

It's always Balotelli

AFP, Manchester



Mario Balotelli settled an extraordinary Premier League battle when his 94th minute penalty earned leaders Manchester City a 3-2 victory over Tottenham here Sunday.

The Italian substitute won the spot kick himself, after a clear foul by the veteran Spurs defender Ledley King, and calmly wrong-footed goalkeeper Brad Friedel as he converted into the bottom left-hand corner.

To make matters worse for Spurs, who now trail City by eight points, seconds earlier they had looked like scoring a winner of their own.

Gareth Bale sprinted away from the home defence and crossed for Jermain Defoe who, at full stretch, could only turn the ball wide of the target.

And the deciding goal capped a remarkable second half which featured four goals in nine minutes - Samir Nasri and Joleon Lescott for the home team before Defoe and Bale brought Spurs level.

After 55 minutes, David Silva collected the ball just inside the Spurs half and suddenly found the necessary space to advance and thread through a pass for Nasri to con-

vert an unstoppable first-time shot from just inside the area.

Within minutes, Silva had won a corner, taken on the left by Nasri and flicked on by Edin Dzeko at the near post.

The ball was met by Lescott who tussled with Scott Parker and converted into an open goal in the process of falling over.

A long clearance from Younes Kaboul on the hour forced centre half Stefan Savic into a disastrous backwards header which was intercepted by Defoe who controlled the ball on his chest as he rounded Joe Hart and rolled the ball into an empty goal.

It took all of four more minutes for Spurs to draw level as Aaron Lennon ran at Micah Richards before squaring to the unmarked Bale who placed a magnificent 22-yard, left-foot shot over Hart and into the top right-hand corner of the City goal.

It was a stunning sequence of events after a disappointing first half. The stakes, and the tension, were high in the opening exchanges with Bale, operating on both flanks in the first half, appearing capable of creating problems.

In the second half, City threatened from a series of corners before a 25-yarder from Luka Modric drifted over, Gael Clichy was forced to head over with Lennon about to connect with a Bale cross.



Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli scores the winner from the penalty spot in their pulsating Premier League clash against Tottenham at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cup starts with shocks

Football

AGENCIES, Malabo

Lowly Equatorial Guinea stunned Libya and Zambia upset Senegal as the African Nations Cup began with surprises as well as tear gas outside the stadium in Bata on Saturday.

Co-hosts Equatorial Guinea, whose starting line-up consisted entirely of players born abroad, beat Libya 1-0 thanks to a late strike by former Real Madrid player Javier Balboa in the first-half of a double bill.

Zambia then scored twice in the first quarter of the game on their way to a 2-1 win over Senegal, back in the tournament after astonishingly missing out in 2010.

The tournament is already without defending champions Egypt, Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa, who all failed to qualify.

Off the field, it was a less happy day for Equatorial Guinea, sharing the tournament with Gabon, as police used tear gas against fans trying to get into

the ground.

Reuters photographs showed police firing tear gas to control supporters who apparently became impatient at delays getting into the stadium. There were no reports of injuries.

There was further embarrassment when most of the crowd left after Equatorial Guinea's match, leaving Zambia and Senegal to play in a half-empty stadium.

Organisers will be hoping for less trouble on Sunday when Ivory Coast meet Sudan and Burkina Faso play Angola in the capital Malabo in Group B.

The first match kicked off seven minutes late following the opening ceremony and a speech by President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mbasogo, which lasted several minutes with the teams lined up and ready for kicked off.

Equatorial Guinea's win over Libya was a remarkable performance for a team ranked 151st in the FIFA rankings, although their success could also ignite controversy over their naturalised players.

Their starting line-up consisted of five players born in Spain, two in Ivory Coast and one each born in Cameroon, Cape Verde, Brazil and Liberia.

Some players qualified through their parents but there are doubts over whether the naturalised players have lived in the country for five years as required by FIFA rules.

The co-hosts, whose Brazilian coach Gilson Paulo took over only three weeks ago, created more chances and won the game when Balboa burst through and side-footed a curling effort past Libya goalkeeper Samir About. In the process, he swelled their bank accounts after picking up the \$1 million bonus offered by a son of the country's president.

There was more to come in the second match as Zambia burst into an early lead and they weathered a second half fightback to upset the odds.

Swiss-based forward Emmanuel Mayuka headed the opener after 12 minutes followed by a breakaway goal for Rainford Kalaba nine minutes later.

Schalke in dreamland

REUTERS, Berlin



Schalke 04 joined Bayern Munich at the top of the table after easing past VfB Stuttgart 3-1 on Saturday to collect their fourth straight Bundesliga win.

Hosts Schalke took a third-minute lead through Joel Matip's close-range effort and Kyriakos Papadopoulos rose above two defenders at the near post to drill home a header in the 57th.

Teenager Julian Draxler finished off a quick passing move involving Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Raul to grab the third goal 10 minutes from time before lacklustre Stuttgart notched a late consolation through Shinji Okazaki.

Bayern are top on goal difference despite slumping to a 3-1 defeat at Borussia Moenchengladbach on Friday,

the first game since the league's winter break.

Gladbach are third on 36 points, one off the pace and two ahead of fourth-placed Borussia Dortmund who visit Hamburg SV on Sunday.

"I was surprised by how strongly we started," Schalke coach Huub Stevens told reporters. "Tactically we played a very strong game. We now have as many points as Bayern and it is nice to dream."

The only sour note for Schalke was the head injury sustained by captain Benedikt Hoewedes.

He could be out for some time after colliding with team mate Marko Hoeger just before the break and being taken to hospital.

VfL Wolfsburg coach Felix Magath fielded four of his eight new signings in the 1-0 victory over Cologne but it was youth academy product Sebastian Polter who headed in the only goal from a Christian Traesch cross.

RESULTS

Schalke 04 3 (Matip 3, Papadopoulos 57, Draxler 80) VfB Stuttgart 1 (Okazaki 87)
Nuremberg 2 (Esswein 43, Maroh 85) Hertha Berlin 0
Freiburg 1 (Ginter 88) Augsburg 0
Hoffenheim 0 Hanover 96 0
Wolfsburg 1 (Polter 78) Cologne 0
Kaiserslautern 0 Werder Bremen 0

Juve win as Totti breaks record

REUTERS, Rome



Second-half goals from Stephan Lichtsteiner and Emanuele Giaccherini sent Juventus four points clear in Serie A after they defeated Atalanta 2-0 in Bergamo on Saturday to finish the first half of the season unbeaten.

In the day's other match, Francesco Totti struck twice to set a league scoring record as resurgent AS Roma climbed to sixth by crushing Cesena 5-1.

"I will play until I'm physically unable to do what I want," the 35-year-old Totti told the Mediaset Premium TV channel.

"If we continue to play like this we'll go far. We're enjoying our football and pleasing fans too," he added after claiming his 211th goal for Roma, a league record for a single club.

In Bergamo, Swiss defender Lichtsteiner nodded in Andrea Pirlo's brilliant pass after 55 minutes to give Juve a deserved lead before substitute Giaccherini's volley made the game safe eight minutes from time.

Atalanta remained sixth from bottom while the win gave Juve 41 points from 19 games, four ahead of AC Milan who visit bottom club Novara on Sunday.

At the Stadio Olimpico, captain Totti struck after 34 seconds before volleying his second from an Erik Lamela pass.

Striker Fabio Borini grabbed the third in the ninth minute as Roma went on the rampage.

Third from bottom Cesena pulled a goal back through Brazilian Eder after 59 minutes but defender Juan (62) and Miralem Pjanic (70) clinched Roma's fourth straight league win as they chalked up 30 points from 18 games.

RESULTS

Atalanta 0 Juventus 2 (Lichtsteiner 55, Giaccherini 82)
Roma 5 (Totti 1, 8, Borini 8, Juan 62, Pjanic 70) Cesena 1 (Eder 58)



Juventus midfielder Emanuele Giaccherini shoots to score against Atalanta during their Serie A clash in Bergamo on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

No one can capitalise

REUTERS, London



Chelsea were held and Newcastle United and Liverpool humbled on a day of surprises in the Premier League on Saturday when the lesser lights enjoyed some unexpected success against the more established teams.

Chelsea drew 0-0 at Norwich City, Newcastle crashed 5-2 at Fulham and Liverpool, who had beaten Bolton Wanderers in their last 10 league meetings over the past five years, lost 3-1 at the Reebok Stadium as the home side climbed out of the bottom three for the first time since mid-September.

There was also a notable win for Queens Park Rangers, who moved out of the relegation zone after beating bottom side Wigan Athletic 3-1 to record their first league win in 10 games and their first three points

under new coach Mark Hughes.

With four of the top five not playing until Sunday - when leaders Manchester City host third-placed Tottenham Hotspur and second-placed Manchester United visit fifth-placed Arsenal - Chelsea had a chance to close the gap but missed out at Norwich.

The west London side remain fourth, five points behind Harry Redknapp's high-flying Tottenham team.

Chelsea coach Andre Villas-Boas said his side did not do well enough at Norwich despite dominating much of the game as they were thwarted by a fine goalkeeping display by John Ruddy.

Chelsea's Spain striker Fernando Torres, their 50 million pounds signing from Liverpool a year ago, failed to find the net for the 17th successive match for club and country.

Chelsea also lost England

midfielder Frank Lampard with a suspected torn calf muscle in the first half.

Villas-Boas, who delayed giving a debut to England defender Gary Cahill, the club's new signing from Bolton, said Chelsea should have done better and a point was not enough.

RESULTS

Bolton 3 (Davies 4, Reo-Coker 29, Steinson 50) Liverpool 1 (Bellamy 37)
Everton 1 (Cahill 24) Blackburn 1 (Goodwillie 72)
Fulham 5 (Murphy 52-pen, Dempsey 59, 65, 89, Zamora 68-pen) Newcastle 2 (Guthrie 43, Ben Arfa 85)
Norwich 0 Chelsea 0
QPR 3 (Helguson 33-pen, Buzsaky 45, Smith 81) Wigan 1 (Rodallega 66)
Stoke 1 (Jerome 86) **West Brom 2** (Morrison 35, Dorrans 90)
Sunderland 2 (Sessegnon 14, Gardner 85) Swansea 0
Wolves 2 (Kightly 21, Edwards 31) **Aston Villa 3** (Bent 11-pen, Keane 51, 84)

"It was a frustrating day because we were dominant, particularly in the second half, but we just couldn't find the net," he told Sky Sports.

"I thought John Ruddy was magnificent for them and for the coordination of his defence, but for our progress in the league a point is not enough."

Regarding another goalless Torres appearance, he added: "He had good chances and to have good chances you have to position yourself well, and with a bit more luck he will find the back of the net."

In some respects Chelsea's west London neighbours Fulham did them a favour by crushing Newcastle who stayed in sixth place on 36 points, five behind Chelsea.

Kagawa stays put

Football

AFP, Berlin

Japan winger Shinji Kagawa has said he sees his future being with German champions Borussia Dortmund and any reports of a move to European giants Manchester United or AC Milan are just speculation.

"Right now, it's just about me being successful here with Dortmund," Kagawa told German newspaper Die Welt on Sunday having been linked to both European teams in the German and Japanese media in recent months.

"There are rumours (about Manchester United or AC Milan) again and again, but I have no information about that. The talk leaves me cold."

The 22-year-old joined Dortmund in 2010 from Japan side Cerezo Osaka for just 350,000 euros, but after helping Dortmund win the German title last season, his market value has soared to around 14 million euros.

He has a contract at Dortmund until 2013 and is back in form after missing the first few months of 2011 after breaking his foot while playing for Japan at the Asian Cup last January.

Falcao fires Atletico

AFP, Madrid

A hat-trick from 40 million-euro signing Radamel Falcao helped Atletico Madrid to their first away win of the La Liga season as they beat Real Sociedad 4-0 on Saturday.

Colombian international Falcao put Atletico ahead after just three minutes from the penalty spot following a handball from Vadim Demidov.

After the break Adrian Lopez extended the lead at the second attempt after the keeper blocked his header.

Falcao lobbed the keeper after spotting him off his line with eight minutes to go and then fired in his third in the final minute taking his sea-

RESULTS

Racing Santander 1 (Stuani 13)
Getafe 2 (Gavilan 26, Miku 82)
Espanyol 3 (Baena 26, Verdu 45+1-pen, Fonte 80) Granada 0
Real Sociedad 0 **Atletico Madrid 4** (Falcao 3-pen, 83, 90+1, Adrian 47)
Real Betis 1 (Etxebarria Urkiaga 26) Sevilla 1 (Negredo 41)

son's league tally to 14 goals, just five behind Lionel Messi.

"This is the best win so far," said Simeone.

Espanyol moved up to fifth as they stretched their unbeaten run to five games with a 3-0 victory over struggling Granada.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Can BPL take Bangladesh cricket forward?

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Fourth Test, Day 1
Live from 6:00am (Tuesday)



Bangladesh A v England Lions
Second Twenty20
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur
Match Start at 12:00pm
Bangladesh U-19s v England U-19s
Second One-day
Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong