

Premiership Sorry United

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United, who crashed to their sixth league defeat of the season at home to West Ham on Saturday, need a miracle if they are to retain their Premiership title, according to manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

United suffered another devastating bodyblow in their bid to win their eighth championship in 10 seasons when a 63rd-minute goal from striker Jermain Defoe gave the Hammers a dramatic 1-0 win.

The loss - United's third league defeat in a row - left the reigning champions 11 points behind league leaders Liverpool, who tightened their grip at the top with a 2-0 win over Middlesbrough at Anfield.

"It leaves us in a precarious position," said Ferguson, who started the match with Ruud van Nistelrooy, Juan Sebastian Veron and David Beckham all on the substitutes' bench.

"It's almost impossible for us to win the league now. It will take a miracle. The first thing is to pick up our form."

Ferguson defended his decision to leave his leading goalscorer van Nistelrooy, and Argentina international Veron, out of the starting line-up.

"Veron and van Nistelrooy were rested," said the 59-year-old Scotsman, who will retire at the end of the season after 15 years in charge.

"Ruud was very tired on Thursday morning (after the 3-0 Champions League win against Boavista on Wednesday). It's not surprising - he's come into English football after being out for a year. He really needed a break."

Ferguson also took a swipe at referee Paul Durkin for not giving United a first-half penalty when the ball struck West Ham midfielder Don Hutchison's arm in the penalty area.

Durkin officiated in last season's FA Cup clash between the two sides



Manchester United's Nicky Butt (L), under pressure from West Ham's Jose Cole at Old Trafford on December 9.

which West Ham won 1-0.

"I thought it was a clear cut penalty in the first half. Paul Durkin never gives us a penalty kick, no matter what the situation," said Ferguson.

"He turned down two in the FA Cup game last season and he's continued today. I used to think he was a good referee but not now."

Ferguson did, however, praise West Ham goalkeeper David James for a string of fine saves which helped the Londoners snatch all three points.

"Their goalkeeper had a fantastic game but we were disappointing in the first half as we never got the

tempo going and allowed them to take control of passing in the match," added Ferguson.

At Anfield, Michael Owen edged closer to a ton of goals for Liverpool as the Merseysiders defeated 'Boro to go six points clear.

Owen bagged his 20th goal of the season and his 99th in a Liverpool shirt when he netted with a rare long-range effort to open the scoring on 27 minutes.

In-form Czech international Patrik Berger added Liverpool's second on the stroke of halftime as the Reds took control.

Liverpool caretaker manager Phil Thompson, in charge while Gerard Houllier recovers from heart

Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Liverpool	14	10	2	2	25	11	32
Arsenal	14	7	5	2	30	15	26
Leeds	14	6	7	1	16	8	25
Newcastle	14	7	3	4	24	18	24
Aston Villa	15	6	6	3	19	15	24
Tottenham	16	7	3	6	25	23	24

Psychological boost for ROK

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AFP, Sogwipo, South Korea

South Korea dealt a psychological blow against the United States here Sunday winning their World Cup rehearsal in the latest stadium to be opened for next year's finals.

South Korea's veteran skipper Yoo Sang-Chul scored the only goal of the scrappy game with a header after 20 minutes.

The result will be important for the Koreans, who will co-host the finals with Japan, as they will be in the same first round group as the Americans.

Portugal are favourites to win Group D while South Korea must beat the United States and Poland if they are to get the second qualifying place - the target set by the national federation.

The match was as much a test of South Korea's soccer nerve as it was the country's technical preparations.

South Korea's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink said his players were still "half-way in preparations to fine-tuning the team" for next year's tournament.

He said Sunday's win would have a morale-boosting role and provide "a good party for people."

US coach Bruce Arena said the loss wouldn't "affect preparations at all." "The World Cup match is the one we are going to compete for," he said.

Arena said it took a while for his players to get comfortable. "In the second half, we did a good job and had a chance to get the goal back."



The flood-lit and packed Sogwipo World Cup Stadium during the USA-Republic of Korea friendly match on December 9.

he said.

Intense security was imposed on the 42,000 capacity crowd in the new stadium at Sogwipo on the island of Cheju, which has been hailed as one of the most beautiful World Cup venues ever, on a slope between Mount Halla and the China Sea.

On the pitch, South Korea and

the United States could not match the surroundings however.

Korea slowly took the upper hand in the build up to Yoo's goal.

Lee Chun-Soo put across a corner that Yoo met at the front post, escaping two American markers on the way, and sent the ball into the net off the crossbar.

Then it became largely a battle of

determination rather than skill with little excitement for the stadium as the rain came down.

In the second half, Lee hit one free kick over the bar from 20 metres, while US midfielder Chris Armas fired just wide at the other end.

The US visitors, whose protection was so tight that even their salad dressing was specially flown in, had their best chance to level after 80 minutes.

Jeff Cunningham had a header scrambled out of the goal box and fellow substitute Ante Razov then fired his shot into the right hand post.

Choi Tai-Uk could have increased the Korean leader in the final second but alone in front of the American goal Choi he pushed his shot wide of the target.

Concern has been expressed about Beckham's recent performances, but Eriksson has offered his reassurance that the 26-year-old will lead England into their opening game against Sweden on June 2 in Japan.

Eriksson insisted he was unconcerned about Beckham's recent absences from a United side which has suffered nine defeats in all competitions this season, saying it was "normal" that international players are rested at some stage of the season.

Roma coach Fabio Capello believes Liverpool counterpart Gerard Houllier should give up management for the good of his health.

Houllier has been recuperating ever since undergoing an 11-hour operation after complaining of chest pains during Liverpool's 1-1 draw with Leeds at Anfield in October.

The Frenchman has passed the day-to-day running of the club to assistant Phil Thompson, but eventually plans a return to the helm at the Merseyside giants.

Serie A Bologna's miss

AFP, Rome

Bologna wasted their chance to move into the top four of the Italian Championship on Saturday when they lost 2-0 at Piacenza.

Veteran centre-forward Dario Hubner struck in the 50th and 63rd minutes to secure the three points for Walter Novellino's team.

The two strikes also made Hubner the league's top scorer with 12 goals to his name.

Argentina post win

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Argentina struggled to a 2-1 win over Japan - an important win despite their coach's description of the performance as "poor".

The South Americans achieved the victory largely without star player Jorge Lombi, who played only the closing stages of the match.

Lombi, who pulled his hamstring in Argentina's opening 3-2 defeat at the hands of South Africa on Friday, struggled to keep up with the game, showing none of his usual darting runs and venomous penalty corners.

Japan shocked the favourites by going ahead in the 13th minute through Kenichi Katayama.

But Argentina hit back in the 22nd minute with Santiago Cappuro, who was deputising for Lombi at penalty corners, beating Jun Takahashi in the Japanese goal.

Barely four minutes into the second half Argentina took the lead when Cappuro pounced on a cross to slam the ball home.

Despite Japanese protests that a high ball was played into the semi-circle, umpire Stinder Kumar from India stood firm and the goal stood.

Japan's late pressure was to no avail and the team suffered their second straight defeat after going down 1-0 to hosts Malaysia on Friday.

"The win is important as it gives us the confidence for the next match," said coach Jorge Ruiz. "The defeat to South Africa was painful. But at the same time I am not too pleased with their performance."

Semis kick off with draws

AFP, Moscow

The FIDE World Chess Championship semifinals kicked off Saturday with both games drawn as the four contenders battled to determine who will contest the eight-game final in Moscow next month.

India's Viswanathan Anand, the World Chess Federation (FIDE) titleholder and current favourite, drew with the black pieces against Vasily Ivanchuk of Ukraine in 43 moves after the game reached a rook-and-pawn ending.

Peter Svidler of Russia, playing white, drew with Ruslan Ponomarev of Ukraine in 35 moves.

The second games in the two four-game series will be played on Monday.

If either of the series ends level-pegging, it will be decided by rapid-play or blitz tie-breaks on December 14.

Beckham to remain captain

AFP, London

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson said Sunday he will retain David Beckham as captain of the national team for the 2002 World Cup finals despite the Manchester United midfielder's recent poor form.

United coach Sir Alex Ferguson left Beckham on the bench for Saturday's Premiership defeat by West Ham and the Champions League tie with Boavista on Wednesday, claiming he was suffering from a niggling back problem and needed a rest.

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Capello Houllier's doctor!

AFP, Rome

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Real Madrid superstar Luis Figo (R) after the ball which is in possession of Tenerife's Javier Venta at Madrid on December 9.

Primera Liga Real surge ahead

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spanish champions Real Madrid put their poor league form earlier in the season firmly behind them as they beat Tenerife 2-0 Saturday to record their sixth successive win in all competitions and go top of the league.

However Real, who beat Tenerife for the first time in three visits the previous two defeats having cost them the title on the last day of the season, can be overtaken by Alaves on Sunday should last season's UEFA Cup finalists beat Real Zaragoza.

Saturday's other match saw Basque outfit Athletic Bilbao miss out on the chance of going top as they

came from behind three times to pull off a 3-3 draw at Sevilla - leading striker Ismail Urzaiz grabbed his ninth of the season to stay top of the goalscorers table.

Real Madrid had to battle hard for their three points and were indebted to a terrible misjudgement by Tenerife's goalkeeper Sergio Aragonese who let Ivan Helguera's timid 14th minute shot in

at his near post to hand the midfielder his second goal of the week.

A pretty dour affair had Real Madrid on the back foot for most of the second-half but they escaped unscathed and Portuguese playmaker Luis Figo added a second from the penalty spot in injury-time to give the scoreline a rather flattering look for the winners.

Primera Liga's top six

Spanish league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Real Madrid	16	8	4	4	29	19	28
Alaves	15	8	3	4	17	9	27
Real Betis	15	8	3	4	18	13	27
Athletic Bilbao	16	7	6	3	24	22	27
Deportivo	15	8	2	5	28	21	26
Celta Vigo	15	6	6	3	29	18	24

Bundesliga Bayern lose way

Football

AFP, Berlin

German champions Bayern Munich dropped to six points behind leaders Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday as they twice let a lead slip to draw 3-3 with lowly VfL Wolfsburg.

Leverkusen had no such problems beating Nuremberg 4-2 and lead Borussia Dortmund, who edged SV Hamburg 1-0 thanks to Lars Ricken's 50th minute goal, by two points. Kaiserslautern pushed Bayern into fourth when they beat Energie Cottbus 2-0 away.

Bayern, who are also European and world club champions, looked to be cruising as their South American strikeforce of Peruvian Claudio Pizarro and Giovane Elber put them 2-0 up after 17 minutes.

However a doughty Wolfsburg

outfit had levelled the match by the 52nd minute as Croat striker Tomislav Maric netted in the 45th minute and midfielder Dietmar Kubbauer added the second.

However four minutes later Pizarro notched his second of the match to put Bayern back in the driving seat but Maric, who used to play for Wolfsburg boss Wolfgang Wolf's old team the Stuttgart Kickers, also added a second to his tally in the 71st minute to round off a thriller.

Nuremberg belied their second from bottom status to come from a goal down to lead 2-1 thanks to a double from Brazilian striker Jeronimo Baretto but it only acted as a wake-up call for Leverkusen.

Leverkusen, who have never won the title, savaged the Nuremberg defence rattling in two goals in the space of three minutes as midfielder Zoltan Sebesen and Michael Ballack restored their lead and Oliver Neuville ensured the three points six minutes from time.

Bundesliga's top six

German league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Bayer Leverkusen	16	12	3	1	42	19	39
Borussia Dortmund	16	12	1	3	27	9	37
Kaiserslautern	16	11	1	4	35	20	34
Bayern Munich	16	10	3	3	34	10	33
Werder Bremen	16	10	2	4	27	16	32
Hertha Berlin	15	8	3	4	25	19	27

Donald scare for SA

FROM PAGE 13

with Nicholson, who hit 13 fours and three sixes in 192 minutes at the crease.

South Africa opening bowler Steve Elworthy failed to make an impact in the absence of Donald and Pollock, finishing with figures of none for 88.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the third day of the four-day game between Western Australia and South Africa at the WACA Ground Sunday:

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 367 (M Boucher 134, J Rudolph 59, N McKenzie 35, G Kirsten 31; M Nicholson 5-68, S Karppinen 4-110)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: First innings Hussey c Kirsten b Ntini 21 Meuleman c Boucher b Henderson 109

Katich c Boucher b Ntini 66 Goodwin run out 61 North b Donald 71 Campbell c Boucher b Henderson 28 Hogg b Klusener 90 Nicholson not out 101 Karppinen b Klusener 0 Oldroyd not out 19 Extras: (b-9, lb-19, nb-6) 34 Total: (For 8 wks dec in 166 overs) 600

Fall of wickets: 1-81, 2-202, 3-212, 4-349, 5-349, 6-391, 7-566, 8-566

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Donald	25	1	100	1
Elworthy	30	6	88	0
Ntini	32	8	108	2
Kallis	25	5	60	0
Henderson	40	11	120	2
Klusener	19	3	96	2

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings Kirsten not out 12 Total: (For no wkt in 13 overs) 40

Ashes schedule vexes Graveney

INTERNET, London

David Graveney has expressed his discontent at England's tour schedule for the Ashes trip to Australia next winter.

Graveney is unhappy that the Test series and one-day internationals are intertwined.

The third and fourth Test matches are split up by a triangular series also including Sri Lanka.

England's chairman of selectors told the Mail on Sunday: "I'm very surprised that the tour has been split up in this way.

"I was under the belief that we would never again go down that path and that all future Tests and one-day tournaments would be played en bloc.

"I understand the financial implications but it has been proved that playing back-to-back Tests and one-day matches greatly increases the chances of injury."

With a hectic summer schedule being followed by a punishing tour Down Under and then the World Cup in 2003, Graveney also fears his players could suffer from playing too much cricket.

He added: "I have pointed out to Malcolm speed, the chief executive of the ICC, at every opportunity the dangers of burn-out for the top players in world cricket.

Kenya outplay Zimbabwe A

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya defeated Zimbabwe A by 47 runs in the first of five one-day matches at the Simba Union Club here on Saturday.

Inspired by an all-round performance in batting and bowling, Kenya made 299 for 5 in their allotted 50 overs after being sent in to bat by the Zimbabweans.

A solid start by openers Kennedy Otieno Obuya and Ravindu Shah was strengthened further by the country's leading batsmen Steve Tikolo (60) and Maurice Odumbe in their third wicket partnership.

Odumbe's innings of 36 runs, off the same number of balls, helped to push the score from 120 to 191, with team's run rate averaging 5.98 per over.

Pace bowlers Martin Suji and Thomas Odoyo stamped their authority with tight opening spells to reduce Zimbabwe A to 28 for 3.

However, Zimbabwe got their act together and were boosted with a contribution of 82 runs from Guy Whittall and Gavin Rennie with 39.

"Such a quantity of cricket

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Smoker's item
6 — Bota
8 St. Louis attraction
12 NYSE counter-part
13 Nosh
14 Angry
15 Complain
16 Sleep-over site
18 Half a skate-boarder's gear
20 Melancholy poem
21 Has the skill
22 West of Hollywood
23 Friendship
26 Frog's perch
30 Journal
31 Leprechaun's dance
32 Past
33 Highway robber
36 Disconcerts
38 Over-emotive one

DOWN

1 Prepare for
2 Somalian super-model
3 Father (Fr.)
4 See coming
5 Pie nut
6 Difficult
7 Call — day
8 "G.W.T.W." character
9 "Clue"
10 Weapon
11 Actress
17 Signet
19 Stipend
22 Russian fighter plane
23 TV alien
24 Cattle
25 "But — forever"
26 Cover
27 La —, Bolivia
28 Census datum
29 Computer acronym
31 Predicament
34 Chest
35 Cracker spread
36 Chubby
37 Impose a fine
39 Mountain air?
40 Regarding
41 Check bar codes
42 Cheat on a test, maybe
43 Basilica area
44 11th President
45 Sheltered
46 Out of bounds
48 Standard

CRYPTOQUIP

X N P K A U U J H B H Z H
F N G U H U N G U E B S W M U
Y W F W K N X A N K M D . W M E W U Y .
" X Z Z J H N . S Z D N S Y P !"
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF YOU EVER HUNG OUT WITH PILOTS, YOU WOULD ACTUALLY HAVE FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES.
Today's Cryptquip clue: X equals L
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.