needed to be watching the TV at half-past 11," he added, in reference to Barcelona's 4-0 defeat of Santos in the Club World Cup final.

Napoli remained in sixth place after losing 3-1 at home to Roma, who are now seventh but also on 21 points.

Napoli fell a goal down after just three minutes when Morgan De Sanctis put through his own goal off a cross by Roma's Argentine forward Erik Lamela.

Pablo Osvaldo, in the 59th minute, and Fabio Simplicio, in the last minute, added to Roma's total, easing the pressure on coach Luis Enrique.

Marek Hamsik had briefly given Napoli hope with an 82nd-minute strike.

Earlier, a superb free-kick from Francesco Lodi set Catania on their way to a 2-0 victory over Palermo in the season's first Sicilian derby.

# Barca hungry for more

## Football

AFP, Yokohama

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola has Spanish title rivals Real Madrid and European glory firmly back in his sights after a trip to the Far East that yielded another world crown.

Guardiola sealed the 13th title of his glittering three-and-a-half-year reign on Sunday when the Catalans overpowered South American champions Santos 4-0, with Lionel Messi bagging a classy double.

It was the perfect launchpad for 2012, Guardiola said, after a weekend on which Real Madrid went three points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga with a thumping 6-2 win at Sevilla.

European champions Barca arrived in Japan last week after an impressive 3-1 win away at Real took them back to the top of the league in Spain.

"It will be a surprise for me if the team gives up," Guardiola said of his side, countering suggestions that after so much success his players could struggle for motivation.

His men strive to "keep going forward", he said. "For us, our target is to play great football for the crowd, fight for the Spanish league and travel around Europe to show people our level."

"The success is all about the great players and their effort," he said.

But the 40-year-old admitted that his star-studded side's latest triumph had come at a cost after striker David Villa, linked with

a move away from the Nou Camp before his injury, fractured his shin in the semifinals against Al Sadd.

He is likely to be out for up to five months, meaning he will likely miss most, if not all, of the rest of the season.

Guardiola said in the immediate aftermath of Villa's injury that it was "not respectful" to talk about the possibility of Barcelona buying a replacement in the winter transfer window.

"His injury was the most unfortunate thing of this tournament, but I am sure that he will return to the team soon," the coach said Sunday.

South American champions Santos were well beaten by Guardiola's team.

They were 3-0 down at the break after goals from Messi, Xavi and Cesc Fábregas, and although they put up a spirited performance in the second half, it could not mask their shortcomings, particularly at the back.

The annual intercontinental tournament is hugely important in South America and coach Muricy Ramalho will face criticism when his side arrives home but he insisted there was no disgrace despite the heavy defeat.

"Barcelona have played various teams around the world and nobody can beat them. Eventually some team may, but I don't think it's possible now," he said.

"This was not embarrassing and it was not a blow to us. We need to be humble -- we were beaten by the best team in the world," he said, adding Messi was the best but that Neymar would one day take that title.

# Soldado fires Valencia

AFP, Madrid



Roberto Soldado scored both goals to take his La Liga season's tally to 11 as Valencia defeated Malaga 2-0 on Sunday, a victory which kept his side in third place and in the hunt for a Champions League place.

Valencia have 33 points, four behind Barcelona and seven behind leaders Real Madrid who crushed Sevilla 6-2 on Saturday to ensure they finish 2011 on top of the table.

In an absorbing encounter, Malaga missed chance after chance with Valencia old boy Joaquin Sanchez looking dangerous all evening.

Soldado was not so forgiving in front of goal as he stayed firmly in contention for a recall to the Spanish side in the new year, especially with first choice David Villa out for up to five months with a broken leg.

For his first goal Jonas Goncalves produced a superb ball through the Malaga defence that Soldado latched onto before skipping around goalkeeper Willy Caballero to break the deadlock on 36 minutes.

His second was thumped home on the volley on 61 minutes after a great run and cross on the left from Jordi Alba.

Soldado missed the chance to notch a hat-trick with 10 minutes remaining when he chipped the ball wide with only Caballero to beat.

Defeat meant Malaga dropped to seventh and out of the Europa Cup positions.

Levante stay fourth after losing 2-1 at Granada.

Granada were fortunate to get a dubious penalty on 35 minutes after the referee signalled that Jose Barkero had handled in the box.

## RESULTS

Atletico Madrid 0 **Real Betis 2**  
(Pozuelo 54, Santa Cruz 90+1)  
**Granada 2** (Siqueira 35-pen, Abel 45)  
Levante 1 (Kone 59)  
**Osasuna 2** (Balde 75, Sergio Fernandez 83) Villarreal 1 (Ruben 65)  
Racing Santander 0 Real Sociedad 0



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia striker Roberto Soldado controls the ball during their Primera Liga clash against Malaga at the Mestalla on Sunday.



<b>BTV</b> Bangladesh v Pakistan Second Test, Day 4 Live from 9:30am
<b>ESPN</b> Sportscenter India Sports News Live at 8:30pm English Premiership Blackburn v Bolton Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)
<b>STAR Sports</b> English Premiership Wolves v Norwich City Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)
<b>TEN Action+</b> Serie A Siena v Fiorentina Live from 10:55pm



<b>Bangladesh v Pakistan</b> Second Test, Day 4 Time: 9:30am Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur <b>National Cricket League</b> Time: 9:30am Khulna v Sylhet, Day 3 Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium Dhaka Metro v Rajshahi, Day 3
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