

Premiership
Blackburn burn Gunners

Football

AFP, London

Blackburn completed their own double over double-winners Arsenal to blow the Premiership title race wide open on Saturday, as Manchester United coach Alex Ferguson and Newcastle boss Bobby Robson saw their sides win away to close the gap.

Goals in either half from Irish winger Damien Duff and Turkey midfielder Tugay secured a 2-0 home win for Blackburn over an Arsenal side that looked fatigued as they played their fourth match in 11 days.

The defeat leaves Arsenal just two points clear of Manchester United - who thanked a David Beckham goal for a 1-0 win at Aston Villa - with eight games left to play, including what looks like a potential decider between the top two at Highbury on April 15.

Ferguson said he believed his men would bridge the gap and deny Arsenal the title.

"We need to win eight games for the title and I know we are capable of doing that. At this stage of the season it is all about getting three points from matches."

Newcastle coach Robson meanwhile argued his men cannot be counted out just yet following a 2-0 win at Charlton which took the Geordies to within five points of the leaders after Alan Shearer netted from the penalty spot prior to the break and Nol Solano bagged a second shortly afterwards.

"It was a big win for us today with Arsenal losing," Robson said. "I was more hopeful that Manchester United might give up something at Villa but whatever way it is an excellent day for us."

Robson, whose team still have to meet United at St James' Park next month, still rates Arsenal as favourites but insisted: "We are giving ourselves a chance and the squad is up for it."

While Newcastle fly high, northern neighbours Sunderland saw their hopes of a miraculous revival under new

manager Mick McCarthy fade after Bolton boosted their own survival prospects with a 2-0 victory at the Stadium of Light.

Second-half goals from Jay-Jay Okocha and Henrik Pedersen enabled Bolton to pull two points clear of relegation rivals West Ham, who came away from Everton with a creditable point after a goalless draw.

Blackburn went into their clash with Arsenal in turmoil after a training ground bust-up which resulted in striker Andy Cole being dropped by manager Graeme Souness, who argued such things happen all over the country and that the pair's 'tiff was nothing major.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	30	19	6	5	64	32	63
Man Utd	30	18	7	5	48	27	61
Newcastle	30	18	4	8	49	34	58
Everton	30	14	8	8	38	34	50
Chelsea	29	13	9	7	50	31	48
Liverpool	29	12	10	7	41	28	46

But the former Manchester United and England star was barely missed as Duff gave the home side a deserved lead mid-way through the first half.

Blackburn secured the points seven minutes after the break when Tugay rifled past Stuart Taylor from the edge of the box.

To make matters worse, the match saw Arsenal's injury worries mount with Martin Keown forced off after a quarter of an hour with a suspected hamstring problem, four days before the make-or-break Champions League trip to Valencia.

David Seaman (hamstring) and Patrick Vieira (knee) both missed the match while Ashley Cole will not be back until next month following a hernia operation.

Gunners coach Arsene Wenger said his side were jaded after the

midweek Champions League draw with Roma.

But he insisted: "Tiredness is not an excuse. We did not have the legs to win the game and were beaten too many times in 50-50s and lost balls we usually don't lose. At the end of the day we deserved to lose the game - we were not unlucky.

Manchester United thanked Beckham's 12th-minute strike for their success at Aston Villa.

Beckham could have had a first-half hat-trick but his back-post finish from Ryan Giggs chip proved enough to set up a thrilling finale to the season.

Newcastle's win at Charlton saw the club take a huge step towards guaranteeing Champions League football again next season.

Shearer opened the scoring from the penalty spot after Craig Bellamy was sandwiched by Mark Fish and Jason Euell in the box.

And it was the Newcastle skipper's flick which set up Bellamy to fire in a low cross that Solano touched home for the clincher.

Elsewhere, Southampton's Michael Svensson went from sinner to Saints hero with an equaliser in the dying seconds against Fulham.

Louis Saha had scored one and sent in a cross that Svensson turned into his own net to give the west London club a two-goal advantage.

But James Beattie's 18th league goal of the season offered Southampton hope nine minutes from the end and Svensson scrambled home the late equaliser to earn the point.

Leeds were left facing the miserable prospect of being dragged into the relegation dogfight after a 3-2 home defeat by Middlesbrough.

Mark Viduka had taken advantage of a defensive mix-up to give Leeds the lead but a Massimo Maccaroni penalty, a long-range effort from Juninho and a delightful job by Geremi put Boro in control before Viduka claimed his second of the afternoon, again courtesy of a spill by international team-mate Mark Schwarzer.

Primera Liga
Helguera a
Real hero

Football

AFP, Madrid

A last-minute goal from Ivan Helguera, one of his side's few unsung names, kept Real Madrid in pole position in the Spanish league on Saturday as he secured a 1-0 win at Villarreal.

Helguera's 89th-minute strike could prove precious as the two sides just below Real, Real Sociedad and Deportivo La Coruna, also recorded victories.

Roy Makaay with an early penalty for his 20th goal of the campaign and Noureddine Naybet with a clincher five minutes from time handed Deportivo a 2-0 home win over struggling Rayo Vallecano.

The game marked the return to action of popular keeper Francisco Molina, back from testicular cancer, whose clean sheet helped his side to a fifth straight league win.

Turk Nihat Kahveci and Valery Karpin scored for Sociedad as they turned things around after Israeli Yossi Benayoun had drawn first blood for Racing Santander.

Real now have 54 points from 26 games to 53 for Sociedad and 51 for Deportivo.

"We had the rub of the green tonight," Real coach Vicente del Bosque opined after seeing his side struggle to find their rhythm following their midweek Champions

League win over AC Milan.

On Sunday, Valencia, currently on 46 points, have a chance to narrow the deficit on the leading trio if they can snatch a win at 14th-placed Athletic Bilbao.

Ninth-placed Barcelona, a colossal 19 points behind the top three and now looking to

qualify for next season's Champions League by winning this year's event, visit fourth-bottom Alaves.

Earlier Saturday, Barca coach Raddy Antic said he was deeply saddened by the assassination of Serbian premier Zoran Djindjic, saying he believed his native land was seemingly in the clutches of "mafia" groups.

"I am very sad. I am against violence. Today in my country the law of the mafia holds sway," asserted former Yugoslavia international Antic, who replaced sacked Louis Van Gaal at Barca six weeks ago.

TOP SIX

Spanish league table after Saturday games (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Real	26	15	9	2	59	26	54
Sociedad	26	15	8	3	45	32	53
Deportivo	26	15	6	5	43	27	51
Valencia	25	13	7	5	41	19	46

Serie A
Juve sitting
pretty

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus maintained their Italian title challenge Saturday as a double second-half strike from Czech playmaker Pavel Nedved and a clincher from predatory Frenchman David Trezeguet proved too strong in a 3-0 win at home to Modena.

Juve now have a six-point cushion over Inter Milan with 57 points from 25 matches.

Inter can trim the gap Sunday should they beat Como at the San Siro.

But AC Milan lost ground after they could only manage a goalless draw at bottom five outfit Reggina, leaving the 'rossoneri' on 49 points from 25 matches.

Juve took a while to get into their stride - just as against Deportivo La Coruna in midweek, against whom they squeaked a 3-2 Champions League win to as good as guarantee

their passage to the last eight.

This time they allowed Modena's dream of avoiding defeat to endure until Nedved produced his opener eight minutes into the second half.

Modena might even have scored as Mehdi Kamara hit the post early on with home keeper Gianluigi Buffon stranded.

Nedved, having finally beaten Marco Ballotini between the Modena sticks, then took a Trezeguet pass in his stride to finish emphatically for 2-0 on 82 minutes before the French striker completed the one-way second half traffic.

TOP SIX

Italian league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Juventus	25	17	6	2	48	16	57
Inter	24	16	3	5	48	27	51
Milan	25	14	7	4	44	19	49
Lazio	24	10	12	2	40	24	42

Ponting refuses

FROM PAGE 16

like the fast-typing of wickets but we've played there twice so we'll know the conditions better than they do."

Michael Bevan missed the Durban encounter with a lower back strain but is expected to be fit for the crunch game in Port Elizabeth where he has twice rescued Australia with gritty innings in their previous two World Cup matches there against England and New Zealand.

Andrew Symonds came in on Saturday and Ponting admitted it would be tough deciding between him and Ian Harvey, who also faced Kenya, for the one remaining place in the side.

"I'm not sure, we'll have to speak about that and look at the conditions. Ian Harvey has done nothing wrong with the ball and Andrew Symonds has done nothing wrong with the bat," Brett Lee, who took a hat-trick

against Kenya, gave Sri Lanka skipper Sanath Jayasuriya a thumb and arm injuries when the teams last met.

Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak, meanwhile, said Sri Lanka can defeat Australia after his own side crumbled by 74 runs against Jayasuriya's men at East London on Saturday.

"They must stand a chance against Australia next week," Streak said.

"They're flamboyant, unpredictable and it'll be a tough match. But obviously Australia must still be the favourite to win."

Streak said that if Marvan Atapattu and Jayasuriya got Sri Lanka off to a good start and seamer Chaminda Vaas made early breakthroughs, the Australians could be under pressure.

The key lay in Muralitharan coming on to bowl with Australia three or four wickets down.

"They've got lots of potential," he said. "Sri Lanka can do it."

Lanka banks on pitch

FROM PAGE 16

Although the pitch was clearly difficult for batting during the Sri Lanka innings, Jayasuriya said he felt it had improved once the Zimbabweans started their run chase.

"The pitch was very slow in the morning but when we were bowling it was a good wicket," he said.

"They started really well against our fast bowlers.

"Our spinners found it a little difficult to turn the ball but later on Murali (Muttiah Muralitharan) came on and bowled a good line and Chaminda Vaas bowled some good reverse swing. That is where we changed the match.

"Earlier on Marvan (Atapattu) batted well because the wicket was not easy at all."

However, Jayasuriya praised his team's performance in reaching the

semifinals after their heavy defeat by India in the previous match.

"India was a disappointment but the guys knew this was an important game," Jayasuriya said.

"What happened in Johannesburg was a disappointing all-round performance altogether. But we have played enough cricket to come back and play well."

Looking forward to Tuesday's match, Jayasuriya said although his side were heavily beaten by Australia in the Super Sixes, conditions at St George's Park could favour his side.

"The first match is over now and history. The semifinal will be a different game altogether," he said.

"History says that Port Elizabeth has been a turning track.

"We have to go there and see but it usually turns and that would suit our bowlers."

DEFINING MOMENTS

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Notable statistics from the Super Six phase of the 2003 cricket World Cup:

* Aravinda de Silva became the fifth player (behind Sachin Tendulkar, Javed Miandad, Vivian Richards and Mark Waugh) to score 1,000 World Cup runs in hitting 92 off 94 balls against Australia at Centurion (March 7). That innings, however, was a footnote in another crushing Aussie win as they trounced Sri Lanka by 96 runs. Adam Gilchrist became the first man in World Cup history to be dismissed for 99.

* Saurav Ganguly's match-winning back-to-the-wall 107 not out against Kenya in Cape Town (March 7) gave him a 21st one-day international century. Only Sachin Tendulkar, with 34, has more.

* Tendulkar continued to hoard records with a 97 in the 183-run Wanderers win over Sri Lanka (March 10). He may have missed out on a 35th one-day century, but after the innings he had recorded the most runs ever scored in a single World Cup, 571 to beat his own 1996 record of 523. He already held the record for the most career

runs in the tournament and the equal highest number of World Cup centuries.

Only Viv Richards, with 63.31 to the Indian's 60.92, has a higher average among the great names. Only five men have a better strike rate (Adam Gilchrist, Kapil Dev, Wasim Akram, Sanath Jayasuriya and Jonty Rhodes) but none of them has scored even half the number of runs recorded by Tendulkar. At the end of the Super Sixes with the semi-final against Kenya to come, Tendulkar had scored 586 runs at 65.11 with a strike rate of 90.43.

* Shane Bond's six for 23 against Australia (March 11) at Port Elizabeth was the best by a New Zealander in one-day history and the equal fifth best in World Cups. He also dismissed Ricky Ponting for the sixth time in his six games against the Australians. And he also ended up on the losing side by 96 runs after Brett Lee retorted with five for 42.

* Kenya became the first team without test status to reach a World Cup semi-final by beating a woeful Zimbabwe in Bloemfontein (March 12). They had not beaten Zimbabwe in 14 previous meet-

ings.

* Marvan Atapattu became the ninth batsman in World Cup history to bat through a completed innings as he made 103 not out to set up Sri Lanka's 74-run victory (March 15) over Zimbabwe at East London, a result taking them into the last four.

* Brett Lee took the first World Cup hat-trick by an Australian in the five-wicket win over Kenya (March 15) at Durban. He took those three wickets with his first 12 balls without conceding a run. He had ended his previous appearance against New Zealand with a burst of five wickets for three in 15 balls -- giving him a composite eight wickets for three runs in 27 deliveries. There had been three previous World Cup hat-tricks -- by Chetan Sharma (India), Saqlain Mushtaq (Pakistan) and Sri Lanka's Chaminda Vaas earlier in the tournament in South Africa.

* Vaas equalled the World Cup record of 20 wickets when he took two for 46 against Zimbabwe on March 15. The record is now jointly held by Vaas, Australia's Shane Warne and New Zealander Geoff Allott, who took their wickets at the 1999 tournament.

All-round failure

FROM PAGE 16

Packed with classy specialists, India have been running as smooth as a Ferrari while the Kiwis have been blowing gaskets and springing leaks aplenty.

The gas certainly ran out when they had the Aussies at their mercy in Port Elizabeth, and despite batting atrociously against India they were suddenly back in the match before three dropped catches ended their hopes.

Yes, there were victories to savour against West Indies and South Africa, and if New Zealand had crept in through the back door to reach the semi-finals would have begrudged them their place.

But despite the fact they had one of the best batsmen in the tournament, Fleming, and arguably the best bowler of all, in Shane Bond, it was those endless all-rounders who let them down all too often.

The end of the road cannot be too far away for Harris, and possibly Cairns, and how much more patience can be shown to Craig McMillan?

All these thoughts will be filtering through the cerebral Fleming's mind as he flies back home across the Indian Ocean.

Cronje

FROM PAGE 16

Indian government tax investigators, who examined the financial affairs of players suspected of match-fixing, also confirmed to the newspaper the widespread nature of the corruption.

The investigators claim that some players in the 1990s each received 50,000 US dollars a month paid into Cayman Islands accounts from India's illegal bookmaking industry.

On the average one-day international, it's believed around 250 million US dollars is gambled, according to a report by the International Cricket Council's Anti-Corruption Unit.

The allegations in the Sunday Telegraph come just a day after Cronje's successor as South Africa captain, Shaun Pollock, was sacked following the team's first round World Cup exit.

Pakistan call

FROM PAGE 16

isolated on the world stage.

"If India do not play against Pakistan, the equilibrium of world cricket will be severely affected because the world Test championship cannot be decided," Dalmiya wrote to sports Minister Vikram Verma.

India last played a Test match in Pakistan in January 1990, while Pakistan toured India in 1999 despite threats from Hindu fundamentalists to disrupt the tour.

Pakistan's hopes of organising a tri-series with England and Zimbabwe next month to fill the void left by India did not bear fruit, Mujahid said.

Shearer thinking England

Football

AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle striker Alan Shearer dropped a gentle hint Sunday that the time might be ripe for him to come out of international retirement and help England qualify for Euro 2004.

The former England skipper,



ESPN

English Premier Football League
Aston Villa vs Man United
Repeat at 10:30 am
Western Union World Football
Repeat at 4:00 pm
Sportscentre Hindi
Sport News
Live at 8:30 pm

STAR Sports

English Premier Football League
Aston Villa vs Man United
Taped Version at 12:30 pm
Sportsline Tonight
Sport News
Live at 8:00 pm



Tick the correct answers, post to
The Daily Star
Win attractive prizes

Competition closes at 8 pm
March 21, 2003 and draw
shortly afterwards

1. Who clinched the Shahjahan Bank International Rating Chess title?			
	Lovlu	Rajib	Zia
2. New Zealand beat South Africa in a World Cup Group B match by:			
	102 runs	9 wkts	5 wkts
3. How many runs did Bangladesh score against South Africa in the World Cup Group B match?			
	120	108	110
4. Bangladesh lost to Canada in the World Cup Group B match.			
Name			
Class			
Roll No.			
School Address			
Phone: (If any)			



ALAN SHEARER

Shearer, 32, told Sunday's Observer newspaper: "I would be lying if I said I didn't miss playing for England.

"I still feel I could do a job for England, in fact I know I could."

That could be just the signal England manager Sven Goran Eriksson was waiting for. After last month's humiliating friendly 3-1 loss to Australia the Swede left the door open for Shearer when saying that if he ever had a change of heart a return "might be discussed".

Shearer's comments could not have been better timed as Eriksson is due to announce his England squad for the upcoming Euro 2004 qualifiers against Liechtenstein and Turkey next weekend.

Shearer, who scored a spectacular Champions League first half

hattrick against Bayer Leverkusen last month, told the newspaper: "I'm enjoying my football now as much as I ever have."

"There's a great feeling around this club at the moment, and a buzz about the city as well."

Although ruling out a return to the international fray as recently as last December the holder of 63 caps for his country has clearly softened that stance although he feels his decision to retire has helped boost his game.

"It's difficult because I think I have benefited from my decision to retire.

"Something had to give, and I don't miss the criticism that's for sure.

"But equally I had some great days (with England), and it's not something you throw away lightly."

Shearer explained how he feels strange every time England play now, and how his Newcastle boss, Bobby Robson, one of the key architects of his rejuvenation, gives him a break around England match days.

"The manager usually gives me a couple of days off, and that's good but it's not the same."

Shearer scored his 24th goal of the season in Newcastle's 2-0 win over Charlton on Saturday which maintained his Tyneside club in third place in the Premiership behind Arsenal and Manchester United.

Reflecting on last Tuesday's 2-2 draw at Inter's San Siro he said: "It was a brilliant night. That's what you live for, as a player. You want to be performing on the biggest stage."

Bowl first, India

FROM PAGE 16

the initiative from the opposition. Their batters always try to score at four or five an over, while Glenn McGrath and Brett Lee make inroads into the opposition's top order.

"If they meet India in the final, they will try to replicate the bowling plan that worked so well for them in the league game at Centurion last month (which India lost by nine wickets after being shot out for their lowest World Cup total of 125).

"Lee and McGrath will try and bowl two lengths, either full or short, while Andy Bichel would try to tighten things up.

"However, these tactics worked a month ago when the Indians were short on confidence. Since then all the batsmen have gradually found form, and now they are brimming with confidence."

India have won eight of their nine games so far, while Australia are the only team with an unbeaten record in the tournament.

Donald advised Indian captain Saurav Ganguly to bat second if he won the toss in the final.

"India would find it easier to play Australia if they bat second.

"When they bat first, they seem too anxious to preserve wickets in the first 15 overs, and don't play too well in that period. Batting second will make them more relaxed as there is a tangible target.

"Speaking of targets, I am sure the main target for the Australians will be the scalp of Sachin Tendulkar.

"He himself would know that the ball will be flying past his nose right through the opening spell of Lee and McGrath.

"Tendulkar is in sublime form, and I doubt that he will be intimidated or subdued by anything the Australians dish out for him.

"This Indian team is hot. They started slowly and have built up the momentum nicely. Australia also look hot, but they remind me of our 1996 campaign where we won everything, till we ran across Brian Lara in the quarters.

"Sometimes, playing so well for so long just implies that a reversal is coming up soon.

"Who knows, India, who broke Australia's 16-Test winning streak, could also break their record streak in one-dayers," Donald wrote.