

Primera Liga

Real shake off Espanyol

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

A glancing header from Ivan Helguera and a cool finish from substitute Steve McManaman gave slow-starting Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Espanyol in their opening league game of the season at the Bernabeu on Monday.

Kicking off the Spanish season a day later than most of their rivals because of their participation in the European Super Cup on Friday, Real looked as if they too had become distracted by the arrival of new signing Ronaldo in the capital.

And with the Brazilian striker looking on from the stands it was Espanyol who took the early initiative as Real appeared to find it difficult to motivate themselves following their brilliant Super Cup victory against Feyenoord.

But Real woke from their slumber just before the half hour mark as first Luis Figo and then Zinedine Zidane found their way past the Espanyol defence and the Helguera goal followed almost immediately.

The Spanish international got his head to a Figo corner and sent the ball spinning past Espanyol keeper Sergio Sanchez and into the net 10 minutes before the break.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Real Madrid's England international Steve McManaman scoring against Espanyol at Madrid on September 2.

Real took control after the break as Figo cut loose on the wing but with last season's leading scorer Fernando Morientes sitting on the bench and brooding over the club's attempt to sell him as part of the Ronaldo deal they needed someone to add the finishing touch.

Guti headed on to the bar midway through the second half and was then denied a goal by a sharp save from Sanchez, while Raul spurned several good chances to open his account for the season.

Morientes and McManaman came on in the last 10 minutes and it was the English midfielder who put the match beyond doubt with a classy finish.

Exchanging a neat one-two with Raul, the former Liverpool man shuffled into the area before slotting the ball neatly past Sanchez to score in the 89th minute.

Reigning league champions Valencia opened the defence of their title with an impressive 2-0 win away to Real Mallorca on Sunday,

but last season's runners-up Deportivo Coruna were dealt a comprehensive 4-2 home defeat by a sparkling Real Betis.

Louis van Gaal's Barcelona can count themselves unlucky to have only taken one point after they were held 2-2 by promoted Atletico Madrid at the Nou Camp, also on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

Newcastle United's veteran striker Alan Shearer (C) acknowledging the fans' applause after equalising against Liverpool at Anfield on September 2.

Premiership Magpies deny Liverpool

Football

REUTERS, London

Newcastle United scored twice in the last nine minutes to force a 2-2 draw with Liverpool at Anfield on Monday and deprive Liverpool of first place in the English premier league.

Liverpool appeared to be heading for top spot and a well-deserved victory following goals from former Newcastle midfielder Dietmar Hamann after 54 minutes and a Michael Owen penalty after 73 gave them a 2-0 lead.

But Newcastle struck back with Gary Speed scoring after 81 minutes and Alan Shearer powering home a header after 89.

A disappointed Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier told Sky Sports afterwards: "We were a bit unlucky not to have taken all three points tonight, we had enough chances, we worked hard and should have won the game."

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson said: "When we went 2-0 down I thought we were heading for

another defeat but we never gave up and once we got one goal back we were back with a chance. We have an indomitable spirit and pace and we never gave up."

The bad news for both Newcastle and England was that Kieron Dyer was nursing painful shin splints in the dressing room after the game and Robson said he was "extremely doubtful" for Saturday's friendly international against Portugal at Villa Park.

The result meant that Tottenham Hotspur stayed top of the league with 10 points from four matches, while Liverpool stayed third behind champions Arsenal on eight points. Newcastle are 13th with four points

from their three matches. Liverpool went ahead after 54 minutes when Hamann scored after robbing Nolberto Solano 30 metres out.

He then advanced on goal before shooting past Newcastle keeper Shay Given with his left-foot for his first goal since last March -- when he also scored against Newcastle.

Gerard Houllier's men doubled their lead 19 minutes later when referee Graham Poll ruled that Nikos Dabizas had climbed over Liverpool skipper Sami Hyypia at a corner and pointed to the spot.

Owen, who had not scored this season, had missed a penalty on

the opening day against Aston Villa and was guilty of at least two woeful misses in the first half, coolly scored from the spot to make it 2-0.

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson, who had not won at Anfield on 26 previous visits as either a player or manager, shook up his team with a triple substitution after an hour.

His move paid dividends when Laurent Robert and Craig Bellamy, two of his subs, combined to set up Speed for a relatively simple goal nine minutes from time.

Then with less than two minutes of normal time to play, Shearer powered home a corner for an unlikely equaliser.

Shearer then went close again a minute later with another header which Liverpool goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek did well to save.

The result came as a huge relief for Newcastle, who started the season with a 4-0 win over West Ham but then lost to Manchester City.

Liverpool remain unbeaten but will be disappointed with the draw which came a day before Houllier's 55th birthday on Tuesday.

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Tottenham	4	3	1	0	6	3	10
Arsenal	4	2	2	0	10	5	8
Liverpool	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Leeds	4	2	0	2	7	4	6
Chelsea	4	1	3	0	7	6	6
Charlton	4	2	0	2	6	5	6

The Ronaldo business

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid's signing of Ronaldo is part of a marketing strategy designed to maximise the great Spanish club's future earnings.

Club president Florentino Perez hinted as much during the Brazilian's official presentation on Monday following his transfer from Inter Milan.

"This is a great day for Real Madrid," Perez said. "The mixture of Real Madrid and Ronaldo is perfect because of the universal appeal that both possess."

By signing Ronaldo, Real Madrid have for the third time in as many years managed to lure one of the world's top players to the Bernabeu. Real broke the world transfer

record to bring first Luis Figo and then Zinedine Zidane to the club, with the French World Cup winner arriving last year from Juventus for a fee of dollars 64.4 million.

And now, in the middle of a general slump in the world football transfer market, they have still managed to stump up dollars 44.25 million for the player whose goals fired Brazil to a record fifth World Cup win in June.

A quick glance around the press room during Ronaldo's presentation, which was packed with over 300 journalists and photographers from every continent, gave an early indication as to the world-wide repercussions of the Brazilian's signing.

Perez said Ronaldo had agreed to cede any new image rights to the club and explained that the club hoped the presence of the most

famous player on the planet would allow them to penetrate new markets in the Far East.

"One of the most important things for Real is its image," said Perez. "We all know that Ronaldo is one of the best players in the world, but he is also one of the most universal images in the world."

"We will begin selling shirts bearing the player's name immediately and we are sure there will be a massive demand. In five years we want to be in every country in the world."

Given that payment to Inter Milan for Ronaldo's transfer will be staggered over the next few seasons Perez will be optimistic of recovering most, if not all, of his investment.

The arrival of the 25-year-old striker confirms Real's status as the aristocrats of European football whose image is just as important as

performance on the pitch.

Only two years ago Real Madrid were on the verge of bankruptcy with reported debts of dollars 250 million.

But with a combination of good fortune and shrewd financial manoeuvring the club has escaped that threat.

Helped by a permissive Madrid city council Perez managed to pull off a masterstroke when he negotiated a deal to sell off the club's city centre training facilities for an estimated dollars 392 million and clear the debts with the stroke of a pen.

The clearance of the debt coincided with Real's return to dominance in European football and allowed the club to begin to exploit its massive marketing potential through shirt sales, club merchandise and image rights deals with leading players.

Pires targets October return

REUTERS, Paris

Arsenal's Robert Pires aims to return to action for the English double winners by late October, the injured French midfielder has said.

"I would love to resume playing for the Champions League match against AJ Auxerre (at Highbury) on October 22," Pires told sports daily L'Equipe.

Pires suffered a cruciate knee ligament injury in March and missed the World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea.

He had surgery in May and has been recuperating at a sports injury clinic in Saint Raphael, in the south of France.

"I'm working hard and I'm improving every day," he added. "Now I can drive the ball, I can run and I can dribble. I'm looking forward to this match at Highbury."

Keane's escape act!

Football

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United captain Roy Keane is due to have a hip operation on Tuesday, keeping him out of action for around three months.

The lay-off should coincide neatly with an official ban following his sending-off last weekend. The Football Association is also due to decide this week whether he should face disciplinary charges over his controversial autobiography.

"Roy is going in for an operation on his hip and is therefore out of the Middlesbrough game. It's something that has been troubling him for quite some time and we've decided that now is the time for it to be done," manager Alex Ferguson said.

"We hope we'll have him back by December for the main part of the

season," Ferguson said on United's website.

"By then, hopefully, we'll have qualified for the second phase of the Champions League. Roy has been getting by, but getting by very impressively."

The website said the timing of



ROY KEANE

Keane's operation was "ideal" as he could be hit by a possible seven-match ban.

Keane has been carrying the injury since before the summer and Ferguson had wanted his captain to miss the World Cup finals to have surgery.

In any case Keane returned home from a pre-tournament training camp after a row with Irish manager Mick McCarthy.

Keane said over the weekend that he hoped McCarthy would rot in hell. His autobiography implies he deliberately fouled Manchester City's Alf Inge Haaland in a match in April 2001 and on Sunday he added that he had no remorse over the incident.

He was sent off against Sunderland on Saturday after elbowing Jason McAteer, a former Ireland team mate, and is likely to be banned for three matches.

Eriksson to open up

Football

INTERNET, London

England manager Sven Goran Eriksson has challenged his stars: Tell me where I have gone wrong.

England were criticised for some lacklustre second-half displays during the World Cup, particularly against Sweden and in the quarter-final defeat by Brazil.

High-profile managers like Alex Ferguson, Bobby Robson and South Korea's Guus Hiddink all attacked the coach's tactics.

Some of the players also feel the Swede should be more animated both on the bench and in the dressing room.

Eriksson yesterday named a 20-man squad for Saturday's Villa Park friendly against Portugal, which includes Leeds bad-boys Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate.

And he plans a prompt heart-to-heart with his World Cup stars. He said: "We will talk about everything and I want the opinions of those who were there. They should not accept things if they

don't agree. They should tell me and we will hopefully find a solution."

"I haven't heard the players wanted more emotion from me. We handled the Brazil game as we always do."

"If that is the criticism, I hope they will tell me."

"I don't know if I should be shouting. I think it is old-fashioned. You have to analyse."

"But there were mistakes and you want feedback on everything." Eriksson is also ready to handle any flak he gets for selecting Woodgate and Bowyer.

The pair were suspended from international duty for two years and nine months because of their high-profile court case.

Woodgate was cleared of assaulting student Saifraz Najeib, but convicted of assault.

Bowyer was acquitted, but his conduct was heavily criticised by the trial judge.

Eriksson admitted: "I don't know if I'm prepared for the criticism which may come. But I think it fair to do this."

"I think I should change my job if I cared about criticism."

"They have served their punishment and I don't think you can go on punishing people for the rest of their lives."

"I don't know the two players. But I want to get to know them and see how they work."

Centre-back Woodgate, 22, whose only previous cap came against Bulgaria in June 1999,



SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON

said: "I am delighted to be back in the England squad and to be considered in the same class as the great players who went to this year's World Cup."

"The strength of the squad is

better than ever and I am under no illusions I will have to play really well to be considered for a place in the team."

"I would like to thank all the people who have supported me through a difficult period. I hope I can reward their faith."

Woodgate will have Leeds pals Paul Robinson, Alan Smith and Danny Mills at England's get-together, as well as Bowyer.

Eriksson said of Bowyer: "He has energy, can play anywhere and is a big talent."

And the former England Under-21 midfielder declared: "I am determined to make the best of this opportunity."

"I am confident I will not let anyone down, though I realise I now have to prove I can do it at this level."

"I'm so glad finally to be given a chance. That is all I have ever wanted and it's a great feeling to be called up."

Leeds boss Terry Venables was 'delighted' for all his players.

On Bowyer and Woodgate, he said: "It's a great experience for them to be involved. And if they play, it will be even better."

France without Henry

Football

REUTERS, Clairefontaine

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry will miss Saturday's European championship qualifying match against Cyprus because of injury, France coach Jacques Santini has said.

Henry is nursing a painful ankle and is replaced in the squad by Liverpool midfielder Bruno Cheyrou who earned his first cap for France in Tunisia last month.

Chelsea influential midfielder Emmanuel Petit is recovering from a toe injury and should be fit in time for the match in Nicosia.

"Manu is going much better and the doctor is optimistic about the Saturday's match," Santini told a news conference at the French team training camp outside Paris.

The newly appointed coach is already without AS Roma defender Vincent Candela who pulled out



THIERRY HENRY

with a calf injury on Monday.

Candela has been replaced by under-21 player Sylvain Armand of Nantes who is called into the senior squad for the first time.

Manchester goalkeeper Fabien Barthez, Bayern Munich defender Bixente Lizarazu and Juventus striker David Trezeguet are all out through injuries.

Serie A from Sept 14

Football

AP, Rome

The president of Italy's soccer league said Tuesday that the start of the Serie A season, which was delayed due to a TV dispute, will definitely be Sept. 14, according to an Italian news agency.

"It will absolutely start the 14th, whoever is not present knows they will be penalized," Adriano Galliani, the league president, was quoted as saying by the news agency ANSA.

Galliani's comments Tuesday were the most definitive words he has used since announcing last month that the season's start would be delayed by two weeks.

The delay was decided on to allow eight Serie A teams without TV contracts more time to find deals before the season begins.

While big clubs such as Juventus and Milan already have rich deals with pay TV networks Stream and Tele+ for live broadcasts of their matches, the eight smaller clubs are still without contracts, meaning all matches at their grounds -- more

than 120 games -- may not be available on television to Italian viewers.

The eight clubs in the 18-team league still lacking TV deals are: Brescia, Atalanta, Perugia, Empoli, Como, Piacenza, Modena, and last season's surprise sensation, Chievo.

Several representatives of those eight clubs have said recently that a further delay was possible. But Galliani's comments -- made before entering a meeting about the issue at the league's headquarters -- seemed to refute that possibility.

If the season starts as currently planned, there will be two matches Saturday, Sept. 14 and seven games Sunday Sept. 15. Only one round of matches would have been missed, which would probably be made up in January. There were no games scheduled for the upcoming weekend due to qualifying matches for the 2004 European championships.

With Spain's La Liga opening play over the weekend, Italy's Serie A is now the only major soccer league in Europe that has not begun its season.

PHOTO: AFP