

CARLOS MARINELLI: Premiership Player of the Week

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There were several worthy candidates for Premiership Player of the Week following some outstanding performances during last week-end s matches. Their emphatic victory over Manchester United at Anfield ensured that the Liverpool team were all in the reckoning.

Five Reds in particular stood out: Michael Owen, who was at his prolific best, scored a superb double to maintain an impressive strike rate. Danny Murphy controlled the midfield, harrying opponents, closing down space throughout the match, and neutralising the potent threat from Juan Sebastian Veron. John Arne Riise confirmed his growing stature with another powerful display at full-back, capped with an unstoppable shot for Liverpool s second goal, while Stephane Henchoz imposed himself resolutely in the heart of the home defence. And Dietmar Hamann, playing just in front of the back four, was a constant thorn in the side of United s attacking aspirations.

Elsewhere, the Newcastle strike pair of Craig Bellamy and Alan Shearer had good claims to be Player of the Week. Shearer celebrated the 400th League game of his illustrious career with a stunning volley to record his first goal at St James Park for a year following serious injury. And his exciting young partner Bellamy ran Aston Villa s defenders ragged with his pace and enthusiasm. His two goals were decisive – a tremendous half-volley from Robbie Elliott s clever chip, followed by Newcastle s third which he impudently prodded through the advancing Peter Schmeichel s legs.

A much less likely candidate for the honour was the player whose goal lifted Leicester City off the bottom of the Premiership and gave manager Dave Bassett his first win since taking over at troubled Filbert Street. The Foxes 1-0 win over Sunderland was a personal triumph for the beleaguered Ade Akinbiyi. Pilloried in the press and mercilessly barracked by his own club s fans for a string of hapless performances in which he allowed chance after chance to go begging, Adinbiyi never hid or lost faith in his own ability to hit the back of the net again.

One newspaper proclaimed, Ade s the worst striker in the League on the morning of the Sunderland match, reflecting on the fact that Akinbiyi – who

had squandered no fewer than four gilt-edged opportunities in the previous home match against Liverpool – had failed to get on the score-sheet since 14th April. But the player's self-belief and persistence paid off when, at the second attempt, he swept Matt Elliott's centre past Thomas Sorensen.

His celebration was more spectacular than the precious goal – he pulled off his shirt and twirled it delightedly above his head while galloping half the length of the pitch in obvious relief. Ironically, he may not be wearing that shirt again as he ponders a bid by First Division leaders Wolverhampton Wanderers to lure him back to Molineux. Akinbiyi had enjoyed a happier stage of his career at Wolves who, he says, 'knew my strengths and kept knocking it to me to score.' For the time being, however, Ade at last had a Leicester moment – and a result – to savour.

Yet the winner of our Player of the Week award was none of the above. Instead it was a little-known Argentine who destroyed Derby County with a performance that made many sit up and take notice for the first time. Carlos Marinelli was hailed as the new Maradona when he joined Middlesbrough for £1.5 million two summers ago as a 17-year-old.

The weight of expectation seemed out of proportion, yet Marinelli was the best player on the park at the Riverside when he scored his first two goals for Boro and created a third.

The boy from Buenos Aires had come, like Maradona, from Boca Juniors. Unlike the great World Cup winner his slight physique is lean and willowy; and he plays on the right-wing. His Boro captain Paul Ince explained:

Carlos scares opponents. Technically he is fantastic. He needs to get a bit stronger but that will come with games. He's going to be a very special player.

Against Derby, Marinelli ran at the Rams' defence from the start but did not get his reward until the second half. After 49 minutes Derby goalkeeper Mart Poom stopped Marinelli's shot but couldn't hold it, allowing Szilard Nemeth to follow up for his first Premiership goal. Marinelli himself scored the second when a left-wing cross found him unmarked 10 yards from goal for an accomplished left-footed finish. And he added Boro's fifth in a 5-1 rout, ghosting past two defenders before hammering home a right-foot shot past the helpless Poom.

Marinelli's double strike was the icing on the cake of a memorable performance in which he dismantled the left side of Derby's defence with his elusive skills and penetrating runs.

Boro manager Steve McClaren commented afterwards, Marinelli deserved his chance four or five games ago and today you could see why. He excites people. We could be hearing a lot more about this particular Argentinian.

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