



Sporting Lisbon players collectively celebrate a goal during their Portuguese Liga match against Beira Mar at the Mario Duarte Stadium in Aveiro on Friday.

Beira Mar hold Sporting

Reuters, Lisbon

Cameroon defender Yohanna Buba struck a hat-trick to give promoted Beira Mar a 3-3 home draw with Sporting in the Portuguese Premier League on Friday.

Sporting lead the league with 17 points from eight matches.

Champions Porto, a point behind, can regain top spot when they hosts rivals Benfica on Saturday.

Struggling Beira Mar took an early lead when Buba headed in a free-kick from the right by Rui Lima after 14 minutes.

Sporting equalised through Brazilian striker Alessandro after 56 minutes and went ahead nine minutes from time when substitute Yannick scored from inside the box.

Buba headed home a rebound in the 86th minute but Sporting looked like they had snatched a win when Brazilian striker Liedson tapped in a cross from the right on the stroke of regulation time.

However, Buba popped up to complete his hat-trick in stoppage time in a goalmouth scramble.

PHOTO: AFP

Recoba sidelined for six weeks

INTERNET, undated

Alvaro Recoba will be out for six weeks with a new calf strain, so with Adriano away indefinitely, Inter could run into a striker shortage.

The Uruguayan had only just returned from a long-term injury lay-off when he limped off during Wednesday's 4-1 win over Livorno.

Tests have shown the setback to be worse than previously believed, as the strain to his left calf muscle will rule him out of action for at least six weeks.

"It's a curse, I am devastated," said Il Chino. "It's incredible -- I am just a disaster. I slipped and felt a pain in my calf. I thought it was just a bruise, but then I realised it was a muscular problem."

With the inconsistent Recoba now sidelined, Adriano's period of "rest and recuperation" in Brazil could be cut short.

The Selecao star was sent home to Rio de Janeiro so that he could relax for a week with his family before beginning a new personalised training regime.

He hasn't scored a goal for the club since March and his poor form was of such concern that this surprising strategy was implemented in a crucial time of the season.

But with the Milan derby this evening and the Champions League clash with Spartak Moscow coming up, the Nerazzurri need all the support they can get.

Not all rosy at Reds

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool closed ranks around manager Rafael Benitez today after an astonishing attack by an unnamed director.

Benitez discovered savage words attacking his regime in the morning media, and chose to make a dignified, calm response ahead of the tough home clash with Aston Villa.

Liverpool have made no attempt to rubbish the media report, and believe they know which of their seven-man board is involved.

And it is believed that the club were tipped off at the beginning of the week that this particular attack was being prepared, which suggests that Benitez, too, has known for several days what was coming.

His management skills, transfer policy and rotation system were criticised in the article, which has angered club chairman David Moores and chief executive Rick Parry.

Benitez said: "I know that I have the support of the chairman, chief executive and the board."

"I have seen the words written, and people have to write, and talk about football. I was surprised, but I would prefer to talk about football. I prefer to think about Aston Villa and how to beat them."

"I was taught by John Toshack at Real Madrid when to say 'no comment'."

He added: "I have too much respect for this club, the fans and board, to want to discuss these things further in public."

Parry launched a strong defence of his manager on the club's website: "We understand the expectations at Liverpool but we are clearly moving in the right direction under Rafael Benitez."

"We unquestionably have a better squad than we did last year so it is not about making judgements at this stage. There are no trophies handed out at the end of October, with the exception of the Community Shield which we have already won. You can only judge our performance over the course of a full season."

"We all knew there was a sizeable job to do when Rafa was appointed and that is why we have never laid down any timescales or imposed unrealistic pressures. What is important is continuous year on year improvement."

"The wins in Istanbul and Cardiff were great achievements which we celebrated together. Some of the early results in the league have not gone as well as we would have wanted which is why we have a collective responsibility to pull together and work even harder to improve things on the pitch."

A search has now started to discover the identity of the 'mole' whose position is now clearly untenable. Of the seven man board, clearly Moores and Parry can be ruled out as well as the two virtual 'sleeping partners' from Granada,

who are the club's second largest shareholders.

Although Benitez will not be dragged further into the debate, apart from saying: "This has not disrupted my preparation for the Villa game, nor has it caused any worries for the players' he is privately more than capable of defending himself.

Prior to the Carling Cup victory over Reading he launched a lengthy, passionate defence of his management at Anfield and in hindsight it seems that he was aiming those words at what he may well have known was about to break over Anfield.

He pointed out the league positions, victory in the Champions League, FA Cup, European Super Cup and Community Shield, while also pointing out the difference in transfer spending he has compared to Chelsea and Manchester United.

The unnamed director also questioned the values of players bought and how difficult it is to off-load them. But Benitez has made few mistakes in the transfer market - Fernando Morientes is clearly one - and has been saddled with a dozen or more players from the Gerard Houllier regime that have been hard to sell on, causing considerable losses.

Kirkland to stay at Wigan

AFP, London

England international goalkeeper Chris Kirkland turned his loan move from Liverpool to Premiership rivals Wigan into a permanent switch after signing a contract that will keep him at the JJB Stadium until 2009.

The former Coventry player was on loan at West Brom last season but struggled with injuries for much of the campaign and, as a result, the 25-year-old missed out on a place in England's World Cup squad.

Emerson awaiting Milan call

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid midfielder Emerson has issued a 'come and get me plea' to Milan after revealing he never really wanted to leave Italy last summer.

The Brazilian was forced to leave Juventus in the aftermath of the Calciopoli scandal, following coach Fabio Capello to the Spanish capital.

But since his arrival at the Bernabeu, Emerson has failed to hit top form and now the 30-year-old would love a return to the peninsula with the Rossoneri.

"I have many friends at Milan and they speak very well of the club and the president," Emerson told quotidiano.net. "If Milan called me I would be very grateful."

"I am happy at Real but I do not want the Juventus fans to consider me a traitor," he added. "I would have played for Juve in the lower

Dyer out again

INTERNET, undated

Newcastle United winger Kieron Dyer has suffered a freak training ground injury that will keep him out for a further two weeks.

The midfielder returned to action in Wednesday's League Cup tie against Portsmouth following a six-month lay off, only to damage his eye in training on Friday.

"Kieron took a knock to his left eye in Friday training in what can only be described as a freak accident," manager Glenn Roeder told the club website.

"He will not take part in contact training for at least two weeks."

Dyer was set to make his first start since April against Charlton on Saturday, but the 27-year-old will now have to wait a little longer to make his much-anticipated comeback.

The problem is just the latest setback for a player whose career has been plagued by injury and illness.

"Kieron does not deserve such wretched luck to happen little more than a day after getting back out on the pitch against Portsmouth," Roeder added.

AFP, Madrid

Sportswear company Nike have signed a new sponsorship agreement with Spanish giants Barcelona which will see them invest a minimum of 150 million euros over a five year period ending in 2013.

The agreement could be extended by a further five years after that the Catalan club said on its website.

The new agreement doubles Nike's financial involvement in Barcelona from the 15 million euros a year previously equalling what the company invests in English giants Manchester United.

On top of the minimum investment, will come bonuses and royalties based on results on the pitch and the sales of Barcelona team shirts which could lift the annual figure to 45 million euros, Spanish press reports said.

Barcelona, whose annual budget tops 300 million euros, in June sold television coverage rights of its matches in the period 2006 to 2013 for one billion euros.

Leeds settle 'tap-up' issue

Football

INTERNET, undated

Leeds have agreed a settlement with Chelsea and have dropped their complaint that the Premiership champions tried to poach three of their academy scholars.

Ken Bates raised the issue in August, when he accused his former club of breaking youth development rules to move teenagers Tom Taiwo and Michael Woods to Stamford Bridge.

He claimed Chelsea had also tried to persuade a third youngster to leave Elland Road -- but Danny Rose opted to stay in Yorkshire.

Leeds chairman Bates called for the London club to be deducted points, thrown out of competitions and suspended from the transfer market.

He claimed financial punishment had no effect on the club bankrolled by billionaire owner Roman Abramovich.

The Premier League and the Football Association launched a joint investigation but Leeds have now withdrawn their allegations and accepted a settlement fee.

Chelsea have agreed to examine their internal procedure for recruiting youth team players but are understood to have made no admission of liability in the cases of Woods, Taiwo or Rose.

A joint statement from the Premier League and FA said: "The Premier League and Football Association today confirmed that Chelsea FC and Leeds United FC have reached a mutual agreed settlement with regard to an alleged approach to three Leeds United FC Academy players in breach of Premier League and FA rules."

"Leeds United FC has withdrawn their complaint and the Premier League has been advised by both clubs that any claims and litigation arising out of any alleged improper approach have been settled. This resolution is subject to a confidentiality agreement and there will be no further statements."

"Additionally Chelsea FC have undertaken to conduct an internal review of policies and procedures in relation to the recruitment of players, take steps to rectify any shortcomings; take the appropriate action in relation to club personnel, including Premier League approved training, and develop their own code of conduct."

"The Premier League and Football Association accordingly consider the matter closed."

Van der Sar eyes Europe

Football

INTERNET, undated

Edwin van der Sar has called on Manchester United to ease the winter chill by booking a trip to the Champions League knockout phase. United have bounced back in fine style following last season's humiliating group stage exit, recording three straight wins, scoring seven goals in the process and conceding just two.

It means a single point from Wednesday night's trip to FC Copenhagen will be enough to ease the Red Devils into the last 16 with two games to spare.

While Sir Alex Ferguson has already indicated there will be no let up in the remaining fixtures against Celtic and Benfica, Van der Sar, a Champions League winner with Ajax in 1995, realises how important it is to lift the pressure of qualification as quickly as possible.

"It is important to qualify straight-away," he said.

"November and December are

always packed with games and the less important some of those fixtures are, the easier it will be.

"It will allow the manager to bring in a few players to give them some experience of the Champions League, which is helpful, although, of course, we want to win all six matches if we possibly can in order to keep our form flowing."

"Even when you do not think it is important anymore a loss can disrupt things a little bit."

In citing scoring more and conceding less, Van der Sar has come up with a fairly obvious reason why United's form in this season's contest is so different compared to last term.

But the giant Dutchman also points out the Red Devils have so far managed to keep all their players on the field in each game, something they conspicuously failed to do 12 months ago when Wayne Rooney and Paul Scholes were dismissed against Villarreal and Lille respectively, both games ending in goalless draws.

"We had players sent off in two games which makes it difficult," he

said.

"Overall, it was disaster, so it is good we have not gone through that experience again."

Although the veteran keeper, who celebrates his 36th birthday on Sunday, believes Copenhagen's enthusiastic fans should ensure the Danish champions carry a greater threat than they did at Old Trafford a fortnight ago, when they were beaten 3-0 and barely created a chance, he feels there is far more quality within the visitors camp.

In addition, nearly all United's first-team stars have benefited from a midweek free of competitive combat after Sir Alex Ferguson changed all 11 players for the mid-week Carling Cup tie at Crewe.

"It was good to get a rest," he said.

"You have to assess the fitness of the players every so often, so to get a week off was good."

"It wasn't that we didn't do anything because we trained hard but it was nice not to have to focus on a game. It is important to be able to relax mentally once in a while."

Vieri fury at spy game

INTERNET, undated



time at Inter.

The former Azzurri man appeared in front of the FIGC Investigation Office on Friday, as the inquiry on the latest interception scandal continues, and was heard by chief Francesco Saverio Borrelli.

"I believe that no one should be tailed, especially if that person has scored more than 100 goals," said Vieri after exiting the FIGC offices in Rome.

"I am disappointed, that is obvious, and Moratti's behaviour disappointed me even more," added the striker, currently contracted to Atalanta.

"It wasn't nice to discover that I was spied on -- this kind of thing should never happen."

Moratti had explained that the decision was due to the club's intention to protect Vieri himself, seeing as he had just arrived at the Via Durini outfit and there were strange rumours about him.

"This is nonsense -- it doesn't make any sense and I consider it a lie."

"I would have never imagined

that this could happen to me during my time at Inter, after all I have done for them," explained Bobo, who spent six years with the club, scoring 133 goals.

"I don't know if Inter should return last year's Scudetto, I really believe there are more important issues in

this story.

"As to this campaign, I think the Nerazzurri can win the title, although Palermo are a strong side. The season has just started and there is along way to go before the end."

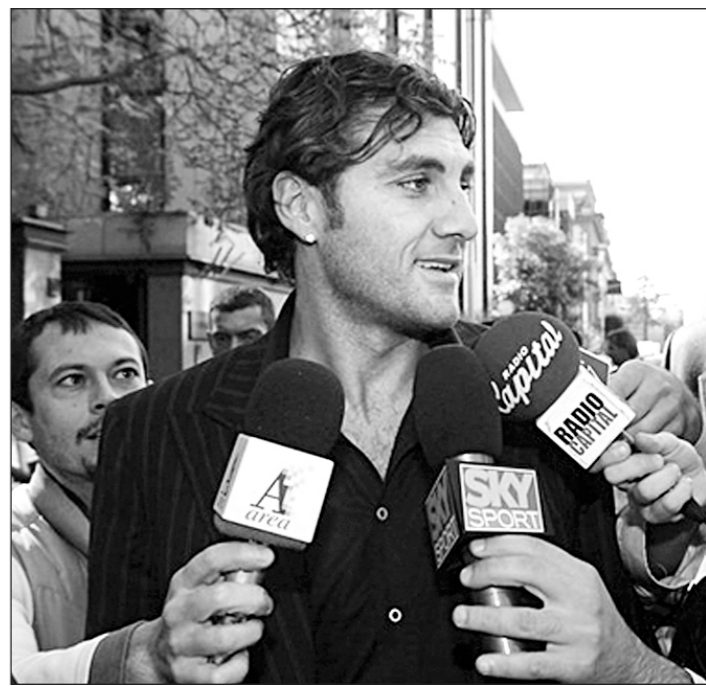


PHOTO: INTERNET

Former Inter Milan striker Christian Vieri addresses the press after being questioned in connection with wiretapping and tailing in Rome on Friday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Blue mine gem
6 Filch
9 Magna laude
12 Addis follower
13 Raw rock
14 Lawyers' org.
15 Danger
16 Ideal
18 Attack
20 Fervor
21 Put in
23 Brewery product
24 Beginning of life?
25 Quartet halves
27 Command
29 Church custodian
31 Highly skilled people
35 "Rags to riches" author
37 TV chef
38 Get up
41 Archery-bow wood

DOWN

3 Contra-diction in terms
4 Wading bird
5 Taco guts
6 Office machine
7 Exam format
8 Apiece
9 Basket-ball
10 WWII player
11 WWII vessel
12 WWII letters
13 Portuguese island
14 Once around
15 Honest politician
16 Payable
17 Nourished
18 Verse
19 Showed guts
20 In need of repair
21 Castle wall
22 Numerical prefix
23 Succumb to gravity
24 One may be shadowed
25 Flavorful
26 Vestige
27 Buenos Aires

Solution time: 25 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

Y O K W L D X X J I D Y O K I D Y T W I D E
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Q L N X Z K I D V Y K L D E N Y O K L .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SUPERHERO PAIR THAT FLIES WITH ONLY A MINIMUM OF WIND RESISTANCE: THE AERODYNAMIC DUO.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals E

The Cryptoquip 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.

8x3