

Sturridge saves Blues blushes

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas' problems mounted on Saturday after his side laboured to a 1-1 draw with lower league Birmingham in their FA Cup fifth round tie.

Daniel Sturridge headed home a second-half equaliser to save Chelsea's blushes at a restive Stamford Bridge after David Murphy had fired Birmingham into a shock lead on 20 minutes.

Villas-Boas' position has come under scrutiny following reports of a training ground mutiny by his senior players after last weekend's Premier League defeat against Everton at Goodison Park.

His team have now won just one game in their last six games across all competitions and Villas-Boas was forced to watch as his side were booted off the field following another unconvincing display.

Birmingham's opener owed everything to poor Chelsea defending from a set piece.

Nathan Redmond's corner eluded a clutch of blue shirts to bounce across the six-yard box and found Murphy at the back post who prodded home for 1-0.

Chelsea were presented with a golden chance to equalise within seconds, when from the restart Wade Elliott conceded a penalty with a clumsy hack on Ramires.

Juan Mata stepped up to take the spot-kick but Colin Doyle in the Birmingham goal guessed correctly and parried the Spaniard's shot onto the post to preserve the visitors lead.

Doyle frustrated Chelsea once more on 34 minutes, the Birmingham keeper parrying away David Luiz's free-kick as the Brazilian's curling effort homed in on the top corner.



Chelsea striker Daniel Sturridge (2nd from R) scores the equaliser during their FA Cup 5th round tie against Birmingham City at Stamford Bridge yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hapless Inter

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan were jeered off the pitch by their own fans at the San Siro on Friday after their latest humiliation, a 3-0 defeat to lowly Bologna.

This latest defeat, their fifth in six winless games and also the fifth time in that period they've failed to score, came hot on the heels of a home defeat to rock-bottom Novara.

Over those six games Inter have conceded 15 goals, scoring just four times.

This run, which included a Cup defeat to Napoli, has badly hit their Champions League chances, leaving them down in sixth and six points behind third-placed Lazio, who have played a game less.

To make matters worse they were also leap-frogged by Napoli, who won 3-0 at Fiorentina.

Veteran Marco Di Vaio scored a first half

RESULTS

Fiorentina 0 Napoli 3 (Cavani 3, 55, Lavezzi 90)
Inter Milan 0 Bologna 3 (Di Vaio 37, 38, Acquafresca 85)

twice within a minute from defensive errors.

On 37 minutes Inter's entire defence got drawn to their right as Bologna attacked down that side only for Diego Perez to pick out Di Vaio unmarked at the back post.

The forward coolly cut inside Yuto Nagatomo's desperate last-ditch sliding tackle and then shot home.

And a minute later Andrea Ranocchia switched off when taking down a long ball on his chest, allowing Di Vaio to steal the ball from him and go on to finish calmly.

Inter had a half chance at the end of the half but Marco Faraoni snatched his shot and pulled it wide.

In the second period Nagatomo set up Forlan but he couldn't get any power on his shot and Gillet managed to get across to stop the ball crossing the line.

Five minutes from time Ranocchia was again guilty of weak defending leaving Nagatomo with a one-on-two and Acquafresca surged past him before finishing low to Julio Cesar's right.

Edinson Cavani was the two-goal hero while Ezequiel Lavezzi added the injury-time cherry on the cake to give Napoli the perfect preparation for their Champions League clash against Chelsea on Tuesday.

Napoli were off to a dream start after just three minutes as Marek Hamsik played in Cavani who fired home.

And they should have had a second when Christian Maggio rose unmarked to meet a corner but his header crashed back off the bar.

It wasn't all one-way traffic as Cesare Natali rose to meet a corner at the other end only to hit the outside of the post with his header.

Ten minutes into the second half Napoli did at last kill off the game as Hamsik again put the Uruguay forward in beyond the backline and his finish was clinical.



Inter Milan playmaker Wesley Sneijder is dejected during their Serie A encounter against Bologna at San Siro on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

More goals needed

AFP, Rome



Antonio Conte says his team needs to score more goals if they are to wrest the Serie A title away from AC Milan this season.

Juventus trail the rossoneri by a point, although they have a game in hand, ahead of the visit of Catania on Saturday.

And following two goalless draws in a point, Conte wants his team to start finding the net more regularly.

Juve have managed just 12 goals in 11 away games this season and overall have scored 12 goals less than Milan.

Only two teams in the top half of the table have scored fewer than Juve, although the Old Lady of Turin have the best defence in the league.

