

# Premiership Fergie throws in the towel?

**Football**

AFP, London

Liverpool assistant manager Phil Thompson on Saturday dismissed Alex Ferguson's assertion that Manchester United can no longer win the championship.

Thompson, who has taken the helm at Liverpool while Gerard Houllier recovers from heart surgery, saw his side clinch a fortunate 1-0 win in a struggling Derby that put them five points clear at the top of the Premiership and eight ahead of United with a game in hand.

Ferguson claimed that his side could not now win the title after their 3-0 drubbing at home to Chelsea but Thompson refused to be taken in by the United manager.

"I don't believe anything I hear like that. He must have had a very large tongue in his cheek," said former Liverpool captain Thompson.

"Manchester United could go to the end of the season without losing another match. When I was playing, the Liverpool team believed it could put together unbeaten runs of 20 matches, and United's players will still have that belief because they are still that good."

Derby battled away after Michael Owen's early goal and dominated most of the second period before Fabrizio Ravanelli's late penalty was brilliantly saved by Jerzy Dudek.

It was the Italian's second successive spot kick-miss after fluffing from 12 yards at Newcastle last week.

"When Ravanelli took that penalty he may well have been thinking about the one he missed against Newcastle and that could have affected him," added Thompson.

Qerzy probably had tudpypner hand mentally at that point. He made some fine save for us and has been outstanding since he joined the club."

Derby boss Colin Todd cursed his side's luck after Ravanelli squandered a point for the Rams.

"I must have driven over too many black cats. We were that unlucky," he said.

"Ravanelli was distraught in the dressing room as captain and because it had cost us so much after putting everything into the game. "I said after he missed that penalty against Newcastle that he would pick the ball up next time and take the penalty. He did just that. I haven't thought about what happens next time."

Earlier, Manchester United's



PHOTO: AFP

WORRY UNITED! Sir Alex Ferguson (L), the Manchester United manager, and his coaching staff are in watch in disbelief as their team is humbled by Chelsea at Old Trafford on December 1.

hopes of retaining their Premiership crown were dealt a severe blow, defeat dropping them to seventh place.

Dutchman Mario Melchiot headed Chelsea into an early lead before his compatriot Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's superb angled drive doubled the visitors' advantage.

Iceland international striker Eidur Gudjohnsen wrapped things up for Chelsea four minutes from time after latching onto Celestine Babayaro's defence-splitting pass to make it three goals in his last two matches.

The result moved Chelsea into fifth and extended their impressive record at Old Trafford where they have lost just three times in their last 27 visits.

Title hopefuls Arsenal took advantage of United's slip-up with an important victory at bottom club Ipswich.

Sweden international Freddie Ljungberg fired Arsenal ahead and Thierry Henry's second-half penalty - his 18th goal of the season - secured a comfortable victory for the Gunners.

Like Thompson, Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger rubbished thoughts that Manchester United would not figure in the final shake-up.

"They've fought back before and are too good a side not to remedy their ills," the Frenchman said.

Kevin Phillips scored a late winner as Sunderland edged West Ham 1-0 at the Stadium of Light while Alan Boksic helped Middlesbrough to the same scoreline at Blackburn.

Ade Akinbiyi gave Leicester a first-half lead at Aston Villa before Jamie Scowcroft completed the scoring in a surprisingly comfortable 2-0 win.

Villa's misery was compounded by the sending-off of substitute David Ginola for a brutal challenge on Dennis Wise.

Newcastle failed to end a miserable run of results in London after they were held 1-1 at Charlton.

The Magpies, who last recorded a victory in the capital in November 1997, almost snatched victory when Gary Speed's fired them in front, but Charlie MacDonald equalized for Charlton seven minutes from time.

To add insult to injury Newcastle had former England captain Alan Shearer sent off by referee Andy D'Urso for an alleged elbow incident.

However, the veteran striker was adamant that he had done nothing wrong. "I would ask the referee to look at the incident again and if he sees I did use my elbow then I would willingly serve the suspension," said Shearer.

Third-placed Leeds can regain second spot if they win at Fulham on Sunday where England striker Robbie Fowler is set to make his debut after signing from Liverpool earlier this week.

Sunday's other fixture sees Liverpool's Merseyside rivals Everton host struggling Southampton while on Monday improving Tottenham entertain Bolton.

# Primera Liga Alaves make history

**Football**

AFP, Madrid

UEFA Cup finalists Alaves went to the top of the Spanish first division for the first time in 70 years after beating Barcelona on Saturday.

The modest Basque club took advantage of Deportivo La Coruna's 1-0 defeat at Espanyol earlier on Saturday to become the Spanish league leaders for the first time since 1930.

Barcelona produced their second woeful display in seven days and never looked like upsetting the modest side from Vitoria, who had spent more than 40 years outside of the top flight of Spanish football until they returned to the First Division three seasons ago.

Alaves got off their marks after 22 minutes when the Catalan club's Swedish international Patrik Andersson brought down Ruben Navarro in the area and Carlos LLorens scored from the spot.

The home side clinched the game just after the hour when Ibon Begona unleashed a long-range left foot shot which gave Barcelona's Argentine international goalkeeper Roberto Bonano no chance to keep the ball out of the net.

The victory takes Alaves' tally to 27 points from 15 games. Deportivo drop to second place but are just a point behind.

However, the Galicians slumped to the third defeat in their last four games, all three losses coming away from home but to teams in the lower reaches of the Spanish First Division.

After a disappointing first half in which neither side showed much ambition or initiative, Espanyol's Raul Tamudo got the only goal of the game after 49 minutes.

Tamudo's inspired individual effort was finished off with a right foot shot just inside the area, which eluded Deportivo goalkeeper Francisco Molina.

Deportivo coach Javier Irueta responded to going a goal down by immediately throwing on the barely-fit Roy Makaay, hero of their Champions' League defeat of English Premiership side Arsenal two weeks ago, but who has missed his club's last two games with a thigh strain.

The gamble nearly paid off as the Dutch international went close twice



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid ace Raul (R), executes a flying header against Osasuna at Madrid on December 1.

but the Barcelona-based side resisted the pressure and nearly got a second goal on a late counter-attack, which forced an outstanding save by Molina from Toni Valamazan.

Real Madrid climbed to third place on 25 points, after staggering to a 2-1 victory over relegation-threatened Osasuna.

Spanish international striker Fernando Morientes opened the scoring for Real after just 12 minutes when he headed home a Roberto Carlos cross from close range.

The strike extended Morientes' scoring streak to seven goals in four games, five of which have come in

the league. Morientes was also instrumental Real's second goal, just four minutes later.

His shot, from a Luis Figo corner, was on its way into the net when his attacking partner Raul Gonzalez got a toe to the ball on the line and was credited with his seventh goal of the season.

However, after dominating the first 45 minutes when an avalanche of goals looked likely, the defending champions - who eventually notched up their fifth victory in their last six league games - clearly relaxed in the second half.

Osasuna gave Real several frights before getting a consolation

goal from a John Aloisi header, the Australian's fifth league goal of the season, but Real Madrid hung on to take all three points.

"We had to fight, and there was some sunshine - but a lot of shadows," commented Real Madrid coach Vicente Del Bosque afterwards.

"Our football in the first half was exquisite but I suffered unnecessarily during the second half. We fell into a few holes," admitted the former Spanish international, who many tip one day to take over the Spanish national team.

Osasuna coach Miguel Angel Lotina pointed at the old cliché of football being a game of two halves as he paid partial tribute to his team.

"We were asleep for the first half and gave them two gift of goals and for a team like Real Madrid a two goal advantage is as good as giving away the game but at least we went down with our heads held high," said Lotina.

"We played well in the second half and, if we'd have played like that in the first half, I'm sure we would have got at least a draw," he added.

### Primera Liga's top six

Spanish league table before Saturday's late matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):							
Deportivo	15	8	2	5	28	21	26
Real Madrid	15	7	4	4	27	18	25
Alaves	14	7	3	4	15	9	24
Real Betis	14	7	3	4	17	13	24
Barcelona	14	6	5	3	22	11	23
Valencia	14	5	8	1	1	1	4

## Ex-Russia coach Sadyrin passes away

AFP, Moscow

Former Russian football coach Pavel Sadyrin, who was suffering from cancer, has died in Moscow's army hospital, ITAR-TASS news agency reported Sunday.

Sadyrin, 59, who led Russia to the 1994 World Cup finals in the United States, resigned from the post after his team was eliminated from the competition following the group stage.

He later coached Saint Petersburg side Zenit and CSKA Moscow until this September, when his illness forced him to resign to undergo a course of special therapy in Germany.

## Blanc spells trouble!

AFP, London

Those of a superstitious nature can blame French central defender Laurent Blanc for Manchester United's five defeats this season following the 3-0 hammering by Chelsea on Saturday.

However it is not solely down to his lack of pace that the 1998 World Cup winner should be blamed rather than his compatriot Fabien Barthez - it is his surname.

All the five teams they have lost to start with a letter from his surname - Bolton, Liverpool, Arsenal, Newcastle and Chelsea - the only positive is that his name does not contain an L or an M which should guarantee them wins over Ipswich and Middlesbrough - while Tottenham can also expect little chance from United.

Whether that's enough to win them an eighth Premiership title under Ferguson is another matter with the return fixtures against the five teams to come.

## Bundesliga Leverkusen's first slip

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich, newly crowned as world champions, received a further boost Saturday when Bundesliga rivals Bayer Leverkusen slumped 2-1 at Werder Bremen for their first league defeat of the season.

Bayern had the day off - they face Hertha Berlin away on Sunday - as they get over their trip to Japan, where they beat Boca Juniors of Argentina to secure the Intercontinental Cup.

And Leverkusen's loss was just the tonic they needed as non-domestic commitments had seen Bayern take their eye off the domestic ball in recent weeks to slip four points behind their rivals.

Leverkusen, regularly the bridesmaids in Germany as they have never won the league, have endured a miserable week because they were thrashed 4-0 by Juventus in Thursday's twice-postponed Champions League encounter.

They now have 36 points from 15 matches, Dortmund moved provisionally second on 34 with a 2-0 away success at Cologne while Bayern have 32 from 14.

Bremen, who jumped into fifth spot, are on the up with five wins on the trot - save for a shock Cup defeat at Urdingen in midweek - and they beat Bayern as well last month.

To add insult to injury Leverkusen had Jens Nowotny sent off 20 minutes from the end.

## Senegal's dream realised

AFP, Pusan

Few teams would relish the prospect of facing world champions France but for Senegal coach Bruno Metsu Saturday's World Cup draw was a dream come true.

Defending champions France already knew they would play in the opening match in Seoul on May 31 and the draw ensured it would be against their former colony.

"It is superb. For us, the dream just keeps continuing," said Metsu, a Frenchman who guided Senegal to the World Cup finals for the first time in the west African country's history.

"It is a great honour -- to play the world champions in the opening match in front of billions of television views -- I could never have imagined it."

Most of Metsu's squad are based in France, four of them with Lens, who currently head the French league.

"Since we qualified the players have been hoping that we might be able to play a friendly against France in the Stade de France. They never expected anything like this."

With Uruguay and Denmark making up the group, Metsu was optimistic about his team's chances of advancing.

"In this group, behind France, anything is possible," said Metsu. "We are mentally very strong and we have to concentrate on the matches in hand, not get distracted by the fact that we are playing in the World Cup."

# Serie A Nedved breaks the duck

**Football**

AFP, Turin

Pavel Nedved scored a long overdue first goal for Juventus Saturday evening as the Turin side defeated Perugia 2-0 to move provisionally within three points of Serie A leaders Chievo.

Czech Nedved has been much criticised since joining the Zebras from Lazio in the summer but finally ended his famine with a second-half header. Frenchman David Trezeguet later added a second for the hosts.

The game began to swing towards Juve in the 25th minute when Perugia's Manuele Blasi was sent off for a foul on Alessandro Del Piero, his second bookable offence.

But Perugia - built in the aggressive image of their coach Serse Cosmi - fought well in the first half with Juve having few chances at goal at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Juve coach Marcello Lippi decided to switch things around at the interval bringing on Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids, surprisingly overlooked for Thursday's Champions League match with Bayer Leverkusen of Germany.

Davids immediately added a sense of urgency to the Juve midfield and seven minutes after the restart the goal came.

When a corner came in from the right Nedved timed his run perfectly to plant a firm header beyond Perugia goalkeeper Andrea Mazzantini.

From that moment on their was little doubt about the outcome and the second goal duly came.

Cristian Zenoni, who had just replaced Alessio Tacchinardi, was the provider, centring to Trezeguet who continued his prolific form by heading his seventh Serie A goal of the season and 15th in all competitions.

The rest of the Serie A programme is contested Sunday with Chievo visiting AC Milan at the San Siro. If the minnows were to slip-up at that match Inter Milan would return to the summit if they beat Atalanta.



PHOTO: AFP

Perugia's Giovanni Tedesco (L) tries to intercept Pavel Nedved, Juventus' Czech international, at Turin on December 1.

### Serie A's top six

Italian First Division table after match on Saturday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):							
Chievo	11	7	2	2	22	11	23
Inter Milan	11	6	4	1	17	9	22
AS Roma	11	5	5	1	17	8	20
Juventus	12	5	5	2	19	11	20
AC Milan	11	5	4	2	18	12	19
Lazio	11	4	5	2	13	6	17

# Formers on Brazil



AFP, Montevideo

Former Brazilian coaches and players all agreed that the current side had escaped with a good draw for the World Cup finals next year when it was made in Pusan, South Korea on Saturday.

Their only worry in Group C was Turkey, who they have played just once in their history in a friendly in 1956.

"They didn't believe even with Brazil's poor performances in the qualifiers they would have any problems with newboys China, who they play first, and Central American outfit Costa Rica, whom they beat 1-0 in the 1990 World Cup finals first round.

Carlos Alberto Parreira, who guided them to the 1994 World Cup trophy, said that with the right preparation there should be no problems for the team.

"They have been drawn against

teams of lesser technical quality and less steeped in tradition," he told Globo television.

"I hope that things will turn out favourably for them and with the right preparation they should make it to the next round," added Parreira, who was sacked as coach of Saudi Arabia at the last World Cup finals.

Mario Zagallo, who coached Brazil to the 1998 final, said that Turkey would be the most difficult opponents though the other two would pose their own sorts of problems for the Brazilians, who only made it through automatically with a last match win over Venezuela.

"Turkey will be the hardest team for us," said Zagallo. "China are a team with real pace and as far as we know Costa Rica will defend the whole time," he added.

Zagallo's former assistant Zico, who starred in perhaps their finest team never to win the final in 1982, was of the same opinion.

"Turkey have progressed a little but neither China nor Costa Rica will be able to handle the pressure at the World Cup," he said.

However Tostao, a member of the 1970 World Cup winning side, sounded a note of warning.

"If we play like we did in the qualifiers then all the games will be difficult," he said. "It is important they wipe out the silly mistakes and prepare better for the less strong opponents than they did in the qualifiers," he added.

Uruguay's Victor Pua, one of the few coaches not in Pusan for the World Cup draw, told Montevideo radio station Sarandi Sport: "I said before the draw, any opponent would be difficult."

"It's a difficult group, especially with world champions France. You could say Senegal are weak, but their footballers play in France and therefore it will be tough. Nothing's ever easy in this world."

Ecuador coach Hernan Dario 'Boli' Gomez, speaking on Ecuador television, live from Medellin, Colombia, said: "It's a difficult group, especially with three-times world champions Italy but it's good to meet the top teams because it gives us a chance to prove ourselves."

# Beckham can't wait!

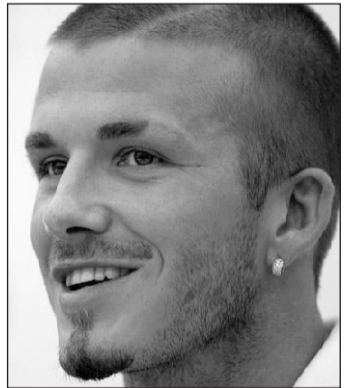


AFP, London

David Beckham on Saturday said he cannot wait for the chance to "lay the ghost of '98" when England tackle Argentina in next summer's World Cup finals.

At a glittering ceremony in Korea, England were drawn in the same group as the South American giants together with Sweden and unpredictable Africans Nigeria.

England captain Beckham suffered the worst moment of his international career when he was sent off for lashing out at Diego Simeone when the teams last met in the last 16 in France.



DAVID BECKHAM

England went on to lose the match on penalties ad rash out of the World Cup with Beckham cast as the villain for his petulant kick at

Simeone.

From that England low point, Beckham has bounced back in stunning fashion, becoming England's skipper and hero - his injury-time free-kick against Greece booking a place in next summer's finals.

Now Beckham has the chance to lock horns with Argentina again when England meet the tournament favourites in Sapporo on June 7.

Beckham said: "As a footballer you always want to test yourself against the best and there is no question that this is a highly competitive group."

"They (Argentina, Sweden and Nigeria) are three very different teams with very different styles."

"Personally I can't wait for June 7 - it's a great chance to lay the ghost of '98."

# Guarded Japanese



AFP, Tokyo

Newspapers here on Sunday welcomed Japan's first round draw for the 2002 World Cup but football officials gave it a more cautious reception.

Japan has been drawn in Group H with Belgium, Russia and Tunisia and will play all of its first round matches at home.

"It's a favourable draw for Japan without a heavily favoured team," said the Asahi Shimbun. "Tunisia, from Africa, is not better than Nigeria

and Cameroon while top European teams like Portugal are not with Japan.

"It increases the chance for Japan to advance," it added. The Mainichi Shimbun said the draw "gives us hopes of not only winning Japan's first match, but also advancing to the knock-out round."

"The four teams, including Japan, are almost the same. Every team has a chance to qualify," said the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Japanese football officials were more cautious.

"There's no weak team among those who qualified for the finals, and there's no weak group," said

Japan Football Association (JFA) president Shunichiro Okano.

"Hopefully, the Japanese team will do their best game by game, regardless of the opponents' rankings."

J-League chairman Saburo Kawabuchi said "it's not either a good or a bad draw for Japan."

In the 1998 finals in France, Japan suffered three straight defeats to Argentina, Croatia and Jamaica and was knocked out in the first round.

Japan will take on Belgium in Saitama north of Tokyo on June 4, play Russia in Yokohama on June 9, and Tunisia in Osaka on June 14.