

Chelsea lose ground

AFP, London

England captain John Terry produced a typical block to spare Chelsea defeat in a 1-1 draw against Tottenham Hotspur in his first match since he was charged by UK prosecutors with racial abuse.

Chelsea centre-back Terry blocked a goalbound shot from Emmanuel Adebayor in stoppage time to ensure a point for the visitors at White Hart Lane on Thursday.

The draw left Spurs third in the Premier League table, two points in front of their London rivals, after Adebayor's opener was cancelled out by an equaliser from Chelsea striker Daniel Sturridge.

And it meant Spurs were nine points adrift of leaders Manchester City and Chelsea 11 shy of the table-toppers.

Tottenham got off to an ideal start as Togo international Adebayor took advantage of Chelsea skipper Terry's slipshod defending eight minutes into the match by slotting home before Sturridge levelled midway through the first half.

Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech made some crucial saves late in the game, as Tottenham desperately searched for a winner.

The build-up centred around Terry, charged on Wednesday with racially abusing QPR defender Anton Ferdinand during Chelsea's loss at Loftus Road in October.

Terry -- promised the full backing of manager Andre Villas-Boas -- was booed by the bulk of Spurs fans as he began his pre-match warm-up, but was applauded by the away contingent.

He was jeered again as he led Chelsea out ahead of kick-off -- and with every touch of the ball. But apart from his mistake to let in Adebayor, he delivered an assured performance.

Chelsea had failed to beat Spurs on their last five visits to White Hart Lane and the hosts had them on the back foot from the first whistle.

And after seven minutes Spurs were ahead -- and Terry was partly at fault, after Sandro took the ball off Sturridge in midfield and sent Bale on a run down the left.

Gareth Bale sped toward the byline and just before crossing the ball into the box, Terry peeled off Adebayor to give him enough space to meet the Wales star's centre for a close range tap-in.

Juan Mata came close to levelling for Chelsea three minutes later, but his stinging shot was palmed into Sturridge's path by Brad Friedel and the Blues striker spooned the rebound over the bar.

Sturridge made amends in the 23rd minute as he turned in Ashley Cole's cross for Chelsea's equaliser.

The goal was met with vehement protests from the home players as the England left-back had appeared to have handled in the build-up.

Five minutes later Didier Drogba came close to firing Chelsea ahead, as he acrobatically controlled Jose Bosingwa's wayward cross, chesting the ball down before volleying against the post.

Chelsea were forced into a reshuffle at the back on the half hour as Branislav Ivanovic came off with what looked like a thigh injury.

Their injury problems were compounded soon afterwards, when Nigeria international Jon Obi Mikel limped off the field.

After the break Chelsea continued to dominate and Ramires ran onto Drogba's through-ball only to be denied by Friedel.

Tottenham had the ball in the net two minutes before the hour mark as Adebayor headed in William Gallas's flick from Luka Modric's free kick, but the 'goal' was ruled out for offside.

A rare mistake from Ledley King in the 73rd minute almost resulted in a second for Sturridge after the Tottenham defender's weak headed clearance fell to the striker, but Friedel was able to keep the ball out.

Cech saved his side from a loss six minutes from time when he managed to tip over Sandro's shot, which took a wicked deflection off Raul Meireles's heel.

And in injury time the Chelsea goalkeeper managed a full-stretch save to tip wide Adebayor's shot from just inside the area.



Tottenham Hotspur striker Emmanuel Adebayor (L) celebrates his goal with teammate Gareth Bale during their Premier League encounter against Chelsea at White Hart Lane on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Toure Africa's best

Football

AFP, Johannesburg

Ivory Coast midfielder Yaya Toure was named 2011 CAF Footballer of the Year in Ghana Thursday just 24 hours after helping Manchester City defeat Stoke City 3-0 and stay top of the English Premier League.

Toure, a physically imposing 28-year-old younger brother of City defender Kolo, finished ahead of Ghana and Marseille midfielder Andre Ayew and Mali and Barcelona midfielder Seydou Keita in a vote among Africa-based national coaches.

Title holder and Cameroon and Anzhi Makhachkala striker Samuel Eto'o was eliminated Wednesday from the race to be crowned the best footballer on the continent along with Senegal and Lille striker Moussa Sow.

Yaya has been a key figure in the rise of Manchester City from Premier League also-rans to title contenders and FA Cup winners with the Ivorian scoring the goals that beat Manchester United in the semi-finals and Stoke City in the final.

He was also a pivotal figure as Ivory Coast finished the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers as the only country with a perfect record having defeated Rwanda, Burundi and Benin home and away.

Toure began his professional career 10 years ago with Belgian outfit Beveren and also played in the Ukraine,



PHOTO: AFP

Ivory Coast and Manchester City midfielder Yaya Toure poses with his African Footballer of the Year award in Accra on Thursday.

Greece, France and for global giants Barcelona before moving to north-west England.

He is only the second Ivorian after Chelsea striker Didier Drogba to win the highest CAF individual award and thanked his family and City team-mates during a short speech at State House in the Ghana capital Accra.

Ayew was hoping to emulate famous father Abedi 'Pele' Ayew, winner of the award three consecutive times from 1991 and a member of the Marseille team that lifted the 1993 UEFA Champions League.

After loan spells with several French clubs, 21-year-old Ayew has established a first-team place with Marseille and scored the equaliser in a heroic triumph at Borussia Dortmund this month that secured a Champions League last-16 place.

He helped Ghana qualify impressively for the 2012 Cup of Nations, which kicks off next month in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, and his turn will surely come to be crowned king of African football.

While not a regular first choice amid the galaxy of stars at reigning World, European and Spanish champions Barcelona, Keita often appears as a second-half substitute with telling effect.

He fell out with Mali coach Alain Giresse only to make peace at a crucial stage of the Cup of Nations qualifiers and helped the 'Eagles' secure a third consecutive appearance at the African showcase.

Iniesta out for 2 weeks

AFP, Madrid

Andres Iniesta has been sidelined for two weeks after picking up an injury in Barcelona's 9-0 massacre of third-tier minnows Hospitalet, the club said Friday.

"Iniesta will out of action for 15 days after sustaining a muscle injury," Barcelona said in a statement on the club website after the domestic King's Cup competition match Thursday night.

The 27-year-old international midfielder tore a muscle in his left thigh when he collided with the Hospitalet keeper, Carlos Craviotto, in the 27th minute of the lopsided clash, it said.

The injury means Iniesta will miss Barcelona's last-16 away game in the King's Cup as well as their league fixture with Espanyol on January 7 or 8, the team said.

Barca has already been hit by an injury to 30-year-old David Villa who suffered a fractured shin during their December 15 Club World Cup semifinal victory over Al Sadd in Japan.

Villa has had an operation on the leg but is expected to be out for at least five months, putting the rest of the season and his chances of playing for Spain at Euro 2012 in serious peril.

Cameroon pays Algeria \$500K

AFP, Yaounde

Algeria have received \$500,000 in compensation after the Samuel Eto'o-led Cameroon players' strike which forced the cancellation of a friendly between the two countries.

The payment, confirmed on Friday by the Cameroon Football Federation (FECAFOOT), comes in the same week that Eto'o was handed a 15-match international ban for his role as ringleader in the action.

Cameroon were due to wrap up a hectic friendlies schedule against Algeria on November 15.

But Eto'o and his team-mates claimed they were not paid money due to them by FECAFOOT and the fixture had to be scrapped, with Algeria initially claiming \$1 million compensation for lost revenue.

Jones boost for Fergie

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson received a welcome boost on Friday after it was confirmed Phil Jones had not suffered a fractured cheekbone against Fulham.

England international Jones was forced to leave the field after 20 minutes of Wednesday's 5-0 rout of the Cottagers following a heavy aerial collision.

Jones underwent a scan on Thursday and it had been feared the defender had suffered a broken cheekbone in the clash.

However after no serious damage was revealed Jones could now be fit to face Wigan at Old Trafford in Monday's Boxing Day programme.

"Phil Jones should be okay for Monday," Ferguson said. "We feared the worst but there is no break."

However Ferguson revealed Ashley Young faced "a few weeks" on the sidelines after suffering a knee injury against Fulham. Defender Rio Ferdinand is also likely to miss Monday's game after injuring a foot in training.

"It's not so good about Ashley Young because he's going to be out for a few weeks. We're still waiting for some of the bleeding to go away, which is quite extensive at the moment," Ferguson said.

Ferguson praised his squad for taking the club's injury problems in their stride.

"The squad at the moment has handled the situation quite well and their form has been really good so I'm pleased with that

Kenny defends Liverpool

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish on Friday defended the club's actions in the wake of Luis Suarez' ban for racist abuse, insisting they had not "caused trouble."

