

Arsenal squanders two-goal lead in North London derby

Only pride is left to fight for although title still mathematically in reach

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

Arsenal's rollercoaster season hit another trough on Wednesday after a pulsating 3-3 draw against their archrival Tottenham Hotspur in the North London derby at White Hart Lane.

The Gunners squandered a two-goal lead and with five games left to play in the Premier League season find themselves in third place (on goal differential) after Chelsea downed Birmingham at Stamford Bridge 3-1. Both Arsenal and Chelsea are six points back of leaders Manchester United.

Still, Wenger was full of praise for his squad and feels the title race is not over.

"Completely open," said Wenger about the title race on www.arsenal.com. "It's open and it is down to us to keep our faith and keep battling."

"We are remarkably consistent because it was a difficult game tonight; with an average performance, we would not have come away with a point."

Squandering their chances is perhaps the tale of Arsenal's season and this draw with Spurs is a microcosm of the Gunners' year.

Arsenal has always been capable of playing the most exquisite brand of football in the Premier League. Under Wenger's guidance, Arsenal began the match with Spurs on fire, perhaps boosted by United's slip-up on Tuesday in Newcastle.

In the fifth minute, Cesc Fabregas fed a nicely weighted pass to speedy winger Theo Walcott who raced in on Spurs keeper Gomes

and slotted it home confidently.

While an early goal was just what the Gunners needed, Spurs didn't wait long to respond. Dutchman Rafael Van der Vaart fired a blast past young Arsenal keeper Wojciech Szczesny just two minutes later.

The blistering pace of the match continued and five minutes later, Abou Diaby found Samir Nasri with a routine pass. Spurs gave the Gunner too much room at the top of the 18-yard box and Nasri was able to line up a blast that seemed to fool Gomes as it went through Michael Dawson's legs.

This goal represented what Arsenal has done on several occasions this season—respond to adversity. It is not for nothing that Arsenal has been in second place for most of the Premier League season.

A defensive error by former Gunner William Gallas allowed Walcott to chip a cross to Robin Van Persie who headed toward goal. Gomes made a flying save but Van Persie fired the rebound home for a 3-1 Arsenal lead.

Just before halftime, big Tom Huddlestone came up with one of his trademark long-range strikes. Szczesny was helpless on the blast as the ball ripped its way through Van der Vaart's legs and in. Arsenal had failed to adequately clear off a corner kick and, as it has been all season long, their mistakes get punished.

One of the most exciting halves of football ended with Arsenal up 3-2.

Spurs began the second half in earnest and Arsenal picked up a couple of yellow cards for bad fouls. Wenger claimed his team "dropped



Arsenal's Robin Van Persie goes airborne while taking a shot against Tottenham Hotspur in Wednesday's North London derby. ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

physically in the second half" after the wild finish against Liverpool last Sunday.

Aaron Lennon, who had come on for Gareth Bale at the half, raced into the box and got hauled down by Szczesny who missed the ball. A penalty was rightly awarded which Van der Vaart dispatched easily.

The Gunners made a double substitution in the 82nd minute,

bringing on Nicklas Bendtner and Andrei Arshavin for Nasri and Walcott respectively.

But Gomes stopped everything else the Gunners could throw at him, showing that the sometimes-shaky goalie seems to step up his game when Arsenal could have used a break.

At the start of last weekend, Arsenal trailed United by seven points

with a game in hand. With a victory over Liverpool, the Gunners could've stepped up the pressure on United, but were unable to put forth a convincing display and deserved no better than a draw.

Pay no attention to the incredible finish in which two penalty kick goals were scored after the seventh minute of extra time; it should not take away from Arsenal not deliv-

ering the goods when they most needed to.

While Manchester United can unofficially be crowned Premier League champions, Arsenal can still battle on for pride. They should feel that second place ought to be theirs.

Some of it can be salvaged with a victory over Manchester United at the Emirates on May 1.

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Hamilton breaks Vettel's streak with win in Chinese Grand Prix

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

Lewis Hamilton earned his and McLaren's first win of the 2011 Formula 1 season, finishing ahead of Red Bull's Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber in the Chinese Grand Prix last Sunday morning. Hamilton became the first repeat winner of the Chinese Grand Prix, and ended Sebastian Vettel's two-race win streak.

"I am absolutely overwhelmed," the McLaren driver told the post-race press conference. "It feels like a long, long time since I was sitting here and I feel very proud and extremely grateful for the hard work everyone's put in."

Had Vettel won the race, he might have gained an insurmountable lead in the Drivers' Championship. When asked, Hamilton was cautiously optimistic about his and McLaren's championship chances.

"We still have a long road ahead of us but we are working very hard to close the gap," he said. "In the race we are quite similar, but in qualifying we've still got a lot of work to do."

"These guys did a fantastic job and I am looking forward to many, many more great races like this."

Hamilton used a combination of tire management—not considered his strong suit—and forceful passing moves—a Hamilton trademark—to overtake race leader Vettel on Lap 52 of the 56-lap race.

Ironically, Hamilton nearly didn't make the starting grid. His car sprung a dangerous fuel leak just before the race; his mechanics were able to repair it with 30 seconds to spare, but had to finish attaching the bodywork on the grid.

Hamilton and his teammate Jenson Button both passed Vettel at the start—a rare bad one from the Red Bull driver—but Vettel repassed Hamilton on Lap 11, just before his pit stop.

Hamilton didn't see Vettel again until Lap 44. He then patiently waited for Vettel's tires to decay. Hamilton made a couple of good attempts at the Red Bull driver, before finally catching Vettel by surprise with a pass in Turn 7. Once past, the McLaren driver opened a five-second gap by the end of the race.

Vettel tried a two-stop strategy, hoping one less stop would give him enough lead on track to hold off cars with fresher tires. Vettel passed Hamilton on Lap 11, just before heading to the pits, then took the lead on Lap 25 when the leaders pitted for their second stop.

Vettel held the lead until he pitted again on Lap 31, then retook it on Lap 37 when the leaders pitted again. Vettel couldn't open a big enough gap to protect him from Hamilton, whose tires were seven laps fresher.

No KERS, no problem. Drive of the race went to Red Bull's Mark Webber, who started 18th and finished 3rd—without the aid of KERS.

Webber had bad luck, and made bad tires choices, in qualifying, but he turned that to his advantage in



Lewis Hamilton gives a big 'thumbs up' after winning the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix. MARK THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES

the race. Webber started on Primes, then used his extra options from qualifying to give him an edge over the rest of the field which started on Options and had to finish on Primes.

Webber didn't gain 15 positions just on tire strategy. He also made a series of courageous and determined passing moves, fighting his way past such experienced opponents as Michael Schumacher, Fernando Alonso, and Jenson Button.

Webber radioed that his KERS unit had broken on Lap 24. Regardless, he cut his way through the field, earning himself a podium finish and giving Red Bull a huge lead in Constructors' points.

Button held on to fourth place, ahead of Nico Rosberg, and the Ferraris of Felipe Massa and Fernando Alonso. Michael Schumacher finished eighth, only half-a-second behind Alonso.

Vital Petrov of Renault earned two points for ninth, and Sauber-Ferrari's Kamui Kobayashi fought his way past Paul di Resta to take the final point.

Twenty-four cars started the race and 23 took the checkered flag. Only Jaime Alguersuari's Toro Rosso failed to finish; his crew failed to tighten his right rear wheel nut and the wheel came off after he left the pits on Lap 9.