"We're managing to play with the

same attitude at home and away but then looking at the statistics, I see that we need to try to score more goals," said the coach.

"I've been talking about improvement, a work in progress and building a foundation since the beginning of the year.

"This house has grown very quickly, given that after only a few months, people are talking about us as Milan's competition.

"That fills me with pride and satisfaction. It's the first time in their careers for many of my players that they have this ambition (to win the league).

"Those who've won before known only too well that there's a path to take. The more you hurry, the stronger are the gusts of wind.

"We need to show we can maintain certain levels of competitiveness."

Conte believes it is only a matter of time before the goals start to flow again, likening his side to Inter Milan striker Diego Milito, who has re-discovered the route to goal after a dry spell earlier this season.

"We're the team that shoots the most and alongside Milan and Roma, we're the team that has the most possession in the opposition's half," added Conte.

"In terms of incisiveness and goal threat, we're the top team in Italy.

"These facts show that the team is functioning. It's true we're struggling to score but these are moments.

"Think about Milito and his dry period and now he's returned to being the amazing goalscorer we all knew.

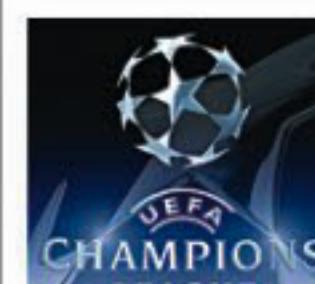
"It doesn't take much to unlock yourselves and finalise everything. I have maximum faith in my players, who are doing fantastic things."



Anzhi Makhachkala's new Dutch manager Guus Hiddink shakes hands with Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos (L) before a team practice session in Belek on Friday.

Ibra's advice to Van Persie

AFP, London



AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic on Saturday urged Arsenal captain Robin van Persie to jump ship if he wants to win anything.

Van Persie's side were thrashed 4-0 by Ibrahimovic's Milan in the San Siro on Wednesday, to effectively end the London club's Champions League hopes.

The Dutch international has almost single-handedly kept Arsenal afloat this season and Ibrahimovic warned that if he wants to win anything, he needs to leave London, just as Barcelona's Cesc Fabregas did last summer.

"When you don't win anything for years, people understand why you leave like Cesc Fabregas," the Swede told The Sun.

"Football is all about winning. If you don't win you want to go. I don't know Robin personally but I remember him from Holland and what a talent he was - now he is complete."

"I don't know what he is thinking but I know what I would do."

"I have made a lot of moves in my life - I take it as a challenge, an adventure."

"And I have won eight titles in eight years with different clubs in different countries."

"But if you stay in one place all your life it is easy to play."

"You are at home, you are in the comfort zone."

Milan rout traumatised Wenger

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger admitted on Friday that the 4-0 Champions League rout at the hands of AC Milan, his club's heaviest European defeat, was a trauma from which he will never recover.

"It never gets out of your system because you take it with you until the last day of your life," said Wenger whose side hope to bounce back on Saturday when they travel to Sunderland in the FA Cup.

"You can find 100 explanations why we had a poor performance and an off day."

"We lost against a good Milan team, not an exceptional one. Unfortunately we were punished severely."

Suarez thanks L'pool fans

AFP, Montevideo

Luis Suarez on Friday thanked Liverpool's fans and those of his former club Ajax for their support during the recent racism row engulfing the Uruguayan player.

The Liverpool striker had to apologise for refusing to shake hands with Patrice Evra after coming face to face with Manchester United's captain for the first time since being given an eight-match ban for racially abusing the Frenchman at Anfield in October.

"I want to say thanks for the great support that the Liverpool's fans have given me in these last days," Suarez wrote on Twitter.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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What to WATCH

ESPN & STAR Cricket

Australia v India
Tri-Series, 7th Match
Live from 9:20pm

NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa
Second T20I
Live from 12:00pm

Channel 9

BPL T20
Dhaka v Khulna
Live from 2:00pm
Barisal v Sylhet
Live from 6:30pm

TEN Action

Serie A
Genoa v Cagliari
Live From 7:55pm
La Liga

Sporting Gijon v Atletico Madrid
Live From 10:55pm

NEO Sports

Serie A
Cesena v AC Milan
Live From 8:00pm
Bundesliga

DAY'S EVENT

BPL T20
Dhaka v Khulna

Live from 2:00pm
Barisal v Sylhet

Live from 6:30pm

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury