

Walcott lifts Everton to victory

Everton up to eighth in Premier league table since August

London

Theo Walcott's second-half winner against Newcastle moved Everton up to eighth -- their highest position in the Premier League table since August.

In the first match since Everton fans were asked by their club to rate manager Sam Allardyce out of 10, Walcott's strike six minutes after the interval at Goodison Park elevated them to a place they had not been in since the second game of the season.

The 1-0 victory also ended Newcastle's four-match winning streak and prevented Rafael Benitez's side from leapfrogging the Toffees in the standings.

Despite the upturn in form under Allardyce, there was a visual indicator of the fan feeling towards him when a banner was unfurled before kick-off that read "Our survey says... get out of our club."

Toffees supporters were goaded by the travelling Newcastle fans over their current boss too, with the airing of a "You've got Sam Allardyce" chant recalling

their displeasure at his time on Tyneside.

An early Everton goal may have silenced them but Cenk Tosun sliced wide after the ball had broken to him when Paul Dummett almost caught Walcott with his attempted clearance.

There were 31 minutes on the clock before either side registered a shot on target and when it did Ayoze Perez's tame effort was underwhelming.

The hosts did have a pair of opportunities of note moments later. Magpies goalkeeper Martin Dubravka was stranded when Michael Keane met Wayne Rooney's corner with a header that Jonjo Shelvey blocked. When the ball came back in from Rooney, Keane again met it with a header he guided to central-defensive partner Phil Jagielka, who poked the ball over with a stretching try.

Former Sunderland goalkeeper Jordan Pickford was another subject of the Newcastle supporters' songs and it was his clearance, blocked by Kenedy, that would have presented Islam Slimani with an opportunity



Theo Walcott of Everton (L) fights for the ball (Pic courtesy: AP)

had Perez's pass not been too heavy. Walcott blazed over the top with the final act of an

opening 45 minutes where the home side failed to register a shot on target.

However, after an off-balance Perez had fired wide early in the second half, an effort was finally directed on Dubravka's goal and Walcott made it count. (Esn)

Europa League win would be perfect send-off for Wenger

London

Arsenal defender Per Mertesacker says the players are focused on winning the Europa League as well as their four remaining Premier League games to give manager Arsene Wenger the perfect send-off.

Wenger announced on Friday he would leave Arsenal at the end of the season, bringing an end to his near 22-year reign during which they won three Premier League titles and seven FA Cups.

European success eluded Arsenal under Wenger but they take on Atletico Madrid in the first leg of the Europa League semi-finals on Thursday.

"He made it very clear to us that this is his clear target now, to win the Europa League and every match we are going to face now. Now we can come together and let him leave in style..." Mertesacker told reporters.

"The team responded to his announcement fairly quickly. We had an atmosphere that, we want to do it for you to send you off in the best possible way."

Arsenal have yet to name a successor to Wenger, who Mertesacker said had been the "best possible fit" for the side.

"Now we have to find another good fit to start a new era," the German added. (Reuters)



Per Mertesacker (file pic)

Costa in Atletico squad

London

Diego Costa has been named in the Atletico Madrid squad for the first leg of the Europa League semi-final against Arsenal following concerns over a hamstring injury.

Atletico confirmed the former Chelsea striker as part of the 20-strong group which would travel to England in a post on the club's official website and Twitter feed.

Costa had been taken off early in the second half against Sporting Lisbon on

April 12 as Atletico went on to secure their place in the last four of the Europa League despite a 1-0 defeat, progressing 2-1 on aggregate.

Speaking ahead of Sunday's LaLiga match

against Real Betis, which finished goalless, Atletico manager Diego Simeone had suggested Costa stood "no chance" of being fit for the first leg of the European tie at the Emirates Stadium. (PA Sport)



Diego Costa (file pic)

Former France manager Henri Michel dies

London

Former France manager Henri Michel, who guided the national team to an Olympic gold medal and third place in the World Cup, has died at the age of 70, the French Football Federation announced yesterday.

Michel managed the team that won gold at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. Under him, France

made the semi-finals of the World Cup in Mexico two years later where they lost 2-0 to West Germany before beating Belgium 4-2 to seal third place.

As a player, Michel made over 500 appearances for French side Nantes and won three league titles in a 16-year career with them. He was also capped 58 times by the national team. (Reuters)

