



Arsenal striker Robin Van Persie (2nd from L) scores the opening goal from a penalty during their Premier League encounter against Aston Villa at Villa Park on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Van Persie eyes record

AFP, Birmingham

Arsene Wenger admitted Robin Van Persie has been given a new lease of life as he attempts to break a Premier League record.

Arsenal manager Wenger believes the Netherlands international does not want to be rested in his mission to score 37 goals in a calendar year.

Van Persie took his tally to 34 goals this year with a penalty in the 2-1 victory at Aston Villa and is now only two away from equalling Alan Shearer's achievement.

The goal at Villa Park has already enabled him to equal Thierry Henry's seven-year club record but the striker is clearly on a personal crusade to etch his name into the record books.

And Wenger claimed he is not ready to give him a rest as he prepares for two home games in succession against Wolverhampton Wanderers and QPR.

"Robin keeps going and of course you always have that question about whether to rest him. He played against Manchester City but at the moment he feels alright so I just take a gamble.

"He is only three goals away from beating the record so now I will start to rest him! We've now got a breather until we prepare for the Wolves game on Boxing Day.

"We've had two difficult away games where we've had to give absolutely everything so to win at Aston Villa was very pleasing."

Wenger paid tribute to the spirit of his squad after the win at Villa kept them on the coat-tails of Chelsea in fourth place.



ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News



Bangladesh League
Bangladesh Navy v Cox City FC
Time: 2:30pm
Beanibazar v Wari Club
Time: 5:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu

Five-star Man Utd

AFP, London



Manchester City maintained their two-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 defeat of Stoke as rivals Manchester United destroyed Fulham 5-0 to stay in touch.

City ensured they will lead the top-flight at Christmas for the first time since 1929 after wrapping up all three points courtesy of two goals from Sergio Aguero either side of a long-range strike from Adam Johnson.

Manchester United enjoyed a similarly routine stroll at Craven Cottage, crushing Fulham to stay in second place.

Danny Welbeck fired United ahead on five minutes, the England striker sweeping in Nani's low cross after the Portuguese winger took flight on a solo run down the right wing.

Nani doubled the lead on 28 minutes before Ryan Giggs scored the 19,999th goal in Premier League history to make it 3-0 just before half-time as United piled on the agony for the Cottagers.

A 35-yard wonder strike from Wayne Rooney made it 4-0 before Dimitar Berbatov completed the scoring with a cheeky back-heeled fifth.

Fifth-placed Arsenal meanwhile went level on points with fourth-placed Chelsea after a last-gasp 2-1 win over Aston Villa.

Arsenal captain Robin van Persie shot the Gunners ahead from the penalty spot on 17 minutes after Ciaran Clark pulled down Theo Walcott.

But Villa came back strongly in the second half and Marc Albrighton's 54th minute strike -- the 20,000th goal in Premier League history -- got Alex McLeish's side back on level terms.

Yet just as it looked as if Arsenal would be forced to settle for a draw,

Yossi Benayoun headed in van Persie's corner on 87 minutes to clinch all three points for the Londoners to make it eight wins from their last 10 games.

At the DW Stadium, a defiant Liverpool side rallied around embattled striker Luis Suarez but the Merseysiders were held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by Wigan.

Suarez, banned for eight matches on Tuesday after being found guilty of racially abusing Manchester United's Patrice Evra, lined up for Liverpool but

RESULTS	
Aston Villa 1 (Albrighton 54)	Arsenal 2 (Van Persie 17-pen, Benayoun 87)
Everton 1 (Osman 60)	Swansea 0
Fulham 0	Manchester United 5 (Welbeck 5, Nani 28, Giggs 43, Rooney 88, Berbatov 90)
Manchester City 3 (Aguero 29, 54, Johnson 36)	Stoke 0
Newcastle 2 (Ba 34, 81)	West Brom 3 (Odemwngie 20, McAuley 44, Scharner 85)
QPR 2 (Helguson 63, Mackie 67)	Sunderland 3 (Bendtner 19, Sessegnon 53, Brown 89)

was unable to break the deadlock as the Reds were left ruing a missed penalty.

Wigan goalkeeper Ali Al-Habsi was the hero for the Latics, saving Charlie Adam's spot-kick to help earn Roberto Martinez's side a precious point.

It was a disappointing result for Kenny Dalglish's team, who had warmed up wearing "Suarez 7" shirts in a show of support for the Uruguayan.

At St James Park, Newcastle's Senegalese striker Demba Ba maintained his phenomenal Premier League goalscoring record but it was not enough to prevent the Magpies crashing to a 3-2 defeat against West Brom.

The Baggies went ahead on 20 minutes, Peter Odemwngie supplying a cool finish after a defence-splitting through ball from Chris Brunt.

Newcastle got back on level terms in the 34th minute, Ba grabbing his 12th of the season with a curling free-kick.

West Brom were back in front on the stroke of half-time however, Gareth McAuley nodding in from close range.

Ba looked to have earned a point for Newcastle with his second on 81 minutes but West Brom's Austrian midfielder Paul Scharner snatched victory with an 85th-minute winner.

Elsewhere Wednesday, Wes Brown was the hero for Sunderland as Martin O'Neill's side overcame a brave second half fightback to pip Queens Park Rangers 3-2 at Loftus Road.

QPR looked dead and buried midway through the second half after goals from Nicklas Bendtner and Stephane Sessegnon put the Black Cats 2-0 up. But two goals in four minutes from Heidar Helguson and Jamie Mackie looked to have given QPR a share of the points at 2-2 only for Brown to pop up with the winner on 89 minutes.

At Goodison Park, Leon Osman scored the game's only goal as Everton pipped newly promoted Swansea 1-0.

Arsenal postpone Wolves match

AFP, London

Arsenal have postponed their Boxing Day Premier League fixture with Wolves after threatened industrial action on London's Underground system, the club announced Thursday.

The Gunners were due to face Wolves as part of the traditional programme on December 26 but have now shunted the fixture back 24 hours as London braces for travel disruption from the strike.

Terry in hot water

AFP, London



England football captain John Terry faces the "battle of his life" after prosecutors said he would face criminal charges over claims he racially abused QPR defender Anton Ferdinand, Britain's press said Thursday.

Wednesday's announcement, which came a day after Liverpool striker Luis Suarez was banned for eight matches for racially abusing Manchester United defender Patrice Evra, proves, however, that British football is taking a lead in dealing with racism, Fleet Street agreed.

"In the age of the celebrity footballer, few players have commanded more coverage... than John Terry," said the Independent's Sam Wallace.

"But the charges laid against him yesterday by the Crown Prosecution Service represent the battle of his life."

All newspapers were in agreement that Terry would never captain England again if found guilty, and Wallace also suggested it would dash his long-term dream of managing Chelsea, his domestic club.

Popular tabloid The Sun said the ruling was a "nightmare" for the Football Association (FA), particularly if the matter is adjourned when Terry appears in court on February 1, four weeks before England play the Netherlands in a friendly match.

In that event, the paper's chief football writer Shaun Custis called on Terry to "do the decent thing and step aside".

"There need be no presumption of guilt," he added. "It would simply be best for the national game."

The Times editorial said the action taken over Terry and Suarez had sent "a very clear message that racism where proven will not be tolerated in British football".

"Certainly compared with the appalling treatment that black players often receive in Italy and some of the Eastern European countries, England is a civilised place to play," it added.

The Guardian also ran a positive editorial, arguing that the attention given to the two cases showed how far the game had come but that Liverpool and Chelsea should have been more cautious in lending their blanket support to the two players.

"Absolutely no one believes that racism is a more common scourge in English football today than it was a generation ago," it said.

"English football has worked hard to combat racism. But all that good work can be undone by one short-sighted act," it added.

"Neither Liverpool nor Chelsea are therefore right to say that they will support their players, whatever the outcome."

The two incidents also highlighted the "complex and contradictory history of racism in English football", Times chief sports writer Simon Barnes argued.

Throughout their history, English football grounds have been "breeding grounds for pestilence" and "places where racial hatred could be hymned to the skies without restraint or rebuke," he wrote.

However, at the same time the game helped lower racial tensions across the whole country and created taboos which were later adopted in all walks of society, he added.

"Racial insults were once routine: now they're so shocking that the England captain must go to court."

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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Napoli forward Edinson Cavani controls the ball during their Serie A clash against Genoa at the San Paolo Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP