

Chelsea's title hope in tatters

AFP, London



Chelsea missed the chance to go top of the Premier League after being held to a goalless draw at home to strugglers Norwich on Sunday.

The stalemate at Stamford Bridge all but ended Chelsea's title bid, with Jose Mourinho's men now a point behind both leaders Manchester City and second-placed Liverpool with just one match of their league season remaining.

Liverpool will return to the summit if they win away to Crystal Palace on Monday. However, City will still have a game in hand on both Liverpool and Chelsea after Monday's match at Selhurst Park.

Norwich's battling effort left them on 33 points with one game remaining and on the brink of relegation.

Sunderland are also in danger on 35 points but the north-east side have two games still to play as do West Bromwich Albion, who have 36 points.

Earlier, Arsenal celebrated their qualification for next season's Champions League with a 1-0 win at home to West Bromwich Albion.

France striker Olivier Giroud scored the only goal of the game when he headed in a 14th-minute corner.

RESULTS

Arsenal 1 (Giroud 14) West Brom 0
Chelsea 0 Norwich 0

Everton's 3-2 defeat by Manchester City on Saturday meant Arsenal kicked-off at the Emirates Stadium knowing they could not be caught in the race for fourth place in the Premier League and a spot in next term's Champions League.

"I believe the mentality of the team was outstanding (in reaching the Champions League)," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, whose side will look to end a nine-year spell without a major trophy when they face Hull in this month's FA Cup final at Wembley. "We still have games in front of us. You can be pleased of the attitude, but frustrated because we were top of the league (for 128 days) then we dropped off."

The veteran French boss added: "We had injuries -- three or four players who missed too many games."

"And in some games, at the start away from home, we were caught by surprise."

"We were perhaps too cautious and not confident enough. We paid a heavy price for it."

This result left West Brom three points above the relegation zone, but still with two games to play.



Arsenal's Olivier Giroud (R) celebrates with teammate Lukas Podolski after scoring a goal against West Bromwich Albion at the Emirates Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Levante stun Atletico

AFP, Madrid



La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid suffered a huge blow to their chances of a first title in 18 years on Sunday as they slumped to a 2-0 defeat away to Levante.

Filipe Luis' own goal after just seven minutes got the Champions League finalists off to the worst possible start and they were then denied time and again by the inspired Keylor Navas in the Levante goal.

And in their push for an equaliser, Diego Simeone's men were caught on the counter-attack 21 minutes from time when David Barral slotted home from Victor Casadesus' cross.

Atletico will still be crowned champions if they win their remaining two games at home to Malaga and away to Barcelona on the last day of the season, but any more slip-ups will allow Real Madrid the chance to take the title should they win their remaining four games.

Atletico had enjoyed a momentous week as they progressed to the Champions League final for only the second time in their history with a 3-1 win over Chelsea on Wednesday.

However, they were chasing the game almost from the off as a corner from the right struck Luis on the chest and rebounded past the helpless Thibaut Courtois.

Navas then produced the first of a string of fine saves as he parried Raul Garcia's effort from close range and David Villa blazed the rebound wastefully over.

The Costa Rican international then did well to turn Toby Alderweireld's low effort to safety as Atletico ended the first-half on top.

Simeone introduced two of the goalscorers in midweek, Arda Turan and Adrian Lopez, at half-time.

Turan saw a shot blocked when well-placed inside the area before a header from the Turkish international looped just over the bar.

Luis then nearly made amends for his own goal when he saw a shot cleared off the line before Diego Costa just failed to convert Diego Ribas' dangerous free kick and Navas produced another wonderful save from a deflected Alderweireld effort.

Atletico were then struck with a sucker punch as Levante broke upfield and Barral was on hand to turn home Casadesus' low ball into the box.

The visitors' luck in front of goal was summed up moments later when Adrian's curling effort came back off the post and rebounded to safety.

And there was to be no heroic comeback in the final quarter as a first defeat for Atletico in 15 games in all competitions left the title race wide open.

Hoeness to return as president

AFP, Berlin

Both Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and German legend Franz Beckenbauer have admitted they expect Uli Hoeness to return as club president after serving his jail term.

Hoeness was found guilty in March of cheating the state out of 28.5 million euros in unpaid taxes, resigning as Bayern president and chairman of the club's supervisory board less than 24 hours after his conviction.

But he received a standing ovation when he addressed Bayern members in Friday's extraordinary general meeting as he waits to begin his three-and-a-half-year sentence.

Karl Hopfner has been voted in as replacement president, but Hoeness took to the stage to insist that he had no plans to retire once he is a free man again.

Juve bag 30th scudetto

AFP, Milan



Juventus secured the 2014 Serie A title with three games to spare on Sunday after closest challengers Roma were stunned 4-1 away to relegation-haunted Catania.

It is the Turin giants' 30th official title in Italy's top flight and third in succession under coach Antonio Conte.

Juventus remain on course to become the first team in Serie A to finish with at least 100 points.

After hosting Atalanta on Monday, Juve travel to Roma next week and close out the season at home to Cagliari.

Juventus had congregated at a hotel in Turin on Sunday afternoon to watch Roma's upset on television and immediately after the final whistle the celebrations began.

Juventus were stripped of two Serie A titles, which they won in 2005 and 2006, following their demotion to Serie B for their role in the Calciopoli match-fixing scandal.

Defender Leonardo Bonucci made reference when he posted a message on Twitter which read: "Champions 32."

Roma had emerged as Juve's only real challengers this season after setting a new Serie A record of 10 opening wins under

RESULTS

Catania 4 (Izco 26, 34, Bergessio 55, Barrientos 79) Roma 1 (Totti 37)
Chievo 0 Torino 1 (Sardo 54)
Genoa 0 Bologna 0
Parma 2 (Cassano 8, Schelotto 90) Sampdoria 0
Udinese 5 (Di Natale 19, 45, Badu 21, Pereyra 33, Silva 44) Livorno 3 (Paulinho 13, 29, Mesbah 88)

French coach Rudi Garcia.

Roma, expected to claim another 10th successive win to match their positive start to the campaign, were 2-0 down inside 34 minutes thanks to a brace from Mariano Izco and despite Francesco Totti reducing the arrears three minutes later the visitors were humiliated in a one-sided second half.

Roma, who still hold the record for the biggest winning margin in Serie A -- following a 7-0 rout of Catania in November 2006 -- went 3-1 down in the 55th minute when Gonzalo Bergessio pounced on the rebound from Sebastian Leto's shot to beat Morgan De Sanctis in the Roma net.

Pablo Barrientos sealed the points and Juve's early title celebrations when he sent an angled strike beyond the outstretched De Sanctis on 79 minutes.

Farashganj beat Badda JS

SPORTS REPORTER

Farashganj Sporting Club moved to fourth position in the Premier Bank Bangladesh Championship League after edging Badda Jagarani Sangsad by a solitary goal at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Pushbon Molla of Farashganj scored the all important goal in the 40th minute, to ensure Farashganj moved to 12 points from nine matches.

Rossi boosts World Cup hope

AFP, Rome

Italy and Fiorentina striker Giuseppe Rossi boosted his World Cup selection hopes after returning to action in the Italian Cup final on Saturday.

Rossi, who previously missed two years of his career due to injury, ended a four-month injury lay-off when he came on for the final 20 minutes of Fiorentina's 3-1 Cup defeat to Napoli at Rome's Olympic Stadium.

He will now battle to regain full fitness in the final Serie A games of the season in the hope of making Cesare Prandelli's 23-man squad for the World Cup in June.

"I feel good, very happy to have returned but obviously disappointed with the result," Rossi told AFP.

Rossi had little time to impress Prandelli, who was in the stadium, but had club coach Vincenzo Montella purring after the game.

"He's doing well. He's lacking some rhythm but I saw him going in for tackles and that's a sign that he has no fear," said Montella.

Having made his return for Fiorentina at the start of the season following a lengthy period on the sidelines, Rossi raced into the lead of the Serie A scoring charts, netting 14 times in just 18 games, before his progress was stopped when he suffered a knee injury on January 5.

He is one of several strikers, including Serie A top scorer Ciro Immobile, hoping to partner striker Mario Balotelli in Brazil.

Coppa glory for Napoli

REUTERS, Rome



Napoli beat Fiorentina 3-1 to win their fifth Coppa Italia on Saturday in a match that kicked off 45 minutes late after three were shot, one critically, in an incident near Rome's Olympic Stadium.

A first half brace from Italy international Lorenzo Insigne and a late strike from Dries Mertens helped the southern side, who finished with 10 men, to their second Cup victory in three years.

Insigne's goals in the 11th and 17th minutes put Fiorentina on the back foot but Juan Vargas brought his side back into the game just before the half hour with a fantastic volley. Mertens then added Napoli's third in injury time.

Fiorentina took the game to their rivals in the second half, with Giuseppe Rossi making a first appearance since Jan. 5 as a 69th-minute substitute, but Napoli held on despite Gokhan Inler's 79th minute sending off.

"The most important thing tonight is the performance we saw on the pitch. We showed we wanted to win and went out and delivered," Napoli manager Rafa Benitez told reporters.

"My biggest regret is not being able to enjoy the final as I should have been able to due to what happened before the match. I think that was the case for everyone."

The match had looked in danger of being cancelled as news of the shooting filtered through.

A large section of the Napoli supporters watched the match in almost complete silence in protest.

As organisers and Napoli midfielder Marek Hamsik moved towards the fans to talk with hardcore 'ultra' leaders about whether the game should go ahead, they were pelted with flares and smoke bombs.

Piero Grasso, the president of Italy's Senate who was at the stadium to present the trophy at the end of the match, declared those responsible were "delinquents, not supporters."

"A game of football cannot be turned into a war between rival gangs," he said.

Despite the ugly atmosphere, it was a beautiful goal that opened the scoring with Hamsik bursting away on the break before slipping the ball to Insigne, who curled in his sixth goal of the season off the post.



Napoli's Slovakian midfielder Marek Hamsik (L) hoists the Coppa Italia trophy next to teammate Argentine forward Gonzalo Higuain after beating Fiorentina 3-1 in the final at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sunrisers AB-struck

SPORTS REPORTER



AB de Villiers struck a majestic unbeaten 41-ball 89 as Royal Challengers Bangalore snatched a thrilling victory from the jaws of defeat against Sunrisers Hyderabad at their M Chanaswami home ground yesterday.

Chasing a fighting Hyderabad total of 155, the home side were reeling at 59-4 by the end of the 10th over with their top batsmen Virat Kohli and Chris Gayle already back in the hutch.

But de Villiers refused to die without a fight, a fight he fought along after Yuvraj Singh departed without contributing much.

Arguably the best batsman at the moment, the South African captain raced to his 50 off only 23 deliveries that contained five sixes and a couple of boundaries. The right-hander started his assault after the 15th over with his side needing another 59 runs. His first target was West Indies captain Darren Sammy, who conceded 19 runs in the 16th. De Villiers's compatriot and fast bowler Dale Steyn threatened to turn the tied around in the next over, where he conceded only three.

But de Villiers stuck his guns to Steyn in the penultimate over, hitting a four and three sixes including a heart-stopping scoop over the fine-leg boundary. The over yielded 24 runs, leaving Bangalore with a simple task of scoring 4 runs from the last six deliveries. The right-hander fittingly ended the chase, hitting the second last ball for a four.

"It is one of those nights where things go your way. He (Steyn) won the first set and I won the second. I would have loved to have a third set against him. In those kinds of situations it is the small things that matter the most. It is team spirit, such things that matter in the end," said de Villiers, the undisputed man-of-the-match.

His captain Kohli said: "He (AB) is the best player in the world by far. He has shown it every now and then, and he has shown it again today why he is rated the number one in the world in any format."

SCORES IN BRIEF

HYDERABAD: 155-6 in 20 overs (Dhawan 37, Warner 61; Starc 2-21, Aaron 2-33) **BANGALORE:** 158-6 in 19.5 overs (AB de Villiers 89 not out, Gayle 27; K Sharma 3-17, B Kumar 2-16)

Result: Bangalore won by 4 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: AB de Villiers