

Di Vaio takes Parma closer

Parma pulled off a 1-0 win at Vicenza here Saturday, consolidating their hold on the fourth place in the Italian Serie A that would give them a place in the preliminary round of next year's Champions' League.

It was another priceless strike for Di Vaio who was out of favour at Parma until Arrigo Sacchi briefly replaced the sacked Alberto Malesani before quitting because of stress after 22 days.

Di Vaio's goals under Sacchi and now Renzo Ulivieri have propelled his club from midtable obscurity towards a place in next season's Champions League.

Reggina host Napoli Saturday evening at Reggio Calabria in a match of crucial importance for both relegation-threatened sides.

Sunday's programme is dominated by the Rome derby in the evening between league leaders AS Roma and Lazio at the Olympic Stadium - a match where defeat would virtually end Lazio's hopes of successfully defending the title they won last season.

By the time the derby kicks off the teams will know how the other team still in the title race Juventus have fared in their home match with Lecce.

Defeat for Roma and victory for Juventus would mean the side from Turin would have the opportunity of drawing level with Roma next week when the sides clash at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

O'Neill angry at Rangers

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic manager Martin O'Neill has lashed out at arch-rivals Rangers over remarks that his all-conquering Parkhead outfit fluked the Scottish Premiership.

Rangers favourite Jorg Albertz claimed last Sunday that Celtic had only won the Premier League title this year because the Light Blues had been "so bad".

And comments from rival boss Dick Advocaat, stating that they want to prove Celtic's success was an "accident" has further fuelled the fire.

The bitter response from the Rangers camp has left the Celtic boss fuming - but he has hit back by claiming the accusations were just "crazy".

"Jorg Albertz did say that we won the league here because they were poor and I have heard that said by a number of people," said O'Neill.

"I bet that these same people will say that Walter Smith and Graeme Souness won it for nine years on the trot because Celtic were just getting going.

"I bet they said that Jock Stein won it for nine years because Rangers were also taking their time to get up and running. That's crazy.

"If you ask Alex Ferguson or Jock Stein, if you could, about winning the championship, they would tell you that teams don't fluke league championships.

"I'm telling you if you win 29 games out of 34 games it's difficult to say that they have won it because somebody else let them win it because they were poor.

"It's the same if we lose the next nine games up to October. There will be no excuses from me. I won't be saying that we're resting up."

O'Neill was in no mood to choose his words carefully as it was the term 'No Excuses' which angered their rivals after the Celtic players appeared in T-shirts bearing the slogan after they clinched the title.

The term is in reference to Rangers' injury problems this season - which they have preferred to highlight rather than Celtic's exceptional results.

Arsene amazed

AFP, London

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger expressed his astonishment on Saturday at his Manchester United counterpart Alex Ferguson spending a British record 19 million pounds (£27 million dollars) on Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy.

The Frenchman, who himself has been criticised for not spending the money made from the sales of Emmanuel Petit and Marc Overmars to Barcelona very effectively, claimed that with the new transfer system set to begin in the summer that Van Nistelrooy's value is sure to fall.

Wenger, who should know a thing or two about financial matters as he is an economics graduate, said that he had not been interested in entering a bidding war with United, who have once again left his side trailing in the Premiership, despite bidding 11 million pounds for the 24-year-old striker last year.



Leeds United's Mark Viduka (L) tries to control the ball while under pressure from Chelsea's Celestine Babayaro during their Premiership encounter on April 28.

Premiership Leeds in top three

Football

REUTERS, Leeds

Robbie Keane and Mark Viduka have struck in the last five minutes to give Leeds United a deserved 2-0 home win over Chelsea, increasing their chances of a top three finish and a Champions League place.

Keane, on loan for much of the season before signing permanently from Inter Milan on Wednesday, made the breakthrough in the 85th minute shortly after coming on as a substitute, getting past Carlo Cudicini at the second attempt.

Australian striker Viduka lashed in the second two minutes later after a mistake by Marcel Desailly, to take Leeds to provisional third place on 62 points and guarantee at least a UEFA Cup place.

They lead Ipswich Town by virtue of having scored one more goal. Ipswich play Charlton on Sunday. Liverpool, who visit Coventry City later on Saturday, have 56 points from two fewer games.

Chelsea, whose charge up the table ended with home defeat by Charlton last week, remain sixth on 54 points but are still very much on course for a UEFA Cup place.

Saturday's game was the first of three in a huge week for Leeds, who play Valencia in the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday and then visit Arsenal in the league next Saturday.

They had the best of the first half but Chelsea came closest to opening the scoring when Ian Harte deflected a cross goalwards forcing a great reaction save by Nigel Martyn.

Leeds, unbeaten in 12 league games, continued to make most of the running after the break as Viduka shot just wide and Cudicini saved well from a Lee Bowyer header after an hour.

Gianfranco Zola hit a post with a 20 metre curler seven minutes later but Chelsea's former Leeds striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbank, who was barracked throughout by the home fans, was never a threat.

The breakthrough came five minutes from time when Keane broke through the middle and although Cudicini did well to block his initial effort the ball rebounded into the Irishman's path and he rolled it into the empty net.

Two minutes later another long ball left Chelsea's central defenders floundering and allowed Viduka time to size up the target before thundering in a rising shot from outside the box.

Keane had only been on the pitch four minutes and was delighted with his contribution.

"It's always nice to come on and score," he said.

"The boss gambled putting me and Erik (Bakke) on and it paid off. "We didn't play particularly well but it was a great team effort and the atmosphere in the camp is great."

Leeds manager David O'Leary accepted that it had been a "scruffy game" but said at this stage of the season he just wanted the points.

Of his decision to leave Keane on the bench he said: "I want him to be hungry. I want him to ask me why he isn't on from the start."

"But he's a great lad and I did it for a reason. He has a knack of putting the ball in the net.

"The main thing today was to keep clean sheets," added O'Leary. "We've got enough people who can take chances, and we did today."

O'Leary says nothing

Football

AFP, London

Leeds United manager David O'Leary refused Friday to condemn the rumour-mill surrounding striker Mark Viduka.

The Australian forward has been linked with both AC Milan and Real Madrid this week and in Friday's edition of Spanish sports daily Marca said he would find it "very difficult to decide" between the two clubs when asked which he would prefer to join, although he added moving to Real would be "a giant step" in his career.

Madrid are apparently poised to make a 22 million pounds (£2.24 million dollars) bid and Milan 20 million pounds (£2 million dollars) for the 25-year-old, who has 20 goals to his name for Leeds this season after his six million pounds (£8 million dollars) move from Celtic last summer.

But O'Leary has revealed if Viduka were to leave, the decision would be his rather than those who pull the financial strings at Elland Road, and then only if the player is unhappy.

United boss O'Leary remains unconcerned by the speculation, with the 42-year-old Irishman in fact flattered by the number of links between his players and clubs on the continent.

had to contend with these kind of stories week in and week out, and I've told Mark that.

"He came in to see me this morning very concerned, but I've told him not to get so uptight about this stuff, that Beckham and Giggs have had to put up with it for years. It just means he's doing well," O'Leary told the Press Association.

"It also shows how far we've come. It's the price of success, so all this constant speculation about Mark is water off a duck's back, and apart from which he is really happy here anyway."

"I just look at it in a positive way. If somebody is being linked with your player then you have to be pleased. I want other people wanting my players because it means my judgment has been confirmed."

"So if we're going to be successful then we're going to have to put up with all these rumours. We can't dismiss them. They're going to happen."

"But if there was a bid then it would be me who decides what happens, and I'm under no pressure to sell anybody else."

"The great Sir Alex Ferguson has desire has to come from within."

"We really have to be careful not to think that our success, and us as a team, is going to go on and on. We really have to start dominating Europe as well as the Premiership."

Another Keane swipe

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United skipper Roy Keane has launched a fresh attack on his Old Trafford team-mates by accusing them of complacency, it was reported here Friday.

Keane, already under the spotlight for his remarks following United's Champions League exit and his tackle on Alf Inge Haaland last week, believes there is a danger of players going through the motions.

"I have seen United players getting complacent, thinking they've done it all and getting carried away by a bit of success," Keane told the June edition football monthly FourFourTwo, the Mirror newspaper reported.

"All you have to do is drop your standards by five or 10 per cent and it's obvious, especially in Europe. You can carry maybe one player, but no more than that."

"You can see it in training when players just go through the motions. You can't do that, you always have to give your best. It's up to the manager to spot it," said Keane.

"Maybe I'll help him, but ultimately the only person who can sort it out is the player himself. Real

"All the players know that the club could come up to them at any time and say: 'Thanks for the memories, but we're shipping you out.'"

United's success over the last decade has in no small part been put down to the team spirit at the club, with the current crop of stars reportedly being especially close.

However, Keane explodes the myth that everything is sweetness and light in the Old Trafford dressing room.

"If you go to any office, not everyone is going to like each other. It is the same at United. Not everyone is pals," said the Republic of Ireland midfielder.

"You don't have to be best mates, you just have to share the same aim of winning trophies," Keane added.

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A solitary goal from Germany-based striker Xie Hui was all China could muster against the Maldives in their 1-0 win in Group Nine of Asia's World Cup qualifying tournament on Saturday.

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Alaves change colour

REUTERS, Victoria

Spanish club Alaves have unveiled the strip they will wear in the UEFA Cup final, having been forced to change from their traditional pink shirts because they clash with Liverpool's famous red kit.

The modest Basque club have worn the distinctive pink shirts throughout their debut campaign in Europe, but for the final in Dortmund on May 16 they have opted for an outfit similar to that worn by Argentine club Boca Juniors.

The all blue strip with a broad yellow band around the chest was displayed to the media at a news conference on Friday and is, like the old pink model, embroidered with the names of the club's 13,500 season ticketholders.

UAE beat India

AFP, Al Ain

Sabit Khater scored for United Arab Emirates in a 1-0 victory over India in 2002 World Cup Asia zone qualifying here on Thursday.

Khater scored in the 64th minute to put them top of Group Eight after this match at Al Ain in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

The Indians were content to sit back and defend though their opponents continually went looking for goal.

Though India's backline were solid for most of the game, it was a lack of organisation in the 64th minute, which led to the goal.

Rush for WC tickets

REUTERS, Zurich

Organisers are reporting a huge demand for tickets to next year's World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea.

Describing the demand as "enormous" and "overwhelming," FIFA warned on Friday: "Many of the ticket series have been over-subscribed, meaning that many applicants will be unsuccessful."

Enrique Byron, head of the World Cup accommodation bureau, told Reuters: "Applications are running into the tens of thousands."

The first phase of ticket sales will end on Monday, when the website for online applications will close.

Real try to pay off debts

AFP, Madrid

Spanish footballing giants Real Madrid are to sell their training grounds north of the capital to city authorities in a bid to pay off their 46 billion pesetas (246 million dollar) debts, regional authorities revealed Friday.

As part of the deal the European champions will sell 80 percent of the 140,000 square metres grounds to the north of Madrid, with the remaining 20 percent being used for a planned money-spinning real estate venture of four sky-scraper office blocks at each corner of the grounds.

The entire operation, which will cost an estimated 60 billion pesetas (320 million dollars), has received the support of Madrid mayor Jose Maria Alvarez del Manzano and regional president Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon.

City authorities are planning to construct a multi-functional stadium and an Olympic village, which will be part of the city's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, on the grounds.

Although Madrid has three football stadia, the city does not have a stadium suitable for hosting major athletics events.

Bundesliga Dortmund slip

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund saw their German title hopes take a knock on Friday when they could only draw 1-1 at Wolfsburg.

Dortmund had hoped to draw level at least overnight with leaders Schalke but instead remain in third spot on 53 points from 31 matches, two behind Schalke and adrift of Bayern Munich on goal difference.

Schalke, still bidding to break their Bundesliga title duck, travel to tailenders Bochum on Saturday for a match which may not be as easy as it appears on paper, given intense local rivalry between the two clubs.

Bayern, with their eyes also fixed on the Champions League this season, host mid-table Freiburg as they bid to retain the title.

Dortmund had to indulge in some damage limitation after Wolfsburg opened the scoring in the tenth minute through Polish forward Andrzej Juskowiak, who outsprung former German international defender Jürgen Kohler. Jorg Heinrich saved a point with a 22nd-minute effort which took a deflection off Nigerian Jonathan Akpoborie.

British football snippets

AFP, undated

Following are some British football stories in brief on Saturday:

Former Chelsea coach Gianluca Vialli is expected to be unveiled as the new manager of English first division outfit Watford, according to a report in British tabloid newspaper The Sun on Saturday.

British radio reports suggested the club would formally announce 36-year-old Vialli's appointment after current manager Graham Taylor's last home match in charge against relegated Tranmere on Saturday afternoon.

Vialli was sacked as coach of English Premiership side Chelsea, whom he had guided to the 1998 Cup Winners Cup and League Cup successes after replacing Ruud Gullit and last year's FA Cup, just a handful of games into this season and has been out of football ever since.

The Watford vacancy has arisen because long serving manager and former England boss Taylor is retiring at the end of the season.

The club, based just to the north of London, got off to a blistering start to the season and looked odds-on for an instant return to the Premiership only to suffer a slump that currently leaves them in 10th place.

A job at Watford would suit the former Sampdoria and Italian international striker, who is reported to be keen to stay in or close to London.

SEAMAN SAYS  
David Seaman signed a one-year extension on his current Arsenal contract here Friday.

The 37-year-old England goalkeeper's season has been marred by shoulder and ankle injuries but he has been in line form since his return to action.

Seaman has also kept his England place since Sven Goran Eriksson took over as coach.

Uzbeks go atop

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AFP, Tashkent

Uzbekistan confirmed their lead in the 2002 World Cup Asian Zone Group Seven after a 2-2 draw with Jordan in their qualifier match here on Friday.

The result left Uzbekistan still at top of Group Seven with seven points after three games, one point ahead of their closest rivals Turkmenistan.

Jordan seized the initiative immediately from the kick off, pinning

Uzbek opponents back, while Uzbekistan played cautiously, relying heavily on the counter-attack.

That strategy paid off when Bedran Al-Shaqran opened the scoring on a breakaway after 14 minutes.

Ten minutes later Abu Touk Esam upset the 50,000 crowd of local fans when he fired the ball home from long range past Uzbeki keeper Oleg Belyakov.

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Dortmund's Otto Addo (C) being chased by Wolfsburg's Patrick Weiser during their Bundesliga encounter on April 27.

"United have dominated for three seasons now. Maybe in England they are hoping that another team will get close to them and develop a good rivalry to them."

"In the last few years United have been a lot of points clear. Arsene Wenger has said it also, but the fact is that United are getting stronger and stronger and becoming even more difficult to catch."

"Liverpool is a team that is still progressing. They've come a long way in the last two years and you can see that they will get better. But United will still be the favourites for next season."

DYER'S LUCKY ESCAPE  
Newcastle midfielder Keiron Dyer escaped from a road accident with cuts and bruises Friday.

The 22-year-old England international, who was this week linked with a 20 million pounds (£19 million dollars) move to champions Manchester United, was involved in a crash outside the club's Chester-le-Street training headquarters Friday morning.

However, he was able to resume his efforts to come back from an operation to repair a stress fracture of his shin later Friday, and manager Bobby Robson confirmed that there was no lasting damage.

"We can confirm that Keiron Dyer was involved in a minor road accident this morning outside the training ground," he said. "As far as the club is aware, other than a few minor cuts and bruises, both drivers were unharmed and Keiron is completely unharmed."

"He is in the beginnings of rehabilitation after two very serious leg operations, but it hasn't affected in any way his rehabilitation. I believe his car is slightly more damaged than Keiron's."

"We can repair the car better than we can repair Keiron Dyer."

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