

Arsenal back on top as Villa capitulate again

Arsenal eased to a comfortable 2-0 victory at Aston Villa to soar to the Premier League summit and leave their hapless opponents rooted to the bottom of the table on Sunday.

What manager Arsene Wenger described as a “great week” for Arsenal had the perfect conclusion when rivals Tottenham Hotspur stalled in pursuit, their long unbeaten run ending in a 2-1 defeat by Newcastle United with a last-gasp Ayoze Perez goal.

Liverpool’s challenge under Juergen Klopp also stuttered before they escaped with a 2-2 draw at home to West Bromwich Albion thanks to a deflected stoppage time Divock Origi effort.

Arsenal celebrated a 50th Premier League goal for Olivier Giroud – a penalty converted four days after his Champions League hat-trick against Olympiakos Piraeus – which swiftly brought more gloom to Villa Park after eight minutes.

Mesut Ozil then produced his 13th assist of the season to allow Aaron Ramsey to slot home in the 38th minute and enable Arsenal to move on to 33 points, one point clear of Manchester City and Leicester City.

Leicester have the chance to regain the leadership when they entertain Chelsea on Monday.

“Overall for us, it was a great week,” Wenger said on Sky Sports, referring to his side’s heroics when they managed, against the odds, to qualify for the knockout phase of the Champions League for the 16th straight season.

The defeat left Villa stranded at the foot of the table on six points from 16 games, six adrift of 19th-placed Sunderland.

Clean sheet

Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech equalled David James’s all-time Premier League record with his 169th clean sheet, in 349 games, prompting Wenger to hail him as “an absolute all-time great”.

Giroud’s splendid week quickly gained a new sheen when Arsenal were awarded a penalty, which referee Kevin Friend took a while to consider before adjudging that Theo Walcott had been bundled over unfairly in the area by Alan Hutton.

From the spot, Giroud converted his 14th goal of the season and 50th Premier League goal in all for Arsenal in 113 appearances, a landmark reached quicker for the Gunners only by Ian Wright and Thierry Henry.

Arsenal, in effortless command, struck again thanks to the industry of Ramsey, who won the ball not far outside his own box from Idrissa Gueye to set up a dazzling counter, then sprinted upfield to get on the end of Ozil’s unselfish square pass and double the lead.

“We believe we have an opportunity to win the title,” man of the match Ramsey told Sky Sports. “We have to maintain our focus and belief.”

Newcastle revival

Spurs, unbeaten for 14 league games since their opening day defeat at Manchester United, were stunned to become victims of Newcastle’s mini-revival under Steve McClaren at White Hart Lane.

The defeat means the Londoners stay fifth on 26 points, missing the chance to move into the top four ahead of Manchester United who suffered a shock 2-1 loss at Bournemouth on Saturday.

Tottenham midfielder Eric Dier met Christian Eriksen's corner with a 39th minute glancing header, which was just reward for their early superiority, but Newcastle, fresh from beating Liverpool last week, were inspired by a double substitution.

First, Spurs failed to deal with a free kick enabling Aleksandar Mitrovic to bundle home a scruffy 74th minute goal, practically the Serb's first touch of the match.

Then the other substitute Perez's 93rd minute volley, that goalkeeper Hugo Lloris let squirm through his grasp, earned Newcastle their first back-to-back wins in the league for a year, taking them out of the relegation zone into 15th place, one above champions Chelsea.

Liverpool's recent optimism in Klopp's reign may be evaporating at Anfield after returning captain Jordan Henderson had put them ahead against Albion, only for a Simon Mignolet mistake to gift an equaliser to Craig Dawson on the half-hour.

Jonas Olsson, who earlier had a goal disallowed, put Albion in front after 73 minutes before Divock Origi's speculative shot took a big deflection in the 96th minute to earn Liverpool a draw which moves them up to ninth on 24 points.