



Portsmouth player Shaun Davies (L) shields the ball from Charlton forward Darren Bent during their Premiership clash at The Valley in London on Saturday. PHOTO: INTERNET

Retirement? You joking?

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has said he has no immediate plans to retire despite the approach of his 65th birthday.

The Scot is also approaching the 20th anniversary of his arrival at Old Trafford with his side currently topping the Premiership in the early days of the new league campaign.

There had been suggestions that with United not having won a Premiership title in the last three years that he could stand down if they once again fail to top the table this season.

But in an interview with the Scotsman newspaper Ferguson said he had to plan to stand down.

"Retirement? You must be joking, especially when you consider that the alternative is to stay home with that wife of mine," Ferguson said.

"Cathy says if I retire, she is heading back to Glasgow."

With four straight wins, United tackle Arsenal at home on Sunday and optimism is once again high among fans that big spenders Chelsea could be dethroned.

Ferguson has always been driven by the next challenge, rather than reflecting on a career which has brought him so much success.

And he is adamant he retains the enthusiasm which brought him south from Aberdeen in 1986.

"At a club like this, the enthusiasm never dims," he said.

"I am lucky I have United as a kind of anchor. I can't be part-time here or take it easy. It is such a big club, if you weren't in control, if you weren't seen to be there all the time, I think it could wobble a bit."

Coe the man for ethics

REUTERS, London

FIFA have named twice Olympic 1,500 metres champion Sebastian Coe as chairman of the organisation's new independent ethics committee.

Coe, the chairman of London's 2012 Olympic organising committee, will take charge immediately of the judicial body which will consider alleged breaches of FIFA's code of ethics by officials, players or players' agents.

"FIFA is delighted to have Sebastian Coe as chairman of this committee," FIFA president Sepp Blatter told a news conference on Friday. "His personality and integrity, which is renowned the world over, will ensure that he is the best possible person for this role."

The new code of ethics and the composition of the ethics committee were both approved by FIFA's Executive Committee during its meeting at the organisation's Zurich headquarters earlier in the day.

It was decided, however, that the ethics committee would not preside over the alleged reselling of World Cup ticket sales by executive committee vice-president Jack Warner.

Blatter said the ethics committee could only consider cases that arose after it was founded. As a result, Warner's case will now be handled by FIFA's disciplinary committee.

LuaLua puts Pompey atop

AFP, London



Lomama LuaLua put Portsmouth on top of the Premiership as his second-half strike earned a 1-0 win at Charlton on Saturday.

The striker came off the substitutes bench to grab the winner as Harry Redknapp's side extended their unbeaten run to five matches to go above Manchester United, who face Arsenal on Sunday.

Everton, who started the day level with Portsmouth, were due to play Wigan later on Saturday.

The Fratton Park side also maintained their impressive defensive record and they have now gone five league matches without conceding a goal as they continue their remarkable revival under Redknapp, who saved them from relegation last season.

In stark contrast to Portsmouth's impressive form, Charlton have suffered a dismal start to life after former manager Alan Curbishley and Iain Dowie's side have now lost four of their first five games.

Dowie handed a debut to

Uruguay midfielder Omar Pouso and also brought striker Marcus Bent into his starting line-up.

Bent nearly produced an instant dividend for that decision when he directed a header onto bar from Dennis Rommedahl's first minute cross.

As Portsmouth struggled to clear the rebound, Darren Bent seized onto the loose ball and drove a fierce shot onto a post.

Portsmouth arrived at The Valley as the only team in England yet to concede a goal after keeping clean-sheets in their first four matches.

But that remoulded back four, which included pre-season signings David James, Sol Campbell and Glen Johnson, was tested again when Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's snapshot forced a save from David James.

Benjani Mwaruwari has earned plaudits this season for his workrate but has often lost his composure in front of goal. However the Zimbabwean was close to breaking the deadlock when he rose above his marker to head just wide from Johnson's cross.

That miss sparked Redknapp's side into life and they were only

denied in the 24th minute by a superb save from Charlton goalkeeper Scott Carson.

The on-loan Liverpool player made a sprawling stop to turn away Kanu's shot after Benjani had flicked on a perfect cross from Gary O'Neil.

Kanu's fine form since moving to Fratton Park in pre-season has been a big factor in Portsmouth's impressive start to the campaign.

But the Nigerian striker should have done better than head wide after Johnson's cross picked him out at the far post.

Denmark winger Rommedahl

lashed a volley into the side-netting from the edge of the Portsmouth penalty area in the 64th minute as Charlton pressed forward in search of just their second win this season.

Portsmouth, without a win at The Valley since December 1993, had struggled to impose themselves after the break. But the introduction of LuaLua midway through the half changed the course of the match.

The Congolese international was a constant threat with his movement and trickery and he grabbed the winner in the 74th minute when his long-range shot beat Carson's weak attempted save.

Sven, Klinsi in line for US job

AFP, New York

Former England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has reportedly spoken with the US Soccer Federation about taking the vacant post.

Citing an unnamed source who feared jeopardizing a relationship with federation officials, the New York Times reported Eriksson is among several possible replacements for Bruce Arena, who was dumped after this year's World Cup.

Sweden's Eriksson resigned after the World Cup in Germany after being paid five million dollars by England's Football Association - a figure the Times said was probably beyond US Soccer's ability to match.

Arena's salary was about 600,000 dollars before bonuses. The Americans went winless and were ousted in the first round of the tournament after a remarkable run to the quarterfinals in 2002 in South Korea.

Others reportedly interviewed regarding the US job include Jurgen Klinsmann, who led Germany to the semi-finals on home soil and wants two million dollars a year, and Argentina's Jose Pekerman.

Zlatan snubs Sweden

REUTERS, Stockholm

Striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic has refused to play for Sweden in the next two Euro 2008 qualifying ties after being sent home for staying out late before the previous match, the soccer association said on Friday.

Ibrahimovic, who plays for Inter Milan, Nantes midfielder Christian Wilhelmsson and Aston Villa defender Olof Mellberg were sent packing by coach Lars Lagerback two days before a Sept. 6 Group F tie against Liechtenstein.

"I do not think that I can persuade someone to play in the national side or, based on FIFA's rules, make them play," Lagerback said in a statement.

Ibrahimovic will miss Sweden's home tie against Spain on Oct. 7 and the away game against Iceland four days later. Wilhelmsson and Mellberg, however, were ready to play again, the association said.

"If a player does not want to play, for whatever reason, then I do not see that he gives anything to the team. Then I would rather have a player who wants to take part 100 percent," Lagerback added.

\$ 4.5 million for Club world champs

REUTERS, Tokyo

The winners of this year's FIFA Club World Cup will receive 4.5 million dollars - the same as in 2005, organisers said on Friday.

A total of 15 million dollars in prize money will be on offer for the six teams involved in the December 10-17 tournament in Japan.

European champions Barcelona and South American Libertadores Cup winners Internacional of Brazil will be seeded and favourites to win the second edition of the revamped competition.

New Zealand's Auckland City and Central American champions Club America of Mexico will also take part, alongside the winners of the Asian and African continental titles, yet to be decided.

Brazil's Sao Paulo beat Liverpool 1-0 in last year's final in Yokohama.

FIFA staged the first world club championship six years ago in Brazil, but pulled the plug on the competition in 2001 after the collapse of their marketing partner ISMM/ISL.

Meanwhile, Japan Football Association president Saburo Kawabuchi has expressed confidence the country will stage the tournament until 2007, according to Japanese newspapers.

FIFA's executive committee is scheduled to convene later on Friday to decide next year's venue.

Zambrotta puzzled

INTERNET, undated

World Cup winner Gianluca Zambrotta has admitted he is puzzled by the Spanish approach to scheduling his new club Barcelona's fixtures. This comes after the news that Barca's game against Racing Santander this weekend has been moved back from Saturday to Sunday.

"In Italy you know well in advance when you are playing," the full back stated. "This is the first time I have not known the date just two or three days before kick-off. It's a weird situation."

"But I don't think it makes it hard to prepare because we have just trained as normal with our thoughts on Sunday."

Zambrotta himself will be fresh for the encounter having been

Beckham wants England place back

Football

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham fears his England career could be over, admitting he is "not sure" about manager Steve McClaren's claims that the door is still open for him. But the former England captain refused to give up fighting, saying he will never retire from international football.

The 31-year-old is still England's most recognisable footballer and has responded to the ignominy of being left in the international wilderness by pledging to battle on.

Yet the Real Madrid star said he suspects his may never play for England again as long as McClaren is in charge.

"Even if I never play for England again, I have got 94 caps and I'm in the top five players that have played for England," he told the Daily Mirror.

"If I never play for England again I will be disappointed, but some

great players - like Steve Bruce - never got a single cap. I tried to be more positive about it.

"I would love to have reached 100 caps. I would still love to reach 100 caps."

"But not out of sentiment or pity. I want to do it on my own merit. I want to fight my way back in. Steve McClaren says the door is still open. I'm not so sure."

The former skipper was sensationally left out of the squad by McClaren last month and has not been recalled, but said he would make himself available.

"I didn't announce my international retirement because I want to play for England again," Beckham said.

"I still want to reach that milestone of playing for England 100 times and help them win the European Championship. It's a target I set myself a long time ago and I won't give up now."

"I don't like to take the easy option and the easy option would be to pack everything in and think 'I am never going to play for England

again'.

"Well, I might never play again. That's entirely possible. But I am the type of person who will fight for things."

"When I want something, I will fight as much as possible to get it. I won't throw my toys out of the pram and give in."

"I want to always be available for my country. If I am needed, then I'm there. I will never retire from international football."

Beckham was considered untouchable during Sven-Goran Eriksson's reign, captaining the side for over five years.

His stoppage-time free-kick against Greece secured England's qualification for the 2002 World Cup, and he scored the winning penalty against Argentina in the final tournament.

However, he came in for increasing criticism for his performances, particularly during

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'Rooney has achieved nothing yet'

Football

INTERNET, undated

Roy Keane has warned Wayne Rooney he has 'achieved nothing' in football yet.

The ex-Manchester United captain, now manager of Sunderland, claims his former Old Trafford team-mate still has a lot to do before he can be judged one of the great players of his generation.

"For me, the jury's still out on Wayne," said Keane. "I think he's got a hell of a lot to do."

"Wayne has achieved nothing -- and would probably say that himself."

"I would judge players over a few years rather than one or two."

In excerpts from a Sunday Times magazine interview, Keane added:

"He's got potential, like I've got potential to be a good manager. Potential is one thing, doing it is another."

Keane is also critical of another England star, Michael Owen, for doing media work too soon after suffering an injury.

The Newcastle striker, currently recovering from a serious knee injury sustained during the World Cup, broke his foot last December and missed most of the second half of last season.

Keane said: "There's loads of people who get sucked in."

"Michael Owen always springs to mind. The day after Owen broke his foot, he's doing an article and I'm thinking 'Work on your recovery, man.'"

The former Republic of Ireland midfielder does not spare his former United boss Sir Alex Ferguson from

criticism.

Keane's interview with the club's MUTV station following a 4-1 defeat at Middlesbrough in October 2005 was pulled from transmission, and three weeks later he parted company with United after 12-and-a-half years at Old Trafford.

And Keane claims his former boss "was swayed by certain people he works with."

He explained: "I was seeing players doing stuff off the pitch -- had the feeling it was affecting them -- and it came to a head with that defeat."

"Yes, I nailed certain people. I took the publicity with a pinch of salt, senior figures at the club should've done the same."

"In the end, the manager was swayed by certain people he works with."



Argentine legend Diego Maradona signs autographs for fans after a charity match against a Danish team of retired professionals led by Michael Laudrup in Copenhagen on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Arsene confident of Arsenal victory

REUTERS, London



Arsenal go to Manchester United on Sunday knowing that a defeat will open up a 13-point gap between the two sides.

Manager Arsene Wenger remains upbeat however, rejecting any suggestion that his side's title hopes are over so early in the season.

"I don't think that. We've played three games. Let's play the game and let's win it," Wenger told a news conference on Friday.

"At the moment, Manchester United has twelve points. If we beat them we will be seven (behind) and if we win our game in hand we will be four, so you can count it the way you want but I calculate it like that."

United have had their best start to a Premier League season, with four wins in four games, while Arsenal lie 17th after getting just two points from their three games.

Wenger believes Arsenal can

turn things around. "The club is doing very well and we have a very promising team, having just come out of the Champions League final," he said.

"We have a team which is getting better and better. I'm convinced we have a good chance to beat them."

Games between the two sides have always been heated but Wenger said things had calmed down since players such as Patrick Vieira and Roy Keane had moved on.

Four years ago, several players from both sides faced disciplinary action after a controversial penalty decision in injury time at Old Trafford sparked a mass brawl.

The problems continued off the pitch with allegations of pizza being thrown by the Arsenal players at United manager Alex Ferguson.

Wenger said: "We played there many times and only one time was there an incident and nobody really knows what happened, even today. I will tell you my version one day."

New twist in Real elections

REUTERS, Madrid

The results of the Real Madrid presidential election could be changed after former candidate Arturo Baldasano withdrew the civil lawsuit which brought about the suspension of the postal vote.

Baldasano's decision means that the Spanish judge investigating alleged irregularities in the postal vote in July's election could order the inclusion of some of the estimated 10,600 votes that were sent to the club but never counted.

Ramon Calderon was declared Real Madrid president after he received 8,344 votes, just 246 more than rival candidate Juan Palacios and 1,642 more than Juan Miguel Villar Mir.

"I decided to withdraw the suit because the other candidates agreed that I should," Baldasano told a news conference on Friday.

Baldasano said that of the 10,600 postal votes, 4,600 were discarded because they were illegitimate, 3,800 because the members ended up voting in person, while some 2,800 were valid but had not been counted.

"In three or four weeks, and if there are no criminal actions taken,

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Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho gestures during a press conference at the club's training ground at Cobham on Friday. PHOTO: AFP