

Serie A preview

Clash of the titans

Football

AFP, Milan

Champions AS Roma hope to put pretenders Juventus in their place on Saturday evening in Turin when the two sides meet in the biggest clash of the *Serie A* season so far.

Juventus have set the early pace this season although last weekend's 0-0 draw at Lecce allowed fellow northerners AC Milan and Inter Milan to grab a share of first place.

Roma, in contrast, have had a poor start to the season both domestically and in Europe but 2-1 wins over Fiorentina and Lokomotiv Moscow - both after going a goal down - have put them back on track in both competitions.

It all makes for a thrilling encounter at the Stadio Delle Alpi and is bound to resurrect memories of last year's 2-2 thriller in the same fixture, which went a long way to deciding the title in Roma's favour.

With five rounds of games remaining Roma travelled to Turin six points ahead of their rivals but when Juventus took a 2-0 lead within six minutes it looked as though that margin would be halved.

Juve continued to dominate but could not find a third before Roma's Japanese substitute Hidetoshi Nakata rewrote the script in the last 12 minutes, scoring a beauty before creating an injury-time equaliser for

Vincenzo Montella.

That sparked premature - but in the end justified - street celebrations in Rome as the side from the Eternal City took a decisive step to their first Scudetto in 18 years.

This year it is Roma who are playing catch-up and they will not be able to rely on Nakata, who is now at Parma.

Roma's Brazilian defender Antonio Zago will be missing because of a three-match ban for elbowing Fiorentina's Paolo Vanoli off the ball while Juve's Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids and Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero will also be absent for their roles in the brawl in the closing seconds of the Lecce match.

Anything less than a win for Juve will leave both Milan clubs with a chance to go top either on their own or together.

Inter have been the least convincing of the three leaders so far and they face their sternest test yet at the San Siro when Bologna, with three wins in four outings, are the visitors.

AC Milan are living up to the reputation for attacking football enjoyed by their new Turkish coach Fatih Terim and hope to build on that when they visit Perugia.

Despite the club's biggest close-season spending spree in years Milan added two new recruits this week when Belarus prospect Vitali Kutuzov joined and striker Marco Simone - a member of the AC Milan

side that dominated the world in the 1980s and early 1990s - returned after four seasons in France.

Lazio continue their quest for their first win of the season when they host Parma who got off the mark at home to Brescia last week thanks to a brilliant goal from Nakata.

The 1-0 defeat by Holland's PSV Eindhoven virtually sealed their fate in the Champions League and now their new coach Alberto Zaccheroni must, to use the time-honoured phrase, concentrate on the league.

Brescia, who this week recruited former Barcelona midfielder Josep Guardiola, host arch-rivals Atalanta while Torino visit fellow promotees Piacenza.

Lecce visit Verona while Verona's city rivals Chievo look to build on their tremendous start to their inaugural first division campaign when they travel north to meet Roy Hodgson's Udinese.

Cash-strapped Fiorentina host Venezia at the Stadio Artemio Franchi.

Fixtures (13:00 GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Juventus v AS Roma (18:30 GMT)

Sunday: Brescia v Atalanta, Fiorentina v Venezia, Inter Milan v Bologna, Perugia v AC Milan, Piacenza v Torino, Udinese v Chievo, Verona v Lecce, Lazio v Parma (18:30 GMT)

Primera Liga preview

Sociedad hope against hope

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Sociedad lie at the foot of the *Primera Liga* with one point and only one goal to their name in four matches and nervously await the arrival of Catalan giants Barcelona for a crucial match on Thursday.

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas once described Swansea as the 'graveyard of ambition' but one of the city's most famous sons, Real Sociedad coach John Toshack, might feel that the phrase would be better applied to his current residence of San Sebastian, a place he has often called his second home.

Three points are vital for Real Sociedad to have some hope that they will not have to endure another season-long struggle against relegation.

Toshack arrived in the middle of last season for his third spell at Real Sociedad, when the Basque club were in exactly the same position in which they currently find themselves.

The widely respected former Liverpool legend - whose first job as a coach was at Swansea City, taking them briefly to the top of the old English First Division - guided Real Sociedad out of trouble to finish a respectable 13th.

He promised Real Sociedad supporters - who remember the halcyon days of the early 1980s when they won the league twice, and even three years ago when they were in the UEFA Cup - that this year would be different.

"I'm not saying that we will win the championship, but I think we can challenge for a place in Europe," predicted Toshack before the start of the season.

However, so far, it has not turned out that way.

Some Real Sociedad players are already starting to voice concerns that their chances of avoiding the drop are nearly dead and next season could see them in the Span-

ish second division for the first time in 35 years.

"Signing some new players could only improve this team and make us more competitive," said Sociedad's Lithuanian international striker Edgaras Jankauskas on Thursday.

Toshack's declaration that he would not dig too deeply into the transfer market over the summer.

In sharp contrast to the parsimonious Toshack, Barcelona coach Charly Rexach spent nearly 80 million dollars on seven new players during the off-season but there are still question marks over whether it was money well spent.

Some acquisitions, like Argentine striker Javier Saviola and Brazilian midfielder Fabio Rochemback, have made an immediate impact. Others, such as the Swedish international defender Patrick Andersson, signed from Bayern Munich, have been less impressive.

However, Barcelona have been getting results, if not always with the style demanded by their fervent fans, and are still unbeaten in the league although they lost 2-1 at Bayer Leverkusen of Germany in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Barcelona lie fifth in the league and could be on top by the end of the weekend, depending on the outcome of other matches.

Barcelona will also be boosted by Thursday's news that their Brazilian striker Rivaldo, the 1999 World Player of the Year, might return Saturday after a three-week absence with a left knee injury.

Sunday's Galician derby between Deportivo La Coruna and Celta Vigo will also determine who leads the way in Spain.

Celta are on top of the first division with 10 points from four matches, are unbeaten and have yet to concede a goal.

However, both those records could be in jeopardy at Deportivo, where Celta have not won for seven years.

The derby is not as high-profile as the same-city clashes of Madrid or

Seville but is still a bitterly fought affair where the referee usually keeps his yellow card close to hand.

Last season's corresponding fixture - a 1-0 win to Deportivo thanks to a goal from Djalminha - was typical, with 10 bookings.

Djalminha may be missing this time due to injury, along with fellow midfielder Victor Sanchez, but Deportivo coach Javier Irureta has adequate replacements with Spanish internationals Sergio Gonzalez and Juan Carlos Valeron, the latter the provider of both late goals in Deportivo's 2-1 victory over Manchester United in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Real Madrid have scored 13 goals in their last three matches and will be out to continue the deluge against visitors Valladolid on Saturday.

The defending Spanish champions are expected to make two changes to the side that thrashed Anderlecht 4-1 in the Champions League on Wednesday, with Zinedine Zidane replacing Albert Celedes and Steve McManaman could be recalled at the expense of Santiago Solari.

Defence isn't a word that has featured too frequently in the Valladolid vocabulary this season - they have the second-worst record having already conceded eight goals but now they have worries at the other end with their Argentine striker Turu Flores doubtful after injuring his right foot in training on Wednesday.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1700 GMT unless stated): Real Sociedad v Barcelona (1715 GMT), Espanyol v Rayo Vallecano (1830 GMT), Real Madrid v Valladolid (1930 GMT), Malaga v Athletic Bilbao (1930 GMT)

Sunday: Osasuna v Sevilla (1600 GMT), Tenerife v Real Zaragoza, Real Mallorca v Villarreal, Real Betis v Las Palmas, Valencia v Alaves, Deportivo La Coruna v Celta Vigo (1800 GMT)

Brazil likely to drop Pele's shirt too

INTERNET, Brasilia

Argentinean Football Association (AFA) has taken a decision about withdrawal of No.10 from its national teams.

This decision was taken in honor of their famous compatriot Diego Maradona who must be the only holder of that number according to the AFA.

Brazil also wants to follow the Argentine's example and to withdraw the tenth number in honor of Pele. The "Jornal do Brazil" newspaper reports that if Brazil takes this decision then not only the football king but also the Brazilian football will be shown honour.

Desperate Yorke



DWIGHT YORKE
AFP, London

Manchester United striker Dwight Yorke admitted on Thursday he was unhappy at being shuffled down the pecking order at Old Trafford.

Yorke, 29, claimed he would consider his future with the Premiership Champions if he is unable to force his way back into a regular starting spot when he recovers from a thigh injury.

The Trinidadian was once the toast of Old Trafford but he has seen summer signing Ruud van Nistelrooy, from PSV Eindhoven, become Sir Alex Ferguson's new flavour of the month.

"This is a major club and you want to do well - but if opportunities don't present themselves, you need to look at the situation," Yorke told MUTV.

Ferguson appears to prefer using the Dutchman as a lone striker with Paul Scholes in the slot behind, doing away with the old forward axis of Yorke and Andy Cole.

Bundesliga preview Rudi a worried man

AFP, Berlin

Kaiserslautern look to extend their brilliant start to the season when they face bottom club VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday but national coach Rudi Voeller will be watching all the league action anxiously.

With Germany playing a crucial World Cup qualifying match against Finland on October 6 and with all but two of his squad playing for German clubs Voeller will be concerned that they avoid injury in the physical action of the *Bundesliga*.

After being thrashed 5-1 by England in Munich earlier this month, Germany are second in qualifying Group Nine with the same number of points as England, who have a far superior goal difference.

If England beat Greece on the same day, Germany will go into a playoff but Voeller's men can still hope they beat Finland and the English can only draw.

An outside bet to start against Finland, Kaiserslautern's international striker Miroslav Klose, is battling against an adductor injury to be fit for the league leader's visit to bottom club VfL Wolfsburg.

Andreas Brehme's Kaiserslautern team have made a perfect start to the season, with seven wins out of seven to equal a league record, and lead second-placed Bayern Munich by five points.

Reigning European and German champions Bayern, with international captain Oliver Kahn in goal and giant striker Carsten Jancker picked by Voeller but currently suffering from a cut tendon in his foot, face a tricky home match against fifth-placed VfB Stuttgart on Sunday.

Bayern looked good in beating Spartak Moscow 3-1 in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Less impressive were Borussia Dortmund, who lost 2-1 to Portuguese champions Boavista on Wednesday.

Dortmund, who supply three of the German squad in defenders Jens Lehmann and Christian Worns and midfielder Lars Ricken, travel to newly-promoted Sankt Pauli on Saturday as they attempt to rediscover their fine early season form.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1330 GMT): VfL Wolfsburg v Kaiserslautern, Hertha Berlin v Cologne, Nuremberg v SV Hamburg, Werder Bremen v Borussia Monchengladbach, St-Pauli v Borussia Dortmund, Schalke 04 v Energie Cottbus, Hansa Rostock v 1860 Munich

Sunday (1530 GMT): Bayern Munich v VfB Stuttgart, Bayer Leverkusen v SC Freiburg

Premiership preview

Goal-hungry MU

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United will be hoping to put their devastating late Champions League loss to Deportivo La Coruna in midweek behind them by climbing back to the top of the Premiership this weekend.

Sir Alex Ferguson's men let the Spanish side snatch two goals inside the last four minutes to eclipse Paul Scholes' strike at the Riazor stadium.

And on Saturday Glen Hoddle's Tottenham could be in the firing line for a domestic backlash.

United meet Spurs at White Hart Lane but will be without captain Roy Keane, who will begin a three-match suspension for his sending off against Newcastle.

Ferguson fielded a team of nine changes from their European line up in United's last Premiership clash, a 4-0 drubbing of Ipswich.

And it will be interesting to see whether the squad rotation policy is retained or if Ferguson unleashes his elite troops - David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Juan Sebastian Veron and Ruud van Nistelrooy - against Spurs.

But one thing is certain - Ferguson will be desperately hoping his defence can shore up the holes that are appearing with unaccustomed regularity.

This season United have conceded 12 goals in their first eight games compared to five at the same stage last year.

And veteran France defender Laurent Blanc points to a lack of confidence, not ability, as the stumbling block.

"If each defender can bring a bit of confidence to the team then we can build big confidence in each other," he said.

"People are criticising the defence because they are conceded

ing goals, but it is up to the whole team to stop the opposition scoring."

United are currently fourth, three points behind Leeds and could go top by virtue of goal difference if they win and everyone around them does not.

Leaders Leeds travel to Ipswich on Sunday, while second-placed Bolton - two points adrift - host Sunderland on Saturday after drawing 1-1 with Arsenal seven days ago with 10 men.

Arsene Wenger's men squandered two points against the depleted Bolton and visit Derby on Saturday poised in third place, ahead of Manchester United on goal difference.

Arsenal slumped to another 1-0 Champions League defeat to Greece's Panathinaikos on Wednesday and will be another place looking to refocus with a Premiership victory.

"I'm concerned about the goal we conceded. We have to defend better," said Wenger.

Gerard Houllier's Liverpool will take on fifth-placed Newcastle full of confidence after an assured display to beat Dynamo Kiev 1-0 in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Liverpool are without star striker Michael Owen, who has a hamstring problem, but have another phenomenal marksman in Jari Litmanen.

The Finnish international scored the winner against Tottenham last weekend and buried Dynamo Kiev with a livewire display and the night's only goal.

Litmanen's success doesn't help the cause of fans favourite Robbie Fowler, who Houllier insists is not match fit.

And Fowler's 20 minutes as a substitute in place of Litmanen on Wednesday will have done little to help.

But with Owen crocked, a starting place for Fowler against Newcastle - four places above Liverpool - could restore some confidence not only for the Reds but England as well.

UEFA Cup

Leeds rebound, Villa exit

Football

AFP, Paris

The gulf between the riches of the Champions League and the lesser kudos of the UEFA Cup was brought home to Aston Villa on Thursday as the English Premiership outfit crashed out of the competition at the first time of asking to Croatia's Varteks Varazdin.

Villa's porous defence had sown the seeds of their side's own misfortune by inexplicably gifting the Croats three goals in a 3-2 loss at Villa Park in the first leg.

Despite a fine individual finish from Moroccan international Mustapha Hadji in injury-time to bring a 1-0 victory in the return the Midland side were sent packing on away goals as the tie finished 3-3 on aggregate.

Varteks appeared to have little interest in increasing their lead and allowed Villa to run at them - particularly in the person of French winger David Ginola - but he was unable to conjure a goal for John Gregory's men and it was only Hadji's fine strike which stirred the crowd from their torpor.

Villa can only look on in envy as the likes of Manchester United and Liverpool, who won last season's UEFA Cup, scoop up the millions of dollars on offer in the Champions League where at least six matches are guaranteed while they have spurned even the more modest pot of gold offered by the junior event.

David O'Leary's Leeds United, who made a mint with their run of the Champions League semi-finals last season but who did not qualify this time out kept on track for that consolation prize as they swept past Portugal's Maritimo 3-0 at Eland Road, having lost the away match 1-0.

First-half goals from Robbie Keane and Harry Kewell, coupled with Eirik Bakke's second-half strike at Eland Road, more than rubbed out Bruno's goal from last week's clash in Madeira.

Keane gave the visitors' defence all kinds of problems and he and Kewell enjoyed a constant supply of ammunition fed through by veteran David Batty and Olivier Dacourt.

"They played well over there but we knew what we had to do today," Kewell said.

"Robbie (Keane) scored a great goal and that gave us the confidence to go on and get the second



PHOTO: INTERNET

Inter Milan's Brazilian ace Ronaldo (L) takes on an unidentified defender from the Romanian team Brasov during their UEFA Cup encounter on September 27.

and third."

Ipswich Town scored a 2-1 win at Torpedo Moscow to go through 3-2 on aggregate as the 'Tractor Boys' survived a dreadful miss from Dimitri Vyazmikin before George Burley's 1981 winners scored through Nigerian midfielder Finidi George and then a Marcus Stewart penalty.

Vyazmikin pulled back a consolation for the Russians.

England's other representatives Chelsea wrapped up a 5-0 overall win over Levski Sofia with goals from John Terry and Eidur Gudjohnsen bringing a 2-0 win on the night.

Scotland's Glasgow Rangers meanwhile thanked Bert Konterman's 84th-minute deflected

shot for a 1-0 win over Russia's Anzhi Makhachkala.

That match took place in Warsaw as UEFA scrubbed the idea of a match deep in southern Russia owing to security worries in the region and elected to have the tie played over one game only.

Fans of Italy's AC Milan remember all too well when their club was the best the continent had to offer - in 1989 and 1994 they won the European Cup with 4-0 wins over Steaua Bucharest and a humbled Barcelona.

These days AC Milan have to make do with a lower standard of opposition but at least the result was a familiar one - a 4-0 success over Borisov of Belarus bringing a 6-0 aggregate success.

Rui Costa, Javi Moreno, Pepe Sarr and Filippo Inzaghi from the penalty spot sent the Italians roaring into the next round.

Inter Milan hammered Brasov of Romania 3-0 for a 6-0 aggregate win but Brazilian star Ronaldo, just back from a 17-month injury lay off, went off after pulling a thigh muscle.

Inter doctor Franco Combi said the injury was not serious.

"We're not worried, it's just a slight pull," said Combi.

Another former European champion, Dutch giants Ajax, picked up a 3-0 win at Apollon Limassol of Cyprus for an 8-0 overall triumph against hopelessly outclassed opponents.

There was more misery for Cypriot sides when FC Bruges of Belgium blasted Olympiakos Nicosia 7-1 to win 9-3 on aggregate.

Carlos won't leave Real

INTERNET, Madrid

Oliveira Junior, the agent of Real Madrid Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos, is considered to be the only individual who has not expressed his opinion about the disagreement between his client and Real Madrid officials.

"I was informed about Real's intention from press releases. None of the club's officials expressed a desire to approach me on the matter. "Even I don't know Jorge Valdano. Roberto Carlos does not want to leave the club but if the royal club wants to have some rights to him must offer him more beneficial conditions.

"He must feel that the club appreciates his work. However, I think, Roberto Carlos earns as much money as he deserves," Oliveira Junior told the Marca newspaper.

Oliveira refutes the rumours as if he and his client are conducting negotiations with other clubs.

"Roberto Carlos is a player of Real Madrid. If he decides to leave the club, Florentino Perez and Jorge Valdano will be aware of it first. "

Romario dropped for Chilean clash

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Legendary Brazilian striker Romario was Thursday left out of the squad for the World Cup qualifier on October 7 with Chile.

Brazilian coach Luiz Scolari decided not to risk the former Barcelona star, who inspired Brazil to 1994 World Cup glory, as he has a nagging ankle injury and called up two of the rising stars in domestic football from Sao Paulo, striker Franca and defender Emerson.

Also left out in the cold is playmaker Zinho, even though he had been considered one of the few successes of their thusfar uninspiring campaign which leaves them in fourth place just four points ahead of Colombia in fifth - whoever finishes in that position will play Australia in a play-off for the finals.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Dida, Marcos.

Defenders: Cris, Edmilson, Emerson, Juan, Lucio, Belletti, Cafu, Junior, Roberto Carlos.

Midfielders: Eduardo Costa, Emerson, Juninho Paulista, Marcelinho Paraíba, Rivaldo, Vampeta.

Forwards: Ronaldinho, Denilson, Elber, Franca, Ronaldo.

Nakata at home at Parma

AFP, Parma

Parma coach Renzo Ulivieri Friday paid tribute to his new Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata who is gradually settling in at the Stadio Ennio Tardini after a poor start.

Last weekend a brilliant goal from Nakata gave Parma a 1-0 win over Brescia, their first success of the 2001-2 campaign and on Thursday he impressed again in the 2-0 defeat of Finland's HJK Helsinki in the UEFA Cup.

That earned Parma a second-round tie with FC Utrecht of Holland and Ulivieri, in remarks reported in Gazzetta dello Sport, gushed:

"I am very glad we have seen the flowering of the real Nakata," said Ulivieri.

"Also here he showed he was improving, running, marking, playing, causing difficult moments for the opponents."

Nakata joined Parma from Serie A champions AS Roma in the summer.

UEFA CUP DRAW FOR ROUND TWO

Draw for the second round of the UEFA Cup made here Friday:

Roda JC Kerkrade (Ned) v Maccabi Tel-Aviv (Isr)

Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Valencia (Spa)

Saint-Gallen (Swi) v SC Freiburg (Ger)

Bordeaux (Fra) v Standard Liege (Bel)

Fiorentina (Ita) v FC Tirol (Aut)

Ipswich (Eng) v Helsingborg (Swe)

Paris-SG (Fra) v Rapid Vienna (Aut)

Union Berlin (Ger) v Litex Lovech (Bul)

FC Copenhagen (Den) v Ajax (Ned)

Inter Milan (Ita) v Wisla Krakow (Pol)

PAOK Salonika (Gre) v Pribram (Cze)

Rangers (Sco) v Dynamo Moscow (Rus)

Hamstad (Swe) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)

Real Zaragoza (Spa) v Servette (Swi)

Leeds United (Eng) v Troyes (Fra)

CSKA Kiev (Ukr) v FC Bruges (Bel)

Utrecht (Ned) v Parma (Ita)

Osijek (Cro) v AEK Athens (Gre)

Viking Stavanger (Nor) v Hertha Berlin (Ger)

Grasshoppers Zurich (Swi) v FC Twente (Ned)

Brondby (Swe) v Varteks (Cro)

Hapoel Tel-Aviv (Isr) v Chelsea (Eng)

Celta Vigo (Spa) v Slovan Liberec (Cze)

AC Milan (Ita) v CSKA Sofia (Bul)

(First leg to be played October 18 - second legs November 1)



PHOTO: AFP

Leeds' Harry Kewell (L) celebrates with Irish teammate Robbie Keane after Kewell scored against CS Martimo, during their UEFA Cup match.