Title: Benteke will be big for Aston Villa, says Agbonlahor

Gabriel Agbonlahor believes having Christian Benteke back on top form can help Aston Villa continue to climb up the Barclays Premier League table.

Paul Lambert's side will go into Saturday's West Mdlands derby at West Bromwich Albion seeking a third straight win and to extend their five-match unbeaten run.

"It's great to see Christian back after his injury and then his suspension. He's a big, big player for us" -Gabriel Agbonlahor

That run of results pushed Villa up to 11th, having previously dropped down to just above the relegation zone when suffering six defeats in succession. The two recent victories over Crystal Palace and Leicester City have coincided with Benteke's return from suspension. The Belgium striker scored the only goal at Selhurst Park and set up Alan Hutton's winner in the 2-1 defeat of Leicester on Sunday.

Having sustained a severe Achilles injury in early April, Benteke suffered another setback when he was sent off in his fourth match back, a 2-1 home defeat by Tottenham Hotspur at the start of November. The signs are the powerful 24-year-old forward is ready to make up for lost time and Agbonlahor believes the whole team will benefit from his presence.

"It's great to see Christian back after his injury and then his suspension," Agbonlahor told www.avfc.co.uk. "He's a big, big player for us.

"He offers a lot more than just scoring goals - look at his assist to Alan Hutton on Sunday. That shows that if he doesn't score he adds something. He contributes a lot of assists. And he could have had a hat-trick on another day. He just came up against a goalkeeper in really good form.

"We are very, very happy to have him back and he has his sharpness back too. It's just great news for the club, no question."

"We had a tough run of games against the top five from last season, but everyone stuck together" - Gabriel Agbonlahor

Villa won three of their opening four matches this season before losing six successive matches, including fixtures against Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester City and Everton. The schedule has been kinder of late and Villa will be keen to maintain the momentum when visiting The Hawthorns on Saturday, with West Brom picking up one point and scoring one goal in their last five matches.

Albion drew at Hull City on Saturday, having lost to Chelsea and Arsenal, plus an in-form Newcastle United and West Ham United. Honours have been even between Villa and West Brom since the Baggies returned to the Barclays Premier League in 2010, with both teams winning twice in eight subsequent meetings and the other four encounters ending in draws. Both Benteke and Agbonlahor were on the scoresheet at The Hawthorns two seasons as Villa gave up a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2, while the Belgium striker scored the winning goal from the penalty spot when the two teams shared seven goals in their last meeting in January. The last three matches between the two sides have brought 15 goals so there is the promise of excitement as well as the usual passion and Agbonlahor is confident the Villa players' spirit will stand them in good stead.

"We had a tough run of games against the top five from last season, but everyone stuck together," Agbonlahor said. "We have a great group of guys here and a good team spirit.

"The table looks OK now. We're not getting carried away though. We will keep working hard. We will continue to try and pick up points."