

## Van Persie talks on hold

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Robin van Persie says contract talks with the Gunners are on hold until the end of the season.

The Dutch star, writing in the official match programme for Sunday's clash with Tottenham, disclosed: "There have been a lot of stories, generally contradictory ones, about my contract situation recently so I'd like to make it clear.

"There's nothing complicated or sinister - the club and I have both agreed to speak at the end of the season and see how things stand. The boss, Ivan Gazidis and I are all comfortable with it.

"I need all my focus to be on football - on captaining this team, improving every day, doing extra work on the training pitch and preparing for the very busy schedule of fixtures we have.

"If I look down the list, there's not much time to sit down and think about anything else!"

## The goal that never was

REUTERS, Milan

This season's Serie A title race could ultimately be decided by the goal that never was during Saturday's top-of-the-table clash between AC Milan and Juventus.

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri was typically philosophical about the incident.

"The best thing would be not to talk and to stay quiet, divine justice can punish everyone for what they say," he said.

"If it had been 2-0, the game would have been well under control especially as we were on top.

"Maybe they painted the goal line too thick," he added.

Players from both sides agreed that the ball was in, including Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

"I wasn't aware at the time of my position or of Muntari's shot. Afterwards, I saw in the pictures that the ball had gone in," he said.

"But I must be frank and say that if I had realised, I would not have helped the referee."



AC Milan midfielder Antonio Nocerino is ecstatic after netting against Juventus in their Serie A clash at the San Siro in Milan on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# All square in game of 'goals'

AFP, Milan

A late goal by substitute Alessandro Matri earned Juventus a 1-1 draw at Serie A leaders AC Milan on Saturday in a match overshadowed by goalline controversy and which ended with players squaring up to each other.

Champions Milan, who took the lead on 14 minutes with an Antonio Nocerino strike, keep their one-point lead over their undefeated Turin rivals.

However, Juventus still have a game in hand.

The biggest talking point was the officials' failure to award Milan's Sulley Muntari a goal on 25 minutes when his goal-bound header clearly crossed the line but was not awarded.

That embarrassing error, however, was balanced out by the referee disallowing a Matri 'goal' 11 minutes from time for an offside which looked particularly harsh.

"That incident that certainly falsified the result. Either the line was drawn wrong and was a bit too big," said Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri.

"There's no need to see the replays. It was pretty obvious from all round the stadium."

Juventus coach Antonio Conte, who reportedly had a bust-up with Milan chief executive Adriano Galliani at half-time, criticised the atmosphere surrounding the match.

"This match was charged up too much by everyone beforehand. The atmosphere wasn't good for the sport. Too much happened that has nothing to do with soccer," he said.

Milan made the more aggressive start even though they were without a long list of injured players as well as suspended top-scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic and it was no surprise when Nocerino put them ahead.

The midfielder had a double helping of assistance from Juve defender Leonardo Bonucci, who created the chance by being careless with possession and then deflected the shot to give keeper Gianluigi Buffon no chance of saving it.

The hosts kept up the pressure after taking the lead and should have gone 2-0 up on 25 minutes when Ghanaian Muntari nodded in a rebound when Buffon could only parry a header by Philippe Mexes.

Replays showed the ball had entered the goal by at least half a metre before Buffon scrambled it away.

But the referee waved play on and Christian Abbiati had to produce a good save at the other end to stop Juve's Marcelo Estigarribia levelling the score.

"It was an incredible goal. Only the referee didn't see it," Milan forward Robinho told Sky television at half-time.

Milan were dominant, pressing Juve hard when they were in possession and always seeming to arrive at 50-50 balls first with Robinho

posing a constant threat with some surging runs.

Mark van Bommel came close to extending their advantage when he thumped the ball just wide three minutes before the break.

Philippe Mexes was lucky not to be sent off soon after the re-start when officials did not see him punch Marco Borriello in an off-the-ball incident.

The champions continued to make almost all the running until Juve came back into the game with Abbiati stopping a short-range effort from Fabio Quagliarella in the 69th minute.

But Matri made up for the disappointment of having his goal disallowed with the leveller seven minutes from time.

In the closing minutes, Juventus had Arturo Vidal sent-off.

### RESULTS

Genoa 2 (Palacio 78, 90+6) Parma 2 (Gobbi 6, Floccari 53)  
AC Milan 1 (Nocerino 14)  
Juventus 1 (Matri 83)

# Bender stakes claim City go five clear

AFP, Berlin



**BUNDESLIGA**

Midfielder Lars Bender staked his claim to start in Germany's friendly against France on Wednesday with two goals as Bayer Leverkusen moved up to fifth in the German league with a 2-0 win at Cologne on Saturday.

With Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund hosting Hanover, and third-placed Bayern Munich at home to Schalke on Sunday, Bender struck as Leverkusen claimed bragging rights in the Rhine derby.

Having lost 4-1 at home to Cologne last September in the league, Bender said this was pay-back time for Leverkusen.

"A derby win like that is always special. We needed to make amends after the home game," said Bender, whose team

hammered Augsburg 4-1 last weekend.

"We deserved the win at the end of the day. It was important to build on the Augsburg win."

The 22-year-old, whose twin brother, Sven, of Borussia Dortmund is also in the Germany squad to face the French in Bremen, netted either side of half-time as Leverkusen moved above Werder Bremen, who lost 1-0 to Nuremberg.

Bender's display was timely as Germany coach Joachim Loew is missing first-choice midfielders Bastian Schweinsteiger, Mario Goetze and Lukas Podolski for Wednesday's match.

"We were looking to move the ball forward from the first minute and we had the game wonderfully under control," said Leverkusen coach Robin Dutt.

"My only criticism would be that we didn't score more goals."

### RESULTS

FC Augsburg 3 (Oehrl 61, 63, Ndjeng 90+2) Hertha Berlin 0  
Mainz 05 4 (Zidan 2, Szalai 17, N. Mueller 30, Choupo-Moting 74) Kaiserslautern 0  
VfB Stuttgart 4 (Harnik 12, 82, Kazaki 21, Boulahrouz 63) Freiburg 0 (Diagne 27)  
FC Cologne 0 Bayer Leverkusen 2 (L. Bender 16, 50)  
VfL Wolfsburg 1 (Helmes 69-pen) Hoffenheim 2 (Roberto Firmino 2, Schiplock 84)  
Werder Bremen 0 Nuremberg 1 (Esswein 65)

AFP, London



**MANCHESTER CITY**

Manchester City opened up a five-point lead at the top of the Premier League with victory over Blackburn on Saturday as Chelsea beat Bolton to ease the pressure on manager Andre Villas-Boas.

With second-placed Manchester United not playing until Sunday's trip to Norwich, City took full advantage of the opportunity to crank up the pressure on their cross-town rivals by taking all three points at Eastlands.

Goals from Mario Balotelli, Sergio Agüero and substitute Edin Dzeko duly sealed a 3-0 win for Roberto Mancini's side, who extended their remarkable 100 percent record at home this season to 13 matches.

Meanwhile Chelsea boss Villas-Boas breathed a sigh of relief after watching his team down struggling Bolton 3-0 at Stamford Bridge.

Second-half goals from David Luiz, Didier

Drogba and Frank Lampard gave Villas-Boas something to smile about after a difficult week which saw the Blues pushed to the brink of elimination from the Champions League.

The victory -- Chelsea's first in five league matches -- saw Villas-Boas's side move back into the Champions League qualification places, three points ahead of fifth-placed Arsenal, who face Tottenham on Sunday.

Caretaker Wolves manager Terry Connor saw his relegation-threatened side produce a stirring fightback from 2-0 down to grab a share of the points against high-flying Newcastle at St James Park.

Wolves looked to be dead and buried at the interval after goals from Papiss Demba Cisse and Jonas Gutierrez saw the Magpies surge into a 2-0 lead.

But Matt Jarvis launched an improbable Houdini act on 50 minutes to make it 2-1 before Kevin Doyle levelled it in the 66th minute.

The hard-earned point was enough to lift Wolves out of the relegation zone at the expense of Blackburn.

### RESULTS

Chelsea 3 (Luiz 48, Drogba 61, Lampard 79) Bolton 0  
Manchester City 3 (Balotelli 30, Agüero 52, Dzeko 81) Blackburn 0  
Newcastle 2 (Cisse 6, Gutierrez 18)  
Wolves 2 (Jarvis 50, Doyle 66)  
QPR 0 Fulham 1 (Pogrebnyak 7)  
West Brom 4 (Odemwngie 3, 48, Morrison 41, Andrews 90) Sunderland 0  
Wigan 0 Aston Villa 0

# Platini backs Germans

AFP, Berlin

UEFA president Michel Platini has said Germany are the best team in Europe at the moment and one of the favourites to win this summer's Euro 2012, ahead of their friendly with France on Wednesday.

"Germany currently has the best team in Europe, they are very young and very creative," the Frenchman told German daily Die Welt on Sunday.

"They didn't lose any of their European Championship qualification matches.

"They are the big favourites to win the championships alongside Spain."

Platini, who led France to the 1984 European title on home soil, cast a critical eye over the current French team, coached by Laurent Blanc.

"We have two or three really good players like (Real Madrid's) Karim Benzema and (Bayern Munich's) Franck Ribery, but the rest are so-so," admitted the 56-year-old.

Having made more than 70 appearances for France during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Platini said matches against Germany gave him several restless nights during his career playing for "Les Bleus".

"I have had nightmares because of Germany," he said. "We lost to them on penalties in the semi-finals of the 1982 World Cup and again in 1986."

"They were dramatic games."

Platini has been the president of UEFA, European football's governing body, since January 2007 and said having extra referees on the goal-line during matches was a better solution than installing cameras.



Chelsea goalscorers David Luiz (R) and Didier Drogba celebrate the former's goal in their Premier League clash at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



**What to Watch**

Channel 9 & STAR Cricket

BPL T20

Dhaka v Rajshahi

Live from 2:00pm

Khulna v Sylhet

Live from 6:30pm

TEN Cricket

England v Pakistan

Third T20

Live from 10:00pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm



**Day's Event**

BPL T20

Dhaka v Rajshahi

Time: 2:00pm

Khulna v Sylhet

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur

Premier League

Brothers Union v Abahani

Time: 3:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium