



Schalke's Brazilian fullback Rafinha (R) shoots past the outstretched leg of VfL Bochum goalkeeper Peter Jensen to score during their Bundesliga clash at the Arena Auf Schalke in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

Schalke go five clear

AFP, Gelsenkirchen



Schalke 04 underlined their title ambitions by moving five points clear at the Bundesliga summit with a 2-1 win over local rivals VfL Bochum here on Friday.

Goals from Brazilian right back Rafinha and Danish international Peter Lovenkrands ensured a fourth straight league win for leaders Schalke.

Schalke, runners-up in 2005, are now five points clear of Werder Bremen and VfB Stuttgart with reigning champions Bayern Munich six adrift.

"Where you are after 34 games is more important than where you are now or at Christmas," said Schalke coach Mirko Slomka.

"We are out of the UEFA Cup and the domestic cup so can concentrate completely on the Bundesliga and that is an advantage as we can train more intensively knowing we will not be playing twice in a week."

After a cagey opening the hosts took the lead with the 21-year-old Rafinha, a five million euro signing from Coritiba FC, netting in the 19th minute after an intelligent back heel from Halil Altintop.

Rafinha, who caught the eye at the 2005 world championships for the Brazilian Under-20 side, celebrated his rare goal with a samba dance.

Schalke doubled their lead in the 27th minute when Lovenkrands, a summer signing from Rangers, hammered a low shot through the goalkeeper's legs.

"We signed Lovenkrands for his pace and that is exactly what he is providing. It was a great finish and good for his confidence," said Slomka.

Gekas pulled one back for Bochum four minutes after the interval with his sixth goal of the season.

"We could have had a penalty at the end but did not get it," said Bochum coach Marcel Koller.

"We have had a few problems at the back but trailing 2-0 you have to be more adventurous."

In the 66th minute, Schalke were awarded a penalty for a foul by Heiko Butscher, but Levan Kobiaschvili missed from the spot.

Schalke have not won the title since 1958 but came agonisingly close in 2001 when they finished second a point behind Bayern.

Bremen, 1-0 conquerors of Chelsea in the Champions League, host Arminia Bielefeld on Saturday while Bayern Munich travel to struggling SV Hamburg.

Becks a 'ticking timebomb'

Football

THE GUARDIAN

With David Beckham playing an ever more peripheral role and the stalemate over his contract extension at the Santiago Bernabeu still unbroken, a Real Madrid board member has said that the club would prefer the former England captain to leave, describing his continued presence as "a ticking timebomb".

The Spanish football magazine Don Balon quoted an anonymous board member as asking: "Why would we spend (16m pounds) over the next two years for a player that we know that coach does not like?"

Of the coach, Fabio Capello, he added: "Capello doesn't want him and he cannot continue like this, spending so much time on the bench, because he would lose part of those multi-million publicity contracts. Nor is it good for Real to have a timebomb ticking by having

such a world famous player as Beckham on the bench."

Beckham, 31, has started only three of Real's last 14 games, two of those in the Copa del Rey, in which teams are traditionally packed with reserves. He has not started a league game at the Bernabeu since the season's opening day and has been in the first XI for just two league matches and one Champions League tie since then.

The player has admitted he is "frustrated" and "unhappy" though the club president Ramon Calderon has constantly stated his desire for Beckham to stay. And with his present contract, worth 9-million-dollars a year, running into its final six months, he has yet to sign an extension, raising speculation his future lies elsewhere. On January 1 he will be free to negotiate with other clubs and will now await offers: there is no prospect of a new deal with Real before then.

"Capello prefers a different type of player and everyone at the club would be relieved if Beckham took

the decision to leave for America - that way nobody could throw in Calderon's face that he was the one who got rid of an icon like Beckham," the unnamed director said, pointing out that Calderon's view now is very different from two months ago. "We cannot admit it publicly but the best thing now for both parties is for Beckham to leave," he added.

Real refused to comment on the story, as is club policy, but Beckham's spokesman last night said: "We are dubious about comments made by an unnamed member of the board. If it is true it goes against everything Capello, Calderon and (sports director Predrag) Mijatovic have been saying to us and to the world's media."

But only last weekend relations were strained when Capello appeared to insist Beckham immediately return to Madrid from Italy and miss Tom Cruise's wedding to have further treatment for an injury.

I'll deliver title: Ibrahimovic

INTERNET, undated

Zlatan Ibrahimovic has promised to bring Scudetto glory to Internazionale. "Where I go, I win," he boasted.

The super Swede has been in fine form since his summer switch from Juventus and has been a major reason behind why the club currently lead the standings.

Inter's primary objective this season is to triumph domestically and he's confident that they will end the campaign as champions.

"Where I go, I win," said the international. "When I was at Ajax I won two League titles and a Cup competition."

"I then went to Juve and won consecutive Scudetti. I'm now here and things are going very well for me and the team..."

Yet the controversial forward insists that he won't be happy with just a Serie A title, he's after European honours too.

"We believe that we can win the League in Italy but also the Champions League," he continued. "We have a squad which can do both."

"We have shown our worth in the Champions League this season. Although we started badly, we did our all to make up for that and completed our recovery."

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Lampard tips Sheva to shine

AFP, London



Chelsea's Frank Lampard expects Andriy Shevchenko to use Sunday's crunch clash with Manchester United to finally show the talent that made him the most feared striker in Europe.

Shevchenko has made a slow start to his first season with Chelsea as he tries to come to terms with the Premiership as well as adapting to life in a new country.

The Ukrainian's struggles have come as a surprise after he established himself as one of the best finishers in world football during his seven-year stay at AC Milan.

Shevchenko was the undisputed king of the San Siro and his thirty million pounds sale to the English champions in pre-season provoked howls of anguish from his adoring Milan fans.

It was widely expected that Shevchenko would have no problems transferring his goal-scoring prowess to Jose Mourinho's team.

But his integration has been more difficult than anticipated, so much so that he has already been

linked with a move back to Milan after scoring just three times in 11 league starts.

Shevchenko was quick to deny those rumours and showed a glimpse of his undoubted ability with goals against Portsmouth and Watford recently.

Lampard is convinced that Shevchenko is showing signs of finding his feet and expects him to use the Old Trafford stage to underline exactly why he belongs among the game's elite players.

Lampard said: "I had huge respect for him before he came to the club and that hasn't changed. He has come to a country which takes a bit of time to adapt to: it's as simple as that."

"He is a fantastic player and I hope this is the sort of game that will bring the best out of Sheva. Certainly in big games, you need top players to stand up and be counted and I have no doubt that is what he will do."

"He is a fantastic pro and I sensed that about him before he arrived. He just has that look about him."

"He works very hard on the training ground and when he wasn't scoring goals, you could see that it was hurting him when he practised."

"That's the mark of a top striker, they all hurt when they're not scoring goals because that's what they live for."

After two years of leading the Premiership almost from start to finish, Chelsea find themselves in the unusual position of having to make up ground on the leaders.

United are currently three points clear of Mourinho's second-placed team, so the psychological implications of defeat for either side are clear.

If Chelsea lose they face a season trying to hang on to United's coat-tails, while a win for Lampard and company would deal a significant blow to Alex Ferguson's title hopes.

"There is a different psychology to being the chasers," Lampard said. "When you are a few points clear at the top of the league, your main concern has to be over-confidence and relaxing; when you are behind, there is a different sort of pressure because you don't fall too far behind."

"But everyone has to remember that this is still very early in the season: the most important thing is to be top when it really matters, at the end of the season."

Rooney quizzed

AFP, London

Manchester United and England striker Wayne Rooney was questioned by police on Friday over allegations that a photographer was assaulted outside a nightclub.

The 21-year-old was interviewed by officers in connection with the alleged incident outside the Panacea club in Manchester city centre on October 15. He was questioned under caution but not arrested.

A spokesman for the force said a file would be passed to prosecutors to make the decision on possible charges.

He said: "A 21-year-old man was interviewed today at a police station in Greater Manchester."

"He voluntarily attended and was interviewed in connection with an alleged assault on October 15. A file is now being prepared for the Crown Prosecution Service."

Carlo cools Milan crisis

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti claimed his fallen Serie A giants were enduring more of a difficult than dramatic period.

AC Milan host Messina on Saturday missing a number of key players, and desperate for a win after slumping to 15th in the league after three defeats and a draw in their last four games.

Dida, Cafu, Alessandro Costacurta, Giuseppe Favalli, Serginho and Gennaro Gattuso have all been ruled out while Alessandro Nesta, Massimo Ambrosini and Kakha Kaladze are doubtful.

However Ancelotti said: "We are going through a difficult period but it's not dramatic."

"We must start winning again." Milan's last league victory was on October 25 in a 1-0 win at Chievo. After 12 matches, Milan have four

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Poldi injury worse than feared

REUTERS, Berlin

Lukas Podolski's injured ankle has not healed as quickly as expected and the Germany striker will be out for a prolonged spell, Bayern Munich coach Felix Magath said on Thursday.

Podolski, 21, suffered the injury in training four weeks ago in a challenge with teammate Mark van Bommel.

He was expected to be out for three weeks but has only just been able to start light running and it is unclear when he will resume full training with his teammates.

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Charlton Athletic winger Dennis Rommedahl (L) fails to evade the sliding challenge of Everton midfielder Leon Osman during their Premier League clash at The Valley on Saturday.

Charlton stave off Toffees

Football

INTERNET, undated

Andy Reid scored his first goal for Charlton as The Addicks came from behind to claim a 1-1 draw with Everton at The Valley on Saturday night.

Herman Hreidarsson's own goal shortly after half time put The Toffees ahead, but Reid's strike after 68 minutes salvaged a share of the spoils.

The game marked Lee Reed's home game in charge of Charlton after replacing Iain Dowie, but his side could not secure the win that would have lifted them off the foot of the table.

The visitors started the better and David Moyes' side really should have forged ahead in the opening exchanges.

Lee Carsley saw a low drive deflected wide by Hreidarsson while James Beattie's point-blank header from Mikel Arteta's corner was blocked by Luke Young.

James McFadden had the clearest sight of goal but after jinking into the penalty area he took too long to pull the trigger allowing Talal El Karkouri to make the challenge.

After a rough start Charlton did get a foot in the door and only great anticipation by keeper Tim Howard to close down Dennis Rommedahl denied the Danish flyer.

Simon Davies then tried his luck from distance but Scott Carson was well placed to make the save while at the other end Darren Ambrose's shot drifted just over Howard's bar.

Carson was again called into action when the lively McFadden fired in a daisy-cutter, before Rommedahl's left-footed effort was tame after cutting inside Nuno Valente.

Rommedahl was again looking lively after the interval but Howard was well placed to pluck his cross out of the air after neat work by the former PSV Eindhoven ace.

Charlton fell behind on 52 minutes when Arteta's free kick struck Hreidarsson, who was helpless to prevent the ball easing past the wrong-footed Carson.

Arteta's delivery looked harmless enough, but Leon Osman got a head onto the ball and got enough of a touch to leave Hreidarsson stranded and Charlton one down.

Osman could have added a second shortly before the hour

mark, but after controlling Beattie's knock-down he dragged his left-footed effort well wide of goal.

The Addicks should have levelled on 65 minutes but Andy Faye spurned a glorious header after sending his effort wide from Ambrose's delightful cross.

The home side did not rue the miss for too long with a gift from Everton full back Nuno Valente allowing The Addicks to get back on level terms.

The Portuguese defender conceded possession on the edge of his box under pressure from Marcus Bent, allowing Reid to strike a fine low left-footed shot past Howard.

Charlton now had their tails up and Rommedahl's wayward shot following a neat one-two with Reid was inches away from Darren Bent at the far post.

Reid tried his luck again with 10 minutes left on the clock, but his driven effort was well-saved by Howard, who also had to contend with the sun in his eyes.

Welsh midfielder Davies had the final shot of the game, but Carson was happy to let his fizzed shot sail over the bar as the sides claimed a point apiece.



Barcelona quartet (from L-R) Lionel Messi on crutches, defender Lilian Thuram, talisman Ronaldinho and full-back Gianluca Zambrotta each pose with their FIFPRO awards at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on Saturday.