

Rooney sinks Fulham

AFP, Manchester

Wayne Rooney kept Manchester United on course for a record 20th title after hitting the winner in a 1-0 win over Fulham at Old Trafford on Monday.

Rooney's 21st top-flight goal of the season, which arrived towards the end of the first half, proved enough to see off spirited mid-table opposition.

The result sent Sir Alex Ferguson's side, who have won their last six league games, three points clear of neighbours Manchester City at the top of the table with eight games remaining.

It was far from vintage United, but with their next four games against teams in the bottom six, it is difficult to see where United are going to slip up.

Having destroyed struggling Wolves 5-0 in their last outing, United were hoping Fulham would prove equally obliging opponents with the league delicately poised.

The London visitors were looking to avoid a ninth straight Old Trafford defeat, while Fulham's failure to score a goal at the venue in seven hours of action also filled United with belief they could use this fixture to improve their goal difference.

Fulham spent the opening exchanges penned inside their own half.

But this was a night for patience as United struggled to impose themselves until Rooney struck three minutes before the interval.

Veteran midfielder Ryan Giggs headed an early chance straight at keeper Mark Schwarzer while Patrice Evra proved an unlikely goal threat in the 32nd minute with an overhead kick which flashed narrowly wide.

Rafael Da Silva spurned another chance when he shot straight at Schwarzer following good work by the impressive Antonio Valencia.

But the ruthless finishing which was so evident eight days earlier at Molineux was missing as Fulham created just as many chances as United before the interval.



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney (L) celebrates his all-important goal with teammate Jonny Evans during their Premier League encounter against Fulham at Old Trafford on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Milan plan to attack

AFP, Milan



AC Milan have hinted they could shun their Italian roots when Barcelona visit the San Siro in the Champions League quarterfinal, first leg on Wednesday.

Speaking following Saturday's 2-1 win over Roma, Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri said there were two ways to tackle Barca.

"Either you sit back and try to hit them on the counter-attack, which is difficult, or you do what we did in our home group game and have a go, but we made some mistakes," he said.

Allegri hinted that he favoured a more positive approach in throwing some caution to the wind rather than adopting a more typical catenaccio (door-bolt) system.

In either case Allegri is more likely to turn to his forwards than his defence to try to solve the Barca conundrum.

The two sides met in the group stages earlier this season and although the scores were close, Barca totally dominated in the 2-2 draw in Spain while they also deserved their 3-2 vic-

tory in Italy.

What those games showed, though, was that Barca do concede goals if teams adopt a more offensive strategy.

And with Robinho and Maxi Lopez training again following injuries, with the former likely to partner Zlatan Ibrahimovic up front, Milan's attacking resources at least appear handsome -- much more so than against Roma where youngster Stephan El Shaarawy was called upon.

In defence it is a different story as influential centre-back Thiago Silva has been ruled out of both legs with a hamstring pull.

It means Daniele Bonera, rather than veteran Alessandro Nesta, who is just back from injury, is likely to play alongside Frenchman Philippe Mexes in the heart of defence.

Silva's loss cannot be understated despite the reliability of Bonera, who stepped into the breach two years ago at Old Trafford as Milan were crushed 4-0 by Manchester United.

Club captain Massimo Ambrosini knows how much Silva will be

missed.

"I'm sorry for Thiago Silva, it's an important loss but we'll keep going," he said.

"Barcelona are the best team in the world but you don't need to be a magician to know that.

"They've made their mark on football history but it's also a great stimulus to be playing them.

"We need everyone to make big sacrifices. There's not just one player to stop, Barca have many weapons."

Also missing for Milan is former Barcelona holding midfielder Mark van Bommel, as well as forwards Pato and Antonio Cassano.

Barca have fewer problems, with only French full-back Eric Abidal and Spain striker David Villa missing from their first team regulars.

Despite Milan's injury troubles, Barca goalkeeper Victor Valdes is wary of the Italians.

"They are very dangerous on dead balls and they're very good at counter-attacks," he said.

"We need to be alert and keep an eye on unmarked players. It's a very complicated tie. It's vital that we play our style of game."

4-match ban on Cisse

AFP, London

Former French international striker Djibril Cisse was suspended for four matches on Monday dealing a huge blow to his Premier League side Queens Park Rangers hopes of retaining their elite status.

The 30-year-old - who arrived from Serie A side Lazio in January - received the ban for his straight red card for a vicious tackle on Sunderland's Fraizer Campbell in Saturday's 3-1 loss.

It is the second time that Cisse has been sent-off in the short spell he has been with the club, though, the former Liverpool and Auxerre star has also scored three times in five matches.

QPR - who sacked manager Neil Warnock earlier this season and replaced him with Mark Hughes who spent heavily in January - are third from bottom with just eight matches remaining.

Student jailed for racism

Football

AFP, London

A British university student was on Tuesday jailed for 56 days for inciting racial hatred, after posting offensive comments on Twitter about the collapse of Bolton Wanderers footballer Fabrice Muamba.

Magistrates in Swansea, south Wales, sent 21-year-old biology undergraduate Liam Stacey to prison after he admitted the charge at a previous hearing last week. He broke down in tears as he was taken away in handcuffs.

Sentencing the student, district judge John Charles said there was "no alternative" to an immediate prison sentence, as when Muamba collapsed "it was not the football world who was praying for him... everybody was praying for his life".

Stacey's remarks on Twitter as the footballer battled for his life were "vile and abhorrent", the judge added.

The student was reported to police and arrested after posting a number of tweets on the micro-blogging site mocking the player, who collapsed with a cardiac arrest during Bolton's FA Cup quarterfinal tie with Tottenham Hotspur on March 17.

Stacey was taken to task by other users after he used offensive language to say that the player had died, prompting him to

respond with a tirade of personal abuse.

Swansea University said last week that they had suspended Stacey pending a formal disciplinary hearing.

Muamba, whom doctors said was effectively dead for 78 minutes as they administered artificial resuscitation, has since made a "miraculous" recovery but is still in a serious but stable condition in intensive care at a London hospital.

The 23-year-old midfielder was on Monday said to be making "encouraging" progress and had even managed to sit out of bed and watch television, doctors at the London Chest Hospital said in a statement.

His collapse led to the FA Cup tie being abandoned. The match is due to be replayed at Spurs' White Hart Lane ground on Tuesday night. A number of Bolton players were seen visiting their colleague in hospital ahead of the game.

In a separate case last Wednesday, magistrates in Newcastle, northeast England, ordered another student to complete a two-year community order with 240 hours unpaid work for sending a string of abusive tweets to former footballer Stan Collymore.

Newcastle University student Joshua Cryer, 21, admitted sending the messages to the former Liverpool, Aston Villa and Nottingham Forest player, who now works as a radio and television pundit.

Chelsea lining up Blanc

AFP, London

Chelsea are willing to make Laurent Blanc the highest paid manager in English football after identifying the France coach as the frontrunner for the vacancy at Stamford Bridge, The Times reported Tuesday.

The newspaper said Chelsea were ready to offer Blanc a staggering £8 million (9.6 million euros/12.8 million dollars) annual salary if he stepped down from his position with France after the European Championships.

The Times reported that "intermediaries acting on behalf" of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich had made initial contact with Blanc's camp last week to see if the former France captain was interested in the role.

The report did not give any indication of whether Blanc, whose contract with France runs out after Euro 2012, was keen on the Chelsea job.

The Times reported that Abramovich was ready to shell out a salary that would make Blanc the highest paid coach in England, dwarfing the £5 million paid to Roberto Mancini at Manchester City.

The inflated wages reflected Blanc's status as a free agent, The Times commented, stating that Abramovich was not keen on having to make a large compensation payment to a coach already in employment.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery arrives at Munich's international airport yesterday for their scheduled flight to Marseille.

Marseille fear onslaught

AFP, Marseille



Rarely can two sides have approached a Champions League knockout tie in such contrasting form as Marseille and Bayern Munich, who meet in the first leg of their quarterfinal at Stade Velodrome on Wednesday.

Where Bayern have won their last five games in all competitions, Marseille have not tasted victory in eight matches. Where Bayern's attack bristles with menace, OM's flounders.

If Marseille can draw any solace from their current plight, however, it is that the seeds of Bayern's current resurgence were sown in defeat.

A shock 1-0 loss at FC Basel on February 22 raised the possibility of an early exit from the Champions League, before a 2-0 defeat at Bayer Leverkusen left Jupp Heynckes' seven points behind Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga.

The response was astonishing. Bayern scored 20 goals in their next three games -- including a record 7-0 rout of Basel -- and after edging Borussia Moenchengladbach on penalties in the German Cup, they beat Hannover 2-1 on Saturday to keep their league title challenge alive.

Dortmund may still be five points clear but a swagger has returned to Bayern's play.

Top scorer Mario Gomez has scored nine goals in his last five games, while Arjen Robben has netted seven times to banish the criticism over his form that dogged him during the winter months.

"We sorted things out together," said French winger Franck Ribery, who returns to the Velodrome for the first time since his 2007 move from Marseille to Bayern.

are a huge club and as soon as we don't win one or two matches, there's lots of pressure from outside.

"It got to the stage where we started to feel a bit of stress inside the club as well, which disturbed us a bit.

"But we were able to react and rediscover our form from the first half of the season. We're playing like a team again. We attack and defend together."

Marseille, too, have endured a season of contrasts.

After winning just once in their first 10 league games, they constructed a 16-game unbeaten run between November and late February that included a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the first leg of their last-16 encounter.

Qualification for the quarterfinals was secured despite a 2-1 defeat in the return game at San Siro but that represented the only bright spot in a seven-game losing run that included a 3-2 loss to third-tier Quevilly in the French Cup.

OM finally stopped the rot with a 1-1 draw at Nice on Saturday but their slump has seen them fall 13 points below the Champions League places in Ligue 1.

Saturday's result also came at the cost of a knee ligament injury to Souleymane Diawara, suspended for the visit of Bayern but now likely to miss the rest of the season too.

"Against Quevilly on Tuesday, we brought shame on the Marseille shirt and on the city," the Senegalese centre-back told Monday's L'Equipe.

"Bayern is an opportunity to erase that shame."

Didier Deschamps must also contend without suspended goalkeeper Steve Mandanda, whose nominal replacement, Gennaro Braccigliano, failed his audition against Quevilly by giving away the winning goal in the dying moments of extra time.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Were you happy with Mushfiqur Rahim's captaincy in Asia Cup?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

twitter

www.twitter.com/dssport



TEN Cricket

Sri Lanka v England

First Test, Day Three

Live from 10:30am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

Marseille v Bayern Munich

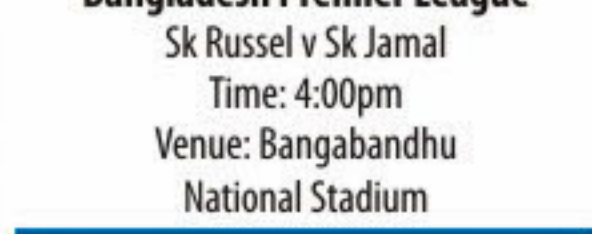
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN Action

UEFA Champions League

AC Milan v Barcelona

Live from 12:45am (Thursday)



DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League

Sk Russel v Sk Jamal

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium