



Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech (C) lies on the ground after being injured by a tackle from Reading's Stephen Hunt (R) in the first minute of their Premiership clash at the Madejski Stadium on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Petrov out for six months

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's Bulgarian international midfielder Martin Petrov is set to be out for six months after rupturing cruciate ligaments in his left knee during their 2-1 victory over Huelva on Saturday.

The 27-year-old had to go off in the 38th minute of the match which was overshadowed by the goal by his replacement Sergio Agüero, who scored with his hand.

It is the second massive blow for Atletico in a matter of days as their Argentinian star midfielder Maxi Rodríguez suffered a similar injury in the international friendly with Spain last Wednesday.

Mancini denies Eriksson rumours

INTERNET, undated

Coach Roberto Mancini has dismissed speculation that Sven Goran Eriksson could succeed him at Internazionale.

Eriksson has been out of work since leaving his post with the English national team after the World Cup this summer.

With the Italian match-fixing scandal severely inhibiting some of Inter's main rivals to the Serie A title, Mancini is under a great deal of pressure to succeed this season, though he reacted to questions about his future with a joke at first.

"I can't say Eriksson is like a father figure for me because he might be offended, but I can say he's like an older brother," Mancini quipped.

"So in June, having been successful with Inter, I will willingly leave him the job." But then the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza man got serious, stressing the importance of the team's UEFA Champions League and Serie A fixtures ahead.

"I'd be happy to leave if the club decide to replace me," Mancini explained.

"Eriksson is a great person, but this type of talk is useless."

"Wednesday's clash with Spartak [Moscow] is crucial, but the match with Catania is also important because we want to restart the Italian league well too."

Gattuso makes Rangers pledge

INTERNET, undated

Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso has promised he will return to Rangers before the end of his career.

The World Cup winner and former Rangers favourite claims he has unfinished business at Ibrox and he has now made a pledge to Gers chairman David Murray.

Gattuso garnered cult status with the Rangers faithful after being brought to the club from Perugia, as a 19-year-old by then incumbent Walter Smith.

While his pugnacious displays in the middle of the park brought rave reviews from the stands, he was allowed to leave the club in 1998, when Dick Advocaat took over at the helm.

Gattuso, who is married to a Scot, is under contract at Milan until 2011 but that has not stopped him from making a vow to return to the club where he enjoyed his formative years.

"I don't know when it will happen but it will happen," said Gattuso.

"I just have to go back and it's a promise I have made to myself and David Murray."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Chelsea win at a price

AFP, London

Liverpool's own goal handed Chelsea a hard-fought 1-0 win at Reading as Jose Mourinho's men kept up the pressure on United and ended the home side 14-month unbeaten record at the Madejski Stadium.

Reading defender Ingimarsson deflected a Frank Lampard free-kick into his own net in first-half injury-time and, after Chelsea's John Obi Mikel and Reading's Andre Bikey were sent off for earning two bookings in separate incidents, Chelsea held on to remain in second place on goal difference.

Chelsea finished the match with John Terry in goal after Petr Cech was taken to hospital following an accidental clash with Steve Hunt and then his replacement Carlo Cudicini was carried off in stoppage time.

Lampard's free-kick created the only goal as his strike cannoned off Ibrahima Sonko and then Ingimarsson to leave Reading goalkeeper Marcus Hahnemann completed wrong-footed.

Mikel had already been booked

when he needlessly hauled back Sonko just after the hour and Bikey was also dismissed by referee Mike Riley soon afterwards after picking up two bookings.

Arsenal's impressive run continued as they stroled to a 3-0 win against winless Watford at the Emirates Stadium.

A Jordan Stewart own goal and further strikes from Thierry Henry and Emmanuel Adebayor gave Arsene Wenger's men, including teenage striker Theo Walcott in his first start for the club, their sixth consecutive win in all competitions.

Stewart deflected Adebayor's header into his own net in the 33rd minute. Then Henry doubled the lead two minutes before half-time with a cool finish before Adebayor struck in the 71st minute.

Craig Bellamy scored his first Premiership goal for Liverpool to salvage a 1-1 home draw against his former club Blackburn.

Bellamy equalised in the 64th minute after Blackburn's South Africa striker Benni McCarthy, who moved to Ewood Park in July as a replacement for the Wales star, scored his sixth goal of the season early on.

Portsmouth moved into third place as goals from Nwankwo Kanu and Andy Cole clinched a 2-0 home

win against West Ham.

Nigerian striker Kanu headed Portsmouth into the lead in the 24th minute with his sixth goal since his pre-season move from West Bromwich Albion.

And Cole condemned Alan Pardew's side to a sixth consecutive defeat with his first goal for Portsmouth in the 82nd minute.

Australia striker Mark Viduka helped Middlesbrough end Everton's unbeaten record with his side's second goal in their 2-1 home win against David Moyes' side.

Aiyegbeni Yakubu gave Middlesbrough the lead when he converted a 27th minute penalty and, after Yakubu had missed a second spot-kick after the break, Viduka slammed in the decisive goal in the 71st minute.

Viduka's Socceroos team-mate Tim Cahill pulled one back for Everton in the 77th minute, but Gareth Southgate's team held on for their second win this season.

Aston Villa's Gareth Barry bailed out team-mate Juan Pablo Angel with a superb equaliser to earn a 1-1 draw against 10-man Tottenham and maintain his side's unbeaten record.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Six-star Bremen go top

AFP, Berlin



Werder Berlin climbed to the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday with a 6-0 demolition of bottom club VfL Bochum.

Werder claimed the summit on goal difference from champions Bayern Munich, 4-2 winners over Hertha Berlin, and Schalke 04, who kept up their title push with a 2-1 defeat of SV Hamburg.

Aaron Hunt set Werder on their way in the seventh minute, but the new league leaders had to wait for an hour before Christian Schulz

doubled up.

That sparked the opening of the floodgates with the rout completed by second-half substitute Jurica Vranjes, Ribas Diego, Clemens Fritz and Ronaldo Naldo who converted a final minute free-kick.

Hertha, who went into the weekend at the head of the pack, slipped to seventh after falling to the might of Bayern who raced into a two goal lead in the first quarter of an hour with goals from Roy Makaay and France international defender Willy Sagnol.

Claudio Pizarro extended the hosts' advantage on 53 minutes but that triggered a fightback from Hertha who fought back with goals from Malik Fathi and Marko Pantelic.

But Bayern's three points were finally assured by Lukas Podolski, the German international's first goal for Bayern since his pre-season move from Hamburg.

Podolski's former club fell to two off the foot of the table after their loss against Schalke which they finished with 10-men after the first-half red card picked up by Czech international David Jarolim.

Hallit Altintrop put Schalke in front in the 16th minute with Piotr Trochowski levelling on the half hour.

Brazilian Bordon put Schalke back in front after the break with their goalkeeper Frank Rost then saving Boubacar Sanogo's 48th minute penalty awarded for a foul on Juan Pablo Sorin.



Bochum's Christoph Dabrowski (R) fights for the ball with Bremen's Miroslav Klose during a Bundesliga match in Bochum on Saturday. PHOTO: INTERNET

Cech undergoes skull surgery

REUTERS, London

Chelsea goalkeeper Peter Cech has had a "successful" operation for a depressed fracture of the skull, the club said in a statement on Sunday.

The 24-year-old Czech Republic international underwent surgery after being transferred to a special-neuro-surgical unit at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, Chelsea said.

"The operation was successful but it is too early to give an accurate assessment of his condition," the statement continued.

Cech, and his replacement Carlo Cudicini, were both knocked unconscious during Saturday's 1-0 Premier League win over Reading at the Madejski Stadium.

Cech was carried off after colliding with Reading striker Stephen Hunt who caught him in the head with his knee.

Cudicini was injured just before the end of the match after colliding with Reading's Ibrahima Sonko in injury time and was carried off with his neck braced after his head hit the ground.

Cudicini was also taken to hospital but was discharged later on Saturday evening.

Chelsea skipper John Terry went in goal for the last few moments. The club's third choice goalie, the Portuguese Hilario, may now be in the starting line-up to face Barcelona in the Champions League at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Ronaldo in dark over red

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazil striker Ronaldo said he was unable to explain why he was sent off for the second time in his Real Madrid career during his side's 1-0 defeat at Getafe on Saturday.

The 30-year-old was given his marching orders for picking up a second booking after saying something to the referee in the dying minutes of the game.

His only previous sending off came two seasons ago when he kicked out at Juventus defender Alessio Tacchinardi in a 2-0 defeat in a Champions League first knock-out round.

He will now miss next Sunday's league clash against arch-rivals Barcelona.

"I don't understand why I was given a second yellow card," Ronaldo told reporters.

"I saw that (Ruud) van Nistelrooy was shouting because the referee had blown for a foul for no reason and I asked him why he had booked him. The referee moved his head and I said he was a 'phenomenon' and he then gave me the yellow card."

Referee Bernardino Gonzalez Vazquez said in his match report that the striker had received the booking for "making a clear protest against one of my decisions."

McClaren to battle on

AFP, London

Under-pressure Steve McClaren insisted on Sunday he won't quit as England coach despite the barrage of criticism which followed the 2-0 defeat to Croatia in midweek.

The England boss was also criticised following the goalless draw with Macedonia at Old Trafford last Saturday while he switched to a controversial 3-5-2 formation for the trip to Zagreb.

The results left England level on seven points in Group E of their Euro 2008 qualifying group with their last two group opponents plus Israel, who they face next in March.

McClaren has pleaded for patience and insists the time to judge him is at the end of the qualification campaign.

"I'm not even contemplating resigning," said the coach.

"I've every confidence in us qualifying, so I'm not thinking about walking away. And it's too early to talk about me being sacked."

"It's where you end up, not where we are at the present time."

McClaren admits he would be a bad manager if he did not lead England to the finals in Austria and Switzerland.

He added: "The job I have taken on is qualification for the European Championships in two years' time. So I feel I should be judged at the end of qualification."

"A good manager would qualify with these players. I feel we'll get there, but the pressure is enormous. Along the way we're going to hit rocks because we need to try things."

"But it's not as if I'm stuck here in a muddle not knowing where I am."

"Over the coming games and months, hopefully we'll address these problems. I understand why the fans are angry. The demand for a performance is always there."

"But the expectation level in the dressing room is we have to qualify."

Ronaldo sees red as Real get the blues

AFP, Madrid



Brazilian striker Ronaldo's miserable season slumped to a new low when he was sent-off in the last minute of Real Madrid's 1-0 defeat at Getafe on Saturday.

Ronaldo, still feeling his way back after a knee injury, came on as a second half substitute for Antonio Cassano at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez but was sent-off in the dying moments for a second bookable offence.

The red card will rule him out of next weekend's clash with champions and bitter rivals Barcelona.

The only goal of the game came on the hour mark when young Spanish defender Ruano Alexis rose above Raul Bravo to head in a cross from Del Moral which left Iker Casillas in the Real goal stranded.

David Beckham started the match but his hopes of forcing his way back into the England squad would not have been helped when he was replaced by Robinho in the 68th minute.

Raul was also introduced into the action but was unable to save his side.

"They played better than us,"

admitted Real coach Fabio Capello.

"We played badly and we suffered because of the speed and aggressive approach of Getafe. They had nothing to lose."

Real stay in fourth place in the table, two points behind Barcelona.

"I don't think you could currently find a better game between two Spanish first division sides," said Sevilla coach Juande Ramos.

"I think this is going to be a very attractive match but what has made life more difficult has been the international commitments of some of my players."

"To prepare for this sort of game, it's best to have time to work together and that hasn't been possible," added Ramos, who knows what is required to defeat Barca.

It has been less than two months since the two sides last met, in the European Super Cup.

Sevilla, last season's UEFA Cup winners, confirmed their credentials as credible championship contenders by inflicting a 3-0 defeat on their domestic rivals and European champions.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard will be without striker Samuel Eto'o until the New Year because of injury while Ronaldinho is still far from the form that won him the World Player of the Year crown for the last two years.

Capello at a Real loss

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Capello revealed his dismay after Real Madrid were beaten by Getafe on Saturday evening and stated that he would not be appealing against Ronaldo's red card.

The Italian coach admitted that he was horrified by his team's display and believed that the right team won the game.

Madrid suffered their first league defeat of the season thanks to a goal from Alexis.

"We played very badly and suffered against Getafe's aggressiveness and speed and that is that," Capello said.

"There are no acceptable excuses as Getafe played with more desire, speed and strength and did not allow us to settle."

"The image the team showed was horrifying. We now have to focus on Tuesday's game and nothing else."

After coming at half-time, Ronaldo picked up two yellow cards and was sent off in the 89th minute.

Capello accepted the referee's decision and stated that he believed there is little point in appealing against the second booking.

"I do not want to talk about the sending off because I accept the referee's decision whether I agree with it or not," Capello continued.

"I do not think that we can appeal against the card."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



AT THE END OF THE ROAD? Real Madrid's Brazilian striker Ronaldo leaves the field after receiving a red card during his side's Primera Liga match against Getafe on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP