



Liverpool defender Daniel Agger is ecstatic after scoring a wonder goal against West Ham during their Premier League clash at Anfield on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Liverpool nail Hammers

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool failed to celebrate the centenary of their legendary Kop stand with any great style on Saturday but they beat West Ham 2-1 at Anfield through goals at the Kop end from Daniel Agger and Peter Crouch.

The win put behind them the disappointments of last weekend's opening day draw.

The Kop, which marks its 100th year on September 1, has seen countless superior performances from Liverpool over the years but, following an unconvincing draw at Sheffield United last Saturday, even

their captain Steven Gerrard confessed before the game that this was an encounter his team had to win.

Liverpool did all manager Rafa Benitez could have expected of them in the first 10 minutes, apart from scoring an all-important opening goal which would have steadied their nerves and those of the expectant home support.

Gerrard shot just wide from the edge of the area. Crouch might have had a penalty following John Paintsil's clumsy challenge. Luis Garcia shot into the side netting and, closest of all, Paul Konchesky was superbly positioned to head a free-kick from Fabio Aurelio off the West Ham goal-line.

It was against the run of play, therefore, that West Ham took an 11th-minute lead and, perhaps predictably, it was a goal that owed much to a large slice of fortune for Bobby Zamora.

The forward collected Nigel Reo-Coker's ball out on the right flank and whipped in a vicious cross towards the near post, goalkeeper Jose Reina, misjudging his angles, then assisting by palming the ball into his own goal.

The goal clearly energised the visitors and, two minutes later, Marlon Harewood should have doubled the lead, collecting a through-ball from Yossi Benayoun and advancing before rolling the ball just wide with a left-foot effort.

This miss would prove costly but was part of a frustrating passage of play for Liverpool. That frustration was most evident in the shape of Craig Bellamy, their Wales striker, who constantly complained at the poor service provided by teammates -- the disappointing Crouch in particular.

Poor finishing, on the odd occasion on which Liverpool could fashion a chance, did not help the cause but the contest swung decisively in the final four minutes of the opening period starting with a "goal" from Reo-Coker ruled out for an unnecessary foul on Fabio Aurelio.

Moments later, Liverpool cen

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Ronaldo wants Real stay

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian striker Ronaldo wants to stay put at Real Madrid, saying he is capable of scoring 30 goals for the Spanish giants this season, the AS sports daily reported Saturday.

AS said that Ronaldo telephoned Ramon Calderon, president of the Spanish league runners-up, to say: "I haven't negotiated with anyone to leave. If I stay here and if I play, I feel capable of scoring 30 goals this season."

Ronaldo, 29, who is currently in Brazil recuperating from an operation, scored 29 goals for Real in the 2002-3 season but only found the net on 14 occasions last season.

The three-time world player of the year saw a move to AC Milan fall through on Friday after the two clubs failed to agree on a fee.

According to newspaper reports Friday, Ronaldo is still wanted by Milan's city rivals Inter and if he was to head for Italy, Real would swoop for Frenchman David Trezeguet from Juventus.

Maradona quits beloved Boca

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine World Cup winning captain Diego Maradona has quit his post as vice-president of Boca Juniors.

His move comes two weeks before former Mexico coach Ricardo La Volpe is due to take over the reins at the club that Maradona holds so close to his heart.

Maradona explained that he was unhappy with the Argentine Football Federation prising their new coach Alfio "Coco" Basile away from Boca after the season had already begun. Basile has been appointed national coach.

"This chapter is closed. There will be no interference. I will maintain close relations with the players and (president) Mauricio (Macri), who deserves my respect, but I will only go to matches as a supporter," said Maradona, who famously scored the "Hand of God" goal against England in the quarterfinals of the 1986 World Cup.

"There are certain things that displease me. Hiring the coach of a team, that's a little bit mafioso. You could not hire the coach of (Boca's rivals) San Lorenzo or Racing whenever you like."

It may not be long before 45-year-old Maradona is back involved in football again, though, as he said he will be ready to take up a management post in January or February.

Gerrard eyes England half-century

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard is set to rack up 50 caps after being selected as part of manager Steve McClaren's 24-man squad for the forthcoming Euro 2008 qualifiers.

England face Andorra on September 2 at Old Trafford before travelling to Skopje to tackle Macedonia on September 6.

Gerrard has 48 caps to his name and should he play in both qualifiers, he would become only the fourth member of this squad to reach his half century.

There were no real surprises in the squad which has been deprived of Manchester United captain Gary Neville and Chelsea midfielder Joe Cole through injury.

"It's always disappointing to lose someone of Gary's quality and experience," said McClaren.

"He's an important part of the squad but we have good cover in Luke Young and Phil Neville who are very capable."

Cole just failed to shrug off a knee injury in time.

"Joe is not quite ready. I've discussed his fitness with (Chelsea manager) Jose Mourinho and there is no point taking any chances. I know

what Joe can do and he's very much in my plans for the future."

McClaren did have some good news, though, as Manchester United's new signing Michael Carrick is back in after recovering from injury -- he even came on for United during their 3-0 win at Charlton last Wednesday.

And with West Ham's Dean Ashton facing a lengthy lay-off, the former Middlesbrough boss drafted in Everton newboy Andy Johnson as well.

"Andy deserves his chance in this squad after starting the season well with his new club," added McClaren.

"He's a great lad and a real team player who gives everything."

"I've spoken to (manager) David Moyes and he's delighted with how well Andy has settled in at Everton."

"I'm also delighted to have Michael Carrick back. Alex Ferguson says he's been training well and should be ready for the two games."

"It's a shame his start at United has been disrupted but he's a top quality player and a great passer of the ball."

There had been rumours new Liverpool signing Jermaine Pennant would make the squad at the expense of Shaun Wright-Phillips but the Chelsea man kept his place in the 24.

With Wayne Rooney suspended, Michael Owen injured and David Beckham out of favour, Chelsea's Frank Lampard is the only player in the

squad with more than 10 international goals to his name.

Other than Gerrard, on nine, and his Liverpool teammate Peter Crouch, with eight, no other player has more than two England goals.

Of the four strikers in the squad, Jermaine Defoe has scored only once in 17 caps while Darren Bent and Johnson both have two appearances and no goals.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Paul Robinson (Tottenham), Chris Kirkland (Liverpool), Ben Foster (Manchester United -- on loan at Watford)

Defenders: Ashley Cole (Arsenal), Luke Young (Charlton), Phil Neville (Everton), Wayne Bridge (Chelsea), John Terry (Chelsea), Rio Ferdinand (Manchester Utd), Wesley Brown (Manchester Utd), Matt Dawson (Tottenham)

Midfielders: Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Owen Hargreaves (Bayern Munich/GER), Michael Carrick (Manchester Utd), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Jermaine Jenas (Tottenham), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Chelsea), Keir Richardson (Manchester Utd), Stewart Downing (Middlesbrough), Aaron Lennon (Tottenham)

Forwards: Jermain Defoe (Tottenham), Darren Bent (Charlton), Andy Johnson (Everton), Peter Crouch (Liverpool)



Schalke's Danish forward Peter Loevenkrands (L) traps the ball in mid-air ahead of Werder Bremen defender Pierre Wome during their Bundesliga clash in Gelsenkirchen on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Schalke topple Bremen

AFP, Gelsenkirchen



Friday.

Bremen had a perfect six points before the match but Schalke ripped up the formbook to triumph 2-0 courtesy of goals from German international forward Kevin Kuranyi and substitute Hamit Altintop.

"We are delighted to leapfrog Bremen who are a great team," said Schalke coach Mirko Slomka.

"We had so many chances to win the game convincingly but we will take the 2-0. There is no point in getting carried away though as we have only played three games."

A tight game was expected but that was not the case, with Schalke, inspired by their Brazilian playmaker Lincoln, dominating proceedings and

only an exceptional display from Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese kept the scoreline down.

"We never found our game. We were too passive and could not handle Schalke," admitted Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf.

"Tim (Wiese) was great for us tonight but there were many who weren't."

Forgotten German international Kuranyi, left out of World Cup squad, put Schalke ahead after just seven minutes rising above Cameroon international Pierre Wome to power in a header.

It was Kuranyi's first goal since March and his explosive celebration emphasised the point.

"The goal was important for me and the team," enthused Kuranyi. "I just hope my club continue to play well and win games and then I can put myself forward for the national team."

Altintop had a great chance to make it 2-0 for Schalke on the hour mark but Wiese raced out to block with his chest.

Wiese, knocking on the international door for Germany, saved his

team again shortly before the interval thwarting Peter Lovenkrands.

"We have two weeks off now and it is clear we need to do some work," the goalkeeper said.

"I do not know what went wrong tonight but we have a great team and need to have faith in ourselves."

Schalke went in 1-0 up at half-time but they could easily have held a 4-0 lead and Bremen's woeful defending will interest their Champions League opponents Barcelona and Chelsea.

Altintop eased Schalke's nerves with a cool chipped finish in the 72nd minute to seal a thoroughly-deserved victory over a Bremen side that looked way off champion material.

Reigning champions Bayern Munich have the chance to nudge Schalke from the summit when they face FC Nuremberg on Saturday.

Both Bayern and Nuremberg have a maximum six points from their first two games.

The other title hopefuls SV Hamburg, buoyed by their Champions League qualification in midweek, face Hertha Berlin today.

Ibarra to miss Brazil friendly

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Boca Juniors defender Hugo Ibarra will miss Argentina's friendly international against Brazil in London next weekend because of a leg injury.

The former Monaco and Porto right back will be replaced by Real Zaragoza's Leonardo Ponzio in the Argentine squad for the Sept. 3 match at the Emirates stadium, local media reported.

Vieri ready to sign for Atalanta

INTERNET, undated

Atalanta President Ivan Ruggieri has confirmed that Christian Vieri is ready to put pen to paper for the newly promoted club.

"We should conclude negotiations on Monday. I am convinced that if Bobo decides to come to Bergamo, he'll find an atmosphere where he can start to recover his form and train regularly," pointed out the patron.

"It's a deal that brings great advantages for everyone. Atalanta need a striker like Vieri to help the team and its youngest elements to grow, and he has expressed the desire to return to the playing field."

It has been a chaotic year for the well-travelled forward, as he has played for Inter, Milan and Monaco in the space of 12 months.

The Italian international then signed a contract with Sampdoria, but it was torn up by mutual consent before he had attended a single training session.

Now he looks set for a return to Atalanta, the club he already played for in 1995-96, but initial reports of a minimum wage agreement of 1,000 pounds per month seem to have been exaggerated, according to the latest rumours.

Sevilla tame highflying Barca

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Sevilla proved that Barcelona were far from invincible with their brilliant 3-0 demolition of the Spanish and European champions in the Super Cup in Monaco on Friday.

In a performance reminiscent of their 4-0 destruction of Middlesbrough in the UEFA Cup final in May, Sevilla put their opponents to the sword with an expert demonstration of aggressive precision football.

Despite having the likes of Ronaldinho, Samuel Eto'o, Deco and Lionel Messi in their ranks, Barca gave a listless display, and their defence, which was without new signings Gianluca Zambrotta and Lilian Thuram, was ruthlessly exposed by Sevilla's live wire forward line.

"They said that Barca were the best team in the world, but we beat them," said Sevilla president Jose Maria del Nido. "Some people doubted we could win but in the end David defeated Goliath."

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos said the key to his side's victory had been the determination and enthusiasm of his players.

"This victory was more to do with the merits of Sevilla than the weaknesses of Barca," he said after the game.

"They are a team who are impossible to stop once they have the ball but we were well prepared and we knew how to stop them. I've got some really committed players in this team."

Sevilla's new signing Christian Poulsen, ably assisted by Brazil international Renato, did an expert job in stifling the Barca midfield, while strikers Frederic Kanoute, Luis Fabiano and Adriano Correia

tormented the Catalans' defence throughout.

Before the game Barcelona president Joan Laporta and some of the players had talked about the possibility of winning all six trophies that are at stake this season but the verdict of the Spanish media was that the defeat would give the club a lesson in humility.

"This will bring them back down to earth," said the pro-Barcelona daily El Mundo Deportivo. "Sevilla showed that Barca have a tough year ahead of them."

Barca coach Frank Rijkaard said his team would have to make major improvements before their opening league match at Celta Vigo on Monday.

"Sevilla fully deserved to win," he said. "They were aggressive and sharp and we lacked spark. I'm disappointed and we have to learn from this, pick ourselves up and keep working hard."



Sevilla players hold up the European Super Cup trophy that they won after defeating rivals Barcelona on Friday at the Louis II stadium in Monaco. PHOTO: AFP

Man City suspend Thatcher

AFP, London

Manchester City have suspended Ben Thatcher for Saturday's Premiership encounter with Arsenal following the outrage caused by his elbow-first challenge on Tottenham's Pedro Mendes on Wednesday.

"Manchester City can confirm that Ben Thatcher has been suspended from first team action pending the results of the club's internal investigation into the incident involving Pedro Mendes during the game with Portsmouth on Wednesday," said a City statement.

"The player will miss tomorrow's home fixture (Saturday) with Arsenal. Ben Thatcher fully agrees with this decision."

The former Welsh international defender has also been charged by the Football Association with serious foul play.

Thatcher, who was booked at the time by referee Dermot Gallagher, has until September 12 to respond.

A statement from the FA read: "The incident is being considered as an exceptional case because the FA contends that the challenge was sufficiently serious that had Thatcher been sent off, an additional sanction would have been merited."

Thatcher apologised to Mendes for the challenge which put the Portuguese star in hospital.

He wrote a letter to the midfielder saying he was sorry for the dreadful tackle which knocked Mendes unconscious during the goalless draw at Eastlands on Wednesday.

Mendes, 27, suffered a seizure and needed oxygen after Thatcher elbowed him in the face.

He has since been released from hospital, though he will need medical and neurological supervision during the coming week before he is given the green light to play again.

Del Piero blasts Capello

Football

INTERNET, undated

Alessandro Del Piero has launched a sensational attack on former Juventus boss Fabio Capello. "I would have left had he stayed," said the captain.

The tactician joined Real Madrid this summer in the aftermath of the Calciopoli demotion, a decision which has resulted in Del Piero pledging his future to the Old Lady.

"My relationship with Capello was not satisfying from many different points of view," said the crowd favourite.

"It wasn't only because I was often left out of the side, but because we just had a different way of seeing things."

"If Capello had decided to stay then I think I would have chosen another club, probably in a foreign League."

Although the tactician did lead the side to two Scudettos in two seasons which have now been revoked, Del Piero has blamed the Coach for Champions League failure last term.

"The man didn't know how to manage the squad," added Pinturichio as he looked back to the Arsenal loss. "I think we dropped out of the tournament because of his methods."

"Then we only got as far as the quarterfinals last season because of a mistake by the Werder Bremen keeper in the last 16 match."

The club symbol also backed the outfit's directors for opting to take their fight for Serie A readmission to the civil courts.

"I think the club had no other choice," he noted. "There was no fair treatment if we compare Juve to the other scandal-hit clubs."

"We were the only outfit to really turn over a new leaf. I don't find it right that we were the only ones to be punished," concluded the No 10.