



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his goal with teammate Marcelo (R) during their Primera Liga encounter against Espanyol at Bernabeu on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Young fires MU

AFP, London



Ashley Young struck twice as Manchester United swept to a 3-1 victory over Tottenham at White Hart Lane on Sunday to close the gap on Premier League leaders Manchester City to two points.

Wayne Rooney gave Sir Alex Ferguson's side the lead against the run of play 30 seconds before the break and Young made it two in the 60th minute after Spurs had once again dominated the start of the second period.

When the England winger added an excellent second in the 69th minute, the home side's spirit was finally broken.

An 87th minute reply by Jermain Defoe offered precious little consolation for the home side.

Victory over Harry Redknapp's third-placed side was the perfect response by United to City's win against Bolton the previous day and served as a powerful statement of intent in the title race.

But for Spurs, who have not beaten United since 2001, there was yet more disappointment after last weekend's chastening 5-2 defeat in the north London derby at Arsenal and they now sit just four points ahead of Arsene Wenger's side.

The manner of the defeat at the Emirates Stadium -- Tottenham capitulated after taking a two-goal lead -- raised questions about their ability to last the course in the battle for third place.

And, while their performance in the opening hour confirmed their qualities, a second successive defeat means they must recover quickly if they are to ensure a top four finish.

The withdrawal of Gareth Bale before the game after an overnight illness came as another blow to a team already without Scott

Parker and Rafael van der Vaart.

But Aaron Lennon deputised impressively for Bale as Spurs quickly assumed control of the game and dominated the first half.

Lennon's pace caused no end of problems for the visitors' defence and with more luck, Tottenham would have reached the interval ahead.

Emmanuel Adebayor offered the first sign of his side's threat with a rising, long-range drive that flew narrowly over David De Gea's crossbar.

And the United keeper was again called into action moments later to parry Louis Saha's shot to safety.

Adebayor carved out another opening, collecting the ball from deep before advancing into the area but De Gea produced an excellent stop when the Togo forward was favourite to score.

Then when the striker did eventually work the ball into the net in the 37th minute, the effort was ruled out for handball.

Having dominated the first 45 minutes so comprehensively, Tottenham's failure to gain reward for their efforts began to look as though it could cost, especially when Rooney headed United in front just before the break.

Rooney was back in the line-up after a throat infection and had offered his side's only threat during a disappointing half.

He took advantage of slack Tottenham marking to stoop and head home from Young's corner to give Ferguson's side a fortunate lead.

Tottenham responded well, maintaining the tempo they had shown during the first half after the break, and United quickly found themselves once again on the back foot.

RESULTS

Fulham 5 (Pogrebnyak 36, 44, 61, Dempsey 56, 83) Wolves 0
Newcastle 1 (Ameobi 90) Sunderland 1 (Bendtner 24-pen)
Tottenham 1 (Defoe 87) **Manchester**

Arsenal's mission impossible

AFP, London



The sparkling form of Robin van Persie has given Arsenal the faintest hope of "making the impossible possible" as they attempt to overturn a four-goal deficit against AC Milan on Tuesday.

Arsenal head into the return leg of their Champions League second round tie with the odds -- and the record books -- stacked firmly against them.

In the 57-year history of UEFA competition, only three teams have ever done what Arsenal must do to avoid elimination on Tuesday following their resounding 4-0 defeat to the Serie A leaders in the San Siro last month.

In the aftermath of that traumatic reverse, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger himself admitted that his team were effectively out of the competition.

Yet the mood in north London has brightened in the weeks since following an extraordinary 5-2 demolition of Tottenham in the north London derby and Saturday's smash-and-grab 2-1 win over Liverpool at Anfield.

The key contributor to both of those wins was club captain van Persie, the Dutch international who is enjoying the best season of his career.

Van Persie's two goals in Saturday's win over Liverpool -- including a sublime injury-time winner -- took his tally to 31 in all competitions and gives Arsenal precious momentum heading into Tuesday.

"It (the win) keeps the confidence high and we are on a good run now," Wenger said after Saturday's win. "It puts us in good condition to make the impossible possible on Tuesday night."

"... when you see the ball landing at the feet of Van Persie you know he can deliver a special goal."

"You can never afford to lose a player of that quality. In every game he comes up with something special."

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri meanwhile has cautioned his team against viewing the tie as a formality.

Milan are well versed in the dangers of complacency, having seen a 4-1 first leg lead overturned against Deportivo La Coruna in the 2004 quarterfinals, as well as losing the 2005 final to Liverpool after leading 3-0.

"I wish to underline that we have not qualified yet," said Allegri, who will be without Alexandre Pato, Clarence Seedorf and Alessandro Nesta for Tuesday.

Frogs Friends seek Park's help

REUTERS, Seoul

A South Korean environmental group is appealing to Manchester United midfielder Park Ji-sung, who said he used to drink juice made from boiled frogs to build his physique, to help it protect the amphibians from a surge in consumption.

