

Gunners shoot Magpies

AFP, London



Arsenal moved four points clear of Everton in the race for the fourth and final Champions League place on offer to Premier League clubs with a convincing 3-0 win over Newcastle United on Monday.

A rare strike by Laurent Koscielny opened the scoring at the Emirates Stadium before Mesut Ozil netted for the 10th time this season and Olivier Giroud sealed victory with his 21st goal of the campaign to boost the Gunners' hopes of a 17th successive term in Europe's premier club competition.

Arsene Wenger's side now require just one more victory from their final two league matches against either West Bromwich Albion or Norwich City to book their spot.

While followers of fifth-placed Everton were cheering on Newcastle in the hope they could do them a favour, the blue half of Merseyside would be disappointed as Arsenal, with the FA Cup final against Hull City at Wembley on May 17 confined to the back of their minds, dominated throughout.

Arsenal, with Aaron Ramsey and Ozil back in the groove after building up their match-fitness following injuries, looked slicker and sharper and it was little surprise when the north London side took the lead in the 26th minute.

Moussa Sissoko needlessly pulled down Giroud 40 yards out from goal and Santi Cazorla's pin-point delivery allowed Koscielny to nip in at the back post and flick home for his second goal of the season.

The only negative for the centre-back was the caution he immediately received from referee Neil Swarbrick for booting the ball into the stands, which was deemed to be an excessive celebration.

Arsenal almost doubled their advantage two minutes later when Lukas Podolski saw his effort from an acute angle on the left side of the area turned around the post by Krul's legs.

Krul came to the rescue once again on the half-hour mark when the Dutch keeper produced an excellent save to keep out Podolski's header from point-blank range.

But the second goal was coming, and Arsenal finally gave themselves vital breathing space three minutes before the interval.

Giroud broke Newcastle's offside trap to latch onto Mikel Arteta's through ball and the striker was twice denied by Krul only for Ozil to tap home the rebound.

Replays did show that Ozil was in an offside position when he converted, but the goal stood.



Chelsea captain John Terry (C) controls the ball during a training session in Cobham yesterday on the eve of their Champions League semifinal against Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: AFP

Another tactical battle

AFP, London



Atletico Madrid will expect another exhibition of ultra-disciplined counter-punching from Chelsea when the

teams reconvene for the second leg of their Champions League semifinal at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Chelsea emerged from last week's first leg with a 0-0 draw after a cautious display in which they enjoyed only 38 percent of possession and mustered five attempts at goal to Atletico's 26.

Jose Mourinho's side were at it again on Sunday, relaunching their Premier League title bid with a 2-0

success at leaders Liverpool after again surrendering possession and playing on the counter-attack.

Chelsea's approach was criticised by Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers, who dismissively described their tactics as "not difficult to coach", but it was effective, and Atletico will be braced for more of the same.

Chelsea's form has oscillated wildly in recent weeks, with performances such as the victory at Liverpool, a 6-0 demolition of Arsenal and the 2-0 defeat of Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League quarter-final second leg interspersed with shock losses to Aston Villa, Crystal Palace and Sunderland.

While Chelsea's title destiny is

not in their own hands, as they need both Liverpool and Manchester City to drop points, full-back Cesar Azpilicueta believes that Sunday's win at Anfield was ideal preparation for Wednesday's assignment.

"This victory has given us a lot of confidence to go into the match with Atletico," the Spaniard told British newspaper the London Evening Standard.

"We had a lot of difficulties (before the game at Liverpool). We had players missing and have the match of our lives to come on Wednesday.

"But we played well and showed how strong our squad is. It's an achievement from everyone.

"After the Atletico game, we'll see about the title. We have two more

games in the league against Norwich and Cardiff, but all our attention is on Wednesday."

Mourinho has declared that Chelsea do not have a chance of winning the league, but he stands on the brink of history in Europe.

Success in the May 24 final in Lisbon would make the 51-year-old Portuguese the first manager to win the Champions League with three different clubs, and few coaches thrive on the tactical duels in Europe's elite competition like he does.

He will also be motivated by the desire to avenge his loss to Diego Simeone's Atletico in last season's Copa del Rey final, which brought his third and final season at Real Madrid to a trophyless conclusion.

Atletico are unbeaten in this

Schurrle calls critics jealous

AFP, London

Chelsea forward Andre Schurrle has reacted to criticism of his side's defensive approach in their 2-0 win at Liverpool on Sunday by branding the critics "jealous".

"Winning is what matters. It's the most important thing," the 23-year-old Germany international said, in comments published by several British newspapers on Tuesday.

"You can play perfect football, have lots of one-touch stuff, and you lose. But that's not what you want -- you want to win. There's no point in playing well and losing.

"If our plan is to win playing this way, and we win, then it is perfect. If people look at us and say, 'Chelsea can't play,' even when we win, it's just because they're jealous."

Chelsea won at Anfield despite having only 27 percent of possession, with Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers complaining that his opposite number Jose Mourinho had "parked two buses" in front of the visitors' goal.

Rodgers also claimed that Chelsea's approach was "not difficult to coach", but Mourinho was unrepentant about his side's tactics, declaring: "The best team won."

Chelsea's win took them to within two points of Premier League leaders Liverpool with two matches of the season remaining.

Royals clinch a thriller

INTERNET, Abu Dhabi



Shakib Al Hasan came off the bench to take his side Kolkata Knight Riders into a Super Over against Rajasthan Royals in a pulsating Indian Premier League match in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

But despite the valiant effort from the premier Bangladesh all-rounder, who bowled superbly and then struck an unbeaten 29 off 18 balls to tie the soccer at 152, Kolkata swallowed a bitter defeat on boundary count after both sides had stroked exactly 11 runs each in their respective Super Over.

A few days ago, individual brilliance from Chris Lynn had given Kolkata Knight Riders a win from nowhere. Yesterday they experienced what it was like to be on the receiving end. Riders needed only 16 off 12 balls with six wickets in hand, when their middle and lower order capsized against James

Faulkner in the penultimate over.

Shakib forced the match into a Super Over and Knight Riders would have been confident of Sunil Narine defending 11. But with three needed to win off the last ball, Steven Smith played a smart dab into the vacant space at extra cover and ran an easy two, levelling the match again and taking Rajasthan Royals to a thrilling win on the basis of a greater number of boundaries scored in the match.

For Knight Riders, it should have never come to that stage. But Faulkner bowled an inspirational over to turn the game on its head.

Suryakant Yadav and Shakib had almost brought Knight Riders on the doorstep of a win adding 49 runs in 26 balls. Then, Faulkner's slower balls made a sparkling re-entry.

Yadav, looking for a big hit, sliced the first ball of the 19th over to long-on to fall for a 19-ball 31. It was still Knight Riders' game, but Faulkner's

fourth and fifth deliveries proved to be the icing on his birthday cake as Robin Uthappa and Vinay Kumar missed straight deliveries to be bowled. Six balls, three wickets and 12 off nine became 12 off 6. With Shakib still around, Knight Riders still had some chance - they kept up with the task as Shakib squeezed out a boundary off the first ball off the last over and squeezed another seven runs to manage to tie the game. However, Smith's presence of mind on the last delivery of the Super Over won them two points.

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 152-5 (Rahane 72, Watson 33; Kumar 2-30, Shakib 1-23)
KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 152-8 (Gambhir 45, Yadav 31, Shakib 29 not out; Faulkner 3-11)

Result: Rajasthan Royals won the match on a higher boundary count after one-over eliminator.

Juve edge closer

AFP, Milan



Juventus came from behind to win 3-1 away to struggling Sassuolo and edge closer to retaining the Serie A title on Monday night.

Simone Zaza put Sassuolo in front, but the visitors recovered and an own goal from Alessandro Longhi brought them level before strikes by Claudio Marchisio and Fernando Llorente gave Juve a victory that leaves them eight points clear of second-placed Roma with three games remaining.

A win at home to Atalanta next Monday will clinch a third successive title for the club from Turin, although it could be over by then anyway if Roma fail to win at Catania on Sunday.

Under pouring rain in Reggio Emilia, the evening started badly for Conte's Juve side as they fell behind inside nine minutes.

Zaza, who is co-owned by Juventus, beat visiting goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon at his

near post with a shot from a tight angle to put relegation-threatened Sassuolo in front.

Sassuolo, playing in the top flight for the first time in their history, famously beat AC Milan 4-3 at home in January, but there was to be no shock this time around.

Tevez volleyed just wide after being teed up by Giorgio Chiellini before the equaliser arrived in the 35th minute.

This time Marchisio found Tevez, and the Argentine striker took a couple of touches before letting fly from 20 yards, the ball taking a deflection off Alessandro Longhi on its way into the net.

The ball was almost certainly going in anyway, but the Italian league attributed the goal to Longhi, denying Tevez his 19th of the season.

Zaza might have restored the home side's lead just before the interval, but this time his effort from a tight angle was saved by Buffon.

And Juve's class told in the second half, as Andrea Pirlo's delightful flighted ball over the top was converted first-time by Marchisio in the 56th minute to put the

Neymar verdict pleases Barca

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona on Monday admitted their relief at a conclusion by the Spanish league (LFP) that there was nothing irregular about their signing of Brazilian star Neymar last summer, although the deal remains under criminal investigation.

"FC Barcelona are pleased with the resolution adopted by the Committee for Economic Control of the LFP that there was no irregular conduct in the signing of Neymar," read a statement released by the club.

Barcelona were indicted in February over alleged tax crimes relating to the 86-million-euro (\$118 million) signing of the 22-year-old, and the LFP had requested more details at the same time.

However, they told the Catalans last Friday that they had done nothing to "infringe LFP rules", Barcelona added.

The scandal over the signing of Neymar from Santos led to the resignation of Barca president Sandro Rosell in January.

State prosecutors have alleged that Barcelona owe the taxman nine million euros (\$12.5 million) in deals to bring the player to the Spanish champions from Brazilian club Santos.

The case was started by one of Barca's own members, Jordi Cases.

He accused Rosell of misappropriation for not declaring publicly that 40 million of the 57.1 million figure initially quoted by Barca was paid to N&N, a company controlled by the player's parents.

Following Rosell's resignation, the club revealed that the entire cost of the operation including Neymar's signing bonus, commissions, marketing deals, a donation to the player's foundation and other deals totalled 86.2 million euros.

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