Liverpool issued a strongly worded statement attacking the ruling on Tuesday while the club's players also released a statement of their own announcing they were firmly behind the Uruguayan.

Dalglish and Liverpool's players also wore t-shirts with images of Suarez on them ahead of Wednesday's draw with Wigan, a move that was criticised by anti-racism campaigners.

However Dalglish remained steadfast on Friday.

"The statement couldn't have caused anyone any trouble and I don't think the players have caused any trouble with the FA either by their statement or support by their T-shirts," said the Scot.

"If we are not in any trouble we will leave it at that before we do get in any trouble."

Dalglish meanwhile said Suarez had been moved by the support from the club and his team-mates.

"He's been quite emotional and very grateful," added Dalglish.

"I don't think it is ever a disappointment when the people you work for give you their undivided support and I think that is the least he deserves."

Liverpool will only decide whether to appeal the ruling once they have received the full written verdict of the disciplinary panel.

"Most of the people have had their say, we've had our say but we will wait for the judgement and take it from there - but it won't be tomorrow," he said.

and we're looking like scoring goals again which is terrific," Ferguson said.

Ferguson meanwhile declined to comment on the aftermath of the Luis Suarez affair following the Liverpool player's eight-match ban for racially abusing Patrice Evra.

"I have nothing to say about that at all," Ferguson said.

The United manager has also criticised Blackburn supporters' treatment of their manager Steve Kean.

The Rovers manager has faced constant protests from fans as his team have slumped to the bottom of the Premier League table under unpopular owners Venky's.

The abuse was so bad that Everton manager David Moyes walked out of Rovers' 2-1 defeat to Bolton on Tuesday in disgust.

United host Blackburn in the game after Wigan and Ferguson has attempted to contact Kean to offer his support.

"I haven't seen anything as bad as that and I fear for the lad. But he's held his dignity fantastically well," Ferguson said.

"I've seen his press conferences and he seems to be in complete control of himself and the events and it's remarkable under that kind of pressure that he can maintain his dignity the way he has done."

"I tried to phone him the other day but he was probably right keeping his phone off! But it's terrible to watch that."

"It doesn't say a lot for society these days when you see that kind of behaviour from fans. We're all emotional and we all like to see our team win but for goodness' sake, give the lad a break."

Arsenal suffer Gibbs blow

AFP, London

Arsenal suffered a fresh injury blow on Friday after confirmation that Kieran Gibbs faces a further month on the sidelines following surgery on a groin problem.

Gibbs has been out of action since October with a hernia problem but had been targeting the Christmas programme for his return only to suffer a setback during his recovery.

"Kieran Gibbs has had surgery on his left groin and he will be out for a month," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said.

"It was a blow, but first what is important is if he cannot play you have to make the decision that we had to make yesterday and have surgery for him."

The injury depletes Arsenal's options at a time when fullbacks Andre Santos and Bacary Sagna are both sidelined.

"Hopefully it will only be one month because Santos will not come back before March," Wenger added.

Sagna is on the mend after suffering a broken leg earlier this season, with Wenger saying Friday he hoped to have the defender back by the end of January.

Romario doesn't rate Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Former World Cup winner Romario believes the current Brazil team risk failing to get past the first round of the 2014 World Cup if their form does not improve.

In a little over two years Brazil will host the football extravaganza for the first time but Romario -- now a politician with Brazil's Socialist Party (PSB) -- believes they have little chance of realistically aiming for a sixth triumph.

"If Brazil keep on playing the football they're playing right now, they risk not getting past the first round," Romario was quoted as saying in Friday's edition of O Globo.

Brazil is currently in a race against time, and under pressure from football's world governing body FIFA, to have stadia and infrastructure ready in time for the tournament.

Romario, a controversial figure on and off the park when he played as a striker for Brazil and a number of top clubs in Europe and South America, has been critical of both the World Cup organisers and of FIFA.

"FIFA has been trying to override our sovereignty, they want to tell us how to run the country. There are still deputies who think as I do," added Romario.

At the beginning of November, FIFA warned Brazil to speed up their preparations to host the World Cup and reluctantly accepted to issue half-price tickets for students and those over 60 years of age.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Who is Bangladesh's sports personality of 2011?
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DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh League
Bangladesh Police v Ctg Abahani
Time: 2:30pm
BKSP v Bangladesh Army
Time: 5:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu