



Bolton Wanderers midfielder Mark Davies (R) scores the opening goal against Blackburn Rovers during their Premier League encounter at Ewood Park on Tuesday.

## Rovers rooted to the bottom

AFP, London



Blackburn Rovers were left bottom of the English Premier League after a 2-1 Lancashire derby defeat at home to fellow relegation candidates Bolton Wanderers at Ewood Park on Tuesday.

Bolton, who kicked off as the league's basement club and remained in the bottom three even after this win, enjoyed a sensational start.

Mark Davies put them ahead inside five minutes and Nigel Reo-Coker made it 2-0 on the half-hour.

Davies' goal reignited the terrace taunts from Rovers fans towards manager Steve Kean, who has been under fire since he was appointed by Venky's, the Indian-based poultry firm that owns the club, a year ago.

However, the jeers were stilled when Blackburn striker Aiyegbeni Yakubu pulled a goal back with 23 minutes left.

But that was as good as it got for Rovers, Premier League champions in 1995.

It had been suggested before kick-off that whichever of the two Scottish managers on show ended up on the losing side could be sacked before Christmas and Bolton boss Owen Coyle sympathised with Kean.

"I feel for Steve - the shoe could have been on other foot, but I'm delighted to come out on the right end of the result," Coyle told the BBC.

Cries of "Kean Out" could be heard all round Ewood Park after Bolton took a fifth minute lead when, after Rovers failed to clear a corner, David N'Gog cut the ball back to Mark Davies whose first-time shot beat Paul Robinson.

And a well-worked move saw Bolton double their lead in the 30th minute.

Reo-Coker, making the most of yet more poor defending, burst through the middle and found Martin Petrov on the left.

Morten Gamst Pedersen failed to deal with Petrov's mis-hit cross but Reo-Coker, despite having his back to goal, was still able to turn and score.

### RESULTS

Blackburn 1 (Yakubu 67) Bolton 2  
(Davies 5, Reo-Coker 30)  
Wolves 2 (Ebanks-Blake 37, Zubar 82)

## Gunners to sell Arshavin

AFP, Moscow

Arsenal is ready to sell out of favour Russian midfielder Andrei Arshavin to his home club Zenit Saint Petersburg for his original transfer sum of 16.5 million euros (\$21.6 million), a report said Wednesday.

Moscow's respected Soviety Sport daily said Zenit was interested in acquiring the 30-year-old Russia skipper and eventually assigning him to coach its youth club.

Soviety Sport said its source confirmed that "Arsenal is ready to enter negotiations with Zenit."

The report comes on the heels of British media speculation that Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger had decided to part with his struggling playmaker during the January transfer window.

"We are always interested in Arshavin," Zenit director Igor Korneyev told Soviety Sport.

"But I can neither confirm nor deny whether we have received an offer."

Arshavin's stock soared when he spearheaded one of the most dazzling Russian sides in decades to a semi-final appearance in the Euro 2008 championship.

Arsenal signed him early the following year after paying a 16.5-million-euro transfer and saw him make an immediate impact with six goals in 12 games.

But he only scored once in the Premier League in 13 appearances this season and has only started for the squad on six occasions.

## Union backs Suarez verdict

AFP, London



Luis Suarez's eight-game ban for racially abusing Patrice Evra has "sent out a strong message" according to the chief executive of England's Professional Footballers' Association.

Gordon Taylor said the punishment was timely given the outcry in England after FIFA president Sepp Blatter suggested racist incidents on the field could be settled by a handshake between the players involved -- comments the head of world football's governing body later retracted.

Liverpool striker Suarez is set to appeal the ban, imposed after a confrontation with Manchester United's Evra during a 1-1 Premier League draw at Anfield in October.

The Uruguay international's defence appeared to rest on the view that language which was viewed as offensive in England was acceptable in his homeland.

Meanwhile Liverpool have reacted furiously to the punishment imposed upon Suarez, also fined £40,000 on Tuesday, accusing the Football Association of being "determined" to find the 24-year-old guilty.

But Taylor said Wednesday: "This was an independent commission experienced in law and football and they must have had compelling evidence, and it sends out a very strong message to the rest of the world."

"I understand the point about cultural differences but if you come to this country all players have to abide by not just the laws of the game but the laws of the land as well."

"Referring to someone's skin colour has got to be offensive -- it's self-evident."

## Spain at the zenith

AFP, Paris

World and European champions Spain will end the year as the world's number one ranked football team after the FIFA rankings were announced on Wednesday.

Spain, who thus secure top spot for the fourth consecutive year, were ousted only once in 2011 when they handed first place to Netherlands for a one-month spell in August.

Since the last rankings were announced on November 23, the top 15 remains unchanged with Netherlands in second, Germany third, Uruguay fourth and England fifth.

### TOP TEN

1. Spain
2. Netherlands
3. Germany
4. Uruguay
5. England
6. Brazil
7. Portugal
8. Croatia
9. Italy

## Milan regain top spot

REUTERS, Rome



A Francesco Pisano own goal and Zlatan Ibrahimovic's 11th strike of the season gave AC Milan a 2-0 win at Cagliari on Tuesday that put them a point clear of Juventus at the top of Serie A in their last game before the winter break.

Cagliari defender Pisano sliced a Robinho cross into his own net under pressure from Antonio Nocerino after four minutes to put the Rossoneri ahead in a first half the Sardinians went on to dominate.

Champions Milan put on a better performance after the break with Ibrahimovic doubling their lead on the hour after combining with Robinho as mid-table Cagliari's challenge faded.

Milan, unbeaten in 11 games, move to 34 points after 16 games, ahead of Juve and three points clear of Udinese.

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri said his team had to show heart to end the year on a winning note.

"The second half was better than the first, but it's important to get three points to end the year with. We'll see what happens now in tomorrow's games," he told

Italy's Sky Sport channel.

Allegri, who once again opted to play Robinho in attack despite pre-match comments from club owner Silvio Berlusconi praising Pato, said he was happy with his selection.

"There's no problem with the president," he said. "He can talk as he likes. I try to do things for the good of Milan."

The home side almost grabbed the lead with their first attack when Brazilian forward Thiago Ribeiro collected a cross from the returning Andrea Cossu

### RESULTS

Siena 0 Fiorentina 0  
Cagliari 0 AC Milan 2

and fizzed a low drive against the upright from a tight angle on the right side of the box.

Two minutes later, Cagliari fell behind when Robinho, running on to a disguised pass from Ibrahimovic, skipped around the mistimed charge of goalkeeper Michael Agazzi and saw his cross bundled over the line by Pisano under the challenge of Nocerino.

Christian Abbiati, back in place of Marco Amelia in the Milan goal, pro-

duced a flying save from an Albin Ekdal piledriver on 14 minutes before Argentine striker Joaquin Larrivey flashed a header wide as Cagliari pressed before the break.

Robinho should have doubled Milan's advantage on 58 minutes but after picking up Ibrahimovic's astute pass and skipping past Agazzi, the Brazilian blasted the ball over the bar from a tight angle.

Two minutes later, the two combined to stunning effect as Ibrahimovic played a one-two with Robinho and used his 1.95-metre frame to toe-poke the ball ahead of Agazzi's lunging dive and into the bottom corner.

Siena and Fiorentina battled to a goalless draw in a lacklustre Tuscan derby as the sides' ended the year languishing in the lower half of Serie A.

Striker Emanuele Calaiò came closest to scoring for Siena, meeting Franco Brienza's left-wing cross with a brave header that came crashing back off the bar on 28 minutes.

Montenegrin forward Stevan Jovetic had the best chance for the away side, forcing Serbian goalkeeper Zeljko Brkic into a brilliant flying save to keep out a sharp turn and shot on the stroke of halftime.

## Real cruise to win

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid's Jose Callejon scored twice and Nuri Sahin bagged his first goal for the club as the holders crushed third-tier Ponferradina 5-1 in a King's Cup last 32 second leg on Tuesday.

Espanyol, Real Mallorca and Sevilla also booked their places in the last 16 with victories.

The rest of the second legs are to be played on Wednesday and Thursday before the start of Spain's two-week winter break.

Callejon, a product of the Real youth system who has returned after a spell at Espanyol, set an under-strength side on course after 25 minutes at the Bernabeu and Turkey midfielder Sahin nodded in from a corner just before the break.

Rafael Varane and youth-team forward Joselu scored either side of Acoran's goal for the visitors, before the busy Callejon raced away to net his third of the tie and ninth in all competitions at the end.

"I like the player and his style of play," Real coach Jose Mourinho said of the 24-year-old after his La Liga leaders wrapped up a 7-1 aggregate win.

"He has a strong personality, he knows the club and the coach at Espanyol has done a good job with him."

Sahin has had few chances to show what he can do since signing from for the Madrid side from Borussia Dortmund in May because of injury but he is slowly starting to find his feet.

"We played a good game today but I need time to get back to 100 percent after seven months without playing," Sahin told reporters.

Financially-troubled Real Mallorca came back from a 1-0 first-leg deficit to win 2-0 at Sporting Gijon thanks to an own-goal by Alejandro Menendez and Emilio Nsue's second-half strike.

Espanyol thumped second division Celta Vigo 4-2 at home.



Real Madrid forward Jose Callejon celebrates his goal against Ponferradina during their King's Cup match at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

### SPORTS POLL

#### WEEKLY QUESTION

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