



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester United striker Robin Van Persie (R) shoots past Arsenal defender Thomas Vermaelen to score the opening goal during their Premier League encounter at Old Trafford yesterday.

Van Persie stabs Arsenal

AFP, Manchester

Robin van Persie scored against his former club and Patrice Evra was also on target as Manchester United secured a 2-1 win over 10-man Arsenal at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Van Persie, 29, who ended an eight-year spell with the Gunners to join United in a £24 million (\$39 million) deal in August, received plenty of abuse from the travelling supporters.

But he took fewer than three minutes to put United, now top of the table albeit Chelsea will regain first place if they win at Swansea later Saturday, ahead before refusing to celebrate in front of his former fans.

Wayne Rooney missed a penalty just before half-time -- his seventh miss in 20 attempts in the Premier League -- to leave United with a record of just one successful effort from their last five spot-kicks.

But France defender Evra doubled the advantage midway through the second half with his first goal at Old Trafford in almost two years before Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere, making just his second appearance

after a long-term injury, was sent off after being shown a second yellow card.

Santi Cazorla curled in a late consolation goal for the Gunners but defeat left Arsenal, who haven't won a major trophy since 2005, nine points off top spot just 10 games into the league season.

While Arsenal remain bitter about van Persie's exit, his move to United has been an undoubted success, with his effort against his old team-mates, his eighth goal in the Premier League and tenth in 13 matches in all competitions.

The 29-year-old Dutch striker wasted no time in taking advantage of a Thomas Vermaelen error to score with his first touch.

Antonio Valencia flicked on Rio Ferdinand's pass to send Rafael clear down the right flank and although the Brazilian's cross was poor, Vermaelen failed to clear and van Persie struck a first-time finish from just outside the area.

Van Persie threatened once again midway through the opening period when he was picked out by a Rooney pass and out-paced Vermaelen, only to have his shot from a narrow angle saved by Vito Mannone.

David de Gea was finally forced

into some work when Evra misjudged Bacary Sagna's long ball and Aaron Ramsey broke into the area before seeing his drive to the near post palmed away by the United goalkeeper.

Just before the break, Per Mertesacker had an anxious moment when his sliced clearance from Rooney's cross flew just past the top corner.

But the corner that followed led to Young's cross being handled by Cazorla, only for Rooney to send his penalty past the left post.

Just a minute after the restart, another Vermaelen error allowed van Persie through but the unmarked Valencia failed to even make contact with the Dutchman's cross eight yards from goal.

Michael Carrick also saw his drive fly narrowly wide after a Rafael effort was charged down.

As Arsenal pressed forward, Jonny Evans failed to make contact with a Santos cross and Olivier Giroud's effort glanced off the outside of the post.

Van Persie though beat the offside trap to latch on to Young's through-ball but saw his guided shot pushed just wide of goal by Mannone.

Zim disbands national team

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe has dissolved the national football team for failing to qualify for the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations as a major match-fixing scandal still overshadows their performance, an official said Friday.

"The team has been discarded in its entirety," Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) president Cuthbert Dube told a news conference in the capital Harare.

Zimbabwe lost 0-2 to Angola in the last qualifying game for the continental tournament after it had carried a 3-1 lead in the first leg, and failed to qualify on away goals.

Shocked fans point to a 2009 match-fixing scandal involving the national team that resulted in a lifelong ban for 15 players and officials, which ZIFA announced in October.

None of the players in Angola played in the "Asiagate" games.

Dauids demands apology

Football

AFP, London

Former Dutch international midfielder Edgar Davids demanded on Saturday that Dutch legend Johann Cruyff apologise over his alleged remark a year ago the only reason he was on the board of Ajax football club was because he was black.

Davids, 39 and now head coach of League Two outfit Barnet, had brushed the remark aside at the time but he told BBC Sport that now he wanted an apology from his compatriot, adding he was especially upset the Dutch Football Association had done nothing about it.

Cruyff denied being racist - something that at the time Davids also concurred with - and claimed his comments were misrepresented. He made his remarks after Louis van Gaal had been appointed general director without his knowledge.

"The issue isn't resolved," Davids told BBC Sport. "I still feel bad because in Holland they pretend nothing happened."

"They tried to sweep it under the carpet, because it's a certain figure in football, and that's the wrong message to send to people."

"He admitted it - there has to be consequences and there weren't. He didn't apologise and that's what I'm still not satisfied about."

"Just be a man and apologise, because you made the remark and it's unacceptable."

Cruyff had said that he had made the remark to Davids, a tough, uncompromising midfielder who was capped 74 times, when they clashed over another topic.

"Ajax is a multi-cultural club and we have found that many talented immigrant players quit when they reach puberty," he wrote at the time.

"So we wanted to tackle this problem with someone from the same background, who had come through it. And that was Edgar Davids."

"During one of our fights I pointed that out to him. But it had nothing to do with his skin colour."

The Dutch FA said in a statement there was little they could do as nothing had been made public by Ajax.

"The alleged statements were made during an internal meeting and never publicly pronounced or confirmed by the football club."

"A person that is racially abused is allowed to file a complaint against another person/an organisation in football at the Royal Netherlands Football Association."

"Once filed, the prosecutor will look into this specific case to see whether or not further investigation is needed."

What to WATCH

TEN Cricket

Sri Lanka v New Zealand
2nd ODI
Live from 3:00pm

ESPN

English Premiership
QPR v Reading
Live from 7:30pm
Liverpool v Newcastle
Live from 10:00pm

STAR Sports

F1 World Championship
Abu Dhabi GP
Live from 6:45pm
Primera Liga
Deportivo v Mallorca
Live from 9:30pm
Osasuna v Valladolid
Live from 10:50pm
Granada v Athletic Bilbao
Live from 12:45am (Monday)
Sevilla v Levante
Live from 2:30am (Monday)

TEN Sports

Paris Masters

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League

(Four-Day Match; Day 3)

Rajshahi v Barisal

Venue: Shaheed Kamaruzzaman

Stadium, Rajshahi

Khulna v Rangpur

Venue: Sk Abu Naser Stadium, Khulna

Sylhet v Chittagong

Venue: BKSP

Dhaka v Dhaka Metro

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Referees mull boycott

AFP, London



Several English Premier League referees are debating over whether to boycott matches involving Chelsea in the wake of the club alleging fellow referee Mark Clattenburg made racist remarks in last Sunday's game with Manchester United according to former referee Clive Wilkes.

Clattenburg, 37, is the subject of investigations by both the police and the Football Association over claims by Chelsea he used 'inappropriate language' including a racial slur aimed at their Nigerian midfielder Jon Obi Mikel.

Clattenburg maintains his innocence on all matters. Wilkes told the Sun newspaper he had been in touch with some of his former colleagues and they had told him they were considering boycotting Chelsea games - especially as in their eyes it is not the first time the club have levelled accusations at one of their number.

"I keep in touch with a lot of the lads and there is such a strength of feeling about what is happening to Mark," he said.

"I know a few referees who are even talking about boycotting Chelsea games because of all this."

"Remember, it's not the first time Chelsea have targeted a referee - there's been Anders Frisk and Graham Poll."

"And some refs are now saying enough is enough. It's no exaggeration to say the refs in this country have never felt lower."

Wilkes added that the referees felt they were not receiving the support they deserved from above.

"They are so disillusioned. They feel vulnerable, feel that they are being left isolated - that they are getting no backing, no support," he said.

"They want to speak out themselves but are too frightened, they fear they will be sacked if they go public with their grievances."

"There have even been murmurings about strike action but that's very much the last resort."



PHOTO: REUTERS

A man kicks the ball into the hole as he competes in a FootGolf tournament in Buenos Aires on Friday. FootGolf is a new sport that had its beginnings in the Netherlands and is played at golf courses. The goal is to kick the ball into a 52 centimetre (20 inch) wide hole with the least amount of kicks possible.

Papa MESSI

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi announced Friday the birth of his first child, Thiago, although the club say he will still play on Saturday.

Messi's partner, Antonella Rocuzzo, delivered their son at the Dexeus hospital about 700 metres (less than half a mile) from Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium.

"Today I am the happiest man in the world, my son was born and thanks to God for this gift! Thanks to my family for the support! A hug to everyone," the 25-year-old Argentine said on his Facebook page.

Messi had permission to miss football training in the morning "for a personal matter" on the eve of Barcelona's home game against Celta de Vigo, Barcelona said in an online statement.

But coach Tito Vilanova said the Argentine is still expected to play at the Camp Nou on Saturday.

"In principle he will be there for the game. It does not change anything that he has not trained for one day, it's not important," Vilanova told a news conference.

In an interview published this week, Messi said he will not be pushing Thiago to lace up his football boots as a career.

"He should be whatever he wants to be," Messi told Spain's top selling daily Marca.

"When he grows up he will get to know what he wants and what he chooses will be fine for me, for his mother and for everyone."

Thiago's arrival caps and no doubt overwhelms a string of good news for Messi in the past week.

The football wonder picked up the Golden Boot award on Monday for scoring 50 goals last season and he is favoured this year to win his fourth Ballon d'Or award for the world's best footballer.

Last weekend he also scored his 300th career goal.