

Premiership

# Lampard puts Blues atop

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea stormed to the summit of the English Premiership on Sunday when a controversial penalty gave them a 1-0 victory over Manchester United at Stamford Bridge while previous leaders Arsenal were held to a 0-0 draw by Fulham.

Frank Lampard's 30th minute spot-kick was enough to secure a crucial victory that sent Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich's Chelsea a point clear of the Gunners who dominated their match at Highbury but were foiled by a goalkeeping masterclass from Dutch veteran Edwin Van der Sar.

It was United's most experienced campaigner, skipper Roy Keane, who handed Chelsea a huge psychological edge in the championship battle by upending Joe Cole in the area after half an hour.

Lampard made the most of his former West Ham team-mate's endeavour by stepping up to send Tim Howard the wrong way from the spot and leave United coach Alex Ferguson questioning the decision.

"First of all the player was not in control of the ball and he was going away from goal a bit," said Ferguson.

"It is an amazing decision to make in a game of that nature. It's disappointing, but, you know, you've not got a top referee today so these things can happen."

Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri acknowledged that the title race was far from over.

"I continue to think about my job day-to-day but of course I want to be the first horse in the race."

"So far so good, but the league is very long. Now we are top. I hope we will still be top in May but I think all three teams could change position."

Arsenal had a handful of chances to beat Fulham but were unable to find a way past Van der Sar.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger refused to be too downcast at his side's loss of two crucial points.

"I am not frustrated. I am very happy with our performance - it was just a matter of scoring goals which we know we can do. We played well and they defended and just refused to play," the Frenchman said.

Liverpool shrugged off the absence of injured superstar Michael Owen as they came from a goal down to beat Birmingham 3-1 and leapfrog over their opponents to sixth in the table.

Finnish star Mikael Forssell gave Birmingham a 33rd-minute lead but that was cancelled out when Matthew Upson fouled Florent Sinama-Pongolle.

Steven Gerrard converted the penalty and Liverpool went on to claim all three points with second half goals from Harry Kewell and



PHOTO: REUTERS  
BLUE RAIDER: Frank Lampard is being congratulated by Chelsea captain John Terry (R) after scoring the decisive penalty against Manchester United in the top-of-the-table Premiership clash on November 30.

Emile Heskey.

A relieved Gerard Houllier saw his Liverpool side move into their highest Premiership position for almost three months.

"The table looks a lot healthier now, but to be fair we should have been in this position before, we have lost about six points we should have got," said Houllier.

In Sunday's other match, Chinese international defender Sun Jihai scored an own goal which gave Middlesbrough a 1-0 win at Manchester City.

On Saturday, Leeds celebrated their financial misery by a consortium of Gulf sheikhs by ending a run of five straight defeats.

A ninth-minute strike by James Milner was enough to secure a 1-0 win over Charlton and give Eddie Gray his first victory since taking over as caretaker manager following the sacking of Peter Reid.

It was only Leeds' third victory of the season but they remain bottom of the table because their goal difference is worse than fellow strugglers Wolves.

But a battling display will nevertheless have given the Elland Road faithful reason to hope on a day which brought good news off the pitch with confirmation that a takeover of the club is imminent.

Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's royal family and a Leeds fan of 25 years standing, confirmed that he was co-ordinating a group of Gulf investors who are planning to take over the cash-strapped club.

"I'm delighted for the players and the supporters of the club because they are the people that really matter," said Gray.

Leeds' victory was enough to drag them level on points with Wolves, who drew 1-1 at home to Newcastle.

Alan Shearer rescued a point for the visiting Magpies after an embarrassing blunder by goalkeeper Shay Given had gifted Wolves the lead.

Given was left red-faced after rushing from his box in the 27th minute only to fluff his clearance and leave Nathan Blake with a clear run for his first goal of the season.

But four minutes later Shearer swept home his 12th Premiership goal of the season from Lomana LuaLua's pass.

Aston Villa moved out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win over Southampton thanks to a goal from veteran striker Dion Dublin while Les Ferdinand and Marcus Bent scored for Leicester as they came away from Fratton Park with a 2-0 win over Portsmouth. Vratislav Gresko's first goal in English football earned Blackburn a 1-0 win over Spurs.

Everton went down 2-0 at Bolton to slip into the bottom three.

### TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Chelsea	14	11	2	1	28	9	35
Arsenal	14	10	4	0	28	10	34
Man Utd	14	10	1	3	25	9	31
Fulham	14	6	4	4	24	18	22
Charlton	14	6	4	4	20	17	22
Liverpool	14	6	3	5	21	15	21

## Rising MU fever

AFP, London

Takeover speculation swirling around Manchester United reached fever pitch on Monday as the club's shares leapt on news that Malcolm Glazer, owner of Super Bowl champions Tampa Bay, has raised his stake in the group again.

United revealed in a statement to the London Stock Exchange that Glazer's stake in Manchester United had risen to 14.3 per cent, which represents over 37 million shares.

Shares in the world's richest football club rose 0.8 per cent to 265 pence in early trading here in the wake of the announcement.

The stock had already seen strong gains on Friday after German bank Commerzbank confirmed that it had brokered the sale of a 4.5-per cent stake in the English Premiership champions for an unnamed buyer.

Glazer shot to fame in the United States when he splashed out 192 million dollars in 1995 for the struggling US football Tampa Bay franchise.

He funded a new 200-million-dollar stadium and helped drag the team out of the doldrums, culminating in this year's Super Bowl victory.

Glazer, whose family made its money from the oil and gas industries, is listed as the 244th richest American by Forbes magazine, worth an estimated one billion dollars. He was recently tipped to buy the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team.

But he is not the only player in the mysterious takeover saga at Manchester United.

In October Irish racing tycoons John Paul "J.P." McManus and John Magnier sparked takeover rumours by doubling their own stake to 23.15 per cent, making them the club's biggest shareholders.

Dutch television mogul John de Mol is also in the frame with a smaller stake in Manchester United.

Takeover rumours have swirled around a series of English sides since Russian oil billionaire Roman Abramovich snapped up Premiership side Chelsea in June.

Manchester United are seen as a particularly attractive proposition due to the combination of their success on the pitch and huge commercial revenues from sponsorship and merchandise sales.

## Eriksson will reveal all before Euro 2004

AFP, London

Sven Goran Eriksson says he will decide on his future as England coach before the Euro 2004 Championship finals.

Eriksson has been offered a new contract until 2008 but is reluctant to commit himself.

His current deal runs until the 2006 World Cup and the English Football Association fear he could return to club football after next summer.

But Eriksson told the Sun newspaper on Monday: "It will be sorted before Euro 2004, but I haven't decided whether it will be tomorrow or in three months time."

"It's too early to say yes, no or whatever. We've time to talk about it."

The FA have publicly offered the Swede a deal that would keep him in the job until the 2008 European Championships, but he has been repeatedly linked with the manager's job at Premiership leaders Chelsea.

Eriksson was unhappy the FA posted details of the deal, believed to be worth 14 million pounds (24 million dollars) on its website.

Eriksson would have preferred confidential negotiations.

## Bundesliga Dortmund misery mounts

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund, knocked out of the UEFA Cup in midweek, suffered another setback on the domestic front Sunday with a 2-1 loss to Hansa Rostock.

The 2002 German champions and former European titleholders remain in fifth place, 11 points behind Bundesliga leaders Stuttgart, after being undone by a second half double from Martin Max.

Sao Paulo-born striker Ewerthon scored Borussia's consolation goal.

In Sunday's other game Schalke 04 came away from a visit to second from bottom club Hertha Berlin with a 3-1 win which lifted them up a place to 11th.

Stuttgart, who were on a high after beating Scottish club Rangers 1-0 in midweek Champions League action, were unable to prolong their positive spell in a goalless fixture at VfL Bochum on Saturday.

The south western German club, who had won their last three home matches, were hampered by the absences of playmaker Alexander Hleb of Belarus and Brazilian defender Marcelo Bordon, both injured, and suspended Portuguese defender Fernando Meira.

### TOP SIX

Standings in the Italian championship after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Roma	11	8	3	0	25	4	27
Milan	11	8	3	0	20	4	27
Juventus	11	8	2	1	26	12	26
Inter	11	6	4	1	20	6	22
Parma	11	6	3	2	19	11	21
Lazio	11	6	1	4	18	16	19

# Milan release Rivaldo

Football

AFP, Rome

World Cup winner Rivaldo will be free to find a new club when the transfer market reopens in January after being released from his contract by European champions AC Milan on Monday.

Since signing from Barcelona last summer, the Brazilian has failed to reproduce the kind of form that made him a key figure in last year's World Cup triumph and has rarely featured for Milan, who last season won three trophies.

The club said Rivaldo's contract, which had 18 months left to run, had been terminated by mutual consent.

"We thank Rivaldo for the contribution he gave to the winning of the Champions League, the Italian Cup and the European Super Cup last season and wish him all our

luck for the continuation of his extraordinary career," said a statement on Milan's official website.

Liverpool are reported to be interested in signing Rivaldo while



RIVALDO

Tottenham last week ruled out an approach for the player because of his huge wage demands. His 215,000 euros (258,000 dollars) a

week in Italy makes him one of the world's highest-paid players.

Last week Rivaldo said he fancied a move to big spending Premiership club Chelsea, whose billionaire owner, Russian oil tycoon Roman Abramovich, has money to burn.

"I would be very happy to play for Chelsea," Rivaldo said. "They have a man in charge of them who has come from outside of England and he's buying the best, most exciting players in the world."

Rivaldo was told he could leave in September but he had a change of heart and decided to stay with the club. But since then he has made just one appearance in the Champions League and has not played in Serie A.

The Brazilian, who scored the equaliser against England in the World Cup quarterfinals, has struggled to settle in Italy since his arrival from Spain and scored just five goals in 22 league appearances last season.

# FA set Ferdinand hearing

Football

AFP, London

England and Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand will lead of possible sanctions when he appears at a Football Association hearing on December 18 into his failure to take a drugs test.

The FA announced Monday, three months after the defender failed to appear for the mandatory drugs test, that Ferdinand will face an FA panel during two days in Bolton a week before Christmas.

Ferdinand has insisted he merely 'forgot' to attend the test, although since the controversy -- which almost led to England's players boycotting a crucial Euro 2004 qualifier against Turkey -- there have been calls for Ferdinand to be handed an exemplary ban.

The FA have set aside two days for the hearing, which will take place at the Reebok Stadium, the venue where Roy Keane received his record eight-match ban following his controversial statements about Alfie Haaaland in his autobiography.

Meanwhile, English soccer chiefs have defended Manchester United's right to play Ferdinand until his doping case is heard after FIFA president Sepp Blatter called the decision into question.

The Football Association said Monday they were prepared to

meet Blatter to discuss the case.

World soccer's chief believes United's results in both the English Premiership and European Champions League could be overturned if the England international defender is found guilty of the charge of misconduct.



RIO FERDINAND

Ferdinand has played in 10 of United's 11 games since September 23 when he missed the drugs test at the club's training ground.

Alex Ferguson's side have picked up 15 of a possible 18 points in the Premier League and won three of their four Champions League matches.

Blatter insists he is to write "a very strong letter to the FA to ask for

some explanations."

However, English football's governing body maintain they have broken no laws.

"We will have to see what is included in his letter, but we are happy to speak to Mr Blatter at any time," FA spokesman Adrian Bevington told BBC Radio.

"I would make clear, though, that under the current procedures, and I believe this is commonplace around Europe, a player can continue playing for his club until a case is concluded.

"If the procedures have to be changed, under FIFA regulations, that's something we would have to give serious consideration too, obviously."

"But I'm not going to start speculating that United are going to lose points."

"Under our procedures, Manchester United are perfectly entitled to have been playing Rio Ferdinand until the case is concluded, as with any other disciplinary case."

Bevington admitted the appeals procedure was slow.

"It's perfectly valid to point out that, as everyone is aware, the disciplinary procedures in this country are under serious review at the moment," he said.

"The key to it here is, to circumnavigate any further problems at this time, that the system is speeded up."

Serie A

# Roma, Milan takeover

Football

AFP, Rome

Roma and AC Milan replaced Juventus at the top of Italy's Serie A on Sunday after extending their unbeaten records with home victories.

Roma, who won the title in 2001, defeated Lecce 3-1 at the Olympic stadium while European champions Milan beat Modena 2-0 at the San Siro.

The two title contenders both have 27 points from 11 matches played, one more than reigning champions Juventus, whose own unbeaten run was ended on Saturday by Inter Milan.

Roma coach Fabio Capello admitted his team were let off the hook a few times before taking control of the match.

"We were up against an excellent Lecce team who pushed us back and didn't allow us room to play," he said.

"At 0-0 they had two good chances to score but we played well after taking the lead."

Brazilian winger Mancini gave Roma the lead in the 19th minute, side-footing home Antonio Cassano's left wing cross from eight yards.

Giant Norwegian striker John Carew doubled the home side's advantage in first-half stoppage time, controlling Emerson's cross with his chest before firing a low left foot shot beyond Marco Amelia in the Lecce goal.

Carew then turned provider for Roma's third, tugging up captain Francesco Totti for an easy tap-in 13 minutes from time. Ernesto Chevantoni scored a late consolation goal for the southern visitors.

Andriy Shevchenko was on target twice as Milan, who booked their place in the last 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday, chalked up their

fourth home win of the campaign.

The 27-year-old Ukrainian international broke the deadlock in the 24th minute, latching on to Andrea Pirlo's probing pass before tucking the ball home with his right foot.

The former Dinamo Kiev star settled the home side's nerves in the 67th minute, running on to Manuel Rui Costa's beautifully weighted pass and firing low past Marco Ballotta for his 12th goal of the season.

Shevchenko refused to take all the plaudits for a hard-fought win against a stubborn Modena side.

"I am very happy with the way things are going for me at the moment but the team deserve credit too," he said.

"It's important that we stay on this road as the next few weeks could prove to be decisive in the title race."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti heaped praise on Italy interna-

tional Pirlo for his contribution in the centre of midfield.

"I believe he is the best player in the world in that role, and that's no exaggeration," he said. "He does some incredible things."

Parma moved up to fifth with a 3-1 win at home to Chievo, while Sampdoria rose to seventh after defeating bottom club Ancona 2-0 in Genoa.

Greek striker Zisis Vryzas scored Perugia's equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Empoli before being sent off in the closing stages, and Reggina were held 0-0 against Bologna in Reggio Calabria.

In Sunday's late match Dino Fava's seventh goal of the season gave Udinese a 2-1 win at strugglers Brescia where all the goals came in a 20 minute spell after half-time.

Danish striker Martin Jorgensen struck first for Udinese before Fava doubled their lead

with a right foot shot. Andrea Caracciolo pulled one back for the home side, but despite applying plenty of pressure in the closing stages, Udinese could not force an equaliser.

Inter bounced back from their Champions League humiliation and kick-started their title push by defeating Juve 3-1 at the Delle Alpi stadium on Saturday night.

Argentine striker Julio Cruz scored twice and speedy Nigerian teenager Obafemi Martins added a third as Inter chalked up their fourth consecutive league win and extinguished the memory of Tuesday's 5-1 thrashing at home to Arsenal.

Juve's only reply in Turin came a minute from time when Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero headed home from close range.

Lazio crashed to a 3-0 defeat away to a spirited Siena.

Brazilian Rodrigo Taddei was the architect of Lazio's downfall, scoring twice in the final four minutes of a pulsating first-half before setting up compatriot Fernando Menegazzi for a late third as Roberto Mancini's men fell to their fourth league defeat of the season.

Lazio, whose Champions League hopes are hanging by a thread after Wednesday's disappointing 1-1 draw at home to Besiktas, were forced to play the last 23 minutes with 10 men following the sending-off of Dejan Stankovic for verbally abusing a linesman.

### TOP SIX

Standings in the Italian championship after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Roma	11	8	3	0	25	4	27
Milan	11	8	3	0	20	4	27
Juventus	11	8	2	1	26	12	26
Inter	11	6	4	1	20	6	22
Parma	11	6	3	2	19	11	21
Lazio	11	6	1	4	18	16	19



PHOTO: AFP  
AS Roma's Francesco Totti (L) celebrates with teammate Antonio Cassano after scoring against Lecce during their Serie A in Rome on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP  
Barcelona's Patrick Kluijvert stabs at the ball in the match against Valladolid on November 30.

Primera Liga

# Deportivo blow it

Football

AFP, Madrid

Deportivo La Coruna blew their big chance to regain the Spanish league lead with a 1-0 loss at home to Villarreal on Sunday, Roger Garcia getting the only goal of the game one minute from the whistle.

Valencia lead the Spanish first division with 27 points from 13 games after beating Real Zaragoza 3-2 on Saturday.

The 2001-02 champions are ahead of Real Madrid on goal difference after the reigning Spanish champions could only draw 1-1 at Osasuna on Saturday in a match marred by rough-house treatment handed out to David Beckham by home fans as well as players.

The England skipper was booed and pelted with fruit and rubbish whenever he ventured near the touchline. However, he had the last laugh when he supplied the sublime defence-splitting pass for

Ronaldo to score and equalise Ibrahim Bakayoko's opener.

Beckham came off four minutes from the end of the match with an ankle injury.

Deportivo slid a place to third after Sunday's loss and now have 26 points.

The Galicians were down to 10 men from 42 minutes after their veteran Brazilian midfielder Mauro Silva got his second yellow card in barely 60 seconds.

However, despite being a man down, Deportivo still dominated the second half and Spanish international striker Albert Luque struck the post twice.

With a share of the points looking ever more likely, Villarreal launched a rare counter-attack down the left wing.

Argentine international Rodolfo Arribarrena provided the service to Roger, and the former Spanish under-21 international made no mistake from close range.

Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao, traditional giants of Spanish football and ever present in the first division, could only produce mediocre performances.

Barca could not overcome visiting Valladolid and fought out a grim 0-0 draw to stay in fifth.

It will be little consolation that they had the best chance of the match when Dutch international Giovanni van Bronckhorst hit the post midway through the second half.