

A gift for Man City

AFP, Liverpool



Martin Skrtel, scorer of Liverpool's opening goal, gifted Premier League champions Manchester City their second equaliser, and a point, in an absorbing 2-2 draw at Anfield on Sunday.

The Liverpool defender had performed superbly until the 80th minute when, under pressure from Edin Dzeko, he inexplicably played the ball back directly to Carlos Tevez, who rounded Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina and slotted in his 100th goal in English football to share the points.

But the consolation for Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers, still searching for his first league victory since taking charge of the Reds, was that this was a much improved display following last week's 3-1 loss to West Bromwich Albion.

Skrtel opened the scoring with a powerful and unstoppable header from a perfectly-delivered right-wing Steven Gerrard corner in the 34th minute, a goal which was thoroughly deserved given the enterprising manner in which Rodgers's team had undertaken their daunting meeting with the champions.

Yaya Toure pulled City level in the 63rd minute but it took the home team just three more to regain the lead through a magnificently-struck Luis Suarez free-kick after Jack Rodwell had been harshly judged to have handled as he blocked a Gerrard shot.

It was a dangerous position, some 22 yards from goal, and Suarez, who had looked low on confidence to that point, needed no second invitation to curl a superb strike around the City wall and beyond England goalkeeper Joe Hart into the bottom right-hand corner.

Anfield had an air of the big occasion about it for Rodgers's home league bow, not least of all because the manager handed a full debut to teenage winger Raheem Sterling, an almost cult figure with the Liverpool faithful.

It was easy to see why, in the 18th minute, when the 17-year-old planted the perfect left-wing cross onto the toe of Fabio Borini who volleyed wide from four yards.

The miss might have proved costly as City launched a counter-attack with Tevez taking James Milner's through pass and succeeding in rounding Reina.

The Argentine forward was forced wide but then saw his cross-shot almost put in by Martin Kelly whose attempted headed clearance struck the post and was gathered by a grateful Reina.

It was a fast-paced opening with Liverpool's game plan upset after just four minutes when Lucas limped off with pulled leg muscle to be replaced by Jonjo Shelvey.

But as Liverpool gained momentum, City were forced onto the back foot and into conceding the opening goal.

In the second half Mario Balotelli, performing admirable but unfamiliar defensive duties, inadvertently played his team into trouble when the ball deflected off him into the path of Suarez but the Liverpool forward crossed into an empty area.

City manager Roberto Mancini threw on Rodwell and Dzeko in an attempt to breathe life into a fading performance and the tactic paid instant dividends with Yaya Toure's equaliser.

Tevez broke down the right and his cross was dealt with unconvincingly by Reina, a half-hearted punch which rebounded off Martin Kelly and into the path of the alert Toure who converted from six yards.

City only remained level for three minutes before conceding a second goal although Skrtel's moment of indecision helped make things all square again.

Thereafter, Skrtel tried to make amends with an 18-yard shot which cleared the City bar while Dzeko twice came close as City attempted to win a league game by a 3-2 scoreline for the fourth consecutive match.

Liverpool substitute striker Andy Carroll might have secured the three points in the other direction in the closing minutes, however, as he rose to meet a Suarez cross and saw his header cleared off the line by Vincent Kompany.



Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez (L) capitalises on an error by Liverpool defender Martin Skrtel (C) to score the equaliser past Pepe Reina during their Premier League encounter at Anfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

PSG can't win

AFP, Paris



Last season's Ligue 1 top two, Montpellier and Paris Saint-Germain, are still awaiting their first wins this term after adverse results on Sunday left both teams in the bottom half of the table.

Montpellier dropped into the relegation places following a 1-0 loss at home to Marseille, who went top, while big-spending PSG are 11th -- already six points off the pace -- after being held to a 0-0 draw by Bordeaux.

PSG coach Carlo Ancelotti made three changes to his starting XI at Parc des Princes but still his expensively assembled side looked worryingly bereft of ideas as they recorded their third consecutive draw.

Star signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic made his return from injury but the biggest surprise in the hosts' starting line-up was the presence of 17-year-old debutant Adrien Rabiot in midfield.

PSG largely controlled the first half but had little to show for their efforts, with long-range shots from Javier Pastore and Nene that were comfortably saved by Cedric Carrasso being the best they could muster.

Ibrahimovic thrashed a rasping free-kick narrowly wide early in the second half, before curling just wide with his left foot in the 73rd minute, but despite a lively cameo from substitute Jeremy Menez, the goal would not come.

Bordeaux had been seeking a ninth

consecutive win in the French top-flight but the point was enough to keep them in the top four.

The resurgent Andre-Pierre Gignac was Montpellier's scourge at Stade de la Mosson earlier in the day, claiming the game's only goal 13 minutes from time to give Marseille their third victory in a row.

A loose pass from Daniel Congre presented the ball to Morgan Amalfitano and he found Gignac, who turned inside Vitorino Hilton and threaded a low shot between goalkeeper Geoffrey Jourdren and his near post.

Champions for the first time in their history last season, Montpellier have picked up just one point from their first three games and find themselves in the bottom three alongside Sochaux and promoted Troyes.

After three matches, Marseille lead the standings by two points from Lyon, Valenciennes, Bordeaux and Toulouse.

Saint-Etienne blew off the cobwebs in the other afternoon fixture, crushing Brest 4-0 at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard to register their first points of the campaign.

Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang claimed a brace of goals in each half, book-ending strikes from new signing Romain Hamouma and Josuha Guilavogui.

Lille needed a debut goal from right-back Djibril Sidibe to claim a 2-2 draw at Nice on Saturday, which left the 2011 champions four points behind Marseille in eighth place.

RESULTS

Montpellier 0 Marseille 1 (Gignac 77)
Saint-Etienne 4 (Aubameyang 13, 62, Hamouma 30, Guilavogui 61) Brest 0

Samp stun Milan

AFP, Rome



Promoted Sampdoria consigned AC Milan to a shock 1-0 defeat at San Siro on Sunday, Andrea Costa scoring the winner in the second half to give Milan the worst possible start after a traumatic close season.

Milan, Serie A runners-up last term, had the spine ripped out of their squad over the summer, with superstars Thiago Silva and Zlatan Ibrahimovic sold to Paris Saint-Germain and a glut of long-serving players moving on.

Sampdoria, who start the new campaign with a one-point deduction over the 'Calcioscommesse' betting scandal, were able to celebrate their first goal at San Siro since the 2007-08 season.

It came in the 59th minute, when left-back Costa rose high above the home defence to head in a corner from the right.

That stirred the hosts into action, with Mario Yepes and Kevin-Prince Boateng hitting the woodwork.

But Ciro Ferrara's men held on to take the points, although there was an injury-time scare when Sampdoria's Argentine goalkeeper Sergio Romero had to be at his best to repel Boateng's header.

Sampdoria were the worthy winners though, and could have even taken a first-half lead via lone Brazilian striker Eder.

Later, Inter Milan showed their city rivals how it should be done with a 3-0 win at another promoted side, Pescara.

Dutch international Wesley Sneijder opened the scoring against the run of play in the 17th minute after a free-flowing move, sweeping the ball home from the edge of the box.

Two minutes later, Sneijder found new signing Antonio Cassano, formerly of Milan, who slid the ball over to Diego Milito to convert from close range.

The hosts had an eye-catching opportunity to reduce the deficit just before the break but Emmanuel Cascione's header was kept out by the lightning reflexes of Inter goalkeeper Luca Castellazzi.

Milito then set up Inter's third nine minutes from time when he slid the ball into the box from the right for Philippe Coutinho to slot home.

Inter sit top of the fledgling table alongside Napoli, who came away from their trip to Palermo with a 3-0 win, courtesy of goals from Marek Hamsik, Christian Maggio and Edinson Cavani.

Elsewhere, Chievo beat Bologna 2-0 and Genoa saw off visitors Cagliari by the same scoreline.

An injury-time strike by Uruguayan forward Nicolas Lopez earned Roma a 2-2 draw with Catania, while Lazio beat Atalanta 1-0 and the game between Siena and Torino ended in a goalless stalemate.

Brazil set Portugal dates

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil will play home and away friendlies against Portugal in 2013 as part of a series of warm-up matches for the World Cup the country will host in 2014, according to federation officials here.

The first friendly will be in Sao Paulo and the second in Portugal, with the dates yet to be fixed. The Brazil team will also play a friendly against England, officials confirmed.

Brazil first play South Africa in Sao Paulo on September 7 and China in Recife three days later.

Nikci denies Schalke

REUTERS, Berlin

Schalke 04 were denied a winning start to their Bundesliga campaign when Adrian Nikci scored an 80th minute goal to give Hanover 96 a 2-2 draw on Sunday.

Felipe, who like Nikci was making his Bundesliga debut, gave Hanover a first-half lead before Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Lewis Holtby scored in a 12-minute spell for the visitors.

Schalke, third last season, dominated the early exchanges and nearly took the lead when Holtby rounded goalkeeper Ron-Robert Zieler only to see his shot cleared off the line.

But Hanover took the lead completely against the run of play in the 43rd minute when Brazilian defender Felipe, who joined from Standard Liege in the close season, stooped to head in Christian Pander's free kick.

Dutchman Huntelaar, last season's Bundesliga top-scorer with 29 goals, equalised with a superb effort, unbalancing his marker with a couple of dummies before rifling his shot into the net.

What to WATCH

TEN Sports

US Open

First Round

Live from 9:00 p.m.

TEN Cricket

Australia v Pakistan

First ODI

Live from 8:00 p.m.

STAR Cricket

England v South Africa

Second ODI



Sampdoria defender Andrea Costa celebrates his all-important goal against AC Milan during their Serie A clash at San Siro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP