



Real Madrid midfielder Emerson (R) makes a challenge against Villarreal's Argentinian midfielder Juan Riquelme during their Primera Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Valencia sign Joaquin

AFP, Madrid

Valencia finally tied up the signing of Spanish international winger Joaquin from Real Betis on Monday.

The right-sided midfielder signed a six-year deal after Valencia paid a reported 25 million euros (32 million dollars).

"Valencia have come to an agreement with Real Betis for the transfer of the international footballer Joaquin, who will play for the team for the next six seasons," the club said on its internet site.

Private radio station Cadena Ser had announced the 25-year-old's transfer on Sunday, despite late interest from French champions Lyon.

Andalucians Betis have already found a replacement, though, in Borussia Dortmund's German international midfielder David Odonkor.

The German club announced on Monday they had come to an agreement with the Spaniards for the pacey player, one of Germany's revelations during the World Cup.

Widely regarded as the quickest player in the Bundesliga, Odonkor could only make it onto the Dortmund bench for two of their first three matches this season.

New look Real draw blank

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's bid to end the glory days of arch rivals Barcelona got off to a stuttering start on Sunday with a frustrating 0-0 draw at home to Villarreal.

Former Juventus coach Fabio Capello's first league game in his second spell in charge of the Spanish giants could not have got off to a worse start at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

After watching Real waste several chances to beat Villarreal keeper Sebastian Viera, the Italian coach and his star-studded side was roundly jeered by the demanding home fans.

Robinho came close to ending the deadlock in the second half by escaping his marker and flying down the left wing. The Brazilian forward had time and space, but instead of unleashing his own strike he passed across the face of goal-only to see the ball miss his far-post target.

"I'm not worried," said Capello.

"They were a strong team physically and played well."

Barca begin the defence of their title on Monday with a trip to Celta Vigo but they'll be without Brazilian playmaker Ronaldinho who suffered a thigh injury in the 3-0 defeat to Sevilla in the European Super Cup in Monaco on Friday.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard will also be missing Brazilian defenders Belletti and Sylvinho but Italian World Cup winner Gianluca Zambrotta should make his league debut.

Getafe are the early leaders after a 2-0 win at Osasuna with goals from Fabio Celestini after 49 minutes and Nacho in the 72nd.

Deportivo La Coruna also got off to a winning start coming back from a goal down to clinch a 3-2 win over Real Zaragoza with Juan Rodriguez, Sergio and Javier Arizmendi on target.

Spanish international striker Fernando Torres gave 10-man Atletico Madrid a 1-0 win at Racing Santander.

Torres netted after just 12 minutes before Atletico had Georges Seitaridis set off.

On Saturday, Fernando Morientes consigned his ill-fated

move to Liverpool to the history books when he made a goal-scoring return to the Spanish League in Valencia's 2-1 win against Real Betis.

Morientes joined Liverpool in January 2005 for 6.3 million pounds from Real Madrid but struggled to adapt to the Premiership and hit just 12 goals in 61 matches.

His slump was so pronounced that he missed out on Spain's World Cup squad.

But back on home turf, he again showed his deadly finishing instincts when he gave Valencia the lead after 33 minutes in the opening game of the new 2006/2007 season.

He scored with a fine volley after a pinpoint cross from Edu to score his second goal of the week after also finding the net in the Champions League win over Salzburg in midweek.

Real Betis were level, however, in the 53rd minute when Munoz Xisco nipped in between two defenders to score from an Enrique Romero left-wing cross.

Valencia hit back with the winner just eight minutes later when Raul Albiol scored with a half-volley.

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Cassano gets Azzurri recall

AFP, Rome

Real Madrid striker Antonio Cassano was on Sunday recalled to the Italy squad for their 2008 European championship Group B qualifying matches against Lithuania and France.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Cristian Abbiati (Torino), Marco Amelia (Livorno)
Defenders: Andrea Barzagli (Palermo), Fabio Cannavaro (Juventus, capt), Dario Dainelli (Fiorentina), Fabio Grosso (Inter Milan), Massimo Oddo (Lazio), Manuel Pasqual (Fiorentina), Cristian Zaccardo (Palermo), Gianluca Zambrotta (Barcelona)
Midfielders: Massimo Ambrosini (AC Milan), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Marco Marchionni (Juventus), Simone Perrotta (Roma), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Franco Semioli (Chievo)
Strikers: Emiliano Bonazzoli (Sampdoria), Antonio Cassano (Real Madrid), David Di Michele (Palermo), Alberto Gilardino (AC Milan), Filippo Inzaghi (AC Milan), Tommaso Rocchi (Lazio)

The world champions take on Lithuania in Naples on September 2 before challenging France, the team they beat on penalties in last month's World Cup final, in Paris four days later.

Cassano's last appearance for the Azzurri was against Norway in June 2005.

The 24-year-old forward struggled in Spain last season after joining Real from Roma in January of this year.

Chelsea back in hunt

AFP, Blackburn



Chelsea forwards Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba scored a goal apiece to silence the club's critics and rejoin the Premiership title race after a 2-0 win at Blackburn on Sunday.

The champions had gone into the game with question marks over their ability to seal a third successive Premiership title having been beaten 2-1 at Middlesbrough in midweek.

But a comprehensive second-half display ensured that Jose Mourinho's men responded to Manchester United's 100 per cent winning start by showing that they will still be around to defend their title this season.

Chelsea are now fourth in the table three points adrift of Sir Alex Ferguson's pacesetters, who lead second-placed Aston Villa and Everton, in third, by two points.

Mourinho had angrily accused his players of abandoning his principles following the midweek defeat at Middlesbrough when he claimed that it was 'not a Jose Mourinho team' that capitulated at the Riverside.

Ewood Park was never going to be an easy place for Chelsea to bounce back, however, having lost 1-0 against Mark Hughes's team last May.

Blackburn are no respecter of reputation either, so they were hardly likely to allow the champions to have it all their own way.

Blackburn's task was perhaps made easier by Mourinho's decision to field a team without wingers, adopting a narrow formation that was meat-and-drink for midfielder Robbie

Savage and Steven Reid to dismantle. Everything that Chelsea tried was broken up by the tough-tackling pair.

Savage, in particular, was a thorn in Chelsea's side.

The Welshman has a well-earned reputation as one of the Premiership's more physical players and he attempted to introduce Michael Ballack to his approach with a couple of wild early challenges.

Ballack remained unfazed, though, and he responded by showing Savage he could give it just as well he could take it.

The Germany captain was Chelsea's most threatening player in the first-half with his probing and range of passing and he teed up Andriy Shevchenko with a cute pass that allowed the Ukrainian to force Brad Friedel into a fine save on 37 minutes.

Six minutes later, Chelsea were denied a clear-cut penalty when Lucas Neill sent Salomon Kalou tumbling to the ground inside the 18-yard box.

Referee Mark Clattenburg waved away Chelsea appeals, despite Neill clearly failing to get a touch on the ball.

If Chelsea were unfortunate on that occasion, they had luck on their side four minutes into the second half when Clattenburg did award a

penalty following a tussle between John Terry and Rovers defender Andre Ooijer.

Ooijer, making his debut after arriving from PSV Eindhoven days earlier, appeared to grapple with Terry 12 yards out.

The England captain went to ground rather easily, but Clattenburg was convinced and he pointed to the spot. Lampard scored from the spot.

Blackburn responded well and former Porto striker Benni McCarthy forced Petr Cech into a spectacular save with a chest-trap and volley from Brett Emerton's cross on 55 minutes.

Chelsea weathered the storm, however, and substitute Drogba made sure of victory when he latched onto Michael Essien's through ball and held off the challenge of Ooijer before beating Friedel from an angle nine minutes from full-time.

The German captain came in for praise from his manager following his debut. "Ballack was very intelligent," Mourinho said. "When the team was winning, instead of playing in the diamond, he played 10 metres back, near Makelele."

"When we scored the first goal, after that the game was open and we played with a lot of quality. In the second half, the possession was good and the way we went to counter-attack was also very good."

"I think in midfield with Essien, Lampard and Ballack, we have good control of the game. In the second half we deserved the victory, but in the first half it was very, very difficult until we scored the first goal."

Team	p	w	d	l	gf	g/a
Manchester Utd	3	0	0	10	2	9
Aston Villa	3	2	1	0	5	2
Everton	3	2	1	0	5	2
Chelsea	3	2	0	1	6	2
Portsmouth	2	1	1	0	3	0

Sunderland to confirm Keane

AFP, Sunderland

Former Manchester United and Republic of Ireland skipper Roy Keane will be confirmed as Sunderland manager after Monday's Championship match against West Brom, the club said Sunday.

The struggling side, currently bottom of the table after four defeats, have agreed terms with the controversial Irishman.

Keane was at the Stadium of Light on Sunday and has agreed to take over from manager-chairman Niall Quinn, who has occupied the role while a permanent choice was sought.

A statement on the club's website, www.safc.com, said: "Roy Keane visited Sunderland today where he met with players and officials from the club."

"Keane and the club have agreed terms for him to be appointed as manager, and it is envisaged that he will sign a formal contract immediately after Sunderland's game against West

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Chelsea frontman Didier Drogba (L) is hugged by fellow striker Andriy Shevchenko after the former scored against Premiership rivals Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park on Sunday.

France treat Makelele like a slave: Mourinho



AFP, London

Jose Mourinho has accused France coach Raymond Domenech of treating Claude Makelele like a slave after refusing to accept the Chelsea midfielder's international retirement.

Former Real Madrid player Makelele faces a four-game domestic suspension if he fails to report for France's Euro 2008 qualifiers against Georgia and Italy next month.

Makelele informed the French Football Federation of his intention to quit the international scene after playing for France in the World Cup final last month.

But Domenech and the FFF have so far refused to accept the decision, and Mourinho claims that the French are now restricting the player's human rights by threatening him with a club ban.

The Chelsea manager said: "Pavel Nedved, Paul Scholes, Luis Figo have all retired from international football. With the Czechs, England and Portugal it is ok, but France? They don't have liberty."

"It is unbelievable. Makelele is not a footballer, he is a slave."

"He has played the biggest game any footballer can play by playing in the World Cup final for France and he now wants to retire from international football."

"But their coach has told us, very objectively, that if he cannot play for France he will be suspended for Chelsea."

"He has written to the Federation and told them that he does not want

(him) to play. France play Georgia and Italy in the qualifiers and if he doesn't play in those two games, he will be suspended for four games for Chelsea. That's the law."

Domenech, who is known for being difficult with the press and

unforgiving with certain players, had said after he announced Makelele in his Euro 2008 qualifier squad in midweek that a call-up should not be questioned.

"You don't come to play for France if you're not sure about it. You come to

play if you want to, and if the coach picks you," said Domenech.

And in an apparent jibe at Makelele, he added: "It's inconceivable that you refuse a call-up if you're still playing at a big club."

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French legend Michel Platini (C) controls the ball next to Swiss-Turkish footballer Murat Yakin (L) and musician Simon Kappel during a gala match between FIFA and Swiss TV Match-Team in the "Sepp Blatter Tournament" in Ulrichen, FIFA President's hometown on Sunday.

Beckham denies extension

AFP, Madrid

Former England captain David Beckham has denied that he has extended his contract with Real Madrid by two years, as reported by the president of the Spanish giants.

Real president Ramon Calderon told Television Espanola late Sunday that 31-year-old Beckham has now committed himself to the club until June 2009, the Marca sports daily reported.

"It's obviously for sporting reasons," said Calderon. "Marketing issues are important but at Real Madrid the most important thing is sporting worth and the coaching team gave the thumbs up to renew Beckham's deal."

But a spokesman for Beckham, who was dropped from Steve McClaren's first England squad, said Monday: "He hasn't signed a new contract but we're due to sit down in September to hold talks."

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Lightning kills footballer

AP, Copenhagen

A 17-year-old soccer player hit by lightning during an amateur game has died, police said.

The victim, whose name was not immediately released, died early Monday. Lightning hit the teenager while he was playing for Ulfborg against Maabjerg at a tournament Saturday. Nine other players were knocked over.

"There were no clouds on the sky. Only a black cloud far away," Maabjerg goalie Kasper Støettrup told the daily Dagbladet Holstebro Struer. "Suddenly he was just hit. Out of nothing."

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FIFA says players can retire



AFP, Geneva

FIFA declined to comment on Monday on the specifics of the row between Chelsea and France over Claude Makelele, but underlined that any player is allowed to retire from international football.

"The general situation is that any player is free to decide that he is not playing for his national team," said Andreas Herren, a spokesman for world football's governing body.

"There is no FIFA rule to prevent any player stopping his international career, that's up to him," he told AFP.

"The one thing that has to be considered is that the intention to leave a national team or put an end to an international career needs to be communicated prior to a specific

summons."

An annex to FIFA regulations on the "Status and Transfer of Players" states that "as a general rule" every club player "is obliged to respond affirmatively when called up" by his national side.

The rules deal primarily with a club's obligation to release a player for international duty.

Makelele informed the French Football Federation of his intention to quit the international scene on July 10 after playing for France in the World Cup final.

But French coach Raymond Domenech and the FFF have so far refused to accept the decision, triggering a bitter row with Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho in recent days.

"Once you've said, 'that's it, I only want to go on playing club football, the association knows for good,' that's it,

you don't have to repeat that every time," Herren explained.

The French football federation can call for FIFA's help to obtain a players' release from a club.

"We've simply taken note reading in the newspaper like anybody else but my understanding is we do not have a case pending in that respect. There is no case yet for us to make any comment on," Herren said.

"At the moment this appears to be a discussion at the level of the club, the player and the national association."

"In 99 out of 100 cases the player says 'I would like to quit my international career' and that's it."

"In some instances the player and the coach might agree that (the player) is available once again, but that's something between the two of them and no one else is involved," the FIFA spokesman added.