



HERE WE GO AGAIN: Manchester United's Ryan Giggs (L) and Patrice Evra runs in joy towards Cristiano Ronaldo (R) after the latter scored against Portsmouth during their Premiership match at Old Trafford on Saturday.

United celebrate in style

REUTERS, London



Manchester United celebrated 20 years under Alex Ferguson's command with an emphatic 3-0 victory over Portsmouth to stay top of the Premier League on Saturday. The points were effectively in the bag after 10 minutes at Old Trafford thanks to a Louis Saha penalty and a dazzling free kick from Cristiano Ronaldo. Nemanja Vidic headed the third midway through the second half. With champions Chelsea not in action until Sunday, United forged three points clear with 28 from 11 games. Chelsea have 25 while third-placed Bolton Wanderers (20) lost ground after a 1-0 defeat at home to Wigan Athletic. At the other end of the table draw specialists Watford notched their first win of the season, moving out of the bottom three with a 2-0 win over Middlesbrough, while Charlton Athletic briefly climbed off the bottom by beating Manchester City 1-0. The south London side were back there later though after

Sheffield United won 1-0 at Newcastle United for their first away win -- and first away goal in the league -- this season. Danny Webber headed the winner in the 68th minute. That result left Newcastle one off the bottom in 19th place -- with the boos of the home fans ringing in their ears after defeat at St James' Park left them without a league win for seven matches. Charlton, Newcastle and West Ham all have eight points with just goal difference separating them although the Hammers have yet to play their weekend match on Sunday at home to Arsenal, who can move up to third with a win at Upton Park. Everton missed a chance to rise into the top four when they went down 1-0 against Fulham at Craven Cottage where they have not scored a league goal since 1967. Improving Liverpool joined them on 17 points thanks to a Dirk Kuyt double in a comfortable 2-0 home win against Reading. Manchester United seemed determined to make up for the blip of a 1-0 Champions League defeat by FC Copenhagen in mid-week, tearing into fourth-placed

Portsmouth from the first whistle. It took less than two minutes for Saha to beat David James from the penalty spot after Wayne Rooney's burst into the penalty area was curtailed by Dejan Stefanovic. Saha was causing mayhem in the Pompey defence and when he was fouled after 10 minutes Cristiano Ronaldo stepped up to send a superb free kick past James. The Portsmouth keeper stood firm against a rampant United, denying Gary Neville on two occasions before halftime and once more after the break. Saha also found James in inspired form but the former England stopper was finally beaten again when Vidic headed in powerfully from Neville's cross. Portsmouth, the surprise package of the first quarter of the season, rarely threatened, although Croatia international Niko Kranjcar did slice wastefully wide when the score was 2-0. "In the main I'm very pleased, very good forward play and we could have scored a few goals," Ferguson told Sky Sports. Liverpool climbed to seventh and took their goal tally to 12 in four games as Dutchman Kuyt scored in

each half. He put the Reds ahead after 14 minutes when a Peter Crouch header fell into his path and then wrapped up the points with 20 minutes remaining after Reading keeper Marcus Hahnemann failed to hold another Crouch header. Watford, who had drawn six of their opening 10 games after promotion back to the top flight, were full value for their first three-point haul of the season. Hameur Bouazza's shot deflected in off Boro defender Jonathan Woodgate after five minutes to give them a dream start and England under-21 striker Ashley Young seized on a poor defensive header to clinch the win after the break. "We had an opportunity last week (against Tottenham Hotspur) but sooner or later if you keep banging at the door, the door will open," manager Aidy Boothroyd told Sky Sports. Watford jumped to 16th position, two above the drop zone, with nine points. Bottom club Charlton won their first league game since August with Darren Bent's first-half header enough to beat Manchester City at the Valley.

Barca stutter at Deportivo

AFP, Madrid



Spanish champions Barcelona gave their title challengers a sniff of hope after dropping two precious points in a 1-1 draw away at Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday. Frank Rijkaard's side, who are fighting for their Champions League survival after a 2-2 draw with Chelsea midweek, travelled to the Riazor stadium without a number of key players. And their absence may prove decisive as the Catalans failed to cap an impressive second half by putting the ball in Dudu Aouate's net. Brazilian Ronaldinho opened the scoring five minutes before the interval after Javier Saviola, making his first start for Barcelona for the first time since May 2004, was fouled on the edge of the box. However Deportivo replied through Juan Rodriguez late in the second half after the midfielder buried a rebound from a penalty by Uruguayan substitute Fabian Estoyanoff. In a tense second half it was all Barcelona as Lionel Messi, Ronaldinho and Andres Iniesta combined superbly up front to produce some scintillating attacking football. But in the end the Catalans couldn't complain with a result

which, nonetheless, will allow Sevilla to go top if they win at home against Osasuna on Sunday. Rijkaard travelled to La Coruna without a number of key players, including midfielder Xavi Hernandez and Icelandic forward Eidur Gudjohnsen, both of whom are injured. Cameroonian Samuel Eto'o is also on the sidelines with a knee injury until at least late January. That allowed Saviola a rare start, and the little Argentine did his best to impress during a balanced first half in which both teams saw chances go amiss. In the 28th minute Joan Verdu did well to pounce on to a long ball from midfield and then dodged past French defender Lilian Thuram before getting a somewhat weak shot away that went straight into the arms of the alert Victor Valdes. Seven minutes later Ronaldinho completed a nice one-two with Saviola on the edge of the area, however as the Brazilian ran through primed to shoot a defender's leg poked the ball away. Saviola then had a shot blocked when he unleashed the ball while surrounded by defenders on the edge of the area. A minute later the referee pointed to the spot after Saviola was fouled in the penalty area as he hit a half volley towards goal. Ronaldinho stepped up and made no mistake in sending a low drive past the prone Dudu Aouate, but moments later Deportivo

threatened when Albert Lopo rose to meet a corner and sent a powerful header just wide of Valdes' post. At the other end Deco was set free by Messi, and the Brazil-born Portugal international hit a wicked angled shot from 20 yards which hit Aouate's right hand post, with the keeper beaten. Barcelona did most of the pressing in the second half, but Aouate was the hero when he dived to take the ball from the feet of the advancing Andres Iniesta. Deportivo wouldn't go down without a fight. A superb long delivery from Estoyanoff after he had beaten his marker almost seen Valdes beaten with an angled header at his far post. Valdes was then forced into action with a one-handed save from the advancing Arizmendi. However the Deportivo player was shoved as he shot, and the referee pointed to the spot. Estoyanoff stepped up, only to be denied by an alert Valdes. The keeper was eventually beaten when Rodriguez was quick to the rebound. Barcelona upped the pace in a bid to secure a winner, however a late flurry of dominating their hosts was soaked up by the Deportivo defence. Barcelona escaped losing altogether when another devastating cross from Estoyanoff was met at Valdes' far post by former Barca reserve forward Cristian, whose effort was blocked by the keeper.

Mancini admits English desire

INTERNET, undated

Internazionale coach Roberto Mancini has reiterated his desire to move to The Premiership in the near future. The Inter chief has long been a fan of the English game, stemming back to his brief stint with Leicester towards the end of his glittering playing career. Now Mancini is enjoying life at The Giuseppe Meazza with the Nerazzurri and he admits that he is unlikely to manage another Italian side. "It's true, Inter could well be the last Italian side I'll manage. In fact, I'm pretty sure that's the case," he said. Despite guiding Inter to a position of being one of the top teams in Europe, Mancini has to cope with constant speculation about his job. "I've been living with reports of other tacticians linked to my job for three years now and have become accustomed to it," he said. "This is part of the business and all I can do is keep working. Massimo Moratti will make the decision he deems the best, but I know I have to win." He confirmed his love of The Premiership, adding: "I adore English football and one day would love to have a coaching experience in the Premier League after I tested it out as a player." "Chelsea would be the ultimate -- I could even swap with Mourinho! -- but it's too early even to joke

Bremen held by Cottbus

AFP, Berlin



League leaders Werder Bremen wasted the chance to put pressure on their championship rivals Bayern Munich after only managing a 1-1 home draw with promoted Energie Cottbus on Saturday. Bremen, who had won their last four league games, could have moved six points clear at the summit with Bayern and Schalke, both three points behind, tussling on Sunday, but squandered vital points at the Weserstadion. "That is not enough because I always want the three points," explained Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf. "We did not manage to take our chances and they made it difficult for us by packing men behind the ball." Cameroon striker Francis Kiyo produced an unstoppable dipping shot on 49 minutes to put Cottbus ahead before Croatian substitute Ivan Klasnic equalised on 76 minutes to rescue a point. "We could have gone home with a win and I think that speaks volumes when you consider how Bremen have been playing," said Cottbus midfielder Timo Rost.

VfB Stuttgart climb to second as their impressive start to the campaign continued with a 4-2 win at Alemannia Aachen. German Under-21 striker Mario Gomez was again on target scoring his sixth goal of the season to help Stuttgart move just two points behind Bremen. "We were on our game from the very first minute and created a lot of goalscoring chances," said Stuttgart coach Armin Veh. "We are full of confidence at the moment and scoring goals for fun." Bayern and Schalke can both move within one point of Bremen with victory in the match of the weekend on Sunday. Bayern have not won at Schalke's intimidating arena since October 1998 and have lost their last three away matches in the league. The league is Schalke's only focus after exiting the UEFA Cup and domestic cup and their fans plan to stage a silent protest on Sunday -- refusing to support their team for the opening 19 minutes and four seconds of the match -- the length of the protest coincides with the year the club was founded, in 1904. Bremen started the stronger against Cottbus with Brazilian playmaker Diego, with five goals to his name already this season, seeing his goalbound shot blocked by a last ditch lunge from the away

defence in the 24th minute. Miroslav Klose then hit the crossbar with a brilliant header but Cottbus rode their luck to go into the interval all square. A Bremen goal looked on the cards but Cottbus took a shock lead four minutes after the interval with Kiyo's powerful strike scorching past Tim Wiese in the Bremen goal. "I cannot understand how Kiyo was allowed to run with the ball with three players around him," fumed Wiese. "We should have closed him down and blocked the shot." The 2004 champions were shell-shocked and manager Schaaf threw on two extra strikers in search of an equaliser. Klasnic, one of the substitutes, came up trumps heading an equaliser with 14 minutes left. Elsewhere the pressure on SV Hamburg coach Thomas Doll shows no sign of letting up with his side falling to a 1-0 reverse at VfL Wolfsburg. German international Mike Hanke scored after 19 minutes to leave Hamburg fourth from bottom of the table with just one win in ten games. Out of the domestic cup and the Champions League -- where they have lost all four games -- it is turning into a nightmare season for Hamburg.

Ronaldo still too fat: Capello

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Ronaldo still needs to lose more weight before he can attempt to return to top form, his coach Fabio Capello said on Saturday. "He is working hard in training and achieving an acceptable level of fitness. He has lost a lot of weight but there is still a little more to come off before he can return to be the player everyone knows," Capello told a news conference. "If a player isn't in good shape he won't play. Everyone thinks they look good in the mirror in the morning but I watch how they perform in training. He will get games but he needs to be fit." Capello was responding to an interview with Ronaldo in the Spanish press on Friday, where the Brazilian international spoke about his frustration at his lack of first team opportunities. Ronaldo underwent a minor operation on his left knee after the World Cup finals and missed the start of the season. But since then he has only played 100 minutes in the league and the Champions League, and has yet to score a goal or start a game in those competitions. "I don't know what the criteria

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Platini critical of Henry

INTERNET, undated

French legend Michael Platini believes Thierry Henry made a mistake in shunning a move to Barcelona. The France international striker was tipped to join Barca in the close season, but opted to pen a long-term Arsenal deal. The 29-year-old has now been with Arsenal since August 1999 and Platini does not believe he has won enough at club level. Henry has won the World Cup and European championship with France, but is yet to taste UEFA Champions League glory with The Gunners. Platini thinks Henry has not lifted enough silverware with the North Londoners and is unhappy he missed the chance to develop further with Barca. "I sincerely believe he made a mistake in not signing for Barcelona," Platini told The Sun. "I told him so and said the same

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BAD DAY AT THE OFFICE: Werder Bremen midfielders Diego (L) and Torsten Frings leave the pitch dejected after a 1-1 draw against Bundesliga strugglers Energie Cottbus at the Weser Stadium in Bremen on Saturday.



Barcelona's mercurial striker Lionel Messi (L) is being tackled from behind by Deportivo La Coruna's Alberto Lopo during their Primera Liga match at the Riazor Stadium in Coruna on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP