

Premiership MU get out of jail

Football

REUTERS, London

Ryan Giggs' 100th goal for Manchester United has rescued a point for Alex Ferguson's side in a pulsating and controversial 2-2 draw with rivals Chelsea at Stamford Bridge.

The home side twice took the lead on Friday, through defender William Gallas and Dutchman Boudewijn Zenden's stunning strike.

But twice United called on their battling spirit to hit back while manager Alex Ferguson continually prowled the touchline on a night when passions and tempers ran high.

David Beckham curled home their first equaliser midway through the first half before Giggs swived and shot home from inside the Chelsea penalty area with 25 minutes remaining to leave them with four points from their opening two league games.

But the visitors, who can be satisfied with surviving a stern test of their credentials by Claudio Ranieri's title hopefuls, left feeling aggrieved that they were robbed of a chance to win the match when referee Graham Poll turned down their strong claims for a penalty.

After 59 minutes, Paul Scholes burst through and, after nudging the ball past Carlo Cudicini, the Chelsea keeper appeared to bring the England midfielder down - but to United's disgust, Poll waved play on.

Ferguson later remonstrated with Poll, England's FIFA representative, on the touchline after Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink had been booked for a foul on Giggs, one of five cautions.

The Scot's anger was no doubt stoked by another poor United defensive display, just four days

before they attempt to overturn a one-goal deficit in the second leg of their Champions League third qualifying round tie with Hungary's Zalaegerszeg.

Despite travelling with the United squad and suggestions that he could make his competitive debut, Rio Ferdinand, at 30 million pounds the world's most expensive

defender, did not shake off an ankle problem in time to feature even on the substitutes' bench.

Beset by defensive frailties throughout last season, the United back four did not take long to show how desperately they still need Ferdinand's presence.

Just three minutes had passed when Zenden swung in a free-kick

from the right flank and, darting in between Roy Keane and Mikael Silvestre, Frenchman Gallas got the merest of touches to divert the ball past Roy Carroll in the United goal.

Chelsea, who beat Charlton Athletic last week in their first match of the new campaign, were bright and inventive, and Hasselbaink, linked with a move to Barcelona in the last 24 hours, twice forced Carroll into smart saves.

United's equaliser came out of the blue, as Silvestre's sweeping diagonal pass from the United half found Beckham, whose close control allowed him to wrongfoot Celestine Babayaro before curling a left foot shot - via a deflection off Marcel Desailly - past Cudicini.

That gave United some confidence, and they were perilously close to taking the lead when another Beckham break ended with Giggs hitting the outside of Cudicini's post from 10 metres.

But it was Chelsea who dealt the sucker punch to go 2-1 ahead on the stroke of half-time.

United failed to deal with Frank Lampard's raid and Zenden nipped in, ripping a fierce left foot shot into the top corner of Carroll's net for a goal that was richly acclaimed by the increased capacity crowd of Stamford Bridge.

As United pressed for the equaliser after the break, Beckham hit the woodwork with a right foot curler and Keane's pilerdriver singled Cudicini's hands.

After Scholes' penalty appeal had been turned down, the tension got the better of Desailly and Beckham, as the pair were both booked for a flare-up after 63 minutes.

By this point Chelsea had gone off the boil, and United's perseverance was rewarded through the fine finishing of Giggs after Silvestre's strong run down the left and cross.

United could even have won it at the death had Cudicini not grasped Keane's low shot safely.

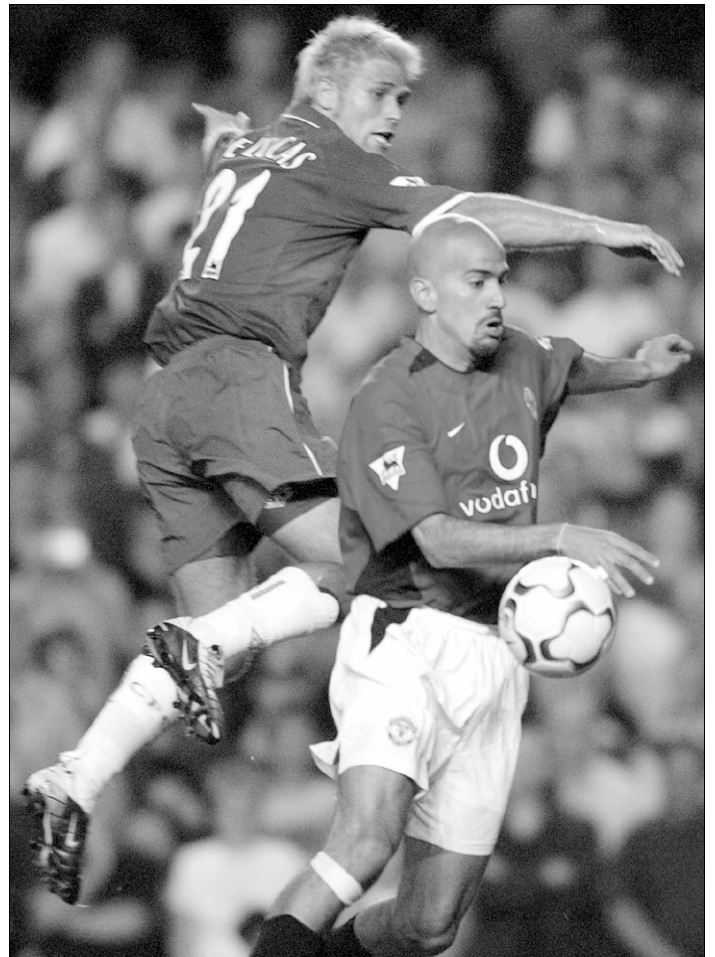


PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United's Juan Sebastian Veron (R) is challenged by Quique De Lucas of Chelsea during their Premiership encounter.

Best recovering

BBC, London

George Best has undergone further treatment in hospital to prevent the spread of infection following his liver transplant.

He was readmitted to the Cromwell Hospital in London last weekend with a complication related to a local infection.

Speaking on Friday, the hospital's consultant physician, Professor Roger Williams, confirmed the former Manchester United and Northern Ireland star had been treated for a "little leak" of bile.

Best, aged 56, is now said to be doing well.

Professor Williams said the condition was a well recognised complication with liver transplants.

"It's one of the things that has to be dealt with if it develops. It's happened and now it's controlled."

"I saw him last night and he is in good spirits and feeling better - no pain," he said.

"Liver operations do have technical complications in the first month. If you don't have any then you're extremely lucky but usually patients have one or other technical problems."

"George had this particular problem which was a pity because he had just got out of hospital and had sailed through it."

Confirming the Northern Ireland man was now doing well, the consultant said: "He's got quite a sparkle in his eye again."

Best, who needed the operation following years of heavy drinking, is expected to stay in the hospital for a number of days.

He was given a new liver during a 10-hour operation on 29 July and haemorrhaged so badly that he needed 40 pints of blood to survive.

He had been waiting about eight months for a new liver and was warned that he would die if he ever drank again.

Best, who now works as a television soccer pundit, received thousands of messages of support some people questioned whether he deserved the transplant.

Beckham's tribute

Football

REUTERS/BBC, London

Chelsea and Manchester United players, fans and officials observed a minute's silence for murdered British schoolgirls Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells before the premier league match at Stamford Bridge.

The 10-year-olds from Soham in eastern England, went missing wearing United shirts with England captain David Beckham's name and number seven on the back. Their bodies were found on August 17 in a wood.

Beckham had issued a public plea for their safe return when the pair vanished earlier this month.

On Friday, he led the tributes at Stamford Bridge, packed with more than 40,000 fans.

Beckham applauded the announcement of the minute's silence as all 22 players gathered around the centre circle at the west London stadium before bowing their heads.

He later dedicated his goal to the dead schoolgirls.

The England captain said: "It's hard to get your mind on football when this sort of stuff happens outside the game."

"The minute's silence was special. The whole nation is grieving. It's an upsetting time and our thoughts obviously go to the families."

"So it was nice for me to score tonight and I dedicate the goal to them."

"To see those little girls with my shirts on was pretty nice - the whole game was dedicated to them."

Soccer teams across the country, as well as England and India cricketers, will observe a minute's silence before matches this weekend in honour of the two girls whose murders have dominated front pages and news bulletins in Britain.

Third Division Cambridge United are the nearest professional soccer club to the girls' home village and the minute's silence at Abbey

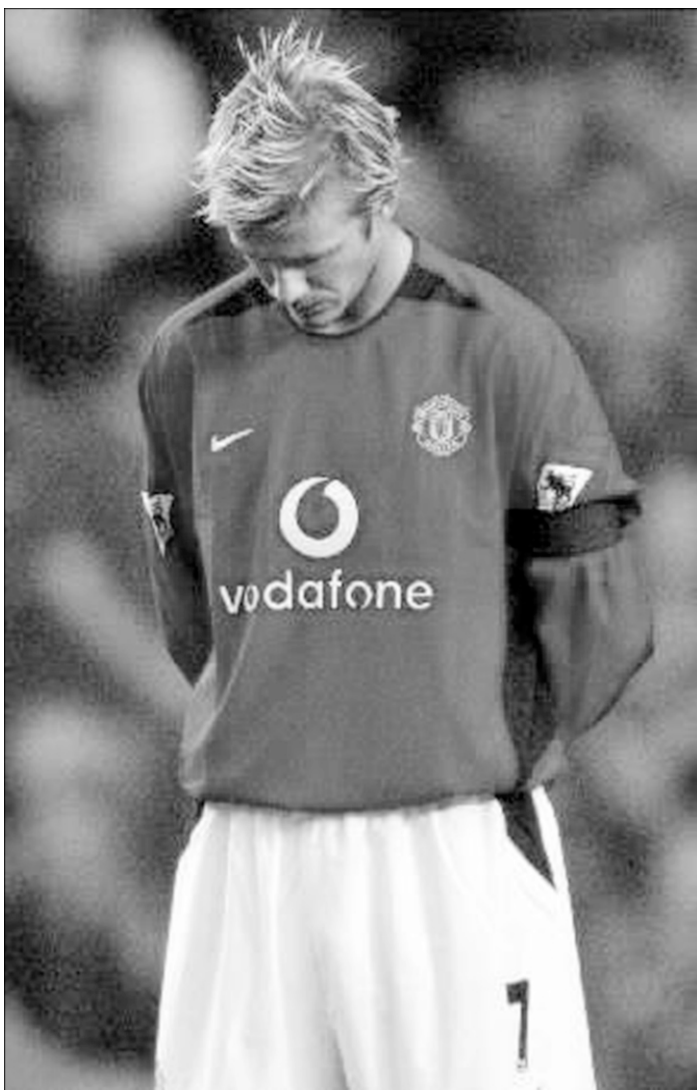


PHOTO: INTERNET

PAYING RESPECT: Manchester United's David Beckham stands in a minute's silence for murdered schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman before the Premiership game against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on August 23.

Stadium will enable fans from the area to pay tribute. They will also be able to contribute to a memorial fund.

Before the match visiting Orient captain Dean Smith will present a floral tribute from the London club to

a member of the United staff from Soham to be taken to the village church. The cricketers' tribute will take place just before the afternoon's play on Saturday in the third test at Headingley, Leeds.

Spanish Super Cup Valencia aim turnaround

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Valencia coach Rafael Benitez believes his side are capable of overturning a 3-0 first leg deficit against Deportivo Coruna in the second leg of the Spanish Super Cup at their Mestalla ground on Sunday (kickoff 1945 GMT).

"There is always a chance of a comeback and I want to make sure that we really go for the game," Benitez told reporters.

"We committed a number of errors in the first leg and we weren't able to control the game after conceding the first goal," he said.

"But it has been easy to convince the players of what they have to do now because the team are really hurt by the defeat."

The reigning league champions were caught cold in the first leg last Sunday as they were torn apart by Depor at the Riazor.

Inspired by the outstanding Juan Carlos Valeron, the King's Cup winners struck three goals in the first half to leave themselves firmly on course to take the first trophy of the season.

Valeron gave Depor a deserved lead on 13 minutes when he steered a well-taken drive past Valencia keeper Santiago Canizares.

He then helped to create the second for Victor nine minutes later and set up the third for Nouredine Naybet with a spectacular through ball shortly after the half hour mark.

But Depor coach Javier Irujeta said that his side were certainly not relaxing despite their impressive performance and comfortable first leg lead.

"There is going to be a great deal of tension at the match," he was quoted as saying by sports daily As on Friday. "They will try and pressure us from the start, but we have to keep our cool."

"The key for us will be if we can score a goal and that will really give us a major advantage."

Fan sues ref Moreno



REUTERS, Rome

Still seething over Italy's ignominious World Cup exit, a fan said he had taken Ecuadoran referee Byron Moreno to court for corruption and plans to call celebrity

midfielder Francesco Totti as a witness.

Co-hosts South Korea upset the "Azzurri" 2-1 with a golden goal winner in June in the second round of the World Cup finals.

Moreno controversially sent off playmaker Totti for diving and disallowed a Damiano Tomassi goal for off-side, incurring the wrath of Italians, who fired off

400,000 angry e-mails in a single night.

"We can't give in to the arrogance of this man (Moreno), who destroyed the hopes of our team," said Maurizio Giorgetti, who filed the suit with Rome's magistrates two months ago.

Moreno has always professed his innocence, telling Rome daily Il Messaggero after the match: "I would do it again. I don't even have to watch the replays ... Totti dived."

The Rome prosecutor's office was not available for comment and it was not clear how the case would stand up under international law.

Giorgetti, a coordinator for the Socialist National Front, a small neo-Fascist political party, said he thought Moreno had been paid by multinational companies to fix the result.

"The globalisers bought off Moreno, that's what happened. As Italians we have to defend the traditions of the tricolore (the national flag)," Giorgetti said in a telephone interview.

On Friday Il Messaggero said magistrates had already prepared court documents to send to Japan, who co-hosted the tournament, requesting information.

National coach Giovanni Trapattoni would also be called to testify in the case, it said.

In the days following the controversial match, FIFA President Sepp Blatter denied allegations that football's world governing body had been part of a plot to oust Italy in favour of the Koreans. He called on Italians to show dignity in defeat.



BYRON MORENO

Hasselbaink happy at Chelsea?

Football

REUTERS, London

Chelsea striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink is happy to stay at the club but says that he is prepared to listen to an offer from Barcelona.

Dutch international Hasselbaink had been reported as saying a move to the Nou Camp would be the "chance of a lifetime".

After helping Chelsea draw 2-2 with Manchester United at Stamford Bridge he told Sky Sports: "I was asked (by a newspaper) if I would be interested (in going to Barcelona)."

"Of course, if a club like that comes to me you're going to be flattered and then you're always going to listen to the offer."

But Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri said the London club had had no formal approach from the Spanish side.

"Maybe Barcelona want Jimmy, but first they must speak with our chairman (Ken Bates)," the Italian said.

"I expect Jimmy to stay here and I would like to work with him...I have not spoken to him about this (speculation) because I know what newspapers are like. But I don't know anything about these (reports)."

"Jimmy is a master goalscorer, and will score goals wherever he is." Hasselbaink paid tribute to the backing of the Chelsea supporters but did not rule out leaving Stamford Bridge.

"The Chelsea fans were magnificent even today when all those things were in the papers and they were behind me and I love playing

for Chelsea and I feel at home.

"But the thing is I'm a professional and I always want to play at the highest level and if a club the size of Barcelona again comes, you have to think about it."

"I'm not putting myself in the shop window. It's not that I want to leave. It's not that I'm putting a transfer request in because I'm not going to do that."

"I'm just saying I'm happy here, but you never know."

His advisor, Humphrey Nijman, told Sky Sports News earlier on Friday that Hasselbaink had not been approached by Barcelona.

The 30-year-old Dutchman, formerly with Leeds United, moved to Chelsea for a then record equal-



JIMMY FLOYD HASSELBAINK

ling fee of 22 million dollars from Atletico Madrid in June 2000.

Spain strikers Albert Luque and Diego Tristan have also been linked with a possible move to the Catalan club in recent weeks.

Raul's Real worry

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Raul fears that the European champions' failed attempt to sign Ronaldo from Inter Milan could have damaged team morale at the Spanish club.

"What worries me most about the Ronaldo affair is that the names of certain team mates are in the press every day and that has created uncertainty about their future," the Spanish international said.

"Emotions are very strong and even though players try to be professional and isolate themselves from such rumours, at times it becomes very difficult."

"Now what we need is to be calm and focused on our first objective, which is the European Super Cup (against UEFA Cup winners Feyenoord) on August 30 as we are all keen to get the season off to winning start."

Real's Spanish internationals Fernando Morientes and Pedro Munitis, Argentine winger Santiago Solari and Brazilian midfielder Flavio Conceicao were all linked with the proposed players-plus-cash deal during the last week.

The collapse of negotiations is likely to signify a swift rehabilitation for striker Morientes, who was the favourite to leave the club if the deal went through.

The 26-year-old Spanish international striker, who has also been the subject of a bid from English premier league side Tottenham



RAUL

Hotspur, is now set to remain at Real.

How far the speculation will have affected his desire to remain at the Bernabeu is, however, open to question.

The Ronaldo affair prompted Brazilian midfielder Flavio Conceicao, who has been sidelined for much of the last two seasons, to say that he would be prepared to move away from the club.

But Solari, who was one of Real's most impressive players last season, insisted earlier this week that he has no intention of quitting the European champions.

Real, who were careful not to mention the names of any players in their own statements as the Ronaldo affair dragged on, are now appealing to the players to rise above the press speculation.

"Everyone here at the club has feelings, but above all as professionals we have to get used to the rumours that surface every summer," said Real coach Vicente del Bosque.

