

FOOTBALL



Man City 2 0 **Bolton**

Steinsson (og) 23' 90 +5
Balotelli 69' HT 1-0



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By Alistair Magowan
BBC Sport

Mario Balotelli scored as Manchester City pulled five points clear of Manchester United at the top of the Premier League by beating Bolton.

The Italian had already hit the post when Gael Clichy's angled shot struck Gretar Steinsson on its way in to open the scoring in a flowing first half.

Joe Hart saved well from Bolton's Ryo Miyaichi before Balotelli tucked home from Adam Johnson's backheeled pass.

Darren Pratley also came close to a bizarre own goal when he hit the bar.

Before Balotelli's victory-sealing strike, Pratley dispossessed substitute Edin Dzeko before firing the ball against his own crossbar from 25 yards.

And it sparked City's second-half showing into life after they failed to match a stellar opening period in which they could have been three goals up in the first five minutes.

Once Balotelli had marked a return to form with his 14th goal of the season, City boss Roberto Mancini - who had rested the likes of David Silva and Sergio Aguero - could breathe more easily.

The victory was City's 19th consecutive home win in the Premier League, equalling a record set by title rivals Manchester United last October.

At the other end of the table, Bolton slipped two points behind their nearest relegation rivals after Blackburn and QPR both drew.

The Trotters remain 19th, level on points with bottom side Wigan, but they did cause problems for Mancini's men at times and must hope that translates into points when QPR visit next weekend in a crucial relegation clash.

Here, they had cause to be thankful to their keeper Adam Bogdan, who had a ongoing battle with an on-song Balotelli throughout the game and also saved Samir Nasri's early follow-up after Balotelli had hit the post.

The Italian also dragged a shot wide from a Johnson cutback and had a penalty appeal turned down on another occasion after Zat Knight appeared to drag him to the ground.

With Silva, Aguero and Dzeko on the bench for City, January signing David Pizarro made his first start for the club, easily slotting into the midfield and dictating much of City's rhythm early on.

But for all City's class, when the first goal came it was from an unlikely source and had a touch of fortune as Clichy's shot nicked Steinsson before finding the net.

Bolton might have caved in but the probing Nigel Reo-Coker ensured they posed a threat at the other end, and David Ngog drew a near-post save from Hart before the England keeper expertly tipped Arsenal loanee Miyaichi's shot round the post following a slip by Kolo Toure.

The Japanese forward, playing on the left of a five-man midfield, was Bolton's most dangerous outlet - but Bogdan remained the visitors' key man as he once again denied Balotelli after the break.

With the contest becoming more even, Mancini sent on Dzeko in place of Pizarro but, after Pratley's near-miss, it was Balotelli who finally got on the scoresheet to make the game safe.

Johnson dribbled past Sam Ricketts and Knight, before backheeling for Balotelli to turn the ball in from close range.

After the game, Mancini said he would speak to Balotelli before deciding whether to hand him a fine for breaking a club curfew on a night out that reportedly extended into the early hours of Friday morning.

LINEUP, BOOKINGS (0) & SUBSTITUTIONS (4)

Manchester City

- 25 Hart
- 04 Kompany
- 05 Zabaleta (K Toure - 19')
- 06 Lescott
- 22 Clichy
- 08 Pizarro (Dzeko - 61')
- 11 Johnson
- 18 Barry
- 19 Nasri (Milner - 84')
- 42 Y Toure
- 45 Balotelli

Substitutes

- 30 Pantilimon
- 13 Kolarov
- 28 K Toure
- 07 Milner
- 21 Silva
- 10 Dzeko
- 16 Aguero

Bolton Wanderers

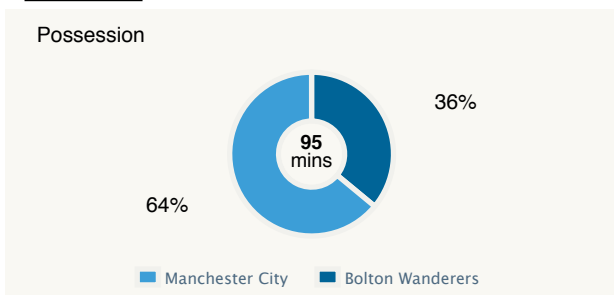
- 01 Bogdan
- 02 Steinsson
- 12 Knight
- 18 Ricketts
- 31 Wheeler
- 32 Ream
- 16 M Davies
- 19 Reo-Coker
- 21 Pratley (Muamba - 87')
- 24 Ngog
- 30 Miyaichi

Substitutes

- 22 Jaaskelainen
- 04 Robinson
- 06 Muamba
- 07 Eagles
- 10 Petrov
- 17 Klasnic
- 29 Sordell

Ref: Clattenburg
Att: 47,219

MATCH STATS



Shots	
23	8
On target	
10	5
Corners	
7	4
Fouls	
13	8

Live Text Commentary

- 90:00 +4:06 The referee brings the game to a close.
- 90:00 +1:55 Effort from inside the area by David Ngog misses to the left of the goal.
- 90:00 +1:26 Gareth Barry challenges David Ngog unfairly and gives away a free kick. Samuel Ricketts takes the free kick.
- 89:43 Corner from the right by-line taken by Adam Johnson, save by Adam Bogdan.
- 86:23 **Substitution**
(Bolton) makes a substitution, with Fabrice Muamba coming on for Darren Pratley.
- 83:28 Samuel Ricketts takes the free kick.
- 83:28 **Substitution**
James Milner replaces Samir Nasri.

- 83:28 Vincent Kompany gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on David Ngog.
- 78:27 Samir Nasri takes a shot. Tim Ream gets a block in.
- 76:08 Corner taken left-footed by Adam Johnson from the right by-line, clearance made by Zat Knight.
- 74:55 Foul by Zat Knight on Edin Dzeko, free kick awarded. Gnegneri Toure Yaya restarts play with the free kick.
- 74:17 Effort on goal by Adam Johnson from deep inside the penalty area misses to the right of the target.
- 70:59 Ryo Miyaichi fouled by Kolo Toure, the ref awards a free kick. Adam Bogdan restarts play with the free kick.
- 68:46 Adam Johnson provided the assist for the goal.
- 68:46 **Goal - Mario Balotelli - Man City 2 - 0 Bolton**
Mario Balotelli scores a goal from close range to the bottom right corner of the goal. Man City 2-0 Bolton.
- 65:35 Samuel Ricketts fouled by Samir Nasri, the ref awards a free kick. Free kick taken by Adam Bogdan.
- 64:41 David Ngog challenges Gael Clichy unfairly and gives away a free kick. Gael Clichy takes the free kick.
- 63:31 Gnegneri Toure Yaya fouled by Darren Pratley, the ref awards a free kick. Gnegneri Toure Yaya restarts play with the free kick.
- 62:21 Joleon Lescott concedes a free kick for a foul on David Ngog. Gretar Rafn Steinsson takes the free kick.
- 60:58 **Substitution**
(Man City) makes a substitution, with Edin Dzeko coming on for David Pizarro.

MORE LIVE TEXT

Live text and data provided by The Press Association

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