Lobby group "Frogs Friends" said that consumption of frog juice had surged since Park's 2006 autobiography in which he said he had drunk it as a tonic, and said they would lobby the international and Premier League star to join their campaign.

"I do not know if it is just coincidence but after it was revealed... that Park eats frogs as a means to boost his strength, the number of cases of illegal poaching of frogs and toads residing in mountains has increased," campaign organiser Park Wan-hee was quoted as saying by Yonhap News Agency on Monday.

Since its establishment in 2007, Frog's Friends has been campaigning to stop Koreans killing amphibians for perceived health properties.

Park is South Korea's best known soccer player and said that his father had fed him frog juice to boost his stamina.

Real crush Espanyol

REUTERS, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo took his league tally for the season to 30 as leaders Real Madrid swept aside Espanyol 5-0 at the Bernabeu to restore their 10-point advantage over Barcelona in La Liga on Sunday.

The Portuguese forward, last season's European Golden Boot winner with 40 league goals, opened the scoring from Gonzalo Higuain's layoff in the 23rd minute, to take his total in all competitions to 38.

Sami Khedira doubled the lead after playing a one-two with his German international team mate Mesut Ozil in the 38th minute and Higuain buried a third just after the re-start.

Kaka set up the third, bagged the fourth with a run and shot off the post in the 66th, and pulled back for Higuain to hammer the fifth high into the net in the 78th.

Jose Mourinho's team moved a step closer towards their first league title in four years as they climbed to 67 points with 13 left to play.

"We're very pleased," Argentina international Higuain told Spanish television.

Champions Barcelona survived a 46th-minute red card for Gerard Pique to beat lowly Sporting Gijon 3-1 at home to move on to 57 points on Saturday.

Sofiane Feghouli earned Valencia a 1-0 victory at Granada, his side's first road win in La Liga since November, to keep them third in the standings with 43 points.

Home keeper Julio Cesar made a hash of parrying the Frenchman's tame shot in the 32nd minute in a scrappy match littered with yellow cards.

Valencia's second league win of 2012 strengthened their hold on third place ahead of Athletic Bilbao in fourth with 37.

Manchester United's opponents in the Europa League next week moved into the Champions League places with a 2-0 home win over Real Sociedad in the Basque derby.

RESULTS

Real Zaragoza 2 (Luis Garcia 84, Minero 90+3) Villarreal 1 (Martinuccio 15)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Suseta 24, 81) Real Sociedad 0
Granada 0 Valencia 1 (Feghouli 32)
Real Madrid 5 (Cristiano Ronaldo 23, Khedira 38, Higuain 47, 78, Kaka 66)



Inter Milan striker Diego Milito is ecstatic after scoring the equaliser during their Serie A tie against Catania at San Siro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Inter scramble draw

AFP, Rome



Claudio Ranieri's grip on his Inter Milan job appeared even more precarious on Sunday after his side had to fight back from two goals down to squeeze out a 2-2 draw against Catania.

Ranieri's team had lost seven of their previous eight games, without scoring a goal, and they were soon in trouble against their unheralded visitors from Sicily.

Catania, with only one point collected in 16 previous visits to San Siro, were dreaming of all three when Alejandro Gomez gave them a 20th-minute lead and Mariano Izco added the second 18 minutes later.

Inter were booed off at half-time by the sparse crowd and the jeers at a clearly unsettled Ranieri increased in the second

half as time slipped away.

But Diego Forlan pulled one back after 71 minutes before the Uruguayan set up the unmarked Diego Milito to grab the equaliser with 10 minutes left.

RESULTS

Parma 1 (Zaccardo 77) Napoli 2 (Cavani 40, Lavezzi 86)
Siena 3 (Bogdani 40, Calaio 80, Del Grosso 82) Cagliari 0
Udinese 0 Atalanta 0
Fiorentina 2 (Moras 61-og, Nastasic 74) Cesena 0
Roma 1 (Borini 16) Lazio 2 (Hernanes 10-pen, Mauri 62)
Lecce 2 (Muriel 61, Brivio 81) Genoa 2 (Sculli 21, 86)
Bologna 1 (Robert Acquafresca 82) Novara 0
Inter Milan 2 (Forlan 71, Milito 80)

Despite the late rescue act, Inter remain in seventh place in Serie A, 11 points off the Champions League places.

Earlier, Lazio defeated city rivals Roma 2-1 in a stormy derby that saw Roma goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg red-carded inside the first 10 minutes.

Stekelenburg was sent off when he brought down German striker Miroslav Klose, who had burst past Juan after springing the offside trap.

Roma's eighth red card of the season was compounded when Brazilian midfielder Hernanes scored from the penalty spot, beating replacement keeper Bogdan Lobont, who had come on for Erik Lamela.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think BPL was a successful tournament?

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ESPN & STAR Cricket

Australia v Sri Lanka

Tri-Series 2nd Final

Live from 9:20am

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

Benfica v Zenit

Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

TEN Action

UEFA Champions League

Arsenal v AC Milan

Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa

First Test, Day 1