

United draws level after City's slip-up

ROB HARRIS
LONDON

MANCHESTER United flourished as Manchester City floundered, leaving the bitter rivals separated by goal difference on top of the English Premier League ladder.

City was left clinging to top spot after its expensively assembled attacking unit failed to score in the league for the first time this season in a 0-0 draw at West Bromwich Albion.

Injury-hit United took full advantage, with Dimitar Berbatov's hat-trick powering the champions to a second 5-0 rout in a week against Wigan on Monday night.

"We're really hitting good form now and there's a real goal threat about us from all departments," United manager Alex Ferguson said.

"If we're top of the league or joint top with City by New Year's Day I'll be happy."

City and United are 10 points ahead of third-placed Tottenham, which plays the first of two games in hand at Norwich overnight.

Chelsea is a point further back in fourth and has all but given up on its title hopes after Fulham condemned its west London rival to a third consecutive 1-1 draw.

Liverpool, three points behind Chelsea in sixth, failed to seize on Chelsea's slip-up, drawing 1-1 at home to bottom-place Blackburn.

Almost halfway through the season, the title tussle looks more and more like a two-horse race, although City is starting to show signs of weaknesses after setting a record for the best start to a Premier League campaign.

Mario Balotelli struck the top of the crossbar from 30m at the start of the second half, having already had a goal disallowed when he volleyed home only to see an offside flag raised.

"We know it is maybe impossible to stay at the top for 38 games but we will try," City manager Roberto Mancini said.

United's Park Ji-sung took just eight minutes to put his team in front, picking a spot



ON FIRE: United's Dimitar Berbatov beats Wigan keeper Ali Al-Habsi on his way to a hat-trick in his team's 5-0 rout.

in the top right of the net from Patrice Evra's cutback.

The Red Devils took full advantage of Wigan's Conor Sammon being sent off for fouling Michael Carrick, with Berbatov - on his second start of the season - holding off Antolin Alcaraz before netting his first of the day.

United had another injury setback at half-time when it lost Jonny Evans - the club's only fit centre back - with a calf injury that is expected to rule him out for two weeks.

Berbatov latched on to Antonio Valencia's pass for his second and Valencia got on the scoresheet with a low strike before Berbatov completed his hat-trick to make up ground on City in the goal difference stakes.

After Park was fouled by Alcaraz; substitute Wayne Rooney allowed Berbatov to net a third from the penalty

spot. While United's focus is on a 20th league title, Chelsea's is just staying in the four Champions League places.

Juan Mata had put Chelsea in front at the start of the second half, but Clint Dempsey equalised with only Fulham's fifth away goal this season. At the bottom, Blackburn nudged closer to its relegation rivals by earning a point at Liverpool.

Liverpool midfielder Charlie Adam put the ball into his own net on the stroke of half-time after a corner from Morten Gamst Pedersen to give Blackburn a surprising lead.

But Maxi Rodriguez spared Liverpool embarrassment after the break with his 11th goal in his last 12 starts.

Sunderland climbed four points clear of the danger zone with a 1-1 draw at Everton.



CHANCES GONE: Chelsea's Fernando Torres contemplates another poor day at the office after the 1-1 draw against Fulham.



READY: Ally McCoist

McCoist upbeat on derby crunch

ALISTAIR WATSON
GLASGOW

RANGERS manager Ally McCoist insists his side will be ready for tomorrow morning's Old Firm derby with arch rival Celtic, despite its loss to St Mirren on Christmas Eve.

The Ibrox side saw its lead at the top of the Scottish Premier League cut to just one point as it lost 1-2 in Paisley, while Celtic won its eighth match in a row against Kilmarnock.

At one stage, Rangers held a 12-point advantage over its Glasgow rival, but a recent slump of form means Celtic might enter 2012 as the league leader if it can come out on top in the crucial crunch.

McCoist, however, denied the title momentum now has swung in favour of Celtic and said form counted for nothing in an Old Firm match.

"We will be ready for the game, I can guarantee you that," the Rangers manager said.

"It's going to be a tough game but we will be ready and the players won't need (to be) lifted for that one because it's a big, big game.

"Celtic are on a good run of form at the moment in terms of victories, but it counts for absolutely nothing."

Rangers will be without centre-back Dorin Goian for the match after he was sent off against St Mirren.

McCoist, however, will have midfielder Lee McCulloch available after the Ibrox club decided to appeal against his dismissal in the loss to the Buddies.

PATRICK JONKER'S TRAINING SCHEDULE 2011-2012 - WEEK 9



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28

Core strength day.

Pilates exercises 6 x plank. Compression tights work and as long as you keep hydrated it's a great way to rid lactate acid from the body.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29

1.5hrs, 30km - 35km.

Ride into a head wind 7x1min efforts at 90% approximately 70rpm, 2min rolling rest in between and ride in the big chain ring. Finish the ride off at a moderate pace on the flat in a higher cadence and smaller gear.

LUIS-LEON
SANCHEZ

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30

Rest day.

We will load up on plenty of fruit plus drink plenty of water, remember to stretch or a 30min walk in the sea will freshen your legs.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31

3.5 - 4hrs, 100km.

Bupa Challenge recon day. If possible ride as many of the hills on the course (take short cuts) and ride each climb at 85% using small gears. Ride at a moderate pace in-between the climbs, consume the same food and electrolytes that you will be using during the challenge.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1

Happy New Year. Rest day or if you are keen and capable repeat Thursday's training.

MONDAY, JANUARY 2

1hr, 20km - 25km.

Easy ride on the flat in small gears, concentrate on pedalling smoothly 100rpm and finish off with 8 x 35sec sprints at 95% with 40sec recovery in a high cadence 110rpm.

TIP OF THE WEEK

How you breathe is very important, take a deep breath and hold it for a few pedal strokes. Try synchronizing your breathing with your pedal stroke as to create a rhythm. You will actually deliver more oxygen to your system this way rather than irregular panting or gasping.



Bupa Challenge Tour

Welcome back to the Bupa Challenge Tour training program. This training schedule is aimed at stage four of the 2012 Santos Tour Down Under, a 138km ride starting from Norwood and finishing in Tanunda on January 20.



LIJI WorldTour Event
JANUARY 15-22