

# Welbeck the difference

AFP, London



Danny Welbeck returned from injury to maintain Arsenal's recent revival as the England striker sealed a 1-0 win at West Bromwich Albion, while struggling Liverpool got back on track with a 1-0 victory over Stoke on Saturday.

Welbeck won it on the hour when he met Santi Cazorla's cross with a powerful close-range header that Ben Foster could only help into the net.

Liverpool ended their three-match losing streak as Glen Johnson's late goal clinched a hard-fought success against Stoke at Anfield.

Reds captain Steven Gerrard was dropped to the bench on the 16th anniversary of his Liverpool debut and Brendan Rodgers' side were lacklustre without him.

Stoke's Bojan Krkic hit the woodwork in the second half, but Liverpool improved after Gerrard came on for the final 16 minutes and England right-back Johnson popped up with the winner in the 85th minute after Rickie Lambert's header had hit the bar.

Robin van Persie scored only his fourth goal for Manchester United this season as the hosts cruised to a 3-0 win over Hull at Old Trafford.

United's injury problems continued early in the first half when Argentina midfielder Angel di Maria was forced to come off.

## RESULTS

Burnley 1 (Ings 87-pen) Aston Villa 1 (Cole 38)  
Liverpool 1 (Johnson 85) Stoke 0  
Manchester United 3 (Smalling 16, Rooney 42, Van Persie 66) Hull 0  
QPR 3 (Morgan 37-og, Fer 45, Austin 73) Leicester 2 (Cambiaso 4, Schlupp 67)  
Swansea 1 (Bony 15) Crystal Palace 1 (Jedinak 25-pen)  
West Bromwich 0 Arsenal 1 (Welbeck 60)



Arsenal striker Danny Welbeck (R) rises above all else and heads in the all-important goal against West Bromwich Albion during their Premier League encounter at the Hawthorns yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Vela fires Sociedad

AFP, Madrid

Former Arsenal winger Carlos Vela scored a hat-trick to give new Real Sociedad coach David Moyes a winning home start in La Liga with a 3-0 victory over Elche on Friday.

Former Everton and Manchester United manager Moyes had seen his team draw 0-0 at Deportivo in the Scot's first game in charge last weekend.

Any worries he had over his home debut at the Anoeta stadium were eased after just three minutes when Mexico international Vela found the target with a powerful header.

Vela made it 2-0 on the half-hour mark with a calm, incisive finish following a superb Xabi Prieto ball and he completed his hat-trick eight minutes into the second half by stabbing into the net at the far post after latching onto a Carlos Martinez pass.

Vela now has five goals for the season while the win, just a third in La Liga for the San Sebastian side, took Moyes's new charges into 12th place in the table.

"It was a good match for me, but the most important thing was that we won," said Vela.

# Ceni keeps playing at 42

AFP, Sao Paulo

Rogério Ceni, Sao Paulo's record goal-scoring goal keeper, on Friday shelved plans to retire despite his 42nd birthday fast approaching in January.

Ceni played 63 of Sao Paulo's 67 games this season and scored 10 goals taking his career total to 123 since his debut in 1993.

In October, he racked up a world record 590th victory for his club, beating the old mark of Manchester United legend Ryan Giggs.

Despite his age, Ceni has been persuaded to keep playing in the hope of leading Sao Paulo to the 2015 Copa Libertadores and hopefully a spot in the FIFA Club World Cup.

"Last night (Thursday), I called Rogério and asked him to meet me at the training centre. I told him that we would like to continue and he said he would like it to," said club president Carlos Miguel Aida.

Ceni had been braced to retire in 2013 after a season which saw Sao Paulo just escape relegation and he had been adamant that he would definitely quit this time around.

"If we win the Libertadores, I am sure he will stay for the Club World Cup," added Aida.

# Aguero v Forster showdown

REUTERS, Southampton



When champions Manchester City visit Southampton on Sunday's clash they will be looking to the Premier League's leading goalscorer to breach the meanest defence in the country.

Argentine Sergio Aguero has 17 goals in 18 appearances in all competitions. It is a spectacular record which would have most teams nervous at the prospect.

Southampton's strengths match up perfectly, though. The Saints are in second spot -- one place above their visitors -- and have conceded six goals in their first dozen league matches.

Goalkeeper Fraser Forster has recorded a league-leading seven clean sheets.

With such a potent striker gunning

for such a solid defence, something has to give.

But far from wincing at the prospect of Aguero terrorising his team, Southampton manager Ronald Koeman is positively relishing the prospect.

"We have a strong defence and it's a nice challenge," Koeman told reporters at Southampton's new 40 million pounds (\$62.49 million) Staplewood training centre on the edge of the New Forest.

"You can't give them no attention for one second, you need that attention during 90-95 minutes and that's a great challenge for our defenders."

City are no one-man side, however, and Koeman is aware danger lurks in every position.

"They have great, world-class players. Aguero is making the difference in the last few weeks. That's a quality for the big teams because they have players who will decide and win games by themselves, that's the most dangerous

point of City.

"If they would like to repeat the title they have to win, that's the pressure on big clubs," he added.

From being the surprise package of the season, Southampton are adapting to life shouldering a little pressure of their own.

"If we want to do better than last season, this period is important," Koeman said. "We know if we like to do something special this season we need to win these type of games."

"Every person has his own opinion about the team. I think we have a strong team, play with good organisation."

"On Sunday we play one of the teams who can win the title... but it is not easy to beat Southampton, and we will show that on Sunday."

Saints are likely to be without Northern Ireland skipper Steven Davis, who Koeman rated doubtful with a hamstring injury.

# Messi not joining Chelsea

GOAL.COM

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho claims rumours linking Barcelona's Lionel Messi with a move to Stamford Bridge are "obviously" false.

Messi sparked the rumour mill into overdrive recently when he appeared to suggest that he might not finish his career at Camp Nou.

Premier League leaders Chelsea were subsequently identified as a possible destination for the Argentine superstar, while Manchester City are also monitoring his situation. But Mourinho, who went up against Messi several times during his time as Real Madrid coach, is adamant that such stories are falsified.

Mourinho told reporters on Friday: "My reaction is that the media world changed so much that the football world also changed so much."

"And I think, in this moment, it's so easy, so easy to have non-truths circulating."

"It's so easy that some people put news without confirming or speak about rumours. Obviously [Messi going to Chelsea] is not true. Obviously it's not true."

# Real hit out at Platini

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid on Friday released a statement expressing their "surprise" at UEFA president Michel Platini after he suggested that a member of Germany's World Cup-winning team should win this year's Ballon d'Or.

Ronaldo won the Ballon d'Or for world player of the year in 2013 and has been widely tipped to retain the title for this year after his prolific record in front of goal helped Madrid win the Champions League and the Copa del Rey.

However, the 29-year-old forward had a disappointing World Cup with Portugal as his country was eliminated in the group stage.

In a statement, Madrid expressed "surprise at (Platini's) repeated remarks regarding his personal preferences for who should win the Ballon d'Or, especially when he is at the head of the leading body in European football, where we understand that strict neutrality should always prevail."

"Secondly, the Ballon d'Or is an individual prize and not a collective one that is given every year to the best player in the world and we believe that, to maintain its prestige, those who vote should take into account only the individual professional merits of the players."

"And finally, we believe without doubt that Cristiano Ronaldo has had the best year of his professional career from an individual point of view, as well as winning the Champions League, the Golden Boot, setting the record for the leading scorer in a Champions League season, winning the Copa del Rey and being top scorer in the Spanish league."

They added that he would be "deserving more than ever of winning the Ballon d'Or."

On Wednesday, Madrid-based sports daily AS reported Platini as saying that a German should win the prize.

"I already said it four years ago. A Spaniard should have won it then because Spain had won the World Cup (in 2010). This year it is Germany," he said.

As well as Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, who had won the Ballon d'Or four years running before missing out in 2013, six members of the Germany side that triumphed in Brazil are on the shortlist.



SERGIO AGUERO



FRASER FORSTER

# Sako buys €3000 boots

INTERNET

With his 100th game for the club coming up against Brentford this weekend, Wolves winger Bakary Sako wanted to find a special way to mark the occasion and so set about commissioning himself a very special pair of centenary boots.

As such, he went out and commissioned himself a stunningly gaudy pair of Swarovski crystal-encrusted Nike boots.

Sako's boots have been customised by Orravan Design, the very same people responsible for furnishing Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang with a similarly jewel-encrusted pair which the then-Saint Etienne striker paid €3,000 for, only to wear them to warm-up for about 20 minutes.

Of course, Sako too won't be allowed to actually play in his spangly boots.

# Bayern go 10 clear

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich opened a 10-point lead in the Bundesliga on Saturday with a 1-0 win at Hertha Berlin to recover from their midweek defeat at Manchester City.

With their nearest rivals Wolfsburg facing Borussia Moenchengladbach on Sunday, Arjen Robben's first-half goal in Germany's capital was enough to give Bayern their 10th league win of the season in 13 games.

After suffering their first defeat of the season at Manchester in the Champions League on Tuesday, their first loss in 23 games, this was a no-frills performance from the defending champions to preserve their unbeaten Bundesliga record.

Bayern went ahead at Berlin's chilly Olympic Stadium when Mario Goetze played Thomas Mueller into the area before Robben hit the top left-hand corner from 17 metres out with 27 minutes gone.

With six months left of the season, Bayern's march to their third straight Bundesliga title looks virtually unstoppable once again.

At the other end, Borussia Dortmund, who are at Eintracht Frankfurt on Sunday,

dropped back to the bottom of the table after both Werder Bremen and Stuttgart picked up wins.

Werder Bremen's 4-0 hammering of Paderborn and VfB Stuttgart's 4-1 win at Freiburg on Friday saw them both leap-frog Dortmund.

Bremen moved up to 14th as caretaker coach Viktor Skripnik picked up his fourth win in five games since taking over from the fired Robin Dutt as Zlatko Junuzovic, Davie Selke, Fin Bartels and Levent Aycicek scored.

Both Schalke and Bayer Leverkusen roared back from midweek Champions League defeats by claiming heavy wins to go sixth and third respectively.

Schalke responded to their 5-0 Champions League thrashing by Chelsea with a 4-1 hammering of Mainz at home with Dutch striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar claiming a hat-trick.

Netherlands international Huntelaar fired Schalke into a 2-0 lead after just 25 minutes with two superb goals before Japan striker Shinji Okazaki pulled one back for the visitors.

But the Royal Blues made sure of the three points when Huntelaar's final pass was curled home by Swiss midfielder Tranquillo Barnetta on 54 minutes.



PHOTO: STAR

Former Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore receives a memento as a token of appreciation from the Bangladesh Cricket Supporters' Association, a fan club for the Tigers. Dav, who is in town as a commentator for the Zimbabwe series, was honoured for his services to the national team from 2003 to 2007 at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.