But given that there is only a week to go before the European transfer window expires it is unlikely that the rumours have finished just yet.

Although Real have called off their bid for Ronaldo, it will be a major surprise if they do not make a major signing before the deadline and at the same time try to offload some of their expensively-assembled squad.

Real's players may not be the only players whose morale has taken a beating in the past week.

Ronaldo is unlikely to be looking forward to returning to Milan to face the anger of Inter fans who feel they have been betrayed by their former idol.

Serie A opener in Libya

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Italian champions Juventus and Cup winners Parma will open the Italian season when they meet in the traditional Supercup curtain raiser in the non-traditional venue of Tripoli in Libya.

The game is normally played in Italy and usually a week before the new Serie A season begins.

But after an attractive offer from Libyan authorities, the Italian Football League agreed to play the showcase match abroad for the second time in the event's history.

Back in 1993 a match between AC Milan and Torino was played in Washington DC.

Following Tuesday's decision to delay the start of the Serie A season to September 15 there will now be a three-week wait until the two clubs get down to the real business of playing for points.

That weakens the games traditional role as a final test for two of the top sides but in any case the match appears to be more a PR exercise for Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi as he seeks to improve the image of his country and regain acceptance in the international community.

But Sunday will offer ordinary Libyans a chance to enjoy one of Italy's best known exports.

A full house is expected at the 70,00 capacity June 11 stadium in Tripoli to see the two top Italian teams.

Both teams are expected to field full-strength sides although Juventus coach Marcello Lippi will be without injured French striker David Trezeguet.

Chilean Marcelo Salas, who missed the bulk of last season after a knee injury, could start in attack alongside Alessandro Del Piero.

In the Libyan capital Tripoli, the official news agency JANA said that the match would go ahead as planned after earlier saying that it had been postponed.

"Some hiccups, which came close to preventing the match from taking place at the scheduled time, have been resolved," said Jana.

"All the preparations have now been completed to allow the match to be played between the two Italian teams on Sunday."

Both Juventus and Parma teams had spent most of Saturday waiting at Malpensa airport outside Milan after their flight to Tripoli had been delayed.

The Gaddafi family has recently shown a growing interest in football as a means to promoting themselves to the world.

The investment arm of the Libyan government, Libyan Arab Foreign Investment company (LAFICO), owns a 7.5 per cent share in Juventus.

Gaddafi's son Al-Saadi, has

become a well-known figure in Italian football since the deal, appearing on television chat shows and even training with Juventus.

Al-Saadi is a professional footballer and has played for the Libyan national side as well as top club team Al-Itihad.

Al-Itihad have spent the close season in Italy playing friendly games with Italian clubs and there have been reports that LAFICO could make further investments in lower division Italian clubs.

In Greece, the Gaddafi family been in talks to purchase a stake in PAOK Salonica.

Al-Saadi has also said Libya intend to make an ambitious bid to host the 2010 World Cup, which is expected to be held in Africa.

That would be a major coup for a country that was under United Nations sanctions until 1999.

Those sanctions were imposed over the 1988 Lockerbie airline bombing which killed 270 people and suspended only after Gaddafi handed over two Libyan suspects for trial in 1999.

Libya is a former colony of Italy's and relations between the two countries have developed strongly since the lifting of sanctions.

In December 1999, then Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema became the first Western leader in 10 years to visit Tripoli and Italian companies have spearheaded investment in the North African state.



PHOTO: INTERNET

A file photo of the Italian Supercup being held up by Parma players. Today the holders meet Serie A champions Juventus in Tripoli.

Jardel asked to explain

REUTERS, Lisbon

Brazilian striker Mario Jardel has been asked by Portuguese premier league Sporting to explain his request for a third medical absence that could sideline him from the club for a month.

Jardel, Europe's top scorer last season with 42 goals, sent Sporting a statement from a psychiatrist saying he was unable to work for about 30 days.

The medical leave is the third that Jardel, 28, has applied for in recent weeks.

In keeping with Portuguese labour law, Jardel has been notified to appear at the club's facilities next week for a medical exam accompanied by his doctor, Sporting said in a statement on Friday.

"The decision was taken after the player presented another medical leave on Thursday," the club said on its website.

Spanish powerhouse Barcelona had issued a joint statement with Sporting on Tuesday denying that Jardel, who is seeking a fresh start after the break-up of his marriage, was set to quit Portugal for the Catalan club.

Lisbon's Record sporting newspaper on Thursday quoted Jardel as saying he had received an offer to play from unidentified club. The Brazilian striker told the newspaper he had been in hospital for depression.