Primera Liga preview

Real eyeing straight sixth

Football

Real Madrid, buoyed by five consecutive league wins, are aiming to make it six in a row at Celta Vigo on Saturday and take over as the Spanish league leaders for the first time this season

"This weekend we can get in front," said Real's Roberto Carlos this week.

"We've worked hard for a number of weeks to get ourselves into this position and I don't think we are going to trip up now. The team has invested a lot of effort in this and now it is time to get the rewards, added the Brazilian World Cup winner, although Real will be missing the suspended Fernando

Francisco Pavon is expected to deputise for the Real captain in the centre of the defence.

Real currently lie in second place and have 33 points from their 16 games, three behind leaders Real Sociedad, who have held pole position for the last three months.

The San Sebastian-based club will leave the door open to their illustrious rivals, who have 28 Spanish titles to their credit as opposed to two by Sociedad, if they lose in Valencia on Saturday.

The European champions have a much better goal difference than their Basque rivals.

Valencia, the reigning Spanish champions, slipped to fourth with 28 points after getting thrashed 4-1 by Real Madrid in the Spanish capital last Sunday

"And that's the reason why I think Valencia are going to win and, in turn, help us. They need to win, to keep alive any hope of retaining their title, and they know that they can't let this opportunity to go begging," analysed Roberto Carlos.

However, Roberto Carlos and the rest of the Real squad don't need to look too closely at the Spanish papers to know that one if

are unbeaten this season is that they have been very difficult to break down away from home. Sociedad coach Raynald Denoueix has indicated that he might opt for a five man back line in Valencia, with the addition of Norwegian international Biorn Kyarme

Up front, Real Sociedad will also relish the return of their Yugoslav sharpshooter Darko Kovacevic, who was missing from Sunday's 2-2 draw with Malaga through suspension.

Kovacevic has found the net nine



ROBERTO CARLOS

times this season, the second highest tally in the Spanish first division and more than any Madrid or Valencia player can boast of having bagged.

For their part, Valencia will be without key midfielders Pablo Aimar and David Albelda, who are both ispended.

Deportivo La Coruna have quietly moved up to third on the back of 10 unbeaten games but face a tricky away trip to Atletico Madrid.

However, Atletico have done their best to make life easier for their Galician opponents.

Atletico's ever-controversial president Jesus Gil - a man who once went through six coaches in a season and who has also been to prison several times, including an 18-month stint at the end of the collapsed and killed dozens of people, returned to familiar form last weekend by lambasting the squad and their coach Luis Aragones.

Gil is finding it hard to swallow that Atletico are ninth rather than challenging for a spot in next season's Champions League.

"However, I have always spoken of this season being one of maintaining our status in the first division and consolidating. Anything else is a bonus," said Aragones on

The players have in turn bravely backed the respected Aragones, who guided Atletico to the second division championship last season, rather than side with the man who pays their wages.

By Thursday, a truce had broken out in what one Spanish sports daily described as 'Atletico's civil war', with Gil apologising to Aragones and the squad, but who knows what effect the damaging spat has had on dressing room morale.

Barcelona still lie down in eighth place but have won their last two games and have started to look in the league something like the side that has been laving waste to opponents in the Champions League.

The Catalan giants have a chance to improve further on Sunday at Malaga, who have not won in their last seven outings, but Barca will be without their suspended Dutch defender Frank

FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off GMT): Celta Vigo v Real Madrid (2000), Valencia v Real Sociedad (2030)

Sunday: Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal (1600), Real Betis v Alaves (1600), Espanyol v Racing Santander (1600), Osasuna v Valladolid (1600) Recreativo Huelva v Sevilla (1600), Rayo Vallecano v Real Mallorca (1600), Atletico Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna (1800), Malaga v Barcelona

Relishing the prospect

Football

REUTERS. Rio de Janeiro

Carlos Alberto Parreira threw away his reservations and agreed to coach Brazil for a third time on Wednesday, undaunted by the "24 hours-a-day suffering" during his previous stint in one of soccer's

Parreira led Brazil to their fourth World Cup title in the United States in 1994, but only after a stuttering



CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA

qualifying campaign in which he was ridiculed by often vicious media

The goading reached its height after a qualifying defeat in La Paz against Bolivia in 1993 but, even after Brazil beat Italy on penalties to win the title in Pasadena. Parreira was still under fire for fielding an allegedly lacklustre team. "The period between 1991 and

he said on Wednesday after being convinced to return by Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Ricardo Teixeira. "Brazil had not won a World Cup

1994 was very out-of-the-ordinary,"

record!

In a taboo-breaking step in this

conservative Islamic state, an

Iranian soccer club has started

allowing female soccer fans into its

Mahdi Dadras, manager of

Tehran's Paykan club, said the

decision was made because its fans

don't use obscene chants and the

presence of women improves his

banned women from soccer stadi-

ums because most fans direct

On Thursday, half a dozen jubi-

lant women were at Iran Khodro

Stadium to watch a match between

Paykan and Barq of Shiraz, from

distasteful language at op

Iranian authorities have long

Football

stadium to watch games.

players' morale.

An Iranian

for over 20 years and the pressure was unbearable for everyone. It was 24 hours-a-day suffering.

"But the situation now is different. "Brazil have been to the last three World Cup finals and won two

"No other team has done anything close to that. Today, the pressure is still there, and it always will be, but the environment is different, it's much lighter. Far from worrying about the

pressure, Parreira -- who took Ronaldo to the 1994 World Cup finals as a 17-year-old and will now have the chance to coach him in his prime -- said he was excited by the prospect of working with some of the world's top players. Although some of Brazil's 2002 World Cup team are unlikely to be

candidates for a place in the 2006 tournament, the South American nation keeps replenishing its resources at an astonishing rate. Last year Brazil produced a wave of new young talent, led by the teenage Santos pair Robinho and

labelled as one of the country's best prospects since Ronaldo. "Our players are the best in the world, so much so that they are

Diego, with the former being

imitated by others," said Parreira. "And this is a very good moment with a lot of new players appearing such as Diego, Robinho, (Corinthians striker) Gil and (Corinthians fullback) Kleber.

"All this makes the coach's job

Parreira has won a reputation as one of the wiliest and most studious coaches in Brazil and has unparalleled international experience, having coached Kuwait in the 1982 World Cup, the United Arab Emirates in 1990 and Saudi Arabia

Sahar Alvandi, a 17-year-old

My dream came true today,

student, was overjoyed to be one of

the first Iranian women to step into a

Alvandi said. "I still can't believe I'm

in a soccer stadium in the Islamic

Republic where it has so far beer

have allowed foreign women to

allowed to watch a Paykan home

In rare cases, Iranian authorities

A few female journalists were

In Nov. 2001, a group of Irish

women were allowed to attend the

Iran and Ireland playoff match for a

let them in the stadium, concluding

that the Irish women "will not under-

stand the bad language that most

Iranian men use during the

The Iranian Soccer Federation

berth in the 2002 World Cup.

the realm of only men in Iran.'

attend soccer matches.

match in recent weeks.

matches.'

southern Iran

soccer stadium.

Premiership preview

Rio's rallying cry

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United's record signing Rio Ferdinand has two aims for 2003: he wants the club to overhaul leaders Arsenal's five-point advantage at the top of the table and to make sure he plays his part in helping them achieve that.

The injury-prone England international defender has a chance to combine both ambitions when United travel to the Hawthorns on Saturday, where he is expected to start in the Premiership giants' match against second-from-bottom West Bromwich Albion.

Ferdinand, a 30 million pounds (47 million dollars) summer signing from Leeds, had to delay his United league debut by two weeks after spraining his ankle in a pre-season friendly and then missed another three matches - and England's Euro 2004 games with Slovakia and Macedonia - after knee surgery.

A torn thigh muscle in the Champions League win over Bayer Leverkusen then meant 10 more games out of action.

However, Ferdinand looked close to top form in the 1-1 League Cup semi-final first leg draw with Blackburn Rovers on Tuesday, successfully marking former United strikers Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke for long periods of the game. "It takes time to get your fitness

back but it is nice to be playing again and I am feeling better as the games go by," Ferdinand told MUTV. "It is always hard when you are

not involved in the training. You miss

the banter and the serious side. "I have not been able to have a long run in the team but hopefully I can stay fit and do well enough to keep my place.'

United have won just twice away from Old Trafford this season and Ferdinand said his side needed to be more ruthless.

"We need a winning mentality. The most important thing now is to keep progressing, put in decent performances and get results.

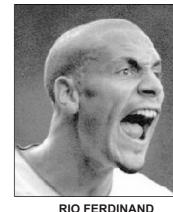
playing, West Brom or someone in the top five, we would still need to

But the man most likely to stiffen United's resolve, club captain and controversial Republic of Ireland midfielder Roy Keane, is expected to miss the game as he continues his cautious recovery from the hamstring strain which forced him off in last Saturday's FA Cup victory against Portsmouth.

"I've had hamstring strains in the past and you think you're better and come back too early," Keane said.

"You end off worse than you were at the start, so I just have to be careful how I deal with it.

"The key word over the next few



days is patience and we'll see what

happens. It's frustrating," he added. Meanwhile West Brom boss Gary Megson said he was trying to bring in Nigeria international Ifeanyi Udeze, a 23-year-old defender with PAOK Saloninka on loan for the rest of the season.

days so we could have a look at him and he could also have a look at this football club and this country." said Megson. "It is something we are trying to

"Udeze has been over for two

do. There is no point in disguising it. We are trying to bring the lad in."

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger will be without midfielders Patrick Vieira and Freddie Ljungberg for Sunday's trip to

"At the moment Ljungberg is njured and Patrick will still be out (with a groin strain)," Wenger told Àrsenal's official website on

Ray Parlour is fit again but Wenger added the Englishman was short of match pratice. "Ray is available but he needs a couple of games in the reserves."

Fourth-placed Chelsea are at home to London rivals Charlton. They will hope to have influential Italian striker Ginafranco Zola back

in their starting XI. He was on the bench for last weekend's FA Cup third-round tie against Middlesbrough after sustaining a knock but could start on

Saturday. However, midfielder Mario Stanic is doubtful after jarring his

knee against Middlesbrough. At the other end of the table West Ham, boosted by the midweek signing of Leeds midfielder Lee Bowver, will look to climb out of the relegation zone against Newcastle.

Under pressure Hammers boss Glenn Roeder is convinced 26-vearold England international Bowyer can make a major impact at Upton

"He is going to be a massive asset for us," Roeder told Sky Sports of the lifelong West Ham fan. "Lee plays at his best when he's

under pressure and we're in a pressure situation here," Roeder "His drive and desire will rub off

on other players."

FIXTURES

(1500GMT) unless stated Saturday: Bolton v Fulham, Chelsea v Charlton, Liverpool v Aston Villa, Manchester City v Leeds, Middlesbrough v Southampton, Sunderland v Blackburn, West Brom v Manchester United, West Ham v

Sunday: Birmingham v Arsenal

1605GMT), Tottenham v Everton (1400GMT)

Serie A preview

Milan's Bologna mission

Football

AFP, Rome

League leaders AC Milan must end Bologna's flawless home record on Sunday if they are to avoid a third defeat on the road and maintain this season's quest for a 17th Italian

Bologna have chalked up an impressive seven wins in a row at the Renato Dall'Ara stadium in Emilia Romagna, scoring 14 goals

Milan are equally formidable on home soil with seven wins and a draw, but away from fortress San Siro the 'Rossoneri' have shown a chink in their star-studded armour. Precious points were dropped in

1-1 draws at Empoli and Lazio. while narrow defeats at Chievo and Juventus raised serious doubts about Milan's title ammunition. Bologna's colourful goalkeeper

Gianluca Pagliuca, who in his five years at Inter was never on the losing side against Milan, believes he can maintain that record despite the opposition's current arsenal of strikers.

"Milan? They are out of this world. Stronger than Inter and possibly Juventus," said Pagliuca, who kept goal for Italy in the 1994 World Cup final in the USA where they lost on penalties to Brazil.

"But we are a group of players with great quality and big hearts. We know that a win for us is not impossible.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti insists the forward-thinking Manuel Rui Costa, Rivaldo, Andrea Pirlo, Fernando Redondo, Andriy Shevchenko and Pippo Inzaghi can all play together in the same line-up.

Despite scepticism at home about

Nigeria's bid to host the 2010 World

Cup, a top bid committee official

said Thursday the country has

everything to make a success of

World football's governing body

FIFA has said that in 2010, for the

first time, an African nation will host

the sport's most prestigious and

nation west African bid to host the

finals, along with Cameroon,

Ghana, Benin and Togo, but faces

competition from South Africa,

Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Morocco.

critics say the frequently unstable

country does not have the infra-

structure and organisational ability

to take on such a mammoth event.

And even within Nigeria, many

Nigeria is heading a joint five-

Football

staging the soccer finals.

potentially lucrative event.

all his offensive players against an

"This idea is not adaptable against a team like Bologna," said the 43-vear-old former Juventus

Former Argentine international Redondo is close to full fitness following two and a half years on the sidelines and could be granted his

nursing a muscular problem and



CARLO ANCELOTTI

could be rested while compatriot Serginho and Danish striker Jon Dahl Tomasson are carrying minor

Bologna's Guiseppe Signori and Giulio Falcone are still on the treatment table with injuries, so Claudio Bellucci and Tomas Locatelli will play alongside giant South American striker Julio Cruz in attack. Paolo Vanoli steps in for the

intelligent Bologna side would be a

player, "It would be suicidal."

World Cup winner Rivaldo is still



Inter, who are second in the table behind Milan on goal difference alone, will fancy their chances at home to Modena on Sunday night. Hector Cuper's men have

Nigeria has what it takes?

But the head of Nigeria's bid

committee for the event, Segun

Odegbami, insisted: "There is a lot

that is good about this country and

as such we should not allow the

negative things to becloud us. We

and functional facilities to host the

championship," the former interna-

in 1999 and thereby gained a lot in

terms of experience by so doing. We

also have a football tradition which

some of the other countries bidding

for the same competition don't

an opportunity to host the biggest

sporting event in the world," he

said that the huge cost of organising

the World Cup would be defrayed by

the profit it will generate, unlike

other such events like the African

Nations Cup and the All-Africa

"We deserve to give ourselves

The committee bid boss also

"First of all, we have the basic

'We hosted the Junior World Cup

should not condemn ourselves.'

tional star said.

dropped just four out of a possible

first ever Serie A start.

suspended Carlo Nervo.

21 points at the San Siro, while newly-promoted Modena have lost five times away from home this season, conceding 14 goals.

Inter are expected to welcome back Italy's leading goalscorer Christian Vieri who has recovered

from a hamstring injury. The former Lazio and Juventus marksman has netted 12 times for

the 'Nerazzurri' this season Cash-strapped Lazio, currently in third place a point behind the joint leaders, will be seeking to put their money worries behind them by maintaining their 100 per cent away record at Brescia on Saturday night.

Coach Roberto Mancini, who

was handed a place on the new

Lazio board earlier this week, is still without Yugoslav hardman Sinisa Mihajlovic who is nursing an injury to his right thigh. Fifth-placed title-holders Juventus, who are four points adrift of the two Milan clubs, welcome

Reggina to the Stadio Delle Alpi on 2001 champions Roma hope to have lone signing Olivier Dacourt available for their home clash against Chievo. The 'flying donkeys' of Verona, who continue to defy all expectations, are currently fourth in

FIXTURES

Saturday (1400 GMT kick-off unless stated): Empoli v Torino (1700 GMT),

Brescia v Lazio **(1930 GMT) Sunday:** Bologna v AC Milan, Como v Atalanta, Juventus v Reggina, Piacenza v Parma, AS Roma v Chievo, Udinese v Perugia, Inter Milan v Modena (1930 GMT)

Games which the country has

which guarantees you profit, no

matter how much you have

invested. You cannot say the same

for competitions like the Nations

Cup and the All-Africa Games,

which Nigeria has staged in the

also said the private sector would

fund the championship as against

the usual practice where govern-

ment was the main financier for

The 12-man west African bid

Last year Nigeria's attempt to

committee will be inaugarated in the

host another renowned global

event, the Miss World beauty pag-

eant, collapsed after Muslim anger

over the supposedly immodest

event triggered three days of sectar-

ian riots which left 220 dead.

Nigerian capital Abuja on Friday.

The 50-year-old sports promoter

past," Odegbami arqued.

major sporting events.

'The World Cup is one event

hosted at a loss.

Football Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoeness said Thursday that dissatisfied Brazilian star Giovane Elber was free to leave the Bundesliga

Elber can leave

expected him to and we can't bow to him the whole time," said Hoeness. "If the transfer fee is adequate and he wants to leave he can go in the summer' Elber, whose contract with the

leaders at season's end if a good

"He hasn't played like we

offer was made.

17-time Bundesliga champions runs until June 2004, has criticised the club for not showing him sufficient respect But Hoeness said: "We've

always paid his salary on time and

this shows enough respect. He's

paid a salary for a world class player

but has not given much of late.



Elber, 30, has said that he wants to remain at Bayern until his contract

"It would perhaps be good for the club because of the transfer fee if I left in 2003 but I hope to stay until 2004." added the Brazilian, who is the third top scorer this season in

Bellamy signs fresh deal

Welsh international striker Craig

Bellamy has signed a new deal with English Premiership side Newcastle which will keep him with The Magpies until the end of the 2006-07 season. The 23-year-old has impressed since joining the club

scoring 20 goals in 57 matches. "I believe the club is on the verge of winning things and I want to be a part of it," said Bellamy.

"The decision to commit myself to Newcastle United is an easy

GIOVANE ELBER

the Bundesliga.

Football AFP, London

in June 2001 from Coventry by

backroom staff and the fans are "For me it is a dream come true. I am playing for one of the

one. We have a talented young

squad, an excellent manager and

biggest clubs in Europe - we're involved in the major competitions and everyone at the club is focused on success. Chairman Freddy Shepherd added: "We are delighted to have secured the services of Craig for

the next four-and-a-half seasons. "He is a tremendous talent who has demonstrated his commitment to the long-term success of Newcastle.'

Veron at ease AFP, Rome

Manchester United midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron says now he has

intention of a quick return to Italy. Rumours suggesting the Argentine would move back to former club Lazio or Juventus after he struggled to find his form in the English Premiership have

been rife. But the 27-year-old said he

was happy at Old Trafford. "I have a three-year contract with Manchester and I am fine in England," Veron told Corriere

in a difficult season. Now that I have settled I have no intention of leaving.' He denied Juventus had approached him but admitted a

"I am finally proving my worth

"If my relationship with Manchester should end, I would give preference to Lazio for emotional reasons," he said.

"I am very close to the fans,

am a friend of (Lazio coach)

move to Lazio still appealed to

Roberto Mancini and I won a lot with Eriksson. It would be like returning home "I will reflect on my future in June, but I want to stay in

on big challenges now. Veron also played down speculation regarding an Italian move for Manchester United team-mate Ryan Giggs

Manchester. We can really focus

"I think Giggs will remain with us," he said.

CROSSWORD **ACROSS** 37 Colonial Supreme caster Court, (Var.) 38 Where it e.g. 5 Nourished should be 41 "Eureka!" 8 Send out 12 Surpass a 42 Commits perjury 43 Star simmer

48 Dandling 14 Worklocale bench 49\$\$\$ attach dispenser 15 Related to 50 Loosen cooking 51 Without 17 Singer 52 Speed-Fitzgerald wagon 18 Trot letters

19 Penn pal?

CLOM

stuffing

32 Appomat

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school

36 Battle the

clock

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53 Ollie's pa

1 Brokaw's

DOWN

Dacourt now Roma's

settled in England he has no Football

AFP, Rome France international Olivier Dacourt has completed his loan move to Italian first division side AS Roma from Leeds United after passing a medical here, the English Premiership club confirmed

Capello's men until the end of the season, although Roma have the option of making the transfer permanent in the summer. The combative Frenchman played a starring role for Leeds during the David O'Leary regime

after he was signed from Lens in

May 2000, but has since fallen out

with current manager Terry Venables. Dacourt, who first played in the Premiership for Everton, upset the former England coach after saying Leeds' season was a "disgrace" in an interview with a France Football

magazine Venables has also been under pressure to lighten the wage bill at Elland Road as the Yorkshire club seeks to reduce its massive debts.

Dacourt could make his Serie A

debut for Roma in Sunday's home game against Chievo. Roma are currently eighth in the table, 11 points behind joint leaders AC and Inter Milan, and are bottom

of their second phase Champions

League group after successive

By Eugene Sheffer

21 Resorts

inter-

24 Jacques,

26 Divinely

tive

27 Role for

28 Actress

29 Calendar

guota

31 Summer

Gogh

subject

35 Herschel's

1781

37 McBride

38 Sorts

39 Pinta

partner

40 Witnessed

41 Bullets

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11 Lachrymal

16 Promptly

10 Spot

9 "The -

5 Standard

6 Alway Involving defeats to Arsenal and Ajax.

home and in Europe.

On his arrival in the Italian capital on Wednesday evening, Dacourt said he was relishing the prospect of nelping Roma revive their season at

"I will be doing everything to show I am worthy of wearing this (Roma) shirt and that Venables ade a mistake," he said.

"The fans are looking for us to kick-start our season and I am here to make my contribution.

Swiss sixteen

for Gunners!

AFP, Geneva

Thursday.

Sixteen-year-old Swiss hot prospect Johannes Djourou will join English champions Arsenal at the end of this season, the player's father told Swiss newspaper Dimanche.ch's website on

Djourou, an under-17 Swiss international whose family hail from Ivory Coast, impressed Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger in a trial at the London club in October.

Arsenal signed another Swiss teenager, 17-year-old Philippe Senderos, last December and he will join the club next season

CRYPTOOUIP

UHMKWTEWB LMAJTE YSMHW JT UFXLG AFBWM'U HMYJLMS WKFAW

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF SHEEP NEED SHEARING, DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE BAA BAA SHOP? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals S

BWMS UWFXS-UWMBHGJTE.

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error

Dacourt, 28, joins Fabio have been training hard all week "I am ready now and hope to play