

L'pool crushed in Germany

AFP, Mainz

Liverpool crashed to a humiliating 5-0 thrashing at the hands of Bundesliga side Mainz here on Friday to end their pre-season preparations on a low note.

With the Reds set to begin their Champions League qualifying campaign against Maccabi Haifa on Wednesday, Rafa Benitez started with a strong line-up including Steven Gerrard, Peter Crouch and summer signings Jermaine Pennant and Craig Bellamy.

The match was goalless after the first 45 minutes at a sold-out Bruchweg stadium, but a host of Liverpool substitutions at half-time seriously weakened the Premiership giants.

Markus Feulner started the damage for Mainz, scoring in the first minute of the second period and goals from Tobias Damm, Ranisav Jovanovic, Chadli Amri and Fatmir Pupalovic completed an emphatic victory for the Bundesliga side.

Benitez told Liverpool's website: "We know we made a lot of mistakes. We need to analyse why things went wrong."

CAS rejects Israeli FA appeal

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Court for Arbitration in Sport on Saturday rejected the Israeli FA's appeal against a decision by European soccer's governing body that two UEFA Cup matches should be played at neutral venues for security reasons.

"In view of the circumstances there is no room to grant the requested injunction which would cancel UEFA's decision," the IFA said in quoting from the decision on its Web site.

Last week, UEFA told the IFA that Israel would not be allowed to host UEFA Cup second qualifying round first-leg matches to be held on Aug 10.

The decision forced Hapoel Tel Aviv to name Willem II's ground in Tilburg, the Netherlands to host NK Domzale of Slovenia. Bnei Yehuda named Senec's ground in Slovakia to face Bulgarian Lokomotiv Sofia in their European debut.

UEFA has said it would make a decision on Monday on Maccabi Haifa's Champions League third qualifying round home leg with Liverpool set for Aug. 22 or 23 and Beitar Jerusalem's UEFA Cup second qualifying round clash with Dinamo Bucharest on Aug. 24.



Lyon's Brazilian striker Chaves Fred (L) gets the ball past Nantes' Argentinian defender Mauro Cetto during the season opener of Ligue 1 in Nantes on Friday.

LIGUE 1
Lyon roar back in opener

Football

REUTERS, Nantes

Olympique Lyon began their quest for a sixth successive French title by winning 3-1 at Nantes in the kick-off of the 2005-06 Ligue 1 season on Friday.

Morocco midfielder Nourdin Boukhari opened the scoring for the home side from a free-kick on four minutes.

Teenage striker Karim Benzema equalised for Lyon a minute later by volleying home a John Carew cross.

Defender Sebastien Squillaci, who has joined Lyon from Monaco, put the visitors in the lead by heading home a corner after 63 minutes. Substitute striker Fred then wrapped it up from inside the box with two minutes remaining.

Lyon looked promising against a brave Nantes side despite the fact that the champions were missing no fewer than nine internationals who have only just returned from holidays.

"We beat a very good Nantes side," said Lyon coach Gerard Houllier. "We showed more composure when it mattered."

Club chairman Jean-Michel Aulas was equally satisfied after a

convincing start.

"It was not easy," he said. "This match comes too early for us and we missed a lot of important players for it. Having won it is a relief."

The opening weekend programme continues on Saturday with eight matches including Girondins Bordeaux at home against Toulouse.

Last season's runners-up, Bordeaux will miss new playmaker Johan Micoud, who will be suspended after being sanctioned while still playing in the Bundesliga for Werder Bremen.

Olympique Marseille start on Sunday by visiting promoted Sedan.

'No offers for Chelsea duo'

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho has revealed that Chelsea have yet to receive a single offer for either William Gallas or Hernan Crespo.

French defender Gallas has been tipped to leave Stamford Bridge after failing to report for pre-season training in Los Angeles.

Mourinho was quick to criticise Gallas for a lack of respect, intensifying speculation that he could be set for a swift exit.

The coach is still upset with the 28-year-old's no-show, but has revealed that Gallas could still have a future at Stamford Bridge.

"He should have come in the same day as Michael Ballack and Mikel John Obi and he didn't," he explained.

"He will train in London with a personal trainer until we arrive back and on Monday he will join the group.

"What he did was a lack of respect to the family. But in families, sometimes, people make mistakes and you have to be able to solve the problem the best you can."

Mourinho also stressed that, with the clock ticking down to the start of the season, no club have yet tabled a bid for Gallas.

"We've had no offers for him. We negotiated a player - (Andrei) Shevchenko - with Milan, and they never wanted to involve William Gallas in the deal, never mentioned him," Mourinho said.

"We've had no offers so William Gallas remains a Chelsea player."

