Rooney fired up for big match

AFP, Sheffield

Manchester United hitman Wayne Roonev has set his sights on shooting down second-placed Chelsea when the English Premiership's top two go head to head.

The England striker is finding peak form at just the right time to make sure Sir Alex Ferguson's side maintain their slender three point advantage over the champions.

He scored both goals as the Red Devils came from a goal down to win 2-1 at Sheffield United on Saturday and is now targeting the match which could well have a huge bearing on Premiership trophy's final destination this season.

Rooney insisted this win at Bramall Lane guaranteed that the Red Devils would enter Sunday's showdown confident of securing

"Now we can go there and look to do a job. We are all looking forward to it and confident that we can get a positive result," said the 21-year-old after he took his season's goalscoring tally to eight.

"This was a great win for us because we knew Sheffield United would make it very difficult.

"I'm obviously pleased to score but the most important thing is the result for the team and getting the three points we needed. We really had to dig in and put up a fight and it was a fantastic win for us in the end. "I don't think my season has

turned around. I'm scoring more but it's a team game and the fact we are winning is all that matters."

Rooney inspired Manchester United to their seventh straight league victory with goals either side of half time at Bramall Lane.

Cristiano eyes **Premiership** title

INTERNET, undated

Cristiano Ronaldo says Manchester United have the belief to win both The Premiership and UEFA Champions League this season. After failing to challenge for the

domestic title in recent campaigns, United are sitting top of the table ahead of champions Chelsea.

Portuguese winger Ronaldo puts the turnaround down to a change in belief and now feels the club are playing superior football to Chelsea. 'I believe it is possible to win all

the big competitions and, no, this is not madness," Ronaldo told the News of the World.

"If you analyse the performances of our team today we are getting all

the best results and that's what all the experts in the game are saying. "This season United have recap-

tured the spirit that made us champions over the years. "I look at the matches of our

rivals in The Premiership and nobody is superior to Manchester United. Not even Chelsea, for all their fame and the success in the last few years. "I am convinced it is possible for

us to win The Premiership and Champions League if we stick to the same mentality.

"Now we believe that we will be champions, while last season we played only for second place. This is the great difference.'

Ronaldo also revealed Sir Alex Ferguson persuaded him to stay at Old Trafford in the summer, after he became a target for fans for his role

in England's World Cup exit. He added: "As for me, the key is Sir Alex Ferguson. He always helps with his advice and I am grateful to

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Solution time: 27 mins.

4 Hair



AC Milan playmaker Kaka (R) skips past Empoli defender Richard Vanigli during their Serie A match at Carlo Castellani Stadium in Empoli on Saturday.

MILAN HELD AGAIN

Pepe sinks Palermo



A late goal by striker Simone Pepe gave Cagliari a 1-0 win over Serie A leaders Palermo who had to play the whole of the

second half with 10 men on

Palermo travelled to the Sant'Elia stadium aiming to set a club record of six consecutive league wins but were forced to abandon their usual attacking style after midfielder Fabio Simplicio was sent off at the end of the first

They hung on until the last minute of normal time, when Pepe grabbed a close-range winner to leave Palermo on 27 points from 12 matches, level with Inter Milan, who play Reggina on Sunday.

Cagliari made a lively start against a Palermo team missing the creative flair of suspended playmaker Eugenio Corini and injured striker David Di Michele.

In the 37th minute Antonio Langella sprinted down the left and delivered a low cross into the path of strike partner David Suazo, who shot straight at Palermo keeper

Suazo's pace was a constant threat. When he burst past Simplicio in the 45th minute, the Palermo player reacted by barging him to the ground, earning a red card that left his team mates to defend for the rest of the match.

Cagliari almost took the lead at the start of the second half, Fontana making a reflex save to keep out a close-range header by Mauro Esposito. Palermo's 10-man team rarely

threatened to score but as the end of the match approached they looked increasingly likely to salvage a point. But in the 90th minute Cagliari

defender Michele Ferri curled a

cross into the area, Suazo scuffed

a volley goalwards and Pepe was well placed to drive it over the line. "If it had remained 11 against 11, think we might have stood a chance, but once Simplicio was gone we left ourselves too much to do," Palermo coach Francesco

Guidolin said. Palermo were not the only team to suffer an upset on Saturday, however. AC Milan's dismal Serie A season continued when they were held 0-0 at Empoli.

The draw, after four defeats in five matches, left Milan with eight points from 12 games.

As in their 2-1 defeat by AS Roma last weekend, when they twice hit the bar, the six-times European champions went close to taking the lead several times.

Their frustrations began in the 17th minute, striker Ricardo Oliveira curling the ball over Empoli keeper Daniele Balli from long range only to watch it come back off

The Brazilian went close again a minute later when Empoli midfielder Davide Moro cleared a header off the line.

The woodwork came to Empoli's rescue a second time when Oliveira angled a shot against the post on the stroke of

Milan continued to dominate the tiny Tuscan side in the second half though it was poor finishing rather than bad luck that led to Clarence Seedorf missing from close range just after the hour mark.

"I saw some positive things tonight compared to some of our recent matches," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti

"It's a hard result to accept, but if we keep creating chances like we did tonight, we will start winning

Becks in clear over Cruise weeding

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Fabio Capello said Saturday that David Beckham was in the clear after making a speedy return from Italy where he had joined in the wedding celebrations of Hollywood star Tom Cruise.

The former England skipper had already been ruled out of Saturday's Spanish League match against Racing Santander with a knee injury but press reports in Britain suggested that Capello was furious with Beckham's trip.

However, the player was back in Spain on Saturday to train while wife Victoria, the former Spice Girl, stayed on at the 15th-century castle in the Italian lakeside town of Bracciano to attend Cruise's marriage to Katie Holmes.

"He had the club's permission to go," said Capello after Saturday's 3win over Racing.

"He trained on Saturday morning. He hasn't missed an hour, a day or a minute of work."

On Saturday, The Sun newspaoer in Britain had Beckham on both the front and back pages.

"Adios (goodbye)," was one of the back page headlines accompanying a picture of Beckham and Capello while the front page photo of Beckham and his wife was headlined "Cruising for a bruising".

Beckham watched his teammates on Saturday from the Santiago Bernabeu VIP seats but his injury is expected to keep him out of the Champions League match with Lyon on Tuesday.

Edu suffers knee injury

REUTERS, Madrid

Valencia's Brazilian midfielder Edu faces a long stretch on the sidelines after damaging knee ligaments during the 3-0 defeat away to Sevilla in the Primera Liga on Saturday.

Valencia doctors said there was a 90 percent chance the player had torn the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee.

Edu left the pitch in tears on a stretcher after falling awkwardly in the final minutes of the game and is set to miss Valencia's remaining Champions League matches in Group D against Olympiakos and AS Roma.

The former Arsenal player was out for seven months last season after tearing the cruciate ligament in his left knee during training.

Valencia striker David Villa also had to leave the pitch on Saturday with an ankle injury.

Quique Sanchez Flores's side has been ravaged by injury this season and are already missing Carlos Marchena, David Albelda. Jaime Gavilan, Asier del Horno and Emiliano Moretti with long-term

Carlo curses

Carlo Ancelotti claims he saw improvements in Milan's performance at Empoli, but that bad luck continues to strike his team.

"In my opinion, the side played fairly well and we didn't allow our opponents any real scoring opportuthe Stadio Castellani.

ward and in the second half we could've done better upfront, but a

The Rossoneri are having real problems hitting the back of the net this season and once again found

Oliveira struck the frame of the goal twice -- first the crossbar and then

incidents, because our unlucky streak continues. We hit the woodwork twice again today and at the moment the results are not reflecting our performances. This was certainly an improvement on the 2-0

balanced in the middle of the park especially against a fast-paced team. We didn't allow them many counter-attacks and that was the key issue, so we can find some positives in this draw.

that Lady Luck had smiled on his men at the Stadio Castellani this evening.

"Igli Vannucchi is a player of great talent who has made a lifestyle Empoli, an example for our younger squad members to look up to. I'm optimistic we can avoid relegation. even if we must maintain our trade-

Lyon's lucky break



Runaway French league Lyon left it late before an own goal by Sedan earned them a

The victory came after a difficult period for Gerard Houllier's side who lost to Rennes last weekend, laboured to victory over Valenciennes as well as suffering injuries to strikers Fred, Karim Benzema and Sidney Govou.

However the own goal by Nadjim Abdou in the 79th minute means Lyon lead by 12 points from second-placed Lille, third-placed Lens and Nancy, in fourth spot. Understandably, Lyon lacked

nunch up front for most of the game though John Carew, Brazilian Cris and Kim Kallstrom all had chances to score. Thankfully for Lyon, Sedan were also not showing great penetration in the final third of the pitch either.

They say champions still manage to win when not at their best and Abdou's own goal proved this to be true on Saturday night's

Juninho Pernambucano fed

Ben Arfa, who pulled the ball back to Cris at the near post. The Brazilian let the ball go through his legs and Abdou deflected the ball

into his own net. "This win is a great boost for the match with Real Madrid," said Lyon coach Houllier ahead of the Champions League clash on

"It's better to go there with a good result and this is the fifth time we have won a match before a Champions League game."

In other matches, Paris Saint Germain were beaten 2-0 at their Parc des Princes stadium by Bordeaux following goals by Brazilian Wendel and Lilian Laslandes, while Monaco, recently in bottom spot, are now fifth from bottom following a 2-2 home draw with Lorient.

Perhaps the most intriguing fixture this weekend is still to come

Players, officials and fans from Marseille and Valenciennes are denying it but Sunday's clash between the pair is being dominated by unhappy memories of an infamous corruption scandal. That happened 13 years ago and

saw both teams relegated from the French first division.

Valenciennes have only just returned to the top flight for the first time since they paid a heavy price for helping Marseille fix a match during the 1993 season.

Marseille finished top of the tree that year but were later stripped of their title and relegated.

Deisler makes Bayern return

Injury-prone German international Sebastian Deisler made his first appearance in eight months coming on as a late substitute in Bavern Munich's 2-1 win over VfB Stuttgart on Saturday.

The 26-year-old Deisler replaced Dutch forward Roy Makaay deep into stoppage time and picked up generous applause from the sympathetic home crowd.

Deisler, capped 36 times by his country, had not played since March following a serious knee injury that forced him to miss the World Cup in his homeland.

A knee injury also saw Deisler. once touted as the golden boy of German football, miss the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South



Lyon midfielder Allou Diarra (C) and two Sedan players are in a tangle to win the ball during their Ligue 1 match at the Louis Dugauguez Stadium in Sedan on Saturday.

More misery for **Benitez**



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Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez was a frustrated man after a 0-0 draw

at Middlesbrough, which left them without a goal in their last six Premiership games

away from Anfield. Benitez saw his side create a series of opportunities as they outplayed Middlesbrough for long periods, but they again failed to find

the target. "We know we need to improve to win games, but if we play like this we will win 99 times out of a 100." said the Liverpool manager.

Even Middlesbrough manager Gareth Southgate admitted that Liverpool had been the better side, so he was content with a point which owed much to the goalkeeping of Mark Schwarzer.

Jonathan Woodgate, the Middlesbrough defender, also performed impressively, while Steven Gerrard was the linchpin of the Liverpool performance on his return to a role in the centre of midfield.

Benitez admitted:"It is frustrating when you play well and create a lot of chances, but don't win. We

CRYPTOQUIP

BXPV FV VXOPKN PIHOH

ZXCRM KOH RVXPV BX BKRH

ZCXPHOM: CFCNIKWWHO

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE SAILOR WAS WAY OFF COURSE. DO YOU SUPPOSE HE DIDN'T GO

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H 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.

THROUGH THE PROPER CHANNELS?

WKCCHBM

B X H K M B H O

played with passion and had winger getting wide and putting ir

"Of course we are not entirely happy with the result, but there are positive things to take out of this game because we kept a clean sheet away from home and avoided

"I certainly felt that we deserved to win, but it's important to score if you want to win. At least, we were attacking all the time and had just one problem when Jose Reina made a good save.

"Steven Gerrard and Xabi Alonso were important in midfield, but we know that Steven will always give you something as a central midfielder."

Southgate was certainly impressed by Liverpool. "I know they have lost a lot of away games, but they were games at places like Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United. Liverpool are still a top quality team," he said.

"They had Peter Crouch on the bench and that shows the calibre of the team. Their cream will rise to the top as the season goes on.

"That's why we mustn't underestimate the value of this draw for us. I won't say we played well, but I was pleased with the character and effort shown by my players. "You've got to admire our resilience because we were up against a

the ball well and pose enough threat when we were going forward. "But we answered the questions that they posed and showed good character. They gave me everything and I can't ask for more than that "

top class side. We bothered them at

times in the first half, but didn't keep

Woodgate, who headed off the line from Crouch in the closing stages, gave England coach Steve McClaren another reminder of his

play at any level and has set himself a standard "Nobody should be in any doubt that he's good enough to play for England. It's just a question of keeping him on the pitch.'

"Jonathan was immense," said

Southgate. "He showed that he can

unlucky streak

INTERNET, undated

nities." he said after the 0-0 draw at "It was overall a small step for-

draw is an acceptable result."

the woodwork instead. In the first half alone, Ricardo

the far upright. "These were two very important

defeat at Atalanta." added Ancelotti. "We were more focused and

Empoli boss Gigi Cagni agreed

"It was a great performance from my men and it's doubly satisfying because we deserved it. Of course, we had a bit of luck, but you also make your own luck in this world," said the coach.

choice in acting as leader for mark aggression and pace."

10x3