

Chelsea stay on top

AFP, London



Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United showed their rivals no seasonal cheer on Friday as they pulled away from the pack in the Premier League with one-sided Boxing Day victories.

Leaders Chelsea set the tone by overcoming West Ham United 2-0. City following suit with a 3-1 success at West Bromwich Albion and United kept pace by beating Newcastle United 3-1, with Wayne Rooney scoring twice and making one.

Chelsea continue to lead City by three points, with United seven points further back, while West Ham's loss allowed Southampton, Tottenham Hotspur, Swansea City and Liverpool to make ground in the race for the top four.

Goals in each half from John Terry and Diego Costa earned Jose Mourinho's Chelsea a one-sided home win over West Ham, who slipped to fifth.

West Ham were expected to provide a stern test after a run of five games without defeat, but Sam Allardyce's team were well beaten in what was the London rivals' 100th encounter.

City were at a snow-splattered Hawthorns, but they made short work of West Brom regardless to register a ninth consecutive victory.

Fernando punished an error by goalkeeper Ben Foster to put City ahead in the eighth minute, with a Yaya Toure penalty and a David Silva goal extending the visitors' lead

before Brown Ideye scored a late consolation.

Manchester United returned to winning ways following last weekend's 1-1 draw at Aston Villa by sinking Newcastle at Old Trafford.

Rooney broke the deadlock in the 23rd minute, tapping in after a sliding Radamel Falco steered Juan Mata's pass across goal, and added a second goal 13 minutes later with an assured finish from Mata's pass.

The United captain teed up Robin van Persie to head home the hosts' third goal eight minutes into the second half, before Papiss Cisse replied with an excellent late penalty.

Southampton moved into the top four, three points below United, by winning 3-1 at Crystal Palace, who slipped into the relegation zone.

Tottenham also exploited West Ham's defeat by winning 2-1 at bottom club Leicester City.

Swansea climbed as well, moving to within four points of the Champions League places by beating Aston Villa 1-0 thanks to Gylfi Sigurdsson's curling 13th-minute free-kick.

Liverpool ended a run of three games without victory by winning 1-0 at Burnley through Raheem Sterling's goal.

Merseyside rivals Everton lost their goalkeeper in a 1-0 defeat at home to Stoke City.

Tim Howard was forced off in the second half at Goodison Park, after Bojan Krkic had scored from the penalty spot in the 38th minute.

In the day's other game, Gaston Ramirez scored one and made another as Hull City escaped from the bottom three by coming from behind to win 3-1 at Sunderland.



Chelsea striker Diego Costa celebrates scoring the second goal against West Ham United during their Premier League encounter at Stamford Bridge yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Neuer plays down Ballon d'Or hopes

AFP, Berlin

Germany's World Cup winning goalkeeper Manuel Neuer on Friday played down his prospects of securing the World Player of the Year award over holder Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

"I'm certainly not favourite," the Bayern Munich star told German daily Süddeutsche Zeitung. "The other two are international 'marques', they've clearly got an advantage."

If Neuer does receive the Ballon d'Or he will be the first of his countrymen to do so since Lothar Matthaus in 1990 and only the second goalkeeper after Lev Yashin, of the then Soviet Union, in 1963.

'Januzaj staying'

GOAL.COM

Louis van Gaal has dismissed speculation that Adnan Januzaj may be allowed to leave Manchester United on loan next month.

The arrival of Angel Di Maria and emergence of young striker James Wilson have pushed Januzaj down the pecking order, but Van Gaal has moved to quash any talk of a temporary exit.

When asked if Januzaj needs the experience of playing elsewhere on loan, Van Gaal told United's official Twitter account: "No. He is a player of United."

2014 YEAR END SPECIAL: FORMULA ONE

Hamilton dominates, Vettel flops

AGENCIES, London



Formula One entered a brave new world in 2014 but sometimes the glamour sport seemed more cruel than cool, and more determined to alienate than attract new fans. There was plenty to savour, of course, with dominant Mercedes drivers Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg taking their wheel-to-wheel duel down to the wire in one of the great rivalries of recent years.

Amid all the flare-ups and frostiness, culminating in the 'Duel in the Desert' showdown also known as 'Abu Double', Formula One presented a compelling storyline at the start of a new V6 turbo hybrid era.

When Hamilton took his 11th win of the campaign, he became the first 'Silver Arrows' driver to take the title since Juan



2014 Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton

Hamilton became the first Briton to become a multiple champion since Jackie Stewart in 1971.

Four-time champion Vettel went through the entire season without a single victory.

Manuel Fangio in 1955 and the first Briton to become a multiple champion since Jackie Stewart in 1971.

If that recalled glories of old, with Hamilton in tears as he celebrated his second crown, the 'cruel sport' also revived darker memories.

Only months after marking the 20th

anniversary of Brazilian Ayrton Senna's death at Imola in 1994, Formula One endured its worst moment since that last driver fatality.

Jules Bianchi, racing for the struggling Marussia team, skidded off at a wet Japanese Grand Prix in October and slammed into a recovery tractor. The Frenchman suffered severe brain injuries and remains critical.

The tragedy hung over the next race in Sochi, the first ever held in Russia, and the remainder of a season that had started with Michael Schumacher fighting for his life after a skiing accident.

Sebastian Vettel won four consecutive Formula One world championships and the last nine races of 2013 but his run of success ended in 2014 when the Red Bull driver went through the entire season without a victory.

Reliability problems and his car's

underperforming Renault engine had something to do with that but Vettel would have a had a more solid case had he not been eclipsed by team mate Daniel Ricciardo, who took three wins and was the only driver outside the Mercedes team to stand on the top step of the podium.

Formula One greats are supposed to show their greatness by making a difference and getting more out of a poorly-performing car than might be supposed possible. On that score alone, Vettel flopped.

Formula One also sustained self-inflicted wounds, notably the controversial double points experiment at the Abu Dhabi finale.

The man behind it, commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone, was busy on several fronts.

Those who had written off the diminutive 84-year-old billionaire were con-

founded when he extricated himself from a bribery court case in Germany by paying a \$100 million fee.

The Briton was loud in criticising the quiet new engines that replaced the screaming V8s, and made more headlines by snubbing social media and suggesting the sport was more interested in wealthy 70-year-olds than the young.

There was more negativity from those whose power units were no match for Mercedes, winners of a record 16 of 19 races with 18 pole positions and 11 one-two finishes.

By year end, the noise debate had died down but the good news story of cars racing hard and fast while consuming much less fuel was lost in wild talk of potential boycotts and arguments about money.

Marussia folded after missing the last three races while Caterham sat out two but made it to Abu Dhabi in the hope of finding a buyer.

The wrangling over revenues and costs, and fears that other small teams could also collapse, contrasted to the thrills on the track.

Hamilton and Rosberg were the main men but grinning Australian Daniel Ricciardo, in his first season with Red Bull, was a revelation as he took his first three wins and eclipsed Vettel.

Vettel shuffled off without a win to Ferrari, who drew a blank for the first time since 1993 and lost Fernando Alonso as well as two team principals and chairman Luca di Montezemolo.

Alonso will hope for better at McLaren, who start their new Honda partnership seeking a first victory since 2012.

Williams, third overall, enjoyed their best season in more than a decade. Mercedes may have more of a battle next year.

Yaya favourite for African honour

REUTERS, Cairo

Manchester City's Yaya Toure will be favourite to collect a record fourth successive African Footballer of the Year crown after he was named in the list of final three nominees by the Confederation of African Football.

The Ivory Coast midfielder faces competition from Borussia Dortmund and Gabon forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, as well as Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama, who plays for Lille.

Toure has collected the award for the last three years, matching the feat achieved by Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o and Ghana's Abedi Pele.

Georgia hire Tskhadadze

REUTERS, Moscow

Former Manchester City defender Kakhaber Tskhadadze has signed a two and a half year contract to take over as head coach of Georgia, the country's football federation said on its website.

Tskhadadze won 25 caps for Georgia, scoring one goal, and was also part of the CIS team that took part in 1992 European Championships.

Tskhadadze played for Spartak Moscow, Eintracht Frankfurt and Manchester City in the 1990's. Since 2009 he has been in charge of Azerbaijani side Inter Baku and will continue to work with the club until May.

Nat'l Handball C'ship from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Exim Bank 24th National Handball Championship begins tomorrow at the Handball Stadium in Paltan. 26 district teams and three services teams, divided into eight groups, will play in round robin league matches and champions of each group will qualify for the quarterfinals. The final will be held on January 1.

The championship will be held on three pitches -- the main handball stadium pitch and two make-shift pitches at the Outer Stadium in Paltan, informed speakers at a press conference at the Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) headquarters yesterday.

The tournament has an estimated budget of Tk 12 lakh, which is being provided by sponsors Exim Bank Ltd.

The press conference was attended, among others, by tournament committee chairman and vice-president of BHF, Hasanullah Khan Rana and general secretary of the federation, Asaduzzaman Kohinoor.

Adriano set to join Le Havre

REUTERS, Paris

Former Inter Milan and Brazil striker Adriano is set to revive his troubled career at the oldest French professional club after second division Le Havre struck a deal to sign him.

The 32-year-old Adriano, whose career has fallen apart in recent years due to disciplinary problems, wished a "Merry Christmas to (his) new fans at Le Havre" on his Twitter feed.

The Ligue 2 club confirmed they had an agreement, adding that it would be effective only once the club's takeover by French businessman Christophe Maillol is completed.



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