"He is a Chelsea player because we have had no offers. You can tell me everyone - Barcelona, Real Madrid, Milan or Inter - wants him but the fact is we have no offers. That is the pure truth."

"We have not even had a bad offer but if we have a good offer we can think about it."

"So until we get an offer he remains a Chelsea player and from Monday he will work with us."

Crespo's future at Chelsea also remains uncertain, with the striker making no secret of his desire to return to Italy.

However, Mourinho has again insisted that nobody has made a move for the Argentine.

"Crespo is another situation we all have to solve together," he commented.

"He started the situation by saying publicly 20 times last season he would like to go back to Italy. I think he has to end the situation he started."

"And again we've had no offers - neither good nor bad."

"So again he remains a Chelsea player and we have him under contract and we are in control, as we are of all players who are under contract with us."

Mido in line for Spurs return

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham boss Martin Jol is reportedly preparing a surprise move to bring Roma striker Mido back to White Hart Lane.

Jol is looking to sign a fourth striker to supplement his attacking options, having missed out on Chelsea frontman Carlton Cole, and could now return to Serie A to land the Egyptian on loan again.

Mido enjoyed a fairly successful 18-month stint in London, hitting 13 goals in 38 Premiership appearances, before returning to Italy at the end of last season.

Jol is a big fan of the former Ajax and Marseille frontman but has been concerned by his apparent lack of discipline, although talks could lead to the deal being completed sometime next week.

Blackburn had been trying to lure the 23-year-old to Ewood Park before landing South African Benni McCarthy.

Crespo 'belongs to Italy'

Football

INTERNET, undated

Hernan Crespo has become an Italian citizen and admits he hopes it'll help earn him an immediate move back to Milan.

The Argentine, who is married to an Italian and last month welcomed his second daughter into the world, swore allegiance to the peninsula on Thursday and picked up his passport from Limido Comasco on Friday evening.

"I feel great," he told the 'Gazzetta dello Sport'. "I have always felt at home in Italy, as I spent 10 years here, created a family and saw my two children born. My heart is divided in half between Argentina and Italy, so I'd love to come back here and play, as I live better in this country and am in love with its football."

His rapport with Chelsea and Coach Jose Mourinho has always

been a fractious one and it is no secret he intends to return to Serie A this summer. Although Inter have also been linked, the latest reports suggest Milan are in pole position with an offer for both the Argentine and want-away Juventus striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

"I can't choose between them, as I have an excellent rapport with both my former clubs and the Coaches. We'll have to see who needs me the most. It's not an issue of money, as this is a lifestyle choice that is simply priceless. I'd never put pressure on a club to give me a secure starting spot either. All I ask for is some faith and then I'll earn my place."

Agent Fernando Hidalgo stated this week that Jose Mourinho had "given his word" to release Crespo from his contract.

"I trust my agent and leave him to deal with these matters. My contract expires in 2008 and on Monday I'll attend the Stamford Bridge get-together. Then we'll see. I'm less desperate to leave than I was a year

ago, as last season I had a splendid relationship with Roman Abramovich, Peter Kenyon, Mourinho, my teammates and the fans. I scored goals and won trophies. I'm at peace with myself, because if I leave London, it won't be as a loser."

Milan will begin the season with an eight-point penalty due to the Calciopoli scandal, but Crespo insists this only makes him more determined to return.

"I am bitterly disappointed by the scandal," continued the former Lazio and Parma star. "I don't believe the entire sport is rotten to the core and am sorry to see so many champions go. Serie A has given me a great deal and I'd love to repay it in some way with my small contribution. Italian football's true worth was shown in Germany. I was happy for my Azzurri friends, as 10 of the 23 players had been my teammates. I understood why I really do feel Italian."

Ribery wants out of Marseille

Football

AFP, Paris

French World Cup star Franck Ribery said Friday that he was determined to leave Marseille, dealing a devastating blow to the club's management on the eve of the new season.

In his most forthright comments to date concerning his future, Ribery said he wanted to join a club that could give him the promise of trophies and Champions League football.

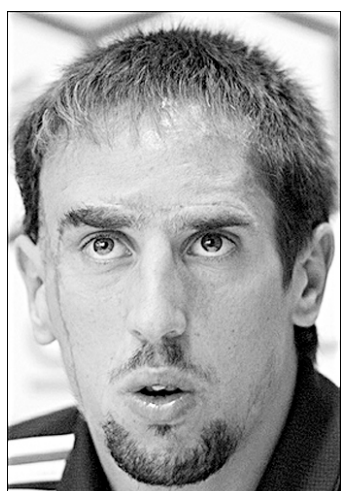
"My wish is to leave Marseille," Ribery told French broadcaster TF1.

"I want to leave because I want to win things. I want to play in the Champions League, I want to continue to develop, I want to be around big players. For me, that's important."

The 23-year-old -- a key figure in France's run to the World Cup final in Germany -- did not give any

information about his future destination.

"The directors at Marseille know where I want to go, and the club that I want to sign for knows as well. Now it's up to them to reach an agreement."



FRANCK RIBERY

Ribery's existing deal with Marseille runs until 2010 but privately the club concede there is no chance of holding the player to that agreement.

Marseille president Pape Diouf however insisted Friday that Ribery must stay at the Stade Velodrome for at least one more season.

"It's all just talk. Nothing has changed," said Diouf. "Ribery is under contract until 2010. He will respect his contract this season whether he likes it or not."

Ribery -- who has been linked to Bayern Munich, Arsenal, Real Madrid and Lyon -- said there could be no going back on his desire to leave.

"My mind is made up and I'm not looking back," Ribery said. "But I'm not forgetting that Marseille is my club. I love this club, I love the fans -- they are the best in France."

"I hope people will understand my decision. I know the fans will be a bit disappointed but I'm young, and I want to do something else."

Fitness the key for Rijkaard

Football

REUTERS, Marina del Rey

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard, content with the balance of his squad, says his players need to improve their fitness before launching their Primera Liga title defence.

The European and Spanish champions are on a pre-season tour of the United States and Mexico, and Rijkaard has placed a high priority on the squad's physical preparation.

"The main reason why we are here is to prepare for next season and it is important for us to keep on working hard," Rijkaard told a news conference on Friday.

"The important thing right now is that we have a lot of players in the group who have a difference between their physical shapes."

"Some have joined the squad late having played at the World Cup. For example, yesterday (captain

Carles) Puyol played only 30 minutes because any more wasn't possible. But he is a very strong guy and will get back into shape quickly.

"Ronaldinho also played only 30 minutes and I thought that was the longest he could be on the field. We have to take it step by step."

"Some players haven't even had one training session yet so it's obvious we still have a long way to go."

Two weeks ago Rijkaard did not rule out another dip into the transfer market after securing Juventus duo Gianluca Zambrotta and Lilian Thuram but on Friday he pronounced himself entirely satisfied with the balance of his squad.

"I am very happy with the team I have right now," he said. "We have a great squad."

Barcelona, who begin their Primera Liga campaign with a trip to Celta Vigo on the weekend of Aug. 26-27, kick off their U.S. tour on today against Libertadores Cup semifinalists Chivas de Guadalajara.

A capacity crowd of 92,650 is expected to fill the Colosseum Stadium.

Atletico snap up Real tyro

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid raided city rivals Real on Saturday signing promising young midfielder Jose Manuel Jurado on a four year contract for a fee reported to be 3million euros with the selling club having the option of buying him back over the next two years.

The 20-year-old was wanted by several other Spanish clubs and while Real's sporting director Predrag Mijatovic said that they recognised what a talent he was but Real could not guarantee him enough playing time.

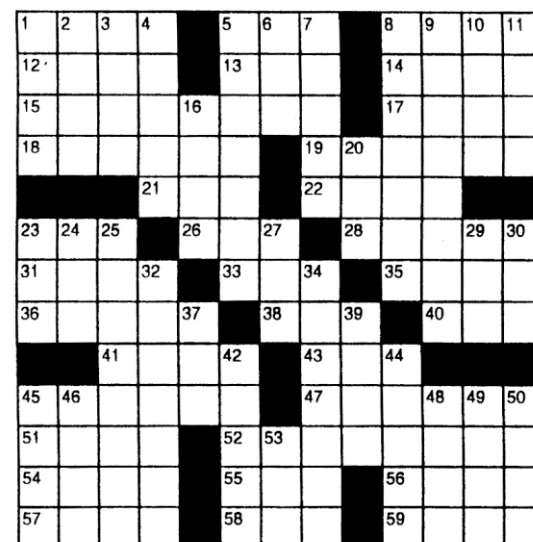
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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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| 1 Incite | repeat- | 59 Meadows | 24 Jackie's |
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| laugh!" | 43 1, 2, 3, | DOWN | mate |
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CRYPTOQUIP

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T P A T B M V D F L K F C G B G H C
N F L H D X . Y F Z D V S F Z

Q H B Q F Z M N S T Z M N H C ?
Yesterday's Cryptoclip: A BIG COMPETITION TO COLOR TREE TRUNKS WOULD GRADUALLY BECOME KNOWN AS OPEN DYE-A-LOG.

Today's Cryptoclip Clue: C equals R

The Cryptoclip 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.