

Lazio go 3rd

AFP, Milan



A first-half brace from Felipe Anderson was enough to secure third place for Lazio in Serie A prior to the festive break on Sunday in a hard-fought 2-2 draw away to Inter.

Inter only claimed their maiden win under Roberto Mancini, their first in six games, last week but had the worst possible start at the San Siro where Anderson hit the first of his goals after just two minutes.

Anderson, who broke his Serie A duck last week, beat Samir Handanovic with a fine angled strike after collecting Stefan Radu's assist in the box.

The Brazilian almost had his brace moments later when he sprung the offside trap to fire over but made amends minutes before half-time after collecting on the halfway line and carrying the ball all the way before beating Handanovic at the keeper's near post.

Inter emerged doubly determined after the break and after Mateo Kovacic and Mauro Icardi tested Federico Marchetti in the Lazio goal it was the former who reduced arrears in spectacular fashion.

Kovacic was just outside the box when a headed clearance fell kindly for the Croatian, who struck on the volley to see his shot sting the palms of a flailing Marchetti before hitting the back of the net.

Mancini replaced Colombian Fredy Guarin with Federico Bonazzoli and two minutes later the highly-rated Inter youth player had a hand in Inter's 80th minute leveller.

Bonazzoli's free kick found the head of Danilo D'Ambrosio in the box and after the ball rolled into the path of Rodrigo Palacio the Argentinian blasted past Marchetti from close range.

The draw left Inter in 11th place at 18 points adrift of leaders and champions Juventus, four behind city rivals Milan and six behind Lazio in the third and final Champions League qualifying spot.

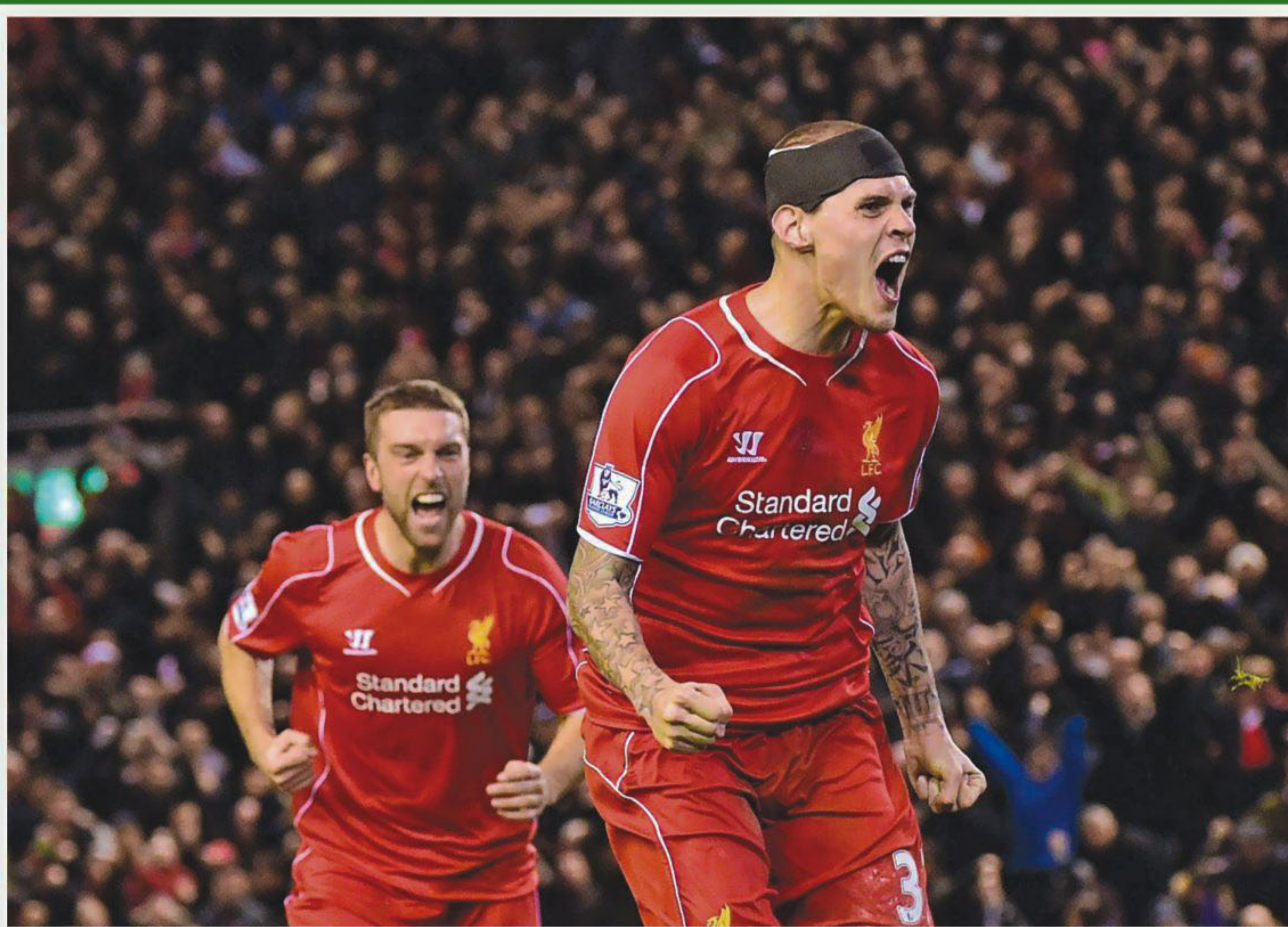
The draw was one of six in the final weekend of the year, which left Juventus top of the pile with a three-point lead on Roma, who lead Lazio by nine points.

Earlier, Italy striker Manolo Gabbiadini confirmed he could quit Sampdoria in the January transfer window after heading a late equaliser to secure a share of the spoils in a 2-2 home draw with Udinese.

Gabbiadini has been linked with a move to Napoli and the highly-rated 23-year-old told Sky Sport after the game: "I don't know if this will be my last goal in a Sampdoria shirt, I always honour the shirt that I'm wearing."

RESULTS

Verona 0 Chievo 1 (Paloschi 81)
Atalanta 3 (Denis 40-pen, 76, Moralez 55) Palermo 3 (Rigoni 6, Vazquez 1, 45+1)
Fiorentina 1 (Vargas 44) Empoli 1 (Tonelli 57)
Sampdoria 2 (Obiang 15, Gabbiadini 60) Udinese 2 (Geijo 31, Danilo 34)
Torino 2 (Glik 52, 63) Genoa 1 (Iago 42)



Liverpool defender Martin Skrtel (R) is ecstatic after scoring the equalising goal against Arsenal deep into injury time during their Premier League encounter at Anfield on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Skrtel denies Arsenal

AFP, Liverpool



A bloodied and bandaged Martin Skrtel headed home a last-gasp 97th-minute equaliser to earn Liverpool a 2-2 draw against Arsenal in the Premier League at Anfield on Sunday.

Having bossed the first half, Liverpool went ahead through Philippe Coutinho, only for goals from Mathieu Debuchy and Olivier Giroud to leave Arsene Wenger's Arsenal on the brink of a smash-and-grab victory.

But Giroud's accidental kick to Skrtel's head led to nine minutes of stoppage time and the tattooed Slovakian centre-back claimed his revenge with a memorable header in front of the Kop.

But though the goal -- Skrtel's first of the season -- gave Liverpool's fans some much-needed Christmas cheer, it did little to improve their team's standing in the table following a run of only two wins in nine games.

Brendan Rodgers's side, who had Fabio Borini sent off, are now 17 points below leaders Chelsea and nine points below the top four, while Arsene Wenger's Arsenal -- destroyed 5-1

on their previous visit in February -- trail the Champions League places by four points.

With Liverpool fielding seven midfielders in a 3-4-3 formation, which saw Raheem Sterling reprise his role as a 'false nine', it was unsurprising to see the hosts dominate possession from kick-off.

Steven Gerrard curled a free-kick wide in the early stages and Adam Lallana drilled a left-foot effort narrowly over after skilfully spinning onto a pass from Lazar Markovic.

After fielding a tame effort from Coutinho, Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny produced a decisive stop, spreading himself to thwart Markovic, who had been freed to run at goal by Gerrard's flick.

Markovic also whipped a first-time shot over the bar from a Sterling pass, before the breakthrough arrived in the 45th minute.

After Giroud conceded possession, Jordan Henderson played a pass into the feet of Coutinho, who threw Debuchy off-balance before drilling a low shot into the bottom-left corner.

There had been a sense of inevitability about the goal, but barely a minute later, Arsenal silenced the Kop by equalising with

their first attempt at goal.

Alexis Sanchez's right-wing free-kick was half-cleared, Mathieu Flamini kept the ball alive, and Debuchy climbed at the back post to head home via a deflection off Skrtel.

Skrtel's misfortune continued early in the second period as he was left with a nasty gash on the back of his head after being accidentally kicked by Giroud, which prompted a six-minute stoppage in play.

Liverpool came close to scoring when play resumed, with Sterling slyly using his hand to knock the ball past the onrushing Szczesny before crossing for Gerrard, whose diving header sent the ball over.

But it was Arsenal who struck next. Giroud clipped Kieran Gibbs's pass wide to Santi Cazorla and then exploited sluggish defending to meet the Spaniard's low cross with a shot that flew past Brad Jones.

Rodgers sent on strikers Borini and Rickie Lambert for the closing stages.

Szczesny saved from Gerrard, but just as it looked like Arsenal would hang on, Skrtel met Gerrard's right-wing corner with an emphatic near-post header to earn the 10 men a point.

Gutierrez to return after beating cancer

REUTERS, London

Newcastle United midfielder Jonas Gutierrez will return to action in an under-21 game on Monday after recovering from testicular cancer, the Premier League club said.

Gutierrez had an operation in his native Argentina in September to remove his left testicle after the discovery of a tumour and received chemotherapy treatment.

The 31-year-old will feature as an over-age player for Newcastle in an under-21 Cup fixture against West Ham United, the north-east club said on their website.

Gutierrez, who has scored 10 goals in 177 league appearances for Newcastle since joining the club in 2008, last made a first-team appearance on loan at Norwich City in April.

Mats fears relegation

AFP, Berlin

Mats Hummels admits there is no guarantee Borussia Dortmund will avoid relegation next May after last season's runners-up finished the first half of the Bundesliga season joint bottom on Sunday.

"There is no guarantee things will improve," the Dortmund captain admitted to German daily Bild after his side were beaten 2-1 at Werder Bremen on Saturday.

"Almost all of our first choice players were missing at some point in the first half of the season and weren't always 100 percent fit.

"We should manage to get everyone fit during January's winter break, then we can show a different side when we have our best 15 or 16 players.

"We have had the worst half to the season anyone could have imagined. The worry has been considerable for weeks and the way we are playing, we are right down there."

Dortmund were last relegated from Germany's top flight in the 1971/72 season, when they finished the first half of the campaign in 15th compared to their current position of 17th.

Despite scoring Dortmund's consolation goal in Bremen, World Cup winner Hummels was one of several below-par performers and was beaten for pace by Bremen's Davie Selke in the build-up to Werder's second goal.

The point bottom side Freiburg earned in Sunday's 2-2 draw with Hanover meant Dortmund finished the weekend joint last.

Both Dortmund and Freiburg have a goal difference of minus eight and their points tally of 15 is Borussia's worst at this stage since the 1987/88 season.

'Learned a lot from ISL'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh captain Mamunul Islam believes the time he spent with Atletico de Kolkata will stand him in good stead even though did not feature for a single minute for the recently-crowned champions of the inaugural Indian Super League.

The 27-year-old midfielder, who wrapped up his two-and-a-half month stint with the Kolkata franchise to resume training with Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club on Sunday, felt that sharing the dressing room with players like Luis Garcia, Josemi and Borja Fernandes and words of encouragement from Saurav Ganguly makes him want to be a part of the ISL again.

"I have learned a lot from ISL, including the struggle and rebound and maintaining fitness, which I think will good for my career," the Sheikh Jamal DC skipper told reporters after a training session at the club premises yesterday. "I will surely go there again if I'm called. I think if I can play, more opportunities will arise for our younger players in such leagues."

Despite being included in the team squad in two matches, Mamunul was



MAMUNUL ISLAM

never given the chance to prove his worth to the wider audience of the ISL. While he did feel a bit resentful over the coaching staff, Mamunul explained how he had people in the dressing room to give him the will to fight.

"Though we didn't have any personal interactions with the coaches apart from training sessions, my teammates encouraged me in difficult times. Especially Josemi, he told me that he himself went through such tough times after switching from Liverpool to Villarreal. Despite playing well for Liverpool, Josemi had to sit out matches at Villarreal, but he told me he never gave up hope," Mamunul fondly recalled.

The Bangladesh skipper believes the

basic difference between ISL and the Bangladesh Premier League, apart from some of the big name European players, is the power and pace of football.

"I think we have high-standard training methods being applied here thanks to (Maruful Haque) Maruf bhai, (Saiful Bari) Titu bhai, (Shafiqul Islam) Manik bhai. The basic difference though is the power and pace of the game. There are other aspects such as crowd and projection of games which make our leagues less attractive," opined the creative midfielder.

The one-of-a-kind midfielder in Bangladesh football, who operates as a creative source of short passes as well as defence-splitting through balls and chips, feels he is learning football every day, by watching the likes of Andrea Pirlo and Xavi Hernandez on TV and well as reading about the game.

"I watch a lot of matches on TV and read books which Maruf bhai gave me. I read what a midfielder should be doing. I try to understand that. Every team has its own style of football and so has every individual player. For example, (Andrea) Pirlo plays long balls while Xavi (Hernandez) thrives on short passes. I try to learn the best of them," ended Mamunul.

Griezmann fires Atletico

AFP, Madrid



France international Antoine Griezmann scored a hat-trick as Atletico Madrid produced a stunning second-half display to hammer Athletic Bilbao 4-1 away on Sunday and move to within four points of La Liga leaders Real Madrid.

The Spanish champions looked on course for back-to-back league defeats for the first time since April 2012 when Mikel Rico gave Athletic a deserved half-time lead.

But Griezmann levelled straight from the kick-off at the start of the second period and completed his hat-trick after Raul Garcia had put the visitors ahead from the penalty spot.

Victory moves Atletico back to within three points of Barcelona, who were 5-0 winners over Cordoba on Saturday, in second.

At the new San Mames both sides were missing a number of key players with Aymeric Laporte and Ander Iturraspe banned for the hosts, while Atletico were without the suspended duo of Koke and Mario Mandzukic, as well as Miranda through injury.

It was the Basque outfit who settled much quicker, and went ahead after 17 minutes when Markel Susaeta's free-kick was expertly nodded into the far corner by the unmarked Rico.

RESULTS

Villarreal 3 (Jonathan 10, Vietto 68, 73) Deportivo La Coruna 0
Granada 1 (Cordoba 40) Getafe 1 (Velazquez 78)
Elche 1 (Lomban 45+1) Malaga 2 (Camacho 49, Luis Alberto 77)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Mikel Rico 17) Atletico Madrid 4

Atletico failed to create anything of note in the opening 45 minutes, and could have been even further behind at the break had Ariz Aduriz decided to shoot when he was released clear on goal by Susaeta rather than trying to turn inside before being crowded out.

However, the champions emerged a different side after an inspired half-time pep talk from Diego Simeone and equalised straight from the kick-off as former Real Sociedad winger Griezmann came back to haunt his old Basque rivals once more with a precise header from Juanfran's cross.

Seven minutes later Atletico completed the comeback in controversial circumstances as the referee pointed to the spot when Tiago hit the floor under minimal contact between he and Mikel San Jose inside the area.

Once the protests from the home fans and players had finally subsided, Garcia kept his cool to send Gorka Iraizoz the wrong way from the spot.

রিহাব উইন্টার ফেয়ার - ২০১৪

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মাননীয় মন্ত্রী, গৃহায়ন ও গণপূর্ত মন্ত্রণালয়

বিশেষ অতিথি
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