Week 8 Review: Monaco seven-up but Nice on top

 Mario Balotelli's brilliant winner ensured OGC Nice top the table going into the international break, but AS Monaco are right behind them after recording their record away win. Meanwhile, Olympique Lyonnais claimed the derby honours.

Balotelli bent in a superb strike four minutes from time to give Nice a 2-1 win over FC Lorient at the Allianz Riviera after Ricardo Pereira's first-half opener had been cancelled out by Benjamin Moukandjo. It was Balotelli's fifth goal in just three Ligue 1 appearances, although his afternoon's work was slightly undone by a red card in stoppage time that will rule him out of Nice's next game at home to Lyon.

"Everyone knows how good he is in front of goal, and we are taking advantage of his finishing qualities," said Nice coach Lucien Favre, whose side are still unbeaten after eight matches. "Twenty points from eight games is magnificent. But our philosophy doesn't change, we go match by match."

Les Aiglons are a point clear of Monaco, who recorded their biggest ever away victory in Ligue 1 as they hammered FC Metz 7-0 at the Stade Saint-Symphorien. Thomas Lemar, Valère Germain and Bernardo Silva all netted in the first half for the principality side before Metz had Cheick Doukouré sent off on the hour mark. Fabinho made it four from the penalty spot and Guido Carrillo added a brace, with substitute Gabriel Boschilia wrapping up Monaco's ninth win in their last 11 matches.

"Once it went 3-0 the match was over. We're happy because it's never easy after a midweek Champions League fixture," said Monaco coach Leonardo Jardim, whose side ground out a 1-1 draw with Bayer 04 Leverkusen in Germany. "We had a very good September, but the season is long."

The Côte d'Azur duo may be setting the pace, but the defending champions Paris Saint-Germain are lurking in third, four points behind the leaders, after a comfortable 2-0 win over Girondins de Bordeaux at the Parc des Princes. Edinson Cavani kept up his prolific form with a first-half brace, the second from a brilliant back-heel, to take him to eight league goals for the campaign and 11 in all competitions.

That result took PSG back up above Toulouse FC, as Pascal Dupraz's men, having beaten the champions in their previous outing, went down 1-0 away at SM Caen. Ivan Santini scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot, the Croatian netting for the first time since the opening weekend.

Lyon are into the top five after winning the 113th derby against Saint-Etienne, and the very first at the Parc OL. In front of a record crowd at their new home of 57,050, Nabil Fekir set up Sergi Darder for the first-half opener and Rachid Ghezzal came off the bench to drill in the second goal in a 2-0 win. For Saint-Etienne, who saw Kévin Monnet-Paquet hit the post early in the second period, it was a first defeat since the opening weekend of the campaign.

"For the first derby at the Parc OL, we had to win for the supporters and for our club, although it was very difficult against a very good team," said Lyon coach Bruno Genesio.

There was also derby glory for Stade Rennais FC, who sunk EA Guingamp 1-0 in the Celtico thanks to Adama Diakhaby's stoppage-time winner after the visitors had Moustapha Diallo sent off at Roazhon Park.

Elsewhere, Chad striker Casimir Ninga scored a hat-trick, his first goals of the season, for Montpellier Hérault SC but they threw away a 3-1 lead to draw 3-3 away to Dijon FCO. The hosts' goals at the Stade Gaston-Gérard came from Loïs Diony, an Anthony Vanden Borre own goal and Yohann Rivière, who struck a last-minute equaliser.
Olympique de Marseille were again left frustrated by the concession of a late goal as Pierrick Capelle’s injury-time equaliser secured Angers SCO a 1-1 draw at the Stade Jean-Bouin after Florian Thauvin’s deflected effort had given OM the lead.

LOSC climbed off the bottom at the expense of AS Nancy Lorraine as an Eder penalty - his first goal of the campaign - secured Lille a 1-0 win in the meeting of the clubs at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. FC Nantes won for the first time since the opening weekend as Mariusz Stepinski’s goal clinched a 1-0 win at home to SC Bastia.

Week 8 reactions

Olympique Lyonnais coach Bruno Genesio hailed his team’s derby victory while Lucien Favre ordered his league leaders OGC Nice to keep going “match by match” after their dramatic win over FC Lorient. Reactions.

Sunday, 2 October, 2016

Olympique Lyonnais 2-0 AS Saint-Etienne

Bruno Genesio (Lyon coach): “It was important to win because we needed the points to climb the table. It was the first derby at the Parc OL and there was lots at stake and a lot of tension before the match, so we are satisfied to have won, even if we didn’t make it easy. We were clinical when we were on top and solid when Saint-Etienne were on top. Often there is not much in it in games like these. I say it when we lose and I want to underline it today because Saint-Etienne played well.”

Christophe Galtier (Saint-Etienne coach): “We knew our opponents had lots of talent in attack. Our run has ended and we have been brought to our knees. We didn’t get the breaks, like when Kévin Monnet-Paquet hit the post. It was an open derby in which we were unfortunate in certain situations. I cannot reproach my players. I thought the team played well and were dangerous at times. Unfortunately, in a derby you need to take your chances. Lyon did that at important moments. We will need to quickly pick up points again in the league when we play Dijon. I dare to hope that I will be able to get some players back quite quickly.”

OGC Nice 2-1 FC Lorient

Lucien Favre (Nice coach): “Twenty points from eight games is magnificent. But our philosophy doesn’t change, we go match by match. It was an unexpected goal that put us in front. We defended well, and it was difficult because Lorient kept the ball well and dragged us left and right. You can’t say Lorient didn’t deserve to equalise. I was already happy to settle for that result. And then Mario Balotelli scored an exceptional goal. We had difficulties finding him in the first half, less so after. I never thought about taking him off. Everyone knows how good he is in front of goal, and we are taking advantage of his finishing qualities.”

Sylvain Ripoll (Lorient coach): “We’re really disappointed, because we put in a quality performance. We were closer to going 2-1 up than the other way round, but we got punished. I’m disappointed for the players. Nothing is really going right for us right now. I don’t want our position in the table to inhibit us. Balotelli hurt us. He’s a great player who came to the fore at the right moment.”

Angers SCO 1-1 Olympique de Marseille

Stéphane Moulin (Angers coach): “If we analyse the match, we're very fortunate to have equalised, because at the moment very few people believed in us at the time except us. Now, we can consider that a draw was the minimum because we had a huge amount of chances. We took too long to make the breakthrough, but we might never have done so. So, I'm very proud of the players.”

Franck Passi (Marseille coach): “I'm really disappointed. In the 93rd-minute, we had 11 points and were three off fourth. Now, we just have nine. The explanation is that we lack maturity. We had the ball in their penalty area, and we should have been able to keep it. You can't forget Angers' goalscoring chances, but the majority of the opportunities, whether in the first or second half, were from stupid losses of possession on our part. We
managed to go forward, which was the most difficult thing to do. We had the impression of being in control, and it was perhaps at the moment when we thought we were most in control that we conceded."

Saturday, 1 October, 2016
FC Metz 0-7 AS Monaco
Philippe Hinschberger (Metz coach): "It's a mixture of laughter and tears. We expected to suffer but we picked the wrong fight and argued amongst ourselves and with the referee. We put ourselves in trouble and they scored with their first attack. We're going to come across as idiots but we'll get over it. Speaking straight after a match like this is very dangerous as you feel frustrated and humiliated."
Leonardo Jardim (Monaco coach): "It's the biggest away win in Monaco history. Once it went 3-0 the match was over. We're happy because it's never easy after a midweek Champions League fixture. We had a very good September, but the season is long. It's not because we won 7-0 that we're going to stop working and stop being ambitious."

Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 Girondins de Bordeaux
Unai Emery (Paris Saint-Germain coach): "The team played very well and showed a lot of personality. We controlled the ball well. Scoring two early goals is always good for the confidence. We would have liked to have scored more in the second half, to kill the game off, and we tried hard. But in the end, we are very happy with the three points. It's very positive to keep working hard for the future. We need to keep improving in the league to keep climbing the ladder. This win helps us to do that and also improve our statistics with another brace for Cavani and assists from Kurzawa and Di Maria, it's good for the whole team."
Jocelyn Gourvennec (Bordeaux coach): "It was a very difficult match, especially in the first half. We suffered in the first 45 minutes and they lifted their level. We rediscovered the PSG of last season and they put intensity into their play. 2-0 was as low a gap as we could have hoped for at the break. I demanded a reaction at half-time and there was one, although not enough to worry them. After losing to Toulouse, Paris had something to prove."

FC Nantes 1-0 SC Bastia
René Girard (Nantes coach): "The lads are happy in the dressing room. I was afraid they'd lost the taste of victory. The wheel of fortune turned this evening and Bastia hit the post. The win does us good as we've been in choppy waters. It's always good to go into an international break in good spirits. Mariusz Stepinski played well and got his reward. The fans were exceptional and I doff my cap to them."
François Ciccolini (Bastia coach): "I think we could have done better. We had a chance to score and then conceded on the counter and that's infuriating. We're on the right path and had possession, but it wasn't enough. We need to find that killer instinct. We could have been a lot better with our finishing and left with at least a point."

LOSC 1-0 AS Nancy Lorraine
Frédéric Antonetti (Lille coach): "It was a small win but not one we're going to turn our noses up at. Against a team that defends in numbers you need to play with confidence, and we don't have that at the moment. You talk about Nancy's disallowed goal, but against Saint-Etienne as well we conceded an offside goal. The good news is that since the Saint-Etienne match we've rediscovered the true Eder. He's a warrior and does us good."
Pablo Correa (Nancy coach): "I'm angry tonight. You could see with the naked eye that Dia wasn't offside and it wasn't a question of centimetres. We played the way we wanted to, but what can you do? We should have scored. Indeed, we did score a legitimate goal and it was chalked off. My players showed desire."

Dijon FCO 3-3 Montpellier Hérault SC
Olivier Dall'Oglio (Dijon coach): "This point is very important from a mental point of view and we claimed it with desire more than talent. We decided to push right until the end. All week long we'd heard that we were Barcelona and it was in the heads. The players aren't used to that level of media attention."
Week 9

exposure. After the third Montpellier goal we managed to lift our heads again.”

Frédéric Hantz (Montpellier coach): “We played the way we needed to and scored three goals in an away game which we mastered mentally. This season we have scored the opener seven times and won only one game. Our problem is mental above all and we’re going to work on that. At 3-1 we shouldn't let Dijon get back on terms. I'm convinced my team is worth more than its current league position and that we can target mid-table.”

SM Caen 1-0 Toulouse FC

Patrice Garande (Caen coach): “It’s an important win but it was a difficult game. We could have been punished at the start of the game. I think in the second half we played with greater freedom, used the ball much better and showed we're capable of playing good football and taking our chances.”

Pascal Dupraz (Toulouse coach): “There were several turning points. It's a match we should have won because we dominated the first half and a good chunk of the second. When you don't respect football and don't hammer the nail in you leave yourselves exposed. Maybe TFC aren't quite mature enough yet to stay where we are in the table. We're not going to reach a hasty judgment on that as it's only Week 8.”

Friday, 30 September, 2016

Stade Rennais FC 1-0 EA Guingamp

Christian Gourcuff (Rennes coach): “We can't criticise the team for a lack of heart. The first half was sketchy, we misplaced a lot of passes. We had to stay patient, and not leave ourselves open to counter-attacks, as Guingamp are very good in that area. In the second half, we were able to put more rhythm into the game and got on top, even before the red card. Playing 11 against ten simply accentuated that. It wouldn't have been a drama if we had got a draw because we made all the efforts to win it. Our substitutes have made the difference in the last few games, but there is all the work beforehand that wears down our opponents.”

Antoine Kombouaré (Guingamp coach): “You get the feeling we played a solid game, even though there was that penalty. We played as we wanted with good defending and the ability to go forward quickly. We created some good situations, but weren't clinical. When you go down to ten men, it's more difficult. We thought that the most difficult moment had passed with Kale Johnsson's penalty save, but the players weren't rewarded for their efforts. I'm very disappointed for them. I hope that we can learn from that kind of game. In each of our last three away games, we've ended with ten men. We have to be able to hold on to the result with ten men.”
Gameiro glory as France batter Bulgaria

The recalled Kevin Gameiro scored twice as France beat Bulgaria 4-1 at the Stade de France for their first win in qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Friday, October 7, 2016

FIFA World Cup 2018 qualifying Group A

Stade de France, Paris

France 4-1 Bulgaria

After starting their campaign with a 0-0 draw in Belarus victory was imperative for Les Bleus and they had to come from behind before emerging as comfortable and stylish victors. France's next game takes them to the Netherlands on Monday. The Dutch also have four points from their opening two qualifiers, as do Sweden.

France made the worst possible start when Bacary Sagna fouled the pacy Georgi Milanov in the sixth minute and Mikhail Aleksandrov tucked away the perfect penalty off Hugo Lloris' right post. That goal awoke memories of Bulgaria's 2-1 win at the Parc des Princes in 1993 which deprived Les Bleus of qualification for the following year's World Cup in the United States.

It took France time to get into their stride as Bulgaria understandably sought to hold onto their advantage. Sagna atoned for conceding the penalty by providing a perfect cross from the right which Gameiro expertly headed into the corner of the net for his second international goal, some five years after his first. With the goal the Atletico forward justified Didier Deschamps' decision to hand him another international chance.

Three minutes later France were in front as a wicked Dimitri Payet cross from the left curled into Vladislav Stoyanov's goal. The Bulgarian goalkeeper had eyes for Antoine Griezmann, who was centimetres away from reaching the centre. By the time the ball was past the forward it was too late for Stoyanov to react.

Sagna went off injured shortly after that, replaced by Monaco full-back Djibril Sidibé. Seven minutes before half-time France moved two goals clear as defender Dimitar Pirgov's dangerous pass across the face of his own goal was picked off by Griezmann. Gameiro's Atletico club-mate was quick to get his shot away, finding the bottom corner and enhancing his status as the darling of the French fans following being both top scorer and player of the tournament at UEFA EURO 2016.

This was France's first match at the Stade de France since the painful extra-time loss to Portugal in the final three months earlier. There were very different emotions this time and the fans almost saw Paul Pogba score a screamer in the 57th minute. The fans did have another goal to celebrate within 90 seconds as Gameiro's movement saw him get in front of his marker to side-foot home a low Griezmann cross.

Blaise Matuidi struck a post in the 77th minute as France attempted to finish with a flourish. After this result and display they will head to Amsterdam full of confidence.
Deschamps: 'Complementary and effective'

French coach Didier Deschamps had full of praise for his new strike duo of Antoine Griezmann and Kévin Gameiro, who scored three goals between them in the 4-1 World Cup 2018 qualifying win over Bulgaria on Friday.

Friday, October 7, 2016
FIFA World Cup 2018 qualifying Group A
Stade de France, Paris
France 4 - 1 Bulgaria

Didier Deschamps (France coach): "We had a nasty surprise early with the foul and the penalty but we got back on track and were two goals up by the half-time break. Our second half was more consistent, and we created many chances while not being threatened at all. We scored a goal and we could have had more. [On the strike duo of Antoine Griezmann and Kévin Gameiro] They were complementary and effective, that's my takeaway from tonight. I'm happy for them and for the team. The fact that they play together at the same club means that their understanding in fine-tuned every day, and it's great to bring that to Les Bleus. We'll head to the Netherlands with the same intention we had tonight: going after the win."

Petar Houbtchev (Bulgaria coach): "The biggest error was believing that the match would be easy after we opened the scoring with a penalty. We committed some big individual errors, especially leading up to the third goal. We knew it would be tough. France played very, very well and I can only acknowledge their class; I wasn't expecting anything less. The French are stronger than us right now."

Pogba sees France home in Holland

Paul Pogba's impressive long-range strike earned France a 1-0 win in the Netherlands on Monday as Les Bleus maintained their unbeaten start to 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying.

Monday, 10 October, 2016
2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying - Group A
Amsterdam ArenA
Netherlands 0-1 France

THE MATCH
France had looked impressive in their defeat of Bulgaria last week, and they picked up where they had left off. Kévin Gameiro forced Maarten Stekelenburg into action with a fierce shot (13') before Pogba sent a vicious right-foot effort past the former AS Monaco goalkeeper from distance (30').

The French pair were both involved as Les Bleus could have doubled their lead ten minutes after the re-start, but after Pogba had teed up Gameiro, Stekelenburg saved with Antoine Griezmann uncharacteristically wayward with his follow-up (55').

Memphis Depay missed the hosts' best chance of preserving their unbeaten start to the group, firing wide just after the hour mark (62'), while the Dutchman's Manchester United team-mate Pogba would have added to his and France's tally only for Stekelenburg to push away a close-range header (66').

Despite France's domination, the hosts almost snatched a point, but visiting captain Hugo Lloris parried Depay's shot with a minute left to seal his side's victory.

THE PLAYER: Paul Pogba
After criticism his displays for both club and country have not lived up to his world record transfer fee, the midfielder's goal will have earned him plaudits.
THE STAT: 7

France's victory takes them on to seven points from three games, leaving them joint top of Group A with Sweden, 3-0 victors over Bulgaria on Monday.

Deschamps: 'Sides are starting to fear us'

France coach Didier Deschamps hailed his side's top-notch first-half performance in the 1-0 win over the Netherlands that took Les Bleus into top spot in World Cup qualifying Group A.

Monday, October 10, 2016

2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying - Group A
Amsterdam ArenA
Netherlands 1 - 1 France

Danny Blind (Netherlands coach): "We were well organised before the goal and we hadn't conceded any chances. I said to my players at the break that we had to keep the ball more. We were unlucky with the goal - our 'keeper mishandled the ball even though he routinely stops shots like that in training. In the second half, we played better and in my opinion we should have got at least a point because we had chances at the end of the match. France were favourites before the match and they still are, but we're only three points adrift and everything is still possible."

Didier Deschamps (France coach): "We controlled the second half less than the first, but paradoxically that was when we had our best chances. We could have scored a second goal that would have certainly secured the result. Luckily Hugo Lloris made a decisive save towards the end. We struggled to keep the ball somewhat and play out of defence, perhaps due to fatigue. But our first half was of such great quality, against an opponent who sat back very deep, that it's clear that sides are starting to fear us. Because the Netherlands are usually an attacking side and we completely stymied them in the first half. The one goal was enough, but we could have been punished. [On being in top spot in Group A] There is no doubt that it's better to be a frontrunner. We still have seven matches to play, but finding ourselves in this position after winning in the Netherlands is a very good thing."