

# Morrison dents Arsenal hopes

AFP, London

Arsenal's bid for a top-four finish suffered a major setback as Steve Morison's late goal earned Norwich a deserved point in a six-goal thriller at the Emirates.

Yossi Benayoun's opener in the second minute had seemed to put Arsene Wenger's side on course for an easy afternoon.

But with Norwich having gone ahead through Wes Hoolahan and Grant Holt, a double from Robin van Persie seemed to have won it for the hosts before substitute Morison stunned the home crowd with a smart finish five minutes from time.

Without a victory in their last three matches, Arsenal came flying out of the blocks and took the lead inside the opening 70 seconds.

Nothing seemed on when birthday boy Benayoun received the ball from Tomas Rosicky but he cut inside Kyle Naughton and curled a beauty beyond the reach of John Ruddy for his third Premier League goal of the season.

It was a dream start but Norwich have proved they are no pushovers this season and they immediately went in search of an equaliser.

Holt was unlucky to see his goalbound effort blocked by Kieran Gibbs in the sixth minute, with the visiting skipper then heading over from Simon Lappin's high cross.

Less than a minute later, however, Lambert's side did draw level as Naughton's low cross picked out Hoolahan and his firm side-footed shot somehow squirmed past an embarrassed Szczesny.

Van Persie had a golden opportunity to

restore Arsenal's lead at the other end but fired over, while Holt was unlucky to be flagged offside from Simeon Jackson's clever through ball.

Norwich looked content to try and hit their opponents on the break and that tactic paid dividends in the 27th minute.

A quick break saw Hoolahan play in Holt and his shot took a lucky deflection to loop over Szczesny and into the net for his 16th goal of a wonderful season.

Van Persie was inches away of an immediate equaliser from Sagna's weighted cross but Arsenal then struggled to break down Norwich's rearguard effort.

Benayoun was lucky not to be shown a red card after lashing out at Bradley Johnson off the ball, while the visitors had two great shouts for penalties that were waved away by referee Anthony Taylor.

After leaving the pitch to a chorus of boos, Wenger's side made a slow start to the second period and should have been punished when Jackson was through on goal but the Canadian fluffed his lines.

Hoolahan also went close to extending Norwich's lead with a volley before the introduction of Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain gave Arsenal some much-needed extra impetus.

Van Persie had wasted two great opportunities to equalise but he made no mistake when Song's weighted ball into the box picked him out and he volleyed superbly into the corner of the net.

The Dutchman could have doubled his tally soon after, although there was a touch of fortune when he finally did in the 80th minute.

The ball deflected straight into the 28-year-old's path 12 yards out and he swept home past Ruddy to give Arsenal the lead.



Norwich City striker Steve Morison scores to make it 3-3 during their Premier League encounter against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Sagna breaks his leg again

AFP, London

France international Bacary Sagna was ruled out of next month's European Championship on Saturday after breaking his leg in Arsenal's 3-3 Premier League draw with Norwich, manager Arsene Wenger confirmed.

Sagna, 29, had only recently returned to action after suffering a fractured fibula in a game against Tottenham last October.

The defender's latest leg break occurred in the same area as his previous injury.

"It is a broken fibula, the same leg," Wenger said. "He was kicked on it, it has not happened alone. When he was kicked, he has broken the leg.

"The guy closed him down and walked on him. I don't know if it was deliberate or not."

Sagna was stretchered off during Arsenal's draw with Norwich at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

## Merte to be fit for Euros

REUTERS, London

Arsenal defender Per Mertesacker, sidelined for three months because of an ankle injury, is "very confident" he will be fit to play for Germany at Euro 2012 next month.

"I have spoken to a lot of people in Germany and England - doctors, physios and coaches - and they are all very comfortable with my ankle," he told the club's website on Saturday.

"I am 90-95 per cent fit. For the past four weeks I have been doing quite a lot of rehab at Arsenal and recently some work with the ball."

Mertesacker, who has won 79 caps for Germany, needed surgery after being injured in Arsenal's Premier League game at Sunderland in February.

Germany will play in Group B alongside Netherlands, Portugal and Denmark at Euro 2012 co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland.

## Sepp frets over pace

REUTERS, Ottawa

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has expressed concern about the slow pace of preparations for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and said he wanted the delays to be made up as soon as possible.

But Blatter - who is meeting top Brazilian officials next week to discuss progress - was also confident Brazil would be ready to host the 32-team tournament despite the challenges.

Brazil is struggling to build the infrastructure needed for the World Cup and the eight-team 2013 Confederations Cup curtain raiser. In March, FIFA's general secretary said Brazil needed a "kick up the backside" to speed up the work.

Blatter apologised for the remarks by Jerome Valcke but still has some concerns about the pace of construction.

"Somewhere there are some delays and what we are doing now is to make sure that what has not been (done) in the past will be done as soon as possible and not later," Blatter told reporters, speaking in English.

"For the time being we are a little bit concerned about some constructions. But you know, constructions, if you push them and to put a lot of energy behind, then you can be ready on time," he said after an Ottawa event

to mark the 2015 women's soccer World Cup, which Canada is hosting.

Next week Blatter will hold two days of meetings in Zurich with Brazilian Sports Minister Aldo Rebelo and the local organizing committee.

The FIFA chief noted that South Africa had successfully held the 2010 World Cup despite widespread doubts ahead of time that it would be ready.

"We are confident, because Brazil is not only a footballing nation but Brazil is also a very important economic power ... So I'm sure that they will do it," he said.

Blatter also reiterated that he wanted goal-line technology to be used at the Confederations Cup and the World Cup.

FIFA is currently testing two systems designed to determine whether a ball has fully crossed the line or not.

World soccer's governing body was embarrassed during the 2010 World Cup when a shot by England's Frank Lampard against Germany crossed the line but no goal was given.

"I can tell you FIFA in the World Cup 2014, and therefore already in our Confederations Cup in 2013, we will use this system. We cannot repeat the ... same situation we have witnessed in the match between England and Germany," Blatter said.

But he ruled out using any other kind of technology in the game.

## City aim to seal deal

AFP, London

Manchester City are steeling themselves for one final assault on the Premier League at Newcastle on Sunday, where victory over the Magpies will leave them on the brink of the title.

After trailing bitter rivals Manchester United by eight points less than a month ago, City took control of the title race at Eastlands this week with a gritty 1-0 win over Sir Alex Ferguson's side.

Two more wins, over Newcastle and at home to QPR, will see Roberto Mancini's men pip United for the title, unless Ferguson's team can make up an eight-goal disadvantage in goal difference.

Yet Mancini insists City will not take anything for granted against a Newcastle side who are brimming with confidence after an impressive 2-0 win at Chelsea which kept alive their dreams of Champions League qualification.

City's fans may have revelled in their derby triumph over United on Monday which saw them edge ahead in the title race, but Mancini has warned that it will count for nothing if they slip up against Newcastle.

"I am happy that we are here and we

have this chance after being eight points behind United," Mancini said.

"We now have a big chance.

"But in the end, nothing has changed. We still have two games to go and in football anything can happen. You can lose or win. But the guys have worked really well and I am proud of this."

Mancini also believes Sunday's assignment at St James' Park, where

### FIXTURES

**Sunday**  
Newcastle v Manchester City (1230 GMT), Aston Villa v Tottenham (1300), Bolton v West Bromwich Albion (1300), Fulham v Sunderland (1300), QPR v Stoke (1300), Wolves v Everton (1300), Manchester Utd v Swansea (1500)

**Monday**

they have won on three of their last four visits, will be more demanding than their title-decider against United.

"Against United we played at home and we played very well," said Mancini.

"Against Newcastle it will be harder."

Newcastle manager Alan Pardew knows that his side are tantalisingly close to a top-four finish, something that would represent a phenomenal

achievement for a club that only returned to the top-flight in 2010.

"It's not often in a professional career that you get an opportunity to actually break into the top four in this country," Pardew said.

"We've been in and around it all year, we've touched fourth place and touched third a couple of times. We're going to give it everything."

City's title rivals United meanwhile can only watch and wait as events unfold at Newcastle before they face Swansea at Old Trafford in Sunday's late kick-off.

If City fail to take maximum points, United will face Swansea knowing that a win will return the destiny of the title to their hands.

Ferguson, however, is sceptical about the possibility that Manchester City are about to let their slender advantage slip having worked so hard to get back in the title race.

"They have got two games left. If they win their two games they win the league," Ferguson said bluntly.

"People talk about goal difference, but it depends how many they win by. Say they win 3-0 on Sunday, their lead would be 11 and they still have QPR at home."

## Yekini no more

BBC ONLINE

Rashidi Yekini, the former African Footballer of the Year has died at the age of 48.

The prolific striker was the first Nigerian to take the continental crown and played a key role in some of his country's greatest football moments.

He scored Nigeria's first ever goal at the World Cup, against Bulgaria at USA '94, and led the way as they won the Africa Cup of Nations in the same year.

He is Nigeria's top international scorer, with 37 goals from 58 games.

He was also a prolific goalscorer in club football - seeing huge success with Shooting Stars of Nigeria, Ivory Coast's Africa Sport and Vitoria Setubal of Portugal, amongst others.

Yekini began his career with UNTL FC in Kaduna in northern Nigeria before moving to Shooting Stars, whom he helped to reach the final of the then African Champions Cup in 1984.

That was the same year in which he made his debut for Nigeria - and he was still playing for his country 12 years later, at the World Cup in France in 1998.

He had playing stints with

Olympiakos in Greece and Sporting Gijon in Spain during a nomadic playing career. He retired in 2003, and made a brief comeback two years later.

The moment that took him to global fame came at the World Cup in the United States, when he scored that goal against Bulgaria.

The strike itself was important enough, but the manner of his celebration, grasping the net in exultation, became an iconic image of the tournament, and of the man.

His death, on Friday night, comes

after a long illness, and he will be buried in his native Kwara State on Saturday.

Amongst those paying tribute to him is the President of the Confederation of African Football, Issa Hayatou, who expressed the shock of "the whole of the African football family" at Yekini's death.

"Rashidi Yekini's fantastic display of skills and talent were evident to the world during Nigeria's campaigns at the USA '94 and France '98 World Cups finals - we will deeply miss him," Hayatou said.

## Pep's farewell in Kolkata?

Football

TIMES OF INDIA

Barcelona fans in India, who are still mourning their favourite club's exit from the Champions League, have reasons to get excited. Talks are on at the highest level to hold a farewell exhibition match for Barca coach Pep Guardiola against Italian giants Inter Milan in Kolkata.

Organizers are looking to host the match at the Salt Lake stadium on May 19, the same night Chelsea clash with Bayern Munich in the Champions League final in Munich.

"We have already got the go-ahead from both the clubs. Several top players, including Lionel Messi, are more or less confirmed though players on national duty for Euro 2012 may not make it. If everything goes according to plan it will be a treat for football fans," Prashant Agarwal, CEO of Kshatriya Sports Management told TOI.

Prashant's company, a part of UK-based firm Indian Football Evolution, was already in talks with several clubs to come to India during the pre-season when top clubs visit new frontiers to expand their support base around the globe. The Nerazzurri (Inter) are already scheduled to play in Indonesia in the last week of May.

"As of now I can confirm that the dream match is very much on the cards. What remains to be finalized is the clearance from the sponsors. We are planning to have the match in the evening so that fans can also enjoy the Champions League final later in the night," he added.

Agrawal said if the match in Kolkata doesn't work out, the alternate plan is to have it in Spain. "Discussions are also on to find out the possibility of an El Clasico but Barca have given first preference to India," he said.

### SPORTS POLL

#### WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think BFF president Kazi Salahuddin can make a difference to Bangladesh football in his second term?

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**Indian Premier League**  
Mumbai v Chennai  
**Live from 4:30pm**  
Bangalore v Deccan Chargers  
**Live from 8:30pm**

**ESPN**  
**English Premiership**  
Newcastle v Man City  
**Live from 6:30pm**  
Man United v Swansea  
**Live from 9:00pm**

**STAR Sports**  
**MotoGP World Championship**  
Portuguese Grand Prix  
**Live from 4:00pm**

**TEN Action**  
**Serie A**  
Cagliari v Juventus