



Feyenoord fans light fire-crackers during their UEFA Cup match against Nancy at Nancy on Thursday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

High tension in Paris

AFP, Paris



France is bracing itself for a weekend of high drama as tensions run riot in the capital Paris -- in the tribunes at least.

With five-in-a-row champions Lyon already holding a 14-point gap on the rest after just 15 games, the championship race -- or procession -- is of little interest these days.

So all eyes will be on the team placed 13th in the table who host the ninth best side in the league. Paris St Germain may be 12 places and 23 points off top spot but they still manage to dominate the sports pages.

Often in recent seasons it has been due to their gross underachievement but this time it is the behaviour of their fans hitting the headlines.

As PSG entertain Toulouse on Sunday, memories will be fresh from the fatal shooting of a hard-core fan

Thursday last week, following the embarrassing UEFA Cup 4-2 home defeat to Israel's Hapoel Tel Aviv.

The fan was shot dead by a black police officer who was trying to protect a Hapoel fan from a mob that chanted anti-semitic and racist slogans, including making monkey noises.

The subjects of racism and violence have been hot topics since then with even politicians throwing their oars into the argument.

PSG have closed two sections of their stadium -- those that hold the notorious Boulogne Boys -- until further notice and there will be 1,200 police at the game.

Police are expecting trouble from the right-wing fascist sections of PSG's support, most of whom should find themselves locked out of the ground.

Even Toulouse defender Lucien Aubey, a black Parisian who supported PSG as a child, is worried for his family who will attend the game.

"It's a shame to close a whole stand but, if it's to improve security, it has to be done," said Aubey.

"The problem is that just a minor-

ity of people are hurting the image of PSG. There were already racists and anti-semites in Boulogne when I was small.

"We knew exactly where the skinheads sat in that stand and we would never have thought of buying a ticket in that section.

"There was not a single foreigner in there. Those individuals are not the true PSG fans."

Aubey has bought tickets for his family to attend the game but he is worried.

"I have told them to arrive early and to leave late after the game," he added.

PSG are desperate for a win as their increasingly under-fire coach Guy Lacombe hangs onto his job by tenderhooks.

His team have not won in five games in all competitions and also face elimination from the UEFA Cup group stages after collecting only one point from their opening two matches.

PSG will not be the only side distracted by European competition. Second placed Lille travel to fifth placed Nancy on Sunday with

one eye on their crucial final Champions League group game away to AC Milan.

Milan have already qualified for the knockout stages and Lille need to better AEK Athens's result away to Anderlecht to secure their place in the last 16.

Auxerre, who host Nice on Saturday, Lens, who entertain Bordeaux, and Nancy are also all involved in the UEFA Cup group stages this week and next and could be vulnerable to highly concentrated opponents.

Lyon will be totally focussed on their trip to Le Mans on Saturday, though, as they are already ensured of topping their Champions League group ahead of Real Madrid.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Auxerre v Nice, Le Mans v Lyon, Lens v Bordeaux, Monaco v Valenciennes, Rennes v Nantes, Sedan v Troyes, St Etienne v Lorient
Sunday
AS Nancy v Lille, PSG v Toulouse, Sochaux v Marseille

Dutch fans run riot

AFP, Nancy

Rampaging Dutch fans forced an early stoppage to Thursday's UEFA Cup tie between hosts Nancy and Feyenoord after the French side had romped to a 3-0 lead.

The match was stopped by Norwegian referee Espen Berntsen after 79 minutes after a section of the Feyenoord supporters, who had already ransacked some parts of the eastern French city in the afternoon, rained down seats on stadium stewards.

The incidents occurred after Nancy had raced to a 3-0 lead against ten-man Feyenoord, who had Royston Drenthe sent off late in the second half.

The Dutch fans tried to get to their French counterparts by smashing glass panes separating the rivals in the Marcel Picot stadium.

Stadium stewards attempted in vain to stem the violence, and the French riot police soon arrived in a bid to calm things down.

After the referee had brought an early end to the match the stadium speaker finally requested all the French fans to leave the stadium.

The Dutch fans were not allowed to leave.

Tevez keen on Hammers stay

REUTERS, London

Argentine striker Carlos Tevez wants to stay at West Ham United despite struggling to settle in London, he told The Sun newspaper on Friday.

Tevez said he refused to wear a Brazil shirt in training, a joke punishment handed out by his team mates, and would like to stay at the club if possible.

"I'd respect what (owner Eggert Magnusson) wanted as it's his club, but I'd prefer that he and manager Alan Pardew wanted to keep me," Tevez said in an interview.

Magnusson took over the club last week. Tevez said injuries had made it hard for him to settle at Upton Park, adding that was sure he could win a regular place in the team once he had come to terms with Premier League conditions.

The 22-year-old said his obvious annoyance at being substituted during Saturday's 1-0 home win over Sheffield United and walking straight out of Upton Park before the final whistle merely showed how keen he was to give his all for the club.

"The positive thing to come out of it is people understand I care. I'm not just here to fill a number, I want to stay and play," he said.

"I just couldn't train in a Brazil shirt, I wouldn't do it," Tevez said, laughing after his team mates asked him to do it as a punishment for his walk-out.

"It was like asking an Englishman to wear a German kit, he'd never do that...it's too much to wear the strip of my country's biggest rivals."

Tevez said he and fellow Argentine Javier Mascherano had been made very welcome by the rest of the squad at West Ham following their arrival in late August.

Midfielder Mascherano has been left out of the squad recently as West Ham have recovered from a poor start to the season and climbed out of the relegation zone.

"Me and Javier both feel we can show what we are about. Javier is a world-class player and just needs his chance," Tevez said.

Wallwork stabbed

AFP, London

West Bromwich Albion midfielder Ronnie Wallwork, a former Manchester United trainee, has been stabbed several times, British television stations reported Friday.

The 29-year-old was in a stable condition in hospital after being attacked overnight in Manchester, northwest England, and his injuries are not thought to be life threatening, the BBC reported.

He was stabbed in the hands, stomach and back in a nightclub, police sources said.

Championship side West Brom signed Wallwork from English Premiership giants United in July 2002 on a free transfer.

Wallwork is currently on loan at Championship strugglers Barnsley. He signed an extension deal in May 2005 which ties him to West Brom until June 2007.

Wallwork helped keep the Baggies in the Premiership in the 2004-2005 campaign but could not prevent their relegation the following season.

He made 28 appearances for United between 1994 and 2002 and hit the headlines in 1999 while on loan at Belgian side Royal Antwerp.

Wallwork was handed a life ban by the Belgian football union for manhandling a referee, a sanction which was reduced on appeal to three years, two of them suspended.

He was reported to have grabbed referee Amand Ancion by the throat.

Terry in the dock



Football

AFP, London

John Terry faces an extra one-match ban after being charged with improper conduct by the Football Association (FA) over his comments about a red card he received during his side's 2-1 defeat at Tottenham earlier this month. Terry was ordered off for the first time in his club career after receiving two yellow cards from Graham Poll.

The Chelsea and England captain claimed afterwards that the referee had given him different explanations of the second yellow at the time of the incident and after the match.

The referee's denial of that claim triggered the misconduct charge which could lead to a one-match ban, a fine or a warning as to his future behaviour for Terry.

The defender, who has already served his automatic one-match ban for the red card, has until December 15 to answer the charge.

Explaining the charge, the FA said: "The charge has been brought on the basis that John Terry's comments question Graham Poll's integrity and therefore constitute improper conduct."

The FA also cleared Poll of saying anything inappropriate towards Chelsea players during the same match. Comments by Chelsea players after the match,

notably Ashley Cole, resulted in media reports that the referee had told them they needed "to be taught a lesson."

But the FA said Thursday: "Responses sought from Ashley Cole, Frank Lampard, Chelsea FC and the match officials confirm that Poll did not say that Chelsea needed 'to be taught a lesson'. There will no action against any parties on this matter."

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho was given a rap on the knuckles and reminded of his responsibilities for his post-match remarks about Poll's performance in the same game.

He will not face any formal disciplinary action.

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Sampdoria pip Palermo



Football

REUTERS, Rome

Sampdoria reached the quarterfinals of the Italian Cup after beating Serie A highfliers Palermo 3-2 to complete a 4-2 aggregate win on Thursday.

Sampdoria travelled to Palermo's Barbera stadium as underdogs, but ran out easy winners thanks to a brace by striker Francesco Flachi and a goal by defender Cristian Zenoni.

The Sicilians were left to dwell on their fourth defeat in 12 days after Serie A losses to Cagliari and Inter Milan, and a 3-0 drubbing by Fenerbahce in the UEFA Cup.

"It's not a happy time for us, but we

have to keep believing in the work we are doing, even if the results are not good," said Palermo coach Francesco Guidolin.

"Undoubtedly, the number of matches we are playing does not help. We have very little time to recover."

"But I don't want to make excuses. We gave everything we had tonight. It's just a shame we didn't take our chances better (in the first leg) in Genoa three weeks ago."

Even with leading striker Amauri and first-choice midfielders Fabio Simplicio and Mark Bresciano starting on the bench, Palermo's second-string team was expected to perform better in front of their home crowd.

Sampdoria had a little luck with their opening goal in the 13th minute, when

a deflection left Flachi inside the area with only keeper Federico Agliardi to beat.

Palermo's lack of urgency was punished, however, when Zenoni took advantage of a poor clearance from a free kick to thump in Sampdoria's second goal at the far post.

Flachi threatened to turn the game into a rout when he struck again early in the second half.

Midfielder Roberto Guana restored a some pride for the hosts by heading in a free kick in the 64th minute, but it was only after Sampdoria defender Giulio Falcone was sent off for a last-man foul on Andrea Caracciolo that they finally managed to put the visitors under sustained pressure.

Franco Brienza's close-range strike 10 minutes from time restored respectability, but failed to gloss over Palermo's spiritless performance.

In the quarterfinals, Sampdoria will face Chievo Verona, who went through on away goals after drawing 1-1 with Reggina to complete a 3-3 draw on aggregate.

'Buffon is indispensable'

INTERNET, undated

Juventus Coach Didier Deschamps believes Gianluigi Buffon is indispensable. "I will do all I can to keep him here," he insisted.

"Gigi is indispensable to both me and the group as a whole," said Deschamps in the pre-match Press conference.

"I say this for what he has accomplished in the past and is accomplishing right now, and for the fact that there is simply no one else out there as good as him, also from a human point of view."

"I will do everything in my power to keep him here for a long time," added the Frenchman, referring to the fact that Buffon has yet to decide what will happen at the end of the season.



PHOTO: AFP

Qatar teenager Khalfan Ibrahim holds up his Asian Player of the Year award at Doha on Thursday.

Kahn all fired up

AFP, Berlin



The war of words has started in the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn saying his team would pick up the honorific title of 'winter champions' and enjoy Christmas at the summit.

Reigning champions Bayern currently lie fourth in the table, three points behind leaders Schalke 04, but are confident of claiming top spot in the remaining three games before the six-week winter break.

"Due to the difficult circumstances before the season (tired players after the World Cup) I expected us to be catching the field up in the second half of the season," Kahn said in bi-weekly magazine SportBild.

"However now I would go as far as saying that we will be winter champions. With two matches at

home and one away that is realistic."

Bayern host struggling Borussia Monchengladbach, fourth from bottom of the table, on Saturday with Gladbach coach Juup Heynckes, who won the German title as Bayern coach in 1989 and 1990, hoping to get one over on his old club.

"We need to try and get something in Munich," said Heynckes. "We can not rely on getting the points we need against Mainz or Bochum."

While Bayern are bullish about their chances Schalke's German international striker Gerald Asamoah believes the league leaders are on par with the team that has won six out of the last eight championships.

"The table shows that the quality in our squad is as good as Bayern's," said Asamoah.

Schalke hope to extend their unbeaten away record on Sunday when they travel to FC Nuremberg. "I just want Schalke to be cham-

pions because the club deserves it. Whether I am in charge or not is secondary," declared Schalke coach Mirko Slomka.

Werder Bremen, two points behind Schalke, entertain fifth-placed Hertha Berlin on Saturday trying to keep their focus on domestic football with a massive European game on the horizon.

Bremen travel to Barcelona on Tuesday and need a point in the Nou Camp to reach the last 16 of the Champions League at the expense of the Spanish holders.

"I am not being pessimistic but I know we are still the outsiders," said Bremen midfielder Torsten Frings. "There are easier tasks than trying to get a point in the Nou Camp."

For third-placed VfB Stuttgart, two points behind Schalke, the league is the only focus and Armin Veh's side travel to bottom side Mainz 05 on Friday.

Mainz have just nine points from 14 matches but manager Jurgen Klopp has vowed to fight on.

"There is a long way to go before I even consider quitting," said Klopp

Stuttgart have been the surprise package this season and former coach Felix Magath, now in charge of Bayern, believes they are not just a flash in the pan.

"I expect the four teams to be up there for the remainder of the season," Magath said. "The only real surprise for me is Stuttgart who have come in with a new young team. You can expect them to get stronger."

FIXTURES

Saturday
Bayern Munich v Borussia Monchengladbach, Werder Bremen v Hertha Berlin, Borussia Dortmund v VfL Wolfsburg, Arminia Bielefeld v Bayer Leverkusen, VfL Bochum v SV Hamburg, Energie Cottbus v Hannover
Sunday
FC Nuremberg v Schalke 04, Alemannia Aachen v Eintracht Frankfurt

Totti threat to Inter dominance

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan have a chance to stretch their lead in Serie A when they target an eighth successive league victory at home to Siena on Saturday.

Inter, who have also qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League, are having their best winning sequence for nearly a decade.

A win against mid-table outfit Siena would give Roberto Mancini's side a seven-point advantage over second-placed Roma ahead of their home game against Atalanta.

Roma, inspired by the on-form Francesco Totti, have won their last five games with the club skipper scoring a brace in last week's 4-2 away defeat of Sampdoria.

Serie A surprise packages Palermo sit two points behind Roma and six adrift of Inter, but have a good chance of staying in the hunt when they travel to struggling

Parma, who have lost their last three games, on Sunday.

Despite Inter's favourable position Mancini will be looking for a more solid defensive performance from his troops after they were saved by the woodwork in last week's 2-1 win over Palermo.

That means changes, and it looks likely that Esteban Cambiasso could replace Santiago Solari in the defensive midfield partnering tough-tackling Frenchman Patrick Vieira.

The other change could see Hernan Crespo coming in alongside Brazilian striker Adriano, who showed the Palermo defence last week that he is close to being back to his best.

Mancini cannot afford however not to play Dejan Stankovic, who has been one of their most consistent performers this season.

Totti, meanwhile, could be the key to Roma's title bid in a season which has been marred by the demolition of Juventus and the points sanctions handed to AC Milan during their involvement in a match-fixing scandal this summer.

His seventh goal of the season in Roma's 4-2 victory at Sampdoria last Sunday was sublime, leaving his coach Luciano Spalletti with no doubts as to who he will play up front as a lone striker.

Totti's form means that Vincenzo Montella and Mirko Vucinic are likely to spend time on the substitutes bench.

Spalletti looks set to make just one change, with Max Tonetto coming in at left-back with Marco Cassetti being dropped to allow Christian Panucci to revert to his favoured right-back position.

AC Milan travel to Cagliari with only one thing on their minds after a run of forgetful results.

After winning their first three matches to wipe out their minus eight-point deficit from the match-fixing scandal, Milan have since flourished.

Only Paolo Maldini's match-winning header in the 1-0 victory over Messina last week has kept the former European champions buoyed having drawn the week

before and lost their three previous league matches.

Milan will be slightly odds-on, however Cagliari will be an attractive outside bet.

Cagliari succumbed to only their third defeat of the season away to Empoli last week, but because they have drawn eight times they have been left 11th in the championship.

That shouldn't stop them giving Carlo Ancelotti's men a hard time in Sardinia, although Milan will be looking for a repeat of last year's corresponding fixture when they won 2-0.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)
Saturday
Inter Milan v Siena (1700), Roma v Atalanta (1930)
Sunday
Cagliari v AC Milan, Fiorentina v Lazio, Livorno v Chievo, Messina v Sampdoria, Parma v Palermo, Torino v Empoli, Udinese v Reggina, Ascoli v Catania (1930)