

Argentina overhaul Portugal

AFP, Paris

Argentina, on a winning run that has taken them to the top of the nine-nation South American World Cup group, overtake Portugal to move into third place in the latest FIFA rankings.

World and European champions Spain remain top, ahead of Germany, as the Portuguese slip back into fourth, one place ahead of Italy, whose recent run of form in the European qualifying competition has lifted them three places to fifth.

England slip back a further place from last month into sixth with the Netherlands also dropping a place to seventh.

TOP TEN

1. Spain
2. Germany
3. Argentina (+1)
4. Portugal (-1)
5. Italy (+3)
6. England (-1)
7. Netherlands (-1)
8. Colombia (+1)
9. Russia (+3)
10. Croatia (+1)

Porto, Malaga through

REUTERS, London

Porto and debutants Malaga became the first teams to reach the last 16 of the Champions League when they guaranteed their progress from the group stage with two games to spare on Tuesday.

Both sides saw their 100 per cent starts end - with Porto drawing 0-0 away to Dynamo Kiev and Malaga earning a 1-1 draw with AC Milan at San Siro - but moved on to 10 points from four games in Groups A and C to secure a knockout round place.

Borussia Dortmund were on the verge of joining them until Mesut Ozil's superb curling freekick a minute from time secured Real Madrid a 2-2 draw at the Bernabeu.

Dortmund and Real are still favourites to progress from Group D after Manchester City and Ajax Amsterdam also drew 2-2, the Premier League champions hitting back from conceding twice in the first 17 minutes to retain their slim qualifying hopes.

Goals from Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Jefferson Farfan rescued Group B leaders Schalke 04 as they hit back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 at home to Arsenal, who stay a point behind in second.

Olympiakos Piraeus also remained in contention by beating visitors Montpellier 3-1.

Paris St Germain thumped Dinamo Zagreb 4-0 in Group A while Anderlecht celebrated their first win in the competition proper for nine years by edging Zenit St Petersburg 1-0 in Group C.



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UEFA Europa League
Brugge v Newcastle
Live from 1:00am (Friday)
Partizan v Inter Milan
Live from 3:00am (Friday)

TEN Action

UEFA Europa League
Anzhi v Liverpool
Live from 12:00am (Friday)
Tottenham v Maribor



Real Madrid playmaker Mesut Ozil is ecstatic after scoring the equalising goal during their Champions League encounter against Borussia Dortmund at Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ozil earns vital point

AFP, Madrid



Mesut Ozil saved Madrid with a brilliant late free-kick to earn a Champions League point in an entertaining 2-2

draw with Borussia Dortmund in the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

Borussia were ahead until the 89th minutes thanks to a Marco Reus strike and an Alvaro Arbeloa own goal in the first period. Pepe had earlier levelled for the home side.

The result means, with two games remaining, the Germans still lead Group D with 8 points, 1 more than Madrid, with Ajax 3 points behind after a 2-2 draw away at Manchester City.

It could have been worse for Madrid as it seemed for long periods the Germans would repeat the 2-1 result from the first game between the sides a fortnight ago in Dortmund.

Afterwards, coach Jose Mourinho was certain his side had been deprived of a goal that was disallowed for offside early in the second-half.

"In the first-half we were not good and our crowd told us so, but we were better in the second. I am not unhappy with the draw, but yes with not winning when we scored 3 goals, because (Jose) Callejon should have had a goal allowed, he was in a legal position and it should have stood," he said.

Borussia's coach Jurgen Klopp was happy with the result.

"We are still top so a draw was a good result for us. If we had won I think we would have deserved it, I'm proud of our performance but a little sad as we were so close to direct qualification," he said.

For Madrid, Luka Modric was chosen to partner Xabi Alonso in the centre of midfield with Raphael Varane again called upon into the centre of defence to allow Sergio Ramos to cover at right-back.

Borussia captain Sebastian Kehl was able to play with a protective mask, despite picking up a facial injury on Saturday against Stuttgart.

The German keeper Roman Weidenfeller had to be quick of his line on 2 minutes to deny Higuain after Angel Di Maria had played a long through pass.

However, backed by around 10000

Higuain cross from a good position on 22 minutes, but it was a sign of life from the home team and it lifted their support.

Both sides were now jostling for control of midfield and the opening goal, that eventually fell to the Germans on 28 minutes.

Right-back Lukasz Piszczek was deep in his own half when he played a searching ball that Lewandowski headed into the path of Reus, who powerfully volleyed home first-time.

The Germans seemed momentarily on top and comfortable until Pepe powered home a Mesut Ozil cross with his head on 34 minutes.

Borussia regained the lead right at the death of an exciting half.

Lewandowski's was again prominent, heading a long kick from Weidenfeller into the path of Grosskreutz who burst into the area and laid on a pass for Gotze to bundle the ball past Casillas.

A desperate lunge from Madrid defender Arbeloa provided the decisive touch, but it was a well-worked goal from the Germans.

Mourinho looked for a reaction, bringing on Jose Callejon and Michael Essien to replace Modric and Gonzalo Higuain.

Immediately, Callejon had the ball in the net, but the effort was ruled marginally offside.

Mourinho's last throw of the dice was to introduce Kaka with 13 minutes remaining and he quickly instigated a move that Ronaldo should have finished.

Callejon had a weak shot cleared of the line by Grosskreutz before Ozil's late escape act curling a free-kick over the wall and just inside a post to make it impossible for Weidenfeller and save Madrid at the last.

RESULTS

Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 0 FC Porto (POR) 0
Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 4 (Alex 16, Matuidi 61, Menez 65, Hoarau 80) Dinamo Zagreb (CRO) 0
Schalke 04 (GER) 2 (Huntelaar 45+2, Farfan 67) Arsenal (ENG) 2 (Walcott 18, Giroud 26)
Olympiakos (GRE) 3 (Machado 4, Greco 80, Mitroglou 82) Montpellier (FRA) 1 (Belhanda 67-pen)
Anderlecht (BEL) 1 (Mbokani 17) Zenit St-Petersburg (RUS) 0
AC Milan (ITA) 1 (Pato 73) Malaga (ESP) 1 (Eliseu 40)
Manchester City (ENG) 2 (Y. Touré 22, Agüero 74) Ajax (NED) 2 (de Jong 10, 17)
Real Madrid (ESP) 2 (Pepe 34, Ozil 89) Borussia

noisy fans the Germans settled quickly into the game.

First Lewandowski burst down the left on four minutes and fired over a dangerous cross that had to be expertly dealt with by Madrid's defence

On ten minutes Iker Casillas was quick to stop a Marcel Schmelzer effort with his feet and Lewandowski fired over the rebound.

Next it was Kevin Grosskreutz's turn to test Casillas after a quick counter-attack and mazy run down the left from Gotze.

Cristiano Ronaldo should have done better when heading wide a

Drogba pledges better times

AFP, Shanghai

Three coaches, boardroom upheaval and a reported players' strike -- Didier Drogba's first season in China hasn't exactly been smooth, but it looks like he'll stick around next year.

Speculation about Drogba's future has been intense but the Ivorian striker appeared committed to the Chinese Super League (CSL) when he spoke of making a fresh start with the club next season.

"Because I joined Shenhua relatively late, I didn't prepare with the team early in the season, so our results this year were not very good," he said, according to the Shanghai Morning Post.

"But I hope next season I can start again from the beginning with Shenhua."

Drogba has scored eight goals in 11 games since joining former Chelsea colleague Nicolas Anelka in Shanghai mid-term, earning the nickname "Devil Beast" as he terrorised Chinese defences.

But despite his prolific record, Shenhua finished a lowly ninth out of 16 teams.

It's a disappointing return after the club's owner, video game mogul Zhu Jun, splashed out on Anelka and Drogba -- who are reportedly on hundreds of thousands of dollars a week -- in a bid to land Shenhua's first title in nearly a decade.

However, after a season of serious internal strife, it's something of a surprise that both players are still at the club.

Hulk's sister freed

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Hulk's sister has been reunited with her family while three suspects have been arrested following a day-long kidnapping saga, police said on Tuesday.

Angelica Aparecida Vieira de Souza, a 22-year-old nutrition student and sister of the 26-year-old Zenit St. Petersburg player, vanished on Monday afternoon while she waited outside a restaurant for a colleague who had gone inside, police in the north-eastern city of Campina Grande said.

Souza was missing until Tuesday morning when she was recovered and questioned by police before being reunited with her family.

Souza was missing until Tuesday morning when the suspects freed her after arguing over a ransom, local police chief Andre Rabelo said.

Pep's agent in Milan?

AFP, Milan

Rumours of Pep Guardiola's interest in taking over at AC Milan gathered pace Tuesday when the agent and brother of the former Barcelona supremo was seen with officials from the Serie A club, said a report.

Milan, who drew 1-1 with Malaga in the Champions League here Tuesday, have endured their worst ever start to a league season, prompting rumours -- which began over a month ago -- that coach Massimiliano Allegri is set to be replaced.

Guardiola is currently on a sabbatical having coached Barcelona during one of their most successful spells in the club's history, however Italian media have persistently linked him to AC Milan.

On Tuesday the website of Italy's biggest selling newspaper, sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport, said Guardiola's brother Pere and former Barcelona assistant coach Manuel Estiarte were seen with club CEO Adriano Galliani.

AC Milan denied the meeting took place.

"AC Milan categorically denies reports of any kind of meeting between Adriano Galliani and those who may represent Mr. Guardiola," read a statement on

Cole stuck on 99 for a while

AFP, London

Ashley Cole may have to wait several months to win his 100th England cap after being ruled out of Chelsea's Champions League match against Shakhtar Donetsk at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

The full-back suffered a hamstring injury during last weekend's Premier League draw with Swansea and Roberto di Matteo, the European champions' manager, said Tuesday that Cole would not be fit in time to face Shakhtar.

As a result the 99-times capped Cole may miss out when England manager Roy Hodgson announces Thursday his squad for next week's friendly away to Sweden.

Injury prevented Cole getting to three figures in an England shirt during the opening World Cup qualifiers against Moldova and Ukraine.

Mancini rules City out

AFP, Manchester



Roberto Mancini declared Manchester City's Champions League campaign over after seeing his side held 2-2 by Ajax on a contentious evening at the Etihad Stadium.

Tuesday's result left the English champions five points below second-place Real Madrid in Group D with only two points from four games, and although wins in their last two matches could take them through, Mancini feels it is too late.

"I don't think we have a chance," said the City coach, who went onto the pitch to confront referee Peter Rasmussen at the final whistle.

"Eight points if we win both games. If we do that and go through, we can win the Champions League! It would be our destiny."

"But I believe in my team always, even maybe sometimes when there are mistakes."

Mario Balotelli appeared to be manhandled in the visitors' box.

They were also controversially denied an 88th-minute equaliser when Aleksandar Kolarov was ruled to have strayed offside before crossing for Sergio Aguero to tap home.

Mancini confessed that he had not seen the incident involving Balotelli, but he admitted haranguing the match official about the decision not to let Aguero's goal stand.

"I said it was a goal," he said in his post-match press conference.

"I didn't see the last bit with Mario that was a penalty. The referee and his staff were really poor tonight."

Mancini also dismissed reports he had threatened a television cameraman in the immediate aftermath of the match.

"The cameraman wanted to film me and follow me from the pitch," said the Italian. "I said it's finished. It's not a film about me -- it's a game."

Mancini's opposite number, Frank de Boer, said he thought the officials had been correct to rule out Aguero's goal.

"I thought immediately that Kolarov was offside," he said.



Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero (L) scores the second goal against Ajax during their Champions League clash at the Etihad Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP