

RVP reignites MU

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United reinvigorated their Premier League title defence by winning 1-0 at home to leaders Arsenal on Sunday to close to within five points of the early-season pace-setters.

Robin van Persie claimed the game's only goal in the first half, scoring against his former club for the third match running, to condemn Arsene Wenger's side to a first league loss since their defeat by Aston Villa on the opening day.

Victory allowed United to climb to fifth in the table, with defeats for Tottenham Hotspur and local rivals Manchester City earlier in the day enabling them to move above both of their fellow title contenders.

Having seen his side pick up just a point from earlier games against Chelsea, Liverpool and City, United manager David Moyes will hope Sunday's victory marks the end of an awkward bedding-in period at Old Trafford.

He will also have drawn strong encouragement from the performance of Phil Jones, who began the game in midfield but deputised magnificently at centre-back after Nemanja Vidic had to go off through injury.

Arsenal remain top going into the international break, two points above Liverpool, but having overseen an impressive win at Borussia Dortmund in mid-week, Wenger is likely to have been concerned by their

RESULTS

Manchester United 1 (Van Persie 27) Arsenal 0
Sunderland 1 (Bardsley 21) Manchester City 0
Swansea 3 (Bony 56, 86, Dyer 74) Stoke 3 (Walters 8, Ireland 25, Adam 90+6-pen)
Tottenham 0 Newcastle 1 (Remy 13)

toothlessness.

Chances were scarce in the game's early stages, save for a deflected Wayne Rooney effort that was comfortably saved by Wojciech Szczesny, but in the 27th minute, United struck.

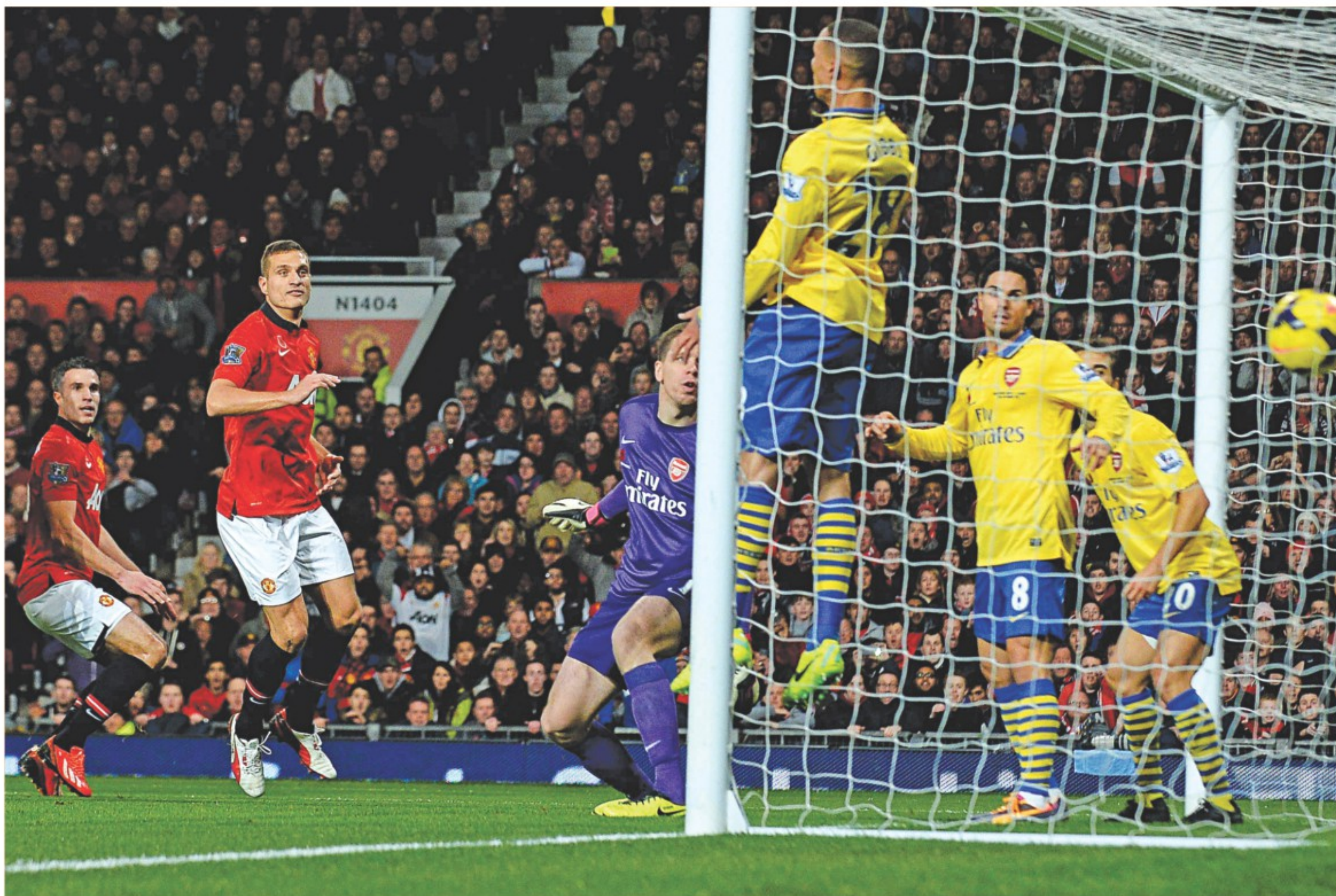
Rooney curled a corner into the box from the left and Van Persie stole between Aaron Ramsey and Olivier Giroud to glance a header over defender Kieran Gibbs and into the top-right corner.

Tottenham Hotspur missed out on the chance to go level on points with second-placed Liverpool in the Premier League as goalkeeper Tim Krul inspired Newcastle to a 1-0 win at White Hart Lane.

Loic Remy scored the only goal of the game in the 13th minute of the match.

Meanwhile Manchester City, so imposing at home, saw their away form prove fallible once again as second-bottom Sunderland beat them 1-0 for the fourth season in a row at the Stadium of Light.

Phil Bardsley dented City's title aspirations with a 21st minute curler after the visitors failed to deal with Wes Brown's long ball.



Manchester United's Dutch forward Robin van Persie (L) watches his glancing header sails into the Arsenal net during their English Premier League match at Old Trafford yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Comedy after death threat

AFP, Turin



Italian third division team Nocerina forfeited a match Sunday after several players faked injuries following death threats from fans.

With just 21 minutes gone of their Salerno derby against Salernitana, Nocerina had lost eight players to "injury".

Having used up their quota of three substitutes, which had come within the first minute, it left the team from Nocera Inferiore in Campania with just six players on the pitch -- not enough to contest a match -- and the referee was forced to call it off.

Nocerina players had received death threats prior to the match and according to local prefect Antonio De Iesu: "Nocerina's management had to convince the players to take to the field despite the threats."

Nocerina, who are bottom of Group B in the Lega Pro, the third tier of Italian football, are likely to face punishment.

The league's president Mario Macalli said: "These events have caused great damage to football and the Lega Pro."

He added that charges would be brought against "the delinquents who were responsible for the threats and against those who played out a film on the pitch."

WORLD CHESS C'SHIP Anand draws 2nd game

CNN-IBN, Chennai

Defending champion Viswanathan Anand was caught off guard by a surprise opening from Magnus Carlsen of Norway as he played out a tame draw against his challenger with white pieces in the second game of the World Chess Championship here on Sunday.

World number one Carlsen showed that he was made of sterner stuff and pulled back the attention on himself with an easiest of draws against Anand, who played with his first white in the match. The first game, in which Anand played with black pieces, was also a drawn affair on Saturday.

The two players followed played games till move 17 and on his 18th turn Anand came up with a 'Novelty' by going for the trade of queens.

The scores are now tied 1-1 after two games and there are 10 more games to go under Classical time control in this Rs 14 crore prize money championship.

SL-NZ ODI abandoned

AFP, Hambantota



Bad weather forced the first one-day international between New Zealand and Sri Lanka to be abandoned in Hambantota on Sunday, cutting short an impressive display by the hosts.

New Zealand were 13-1 from 4.2 overs in reply to Sri Lanka's 288-9 when heavy rain lashed the southern port city and wiped out the rest of the match.

Earlier, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Kumar Sangakkara and Angelo Mathews hit half-centuries to lead Sri Lanka to a big total after the home team was asked to take first strike.

Stand-in captain Kyle Mills gave the tourists a flying start when he trapped opener Dimuth Karunaratne leg-before with the first delivery of the innings.

Dilshan and Sangakkara, however, settled in to pulverise the Black Caps during a second-wicket partnership of 137.

Sangakkara made 79 off 81 balls with nine boundaries and two sixes, while Dilshan scored 81.

Left-arm spinner Anton Devcich dealt a double blow when he removed Sangakkara and former captain Mahela Jayawardene in the space of four deliveries to reduce Sri Lanka to 139-3.

But Dilshan put on 58 for the fourth wicket with skipper Mathews, who smashed nine fours and a six in an unbeaten 74 off 64 balls.

Roma stunned, Milan held

AFP, Milan



Serie A leaders Roma dropped two precious points to title-chasers Napoli and Juventus after being stunned by an injury-time leveller at home to top flight new boys Sassuolo on Sunday.

Roma looked set to take their lead over Napoli and Juventus, who kick off later in Turin, to six points after Alessandro Longhi's 19th-minute own goal gave the hosts a 1-0 lead at the Olympic Stadium.

However, Sassuolo refused to give up and were rewarded in the fourth minute of injury time when Domenico Berardi smashed the ball high into Morgan De Sanctis's net as confusion reigned in the Roma area.

Ahead of Napoli's visit to Juventus, Roma now lead both by four points having slumped to their second draw in as many games, a week after Torino brought an end to the Giallorossi's record 10-match winning streak.

Elsewhere, Marko Livaja scored a late winner for Atalanta to give the Bergamo side a 2-1 win at home to struggling Bologna while Cagliari moved up two places in the table to 13th after a Daniele Conti double helped secure a 2-1 win at home to Torino.

Parma also grabbed a share of the points at home to Lazio after Alessandro Lucarelli levelled Keita Balde's 50th minute opener.

The goals were few and far between in Sunday afternoon's matches, however, with

RESULTS

Genoa 2 (Portanova 30, Kucka 35); Verona 0
Atalanta 2 (Brivio 73, Livaja 90+3); Bologna 1 (Bianchi 76)
Cagliari 2 (Conti 43, 88); Torino 1 (Immobile 52)
Chievo 0; Milan 0
Parma 1 (Lucarelli 64); Lazio 1 (Balde 50)
Roma 1 (Longhi 14-og); Sassuolo 1 (Berardi 90+4)

basement side Chievo securing a precious point while holding under-pressure AC Milan to a scoreless draw at home.

Milan, who had Ignazio Abate sent off late in the second half, moved up to 10th but Massimiliano Allegri's side are 19 points behind Roma and 15 off the first Champions League places.

Roma dominated Sassuolo for the opening 60 minutes and should have scored several goals to put the match beyond reach.

The leaders took an early lead when Longhi turned the ball into his own net after what looked like an attempt to clear over the crossbar after goalkeeper Gianluca Pegolo had saved Alessandro Florenzi's shot.

Rudi Garcia's side suffered a blow during the half when Marco Borriello was forced off with an ankle injury and replaced by American midfielder Michael Bradley.

However, the hosts spurned several scoring chances and were left to pay the price late on when Berardi smashed the ball home as Roma's defence panicked with the ball running loose in the area.

Nadal downs Federer to reach final

AFP, London

Rafael Nadal won the latest instalment of his epic rivalry with Roger Federer as the Spaniard swept into the final of the ATP World Tour Finals with a 7-5, 6-3 victory on Sunday.

Nadal was in commanding form in the last four showdown at London's O2 Arena and his 22nd win in 32 meetings with Federer booked the world number one's place in Monday's final against Novak Djokovic or Stanislas Wawrinka.

But there was nothing routine about Nadal's latest show of force against Federer as it marked the first time he had ever beaten the Swiss great indoors after four defeats, including a loss in the 2010 final of the Tour Finals.

That was the 27-year-old's only previous appearance in the final of this prestigious season-ending event, but he looks in the mood to finally end his long wait to lift the trophy after halting Federer's remarkable run of success in the tournament in just 79 minutes.

Lippi makes history

AFP, Guangzhou



Marcello Lippi's Guangzhou Evergrande broke China's 23-year Asian title drought Saturday when they clinched the AFC Champions League on away goals with a 1-1 draw against FC Seoul.

Elkeson's brilliant opener on 58 minutes was quickly cancelled out by FC Seoul's Dejan Damjanovic, but a draw was enough for Lippi's team after their 2-2 result two weeks ago in Seoul.

The World Cup-winning coach celebrated wildly with his players as the tournament's form side were crowned worthy winners in front of a jubilant crowd of 42,000 in Guangzhou.

No Chinese team has become kings of Asia since Liaoning in 1990, and for Evergrande, the feat comes just three years after they were relegated as punishment for a match-fixing scandal.

It is also a huge achievement for Lippi, who along with the 2006 World Cup has now clinched both the Asian and European club titles after winning the 1996 UEFA Champions League with Juventus.

The Italian admitted some anxious moments after FC Seoul's equaliser, but the seasoned campaigner said the game ultimately went according to plan.

"When they did score their goal to make it a 1-1 draw it was a pretty dangerous situation for us because it could be a 50-50 game for both of us," he said.

"But in the end we won the game and we got this cup and we deserved it."

Evergrande's Argentine wizard Dario Conca twice grazed the post in a mixed first half but the game came alive when Brazilian striker Elkeson showed superb touch to open the scoring.

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