

Lorient forward Andre-Pierre Gignac (R) heads towards the Marseille goal during their Ligue 1 match at the Velodrome Stadium in Marseille on Saturday.

Lyon fall at Rennes



Jean-Michel Aulas launched a broadside at French league officials who

he feels are against his five-times consecutive champions. Lyon fell to their first defeat of

the season, 1-0 at Rennes on Saturday, with their hosts ending the leaders' bid to match a league record of 10 straight wins. Despite a Lyon fightback in a

tense second half, an early goal from Stephane Mbia proved enough to end the only remaining unbeaten record in Europe's top leagues.

But barely three days after their midweek Champions League encounter against Dynamo Kiev. Aulas felt they might not have lost the points had they played on Sunday instead.

"Why did we play Saturday afternoon when we had to play in Kiev on Wednesday night?" said

"Every time we make a request to the league, they refuse it with a nauseating excuse."

Earlier in the week, Rennes's Sylvain Marveaux had also claimed in the media that Lyon are favoured by referees, something else which riled Aulas.

Rennes played well in the first half, but claiming that the referees favour Lyon and that Lyon are degenerating the spirit (of the game) is out of line.'

Lyon went into the match with a significant 11-point league lead and with 14 wins and a draw from their 15 matches at home and away this season.

That included nine league wins in a row and left them needing one more to match the record of 10 set by a once legendary Reims side (1948-49), Bordeaux (1953-54) and St Etienne (1969-

It was not all bad news for Lyon, though, as their closest rivals Marseille missed the chance to cut the lead to eight points after being stunned 1-0 at

It was Marseille's fourth defeat in their last six league matches and has seen them lose 11 points to Lyon since starting the season

> Lyon got off to a dreadful start, going behind 1-0 after 13 minutes as Mbia stole in front of midfielder Jeremy Toulalan to score at the near post from an Olivier Monterrubio corner.

neck-and-neck with their rivals.

The hosts were unfortunate not to double their lead just before the break. Nigerian striker John Utaka had the ball in the net but that was ruled out for a narrow offside decision.

Gerard Houllier's men were transformed after the break and dominated from start to finish.

But try as they might, the leaders could not find a way past Rennes's magnificent goalkeeper Simon Pouplin, with ex-Arsenal forward Sylvain Wiltord thwarted four times in the second half.

Such was Pouplin's brilliance that he earned the plaudits of Houllier and his opposite number Gregory Coupet.

Pouplin said: "We are very happy to be the first to trip them up. The end of the game was very

"We had a great first half and then defended really well in the second. Maybe it's a win that will spark something.

"I was very pleased with the congratulations of Houllier and Coupet."

Lyon's task became even harder on 78 minutes when Brazilian playmaker Juninho was dismissed for a flailing elbow that connected with Etienne Didot. Lyon's shut-out was the first time

this season they had failed to hit the

Their lead was cut to 10 points as Lille moved up to second with 21 points after a 3-0 win at Valenciennes. Sochaux, who beat Troyes 1-0 at home, are third but level on points with Lille.

Marseille dropped to fourth, level with St Etienne who thumped Toulouse 3-0.

Monaco remain bottom after they were held 0-0 at home by Nice. although it could have been worse as Nice's Brazilian midfielder Ederson missed a penalty four

charged West Indian side, particularly Chris Gayle and Shivnaraine

"But we progressed very well in the tournament after losing our first match to New Zealand. We believe we will have the opportunity to make up

"We have the players to do very

INTERNET, undated

Fergie

Arsene Wenger has hailed Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson as the best manager in the business after the Scot saw his side beat Portsmouth 3-0 on his 20th anniversary in the job.

The pair established a fierce rivalry after Wenger took charge at Arsenal in 1996, though the Frenchman admitted Ferguson's haul of trophies stands up to anybody's.

"Without a doubt, he has achieved more than any other. Nobody has done better than him. Count the number of championships Brian Clough won at Forest and the number Ferguson has won at United -- they don't compare," Wenger pointed out.

"And when you look at Paisley's Liverpool record, and how long he was in charge, that doesn't compare with Ferguson either.

Indeed Ferguson has amassed eight Premiership titles in his time with the North West giants, and the Frenchman underlined his resilience as his most outstanding characteristic.

"It's remarkable for somebody to maintain such consistent motivation at that level for so long and still deal with all the other ingredients as well." he added



ALEX FERGUSON

Wenger lauds UEFA boss slams Chelsea

Football

INTERNET.undated

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has slammed Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho for his behaviour before, and during last week's Champions League 2-2 draw with Barcelona.

The build-up to last week's encounter had been marked by several remarks by Mourinho, who insisted that Eidur Gudiohnson had learnt to dive since moving to Barcelona, and that referees favoured Frank Rijkaard's side.

The pre-match antagonism was nothing new from the outspoken Portuguese, and European football's most powerful figure urged Mourinho and his colleagues to act more responsibly.

"I think they have the duty to see to it we have the respect for the game and not to behave like kids, making statements like someone who was promised candy but didn't get it," he told the Mail on Sunday.

"They (managers) are the ones in this first hand who represent football. Their behaviour and their statements are listened to and are guiding many people in the wrong direction, in my opinion.

Mourinho received a twomatch touchline ban two years ago after his criticism of referee Anders Frisk's performance in a Champions League tie between the two sides caused a storm, which culminated in the official retiring from football, and



LENNART JOHANSSON

Johansson suggested another touchline ban could be in the pipeline.

"If he was punished once, it shouldn't happen again," insisted the Swede. "But he's not alone. We should not just find someone who should be hunted all the time. That goes for everyone, whatever name they have.

Fines, he added, were becoming an increasingly ineffective method of punishing Europe's wealthiest clubs, and were largely inconsequential for Chelsea. "I do not believe in fines. Chelsea have the money to pay them." Johansson also lamented the

nothing UEFA could do about it. "You talk about laws, that's one thing. But here it's a question of morals. I'm very very sad about this development. I'm against it.

millions of pounds that have been

spent by club owner Roman

Abramovich in his quest to bring

success to Stamford Bridge,

though admitted that there was

"Is it morally wrong? For me it is. But I cannot blame them for doing something that in law is accepted. Whether Abramovich has 50 billion or 500 billion, if he likes to spend one billion to buy players, then we think this is not the way to do foot-

Monaco goalkeeper Flavio Roma has revealed that Chelsea are interested in signing him.

Chelsea number one Petr Cech fractured his skull last month in a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt and looks set to be sidelined for much of the season.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho may decide to bring in more cover in the January transfer window and

champions would be a very attractive proposition.

"It's true Chelsea got in touch soon after the injury to Cech and asked about my availability," Roma told the News of the World. "Of course I would like to play for

Carlo Cudicini's agent, meanwhile, has dismissed suggestions of a bust-up between the player and

them.'

with Barcelona even though he had fully recovered from the injury.

Federico Pastorello admits Cudicini was unhappy not to replace Hilario between the posts, but insisted there was no problem. "It wasn't a war and I'm sure Mr

Mourinho would have been more worried if Carlo had shown he didn't care," Pastorello explained

Sachin's scalp a boost, says **McGrath**

PTI, Melbourne

Taking the wicket of Sachin Tendulkar in Champions Trophy has boosted the confidence of Glenn McGrath who feels he owes Australia an Ashes win this time around.

This was revealed by renowned physiotherapist Errol Alcott, who recently stepped down from a 22year career with the Australian cricket Alcott said McGrath had regained

vital confidence at the Champions Trophy after a nine-month lay-off and would be back to his best for the Ashes series beginning later this "I thought at the time that getting out Sachin Tendulkar in the quarter-

needed confidence boost, and it's done exactly that," Alcott was quoted as saying by 'The Herald Sun' today. "He's got a bit of confidence back and that seems to be what turned it around. He looks to be back in great

final would have been a much-

face," he said. While plenty have had their say on McGrath's return to form, there are few more qualified to deliver ar assessment than Elcott himself.

nick. He'll have a big smile on his

From 1984, Alcott was a miracle worker at times with the Australian side, returning injured players to the paddock well ahead of schedule.

McGrath, 36, was so frequently on Alcott's table that the new South Sydney rugby league athletic performance director iokes he knows the fast bowler "almost intimately".

SA look at **WC** preps

PTI, Durban

After being knocked out of the Champions Trophy in the semifinals by the West Indies, South Africa are now aiming to get back to winning ways when they take on India and Pakistan in separate home series over the next three months

India will arrive in the country in the middle of the month for five one-day internationals and three Tests. while Pakistan come in January with a similar itinerary.

South African coach Micky Arthur hoped that the team can prepare for next year's World Cup with good results on home soil.

"We beat Pakistan and Sri Lanka in their backyard and hope to do the same against the Indians. We have the team to topple any team in the world. The team we have at the moment will be the one we will prepare for the World Cup." Arthur said when he returned with his team after the high profile event in India. Captain Graeme Smith denied that

the team "choked" in the semi-final against the West Indies. "We just came up against a highly-

Chanderpaul", he said

against the Indian and Pakistan cricket

well against both the teams", he said.

Maria aiming at win

AFP, Madrid

Maria Sharapova and Justine Henin-Hardenne aim to depose Amelie Mauresmo as world number one at the WTA Championships but reaching the end of the season in one piece is also high on their wish lists.

shoulder, was forced to pull out of her last tournament in Zurich and hasn't played since. French Open champion Henin-

Mauresmo, nursing an injured

Hardenne hasn't been seen with a racquet in her hand since the US All of which led Sharapova, the

word number two and US Open

winner, to back calls for wideranging changes to the calendar in the hope of preserving players' limbs as well as the integrity of the "I feel strongly that the tennis season needs to be made shorter, with more breaks for players to

rest in order to be in peak condition when we do play," said Sharapova, who fell to the curse herself in Moscow last month when a hip injury forced her to A WTA Tour report has shown that top 10 player withdrawals

has increased by 72 percent in the last five years. Despite the gloom, French star Mauresmo, with the Australian Open and Wimbledon titles under her belt, believes her enforced rest since Zurich could work to her

from the high-profile tournaments

advantage. "I'm feeling better. I picked up my racket again last Monday and started serving and everything was OK," she said.

"I haven't played since Zurich so obviously I would like to have had more matches but I'll take it as it comes. I might be fresher than the other girls and that might give me an edge at some point."

Rafa confident of Reds revival

AFP, Liverpool



to four matches.

Rafa Benitez refuses to concede that his team is out of contention for this season's Premiership title after a 2-0

victory over Reading at Anfield. A goal in either half from Dutch international forward Dirk Kuyt extended the Reds' winning streak

That run dates back to the middle of last month when a 2-0 defeat at Manchester United left Liverpool trailing their north-west rivals by 11 points and seemingly out of contention in their efforts to end a 16-year wait for the English championship.

However, while remaining diplomatic about his team's chances of closing such an imposing gap, Benitez voiced his confidence that all may not yet be lost.

"It is a long race and we must keep going," he said. "My idea is to think about the next game and keep this run going. If we can win another three points then we will see what difference that makes to the table. If we can win a few more games in a row then we will see but we are in a better position now than before. My plan now is to keep going forward."

Specifically, going forward would involve adding to their solitary point away from Anfield this season, their wretched form on the road featuring four defeats from

visit Arsenal in a contest they cannot afford to lose if Benitez's title aspirations are to be fulfilled.

Benitez added: "It's clear we have to improve our away form if we want to continue progressing. We need to do the same things we did in some of those away games, but we need to put our chances

"The worst game was maybe the United game but in the other games we had chances -- at Chelsea, Sheffield, Bolton. We need to do the same things, or better, but score goals at the end."

The current form of Kuyt, scorer of five goals in just seven Premiership starts since his ninemillion-pound arrival from Fevenoord early in the season, should certainly give the Liverpool manager hope that a victory at the Emirates Stadium is within his team's grasp and Benitez paid tribute to the Dutchman.

"I've known him for years and he is a player who always scored goals, always worked really, really hard," Benitez said.

"He's a player you know is always very consistent and it's not easy for a striker to be consistent. But he works hard, scores goals and creates chances and space for his teammates.

"His understanding with Crouch is becoming very good and now we have to make sure we take this home form with us when we go

Reading manager Steve

Coppell packed his defence at Anfield in an effort to avoid a repeat of his Crystal Palace team's 9-0 defeat at this ground in September 1989 -- coincidentally, the start of the last season in which Liverpool won the title.

The tactic proved futile although the Liverpool manager paid them the consolation of predicting Premiership survival, saying: "I think they will stay up. They have a very good manager, you can see they are well-organised and know what to do."

For Coppell himself, there was the added consolation of a hardworking effort by his side as they fell to a fourth consecutive league reverse and the hope that the fixture list may be kinder to Reading in the near future.

Coppell said: "Over the last couple of weeks we've been found out a little bit, we've left ourselves vulnerable at the back so we needed a stronger foundation

"But Liverpool are a terrific team with terrific individuals. Two years ago they were European champions and we were in a different division. We're trying to bridge a huge gap but today my players did well, they were committed and disciplined.

"Early doors, when we had 13 points, I said that was maybe a coincidence because of the fixtures. Perhaps our present situation might also be a coincidence because of the fixtures."

Siena salvage a point

AFP, Rome



the last 13 minutes as Siena fought back from two goals down to salvage a 2-2 draw at home to Parma on

Albanian striker

Erjon Bogdani

scored twice in

Saturday. Two-time UEFA Cup winners Parma appeared to be heading for their first away win since April 15 after goals from Domenico Morfeo and Igor Budan.

But Siena, whose coach Mario

Beretta was in charge of Parma last

CROSSWORD

14 Street that 46 Hibernia

37 Three

38 Edge

44 It takes

the

cake

50 Sweater

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house for

52 Boarding-

doas

54 Emulate

55 Errand

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56 Parlor

piece

alcoho

Across,

in a way

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vessel?

40 Panorama

42 Roast-pig

side dish

ACROSS

6 Site of

rapid

12 It comes

13 On

growth

after 23

downhill?

15 Rupture

16 Egyptian

cross

19 Indispen-

sable

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spike

lead-in

27 Congers

29 Actress

32 "In the

Navy"

group

35 Compe-

tent

36 Indiana

Hilary

22 Corn

24 La-la

17 Y-chromo-

recipients

ground

time added on -- earned a point for the Tuscan battlers. A draw left Siena in fourth place in Serie A on 16 points, five adrift of joint leaders Inter Milan and Palermo, who both play on Sunday.

Parma are on eight points, just

season, produced a stirring late

six clear of the relegation zone. Berreta was proud of his players for their never-say-die spirit.

"We showed tremendous character in the last half hour," he said. "It wasn't our best performance

of the season, I can't fault the team

Morfeo said his Parma side will

for their attitude in the second half."

rally and Bogdani's double strike -away leads so easily. his second in the third minute of "If we want to stay up, we have got to kill off games and not let our concentration slip so easily," he

go down if they continue to throw

Newly-promoted Sicilian side Catania won 1-0 in Saturday's late match in Calabria where Giorgio Corona grabbed the winner in the 69th minute.

The win left Catania on 12 points, while Reggina remain bottom of the table on minus three points having been made to start with a 15-point penalty for their involvement in the Italian match-



GIMME THE SHIRT: Parma's attacking midfielder Domenico Morfeo (R) has his shirt tucked by Siena's Alberto during their Serie A encounter at the Artemio Franchi Stadium on Saturday.

12 Resort

royal

23 Commo-

24 1933 dam

28 Light rain

31 Shortest

of the 12

(Abbr.)

lander's

souvenii

34 Keep tabs

name?

41 RenFair

42 "Family

Feud"

option

again?

place?

45 Rose's

47 Black

48 Stagger

49 Actor Ron

43 Never

25 Tease

26 Fine

30 Winter

33 Main-

39 Code

insomnia

By Eugene Sheffer

1 Epidermis 18 Off base?

2 Kerosene- 21 Cause of

DOWN

feature

3 Baking

4 San

5 Zero

Otto

merel

8 Craggy

9 'Wheel o

space

zone?

11 Crucial

Solution time: 27 mins.

10 Canal

Fortune"

7 Not

potato

Francis

6 Physicist

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CRYPTOQUIP

WC JDL ERF R CIA WFIRO RUDLH UGIRHEWBP WB RWG, OLNNDOI HEIJ ADLTF

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SINCE NO ONE EXCEPT COMIC CONWAY CAN EXPOSE OUR SECRET, I SUPPOSE ONLY TIM WILL TELL. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals I

UI WBONWGWBP HEDLPEHO

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.

Roma reveals Blues interest Roma has claimed he is on the list of **Football** Cudicini, who suffered concussion against Reading, was over-The 32-year-old also conceded INTERNET, undated that an offer from the Premiership looked for Chelsea's midweek draw