

Premiership preview

Pompey pack a punch

Football

AFP, London

New boys not whipping boys has been the message emanating from Premiership newcomers Portsmouth in the opening weeks of the campaign.

Two wins and two draws from their first four games have left Harry Redknapp's team sitting pretty in third place in the league and confirmed their pre-season credentials as the most likely of the three promoted sides to stay up.

The season is still young but whether Portsmouth can realistically entertain aspirations beyond survival should be a little clearer by the time Arsenal have finished with them on Saturday afternoon.

Spending constraints prevented Arsene Wenger from making significant additions to his squad in the close season, his financial embarrassment made all the more painful by the freespending antics of their London neighbours Chelsea.

But Wenger's success in persuading his compatriots Thierry Henry, Patrick Vieira and Robert Pires to sign new contracts nevertheless made it a hugely significant summer for Arsenal and there has been an ominously determined edge to their performances since the start of the season.

Four straight wins speak for themselves and it would represent a major surprise if Portsmouth were to prevent them making it five at Highbury.

The visitors will however have the advantage of a relatively fresh squad following a week of international football during which the bulk of Arsenal's first team was scattered across the globe.

Wenger will definitely have to do without midfielder Gilberto, who was only due to return to London on

Friday after playing for Brazil in midweek.

"Gilberto won't be available. Apart from that, everyone has returned in good shape," a relieved Wenger reported.

Portsmouth's Serbian defender Dejan Stevanovic acknowledges the south coast club, bankrolled by the millions of his compatriot Milan Mandric, still have some way to go before they can travel to places like Highbury expecting to pick up points.

But he is confident about their ability to consolidate their place in



STEVE MCMANAMAN

the top flight.

"I don't think we should simply talk about survival," he said. "We need to be looking at mid-table. The team is capable of that and if we pick up the points where we should we'll achieve that."

Manchester United will seek to get back to winning form at Charlton following the unexpected reverse at Southampton a fortnight ago which allowed Arsenal to pull clear at the top of the table.

After a turbulent week in which chief executive Peter Kenyon announced his shock departure for Chelsea and manager Alex

Ferguson revealed he had been approached by the London club, United fans could do with the reassurance of a good performance on the field.

Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri's attempts to blend the 100 million pounds of talent acquired this summer into a championship winning force continues with the visit of Tottenham to Stamford Bridge.

Former England winger Steve McManaman is expected to make his Premiership debut for Manchester City in Sunday's clash with Aston Villa.

Having been used in a variety of roles during his time at Real Madrid, McManaman says he is ready to slot into the City side wherever manager Kevin Keegan can find a place for him.

"You talk about Luis Figo being a great right winger but he is playing on the left at the moment," McManaman pointed out. "Zidane has played up front but he is playing centre midfield currently and was playing on the left last season."

"You don't want to be labelled a utility man or anything as derogatory as that but I think good players can and will play anywhere," he said.

"I have performed well in the centre of midfield for Real and Liverpool and played on the left and on the right for England and for Liverpool before that."

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)  
Saturday: Arsenal v Portsmouth, Blackburn v Liverpool, Bolton v Middlesbrough, Charlton v Manchester Utd, Chelsea v Tottenham, Everton v Newcastle, Southampton v Wolves  
Sunday: Birmingham v Fulham (1505 GMT), Manchester City v Aston Villa (1300 GMT)  
Monday: Leicester v Leeds (1900 GMT)

Di Canio set for MU

AFP, London

Maverick Italian striker Paolo di Canio, once a potential transfer target for Manchester United, is in line to face the English champions for new club Charlton on Saturday.

Charlton boss Alan Curbishley was impressed with a di Canio brace for the reserves against Fulham on Tuesday night, although he looks likely to keep the Italian on the bench.

"Paolo is okay. He has trained ever so hard during the two-week international break and after coming through the reserve game against Fulham he will be in contention for the United match," Curbishley said.

Jason Euell and Shaun Bartlett have been performing well up front for Charlton and Curbishley is unlikely to disrupt their partnership but he is well aware of di Canio's ability to turn games and the Italian is likely to be given a chance to influence events at the Valley.

United defenders John O'Shea and Rio Ferdinand are both doubts for the trip to south east London.

O'Shea pulled out of the Republic of Ireland's friendly with Turkey in midweek after picking up an ankle injury against Russia at the weekend, while Ferdinand missed England's last two matches due to a kidney infection.

United have never lost to Charlton in the Premiership.

Vieira a Red Devil?

AFP, London

Patrick Vieira may have signed on with Arsenal until 2007 but the world's leading midfield enforcer refuses to rule out playing for arch rivals Manchester United one day.

Vieira, 27, ended speculation about his immediate future last month when he signed a new deal at Highbury, putting a stop to reports that he could be lured away to either United or Real Madrid.

But he admits one more big move before the end of his career is a distinct possibility.

"I read that Manchester United asked about me during the summer, and anything is possible in football," Vieira said.

"Various players have moved between Tottenham and Arsenal, AC Milan and Inter, Lazio and Roma, and Rangers and Celtic. I may go to United or I may not."

"It is happening more and more, so who knows what will happen."

"But I have not left Arsenal, because I feel good here. But although I am happy where I am, you can never say never."

Caniggia too!

AFP, Doha

Former Argentinian international striker Claudio Caniggia has become the latest big-name veteran to sign up to play in Qatar.

The 36-year-old has put pen to paper on a one-year deal to play for league champions Qatar Club where he will be facing the likes of countryman Gabriel Batistuta, Germany's Stefan Effenberg, Frenchman Frank Leboeuf, Algerian Ali Benarbia and Spanish trio Fernando Hierro, Josep Guardiola and Ivan de la Pena have all agreed to play in the league.

Wife wanted

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wasn't possible to meet him," Nipa said.

Asked to explain why he returned to the Reds, Aminul's spouse said there was a big misunderstanding between Aminul and his family during the twenty-four hour drama.

"Believe it or not, we were actually happy that Abahani had snatched my husband. Aminul was also not interested to continue playing for Muktijoddha although he received the cheque. He made his mind up knowing so many big name players would be leaving Muktijoddha," Nipa said.

Replying to another question, Nipa said that Aminul wanted to return Muktijoddha's money after almost striking a deal with Abahani officials.

Aminul's wife believed Aminul's motive for dumping Abahani was to ensure his elder brother's (Moinul Haq Moin) safety.

"If Aminul had contacted us before going to Muktijoddha, things could have turned out differently," she said.

Klusener

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The player is involved in a dispute with United Cricket Board (UCB) of South Africa after his contract with UCBSA was not renewed.

Klusener was allegedly referred to as a "disruptive element" by captain Graeme Smith after the World Cup.

Imran blasts

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A UCBSA delegation -- comprising commercial director Ian Smith, security director Bob Nicholas and Ben van Deventer from the South African police services -- is due in Pakistan on Sunday to ascertain security and will report back to the board.

PCB has already offered South Africa the top-level security reserved for state heads during their tour.

Pakistan has suffered a cricket drought as foreign teams have refused to tour the country following two suicide bomb blasts in Karachi during Test series in May and June last year.

Primera Liga preview

Prelude to Europe

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spanish Primera Liga giants have their eye on Europe as they go into this weekend's domestic action with the likes of Real Madrid coveting success and riches from the Champions League which starts next week.

Real Madrid have set themselves a target of a 30th league crown and a tenth European title in the knowledge that last year, when they failed to win the latter trophy, was regarded as something of a failure.

Having since added England skipper David Beckham to their ranks Real expect to achieve the double this time round and are already sharpening their knives for the arrival of Group F rivals Marseille on Tuesday.

First, however, is a home encounter Saturday against Real Valladolid.

Both sides have taken four points from two matches to date in a somewhat lacklustre start by the big teams after two rounds of matches which have brought a rather paltry 36 goals in all.

Real, still worrying about their defensive shortcomings after allowing veteran Ivan Helguera to quit and move to Qatar, hope talismanic Frenchman Zinedine Zidane will have recovered from the thigh injury which forced him to miss Thursday training.

Most of Real's foreign legion was on international duty in midweek and Brazilian stars such as Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos were excused training also as they trekked back from South America following a narrow World Cup qualifying win over Ecuador, the goal coming from Barcelona's Ronaldinho.

Real striker Raul will look to show

that his two goals for Spain in Wednesday's 2-1 Euro 2004 qualifying win over Ukraine have brought to an end some modest form by his own exalted standards while Guti says he is looking to hold down a place in central midfield following the departure of Claude Makelele to Chelsea.

"I think I can be useful in several roles for the club," Guti told AS earlier in the week.

Valladolid coach Fernando Vazquez thinks he has a plan, meanwhile, to stop Real.

Noting that the loss of Makelele had left a defensive hole just in front



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

of the back four he told Marca daily: "If we attack I think they will get disorganised and that will be the moment to get the ball off them."

Deportivo La Coruna, who are in Champions League action Wednesday at AEK Athens, travel to Seville, also on Saturday, as the only side to have taken a maximum six points from their two opening games.

Seville themselves are unbeaten and will look to score a surprise win over Super Depor, whose coach Javier Irureta last week exchanged words with star forward Diego Tristan, who has yet to hit the net this term having had to step into the

gap left by last season's league top scorer Roy Makaay.

Deportivo's Uruguayan striker Walter Pandiani, who has twice found the net already despite only having a bit role, has rubbed salt in Tristan's wounds by claiming the latter does not respect him.

Barcelona, who have vowed to close the gulf between themselves and Real Madrid this season, have only the UEFA Cup to look forward to in Europe.

But on Sunday they can look forward to three points away to basement side Albacete, without a point to date.

Frank Rijkaard, the Barca coach, is still pondering his most effective attacking line up and has the luxury of sending out the likes of Argentine star Javier Saviola or Dutch hitman Patrick Kluivert.

Elsewhere, Real Sociedad, runners up last season but with just two draws so far, will be without injured Turkish star Turc Nihat Kahveci for a tough visit along the north coast to a Racing Santander side who have likewise yet to taste defeat.

That encounter will be a useful tune-up for a Champions League meeting with Greek side Olympiakos in San Sebastian on Wednesday.

Celta Vigo, Spain's other Champions League participant - they travel to Belgium's Bruges on Tuesday - host Betis on Saturday with both outfits chasing a first win.

FIXTURES

Saturday: Real Madrid v Real Valladolid (1700 GMT), Celta Vigo v Real Betis, Seville v Deportivo La Coruna (1930)  
Sunday: Osasuna v Atletico Madrid (1505), Athletic Bilbao v Real Mallorca (1700), Espanyol v Villarreal, Racing Santander v Real Sociedad, Valencia v Malaga, Real Zaragoza v Murcia, Albacete v Barcelona (all 1930 GMT)

Serie A preview

Mancini's nostalgic return

Football

AFP, Rome

Emotions are likely to be running high at the Luigi Ferraris stadium on Saturday where newly-promoted Sampdoria host Lazio in their first Serie A home match for four years.

Visiting coach Roberto Mancini spent 15 seasons at 'Samp' and was a key figure in the club's most successful period in the early 1990s.

His partnership alongside strike partner Gianluca Vialli helped them to a European Cup Winners' Cup success and their only Italian league title while, in 1992, they reached the European Cup final only to lose 1-0 to Barcelona.

Mancini, 38, has fond memories of his days at the Genoa club, but won't be handing out any favours this weekend.

"I enjoyed some wonderful moments there, some of the best of my career," he said.

"I was fortunate to be surrounded by some great players at the time and the atmosphere at the club was special."

"I'm sure I will feel a little nostalgic, but I am with Lazio now and we are going there for a victory."

Lazio defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, who played alongside Mancini at Sampdoria between 1994 and 1998, said he too would feel a tinge of sentimentality.

"It won't be easy for me because Genoa is my second city and I have Sampdoria in my heart," said Mihajlovic, in his sixth season with Lazio.

"But we want to win the title and what matters is getting the three points. We know it won't be easy as we are up against a strong side with some very experienced players."

Brescia coach Gianni De Biasi has turned up the heat ahead of Sunday's match away to Roma by accusing their captain Francesco Totti of diving.

"Totti is a world class player and gets challenged a lot, but when he falls he looks like he's been shot," Biasi said. "Nobody can question the man's talent but he falls down far too easily."

Totti missed Italy's two Euro 2004 qualifiers against Wales and Serbia and Montenegro with a bruised hip, but will definitely start at the Olympic Stadium.

Athletics

AFP, Monaco

Surprise 100 metres winner Kim Collins is one of around 30 newly crowned world champions putting their reputations on the line in this weekend's World Athletics Final.

Athletes ranked in the top seven of their event, plus one wild-card, have been invited to compete in the Stade Louis II in the event formerly known as the Grand Prix Final which for the first time is spread over two

received a welcome boost ahead of Saturday's home match against Bologna as defensive duo Kakha Kaladze and Giuseppe Pancaro resumed training after recovering from minor knicks.

Inter Milan, who struggled to break down a stubborn Modena side in their opening league match before prevailing 2-0, visit Tuscan side Siena.



PHOTO: AFP

Norwegian international striker John Carew gives a thumbs up wearing an AS Roma jersey during his official presentation at Roma's headquarters on September 11. Carew has been loaned by Valencia to Roma for one season.

"We must be patient - it would be pointless to rush his recovery and risk a relapse," Biasi said.

Reigning league champions Juventus will be without striker Fabrizio Miccoli for their tricky away trip to Verona-based Chievo.

The Italy international came off at half-time in Juve's 5-1 demolition of Empoli and was rushed to hospital for an emergency operation for acute appendicitis.

European champions AC Milan

ended a nightmare since scooping the 100m/200m double.

White is almost certain to lose her gold medals after the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) this week rejected her explanation for the presence of the stimulant Modafinil in her doping sample after her 100m victory.

The 26-year-old American claims she needs the drug to combat the effects of the sleeping sickness narcolepsy.

If the IAAF's findings are supported by a hearing by the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), White could be stripped of her titles.

FIXTURES

(All matches 1300 GMT unless stated)  
Saturday: AC Milan v Bologna (1830 GMT), Sampdoria v Lazio (1600 GMT)  
Sunday: Chievo v Juventus (1830 GMT), Empoli v Reggina, Lecce v Ancona, Modena v Udinese, Parma v Perugia, Roma v Brescia, Siena v Inter Milan

Brit Flower's Essex deal

REUTERS, London

Andy Flower, the former Zimbabwe captain who quit international cricket after a World Cup protest against Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, has signed a new two-year deal at Essex as an English-qualified player.

Flower, 35, whose black-armband protest with Henry Olunga against Mugabe made headline news throughout the world in February and March, has played the last two seasons as an overseas player for the county.

David East, Essex's chief executive, told the club's website on Friday that Flower had been a "model overseas player" for the team.

Flower, a British passport holder through his marriage, has scored 1,000 runs in both his seasons with Essex.

He had an outstanding 10-year Test career with Zimbabwe, hitting 4,794 runs from 63 matches to give him an average of 51.54. He was voted a Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 2002.

Flower and Olunga were protesting against the controversial land reforms of Mugabe and other measures which they said impinged on democratic freedoms within Zimbabwe.

Griqualand get Afridi

CRICINFO, Griqualand

South African provincial side Griqualand has signed hard-hitting batsman Shahid Afridi for the 2003-04 season.

Afridi, who has played 176 one-day internationals and 14 Test for Pakistan, will arrive in Kimberley on October 9, a week before the SuperSport Series starts.

He will join other new players Greg Smith, Benji Hector and Mandla Mashimbyi in the squad.

Griqualand have two three-day pre-season friendlies against Western Province and Boland before their first competitive game, against Eastern Province on October 17.

Sami back

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spokesman.

The 20-year-old -- along with express pacer Shoaib Akhtar -- is seen as a replacement to the illustrious pairing of Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis.

Wasim, the highest wicket-taker in one-day cricket with 504, retired in May while Waqar has been sidelined following Pakistan's first round exit from the World Cup in March.

Sami missed the Test series against Bangladesh due to an ankle injury he sustained while playing for Kent in the English season.

Since making his Test debut in New Zealand in 2001, he has played nine Tests and 31 one-day games for Pakistan.

Sami said he is keen to return to the action.

"It was disappointing to miss a home series but now I am fully fit and roaring to go," he said.

Pakistan need a fit Sami and Shoaib for their series against South Africa.

PAKISTAN: Mohammad Hafeez, Imran Nazir, Yasir Hameed, Inzamam-ul-Haq (captain), Yousef Youhana, Abdul Razzaq, Kamran Akmal, Shoaib Malik, Younis Khan, Shabbir Ahmad, Umar Gul, Junaid Zia, Danish Kaneria, Salman Butt, Mohammad Sami.

Freddy

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"I think I have always had it in me. It was just a case of finding it."

"I think I have matured as a batsman, and probably a person as well."

Flintoff's seam bowling may still leave something to be desired -- despite his accuracy, bounce and surprising pace, he takes less wickets than he would like -- yet Smith consistently named him as England's most accomplished bowler in the series.

The statistics may not back that up -- his 10 wickets cost 59.2 runs apiece -- but the Flintoff story has yet to be fully reflected in statistics.

The 25-year-old Lancastrian, the fastest scorer in the team, has never bothered about figures when playing to team orders. Was he disappointed at missing out on a century at The Oval?

"It's just five runs," he shrugged. "Personal milestones don't count for much when you are trying to win a series."

Flintoff came into the five-Test series with a batting average of under 20. That has now jumped to 26 after he averaged more than 50 against South Africa at number seven in the series.

He has chosen the perfect time to mature, with Alec Stewart, the side's wicketkeeping all-rounder, retiring at the age of 40.

With Stewart gone, the way is open for Flintoff to edge up the order, while growing up a little more.

AFP, Berlin



With 1,000 days to go before the 2006 World Cup, hosts Germany unveiled Thursday an ambitious multi-million euro programme of cultural events to take place before the first kick-off.

"We want the world to wait in anticipation for 2006. The one-two between sport and culture will work," said Franz Beckenbauer, chairman of the World Cup organising commit-

tee and German footballing legend.

The programme gets underway in earnest on Friday with the opening of a museum dedicated to the sport inside a massive 15-metre (50-foot) high illuminated football on Berlin's famed Pariser Platz.

The museum, which will include England star David Beckham's football boot and the match balls used in the 1954 and 1974 finals won by Germany, will be opened by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and FIFA president Joseph Blatter.

Designed by Austrian artist Andre Heller and with lights which make it appear like a globe of the world, the

ball will stand just a few metres from the Brandenburg Gate.

"It's a chance to show our country in its best light," Interior Minister Otto Schily said of the cultural programme.

The events will include conferences on sport and society, plays and concerts and will cost an estimated 30 million euros (33.5 million dollars).

The illuminated football will remain in Berlin for about seven weeks before beginning a tour to the 12 stadiums that will host the 2006 World Cup.



PHOTO: AFP

German multimedia artist Andre Heller (L), the legendary Franz Beckenbauer (C) and Interior Minister Otto Schily pose in front of Heller's giant football which is in sight of the Brandenburger gate in Berlin on September 11.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

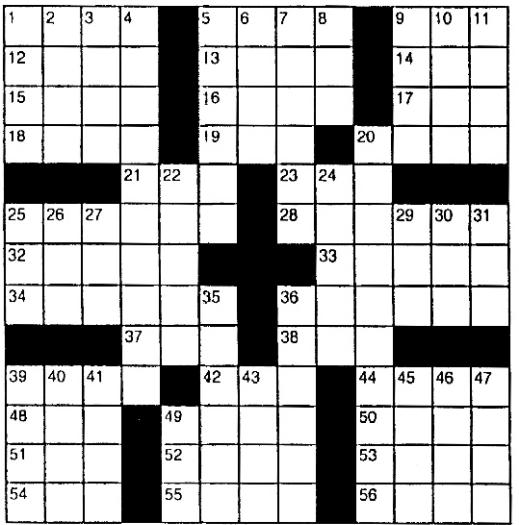
ACROSS  
1 Soft-drink choice  
5 Wild party  
9 With it, once  
12 Leading man?  
13 Particular  
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15 Bausch's partner  
17 Prunes  
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19 Lady of the Haus  
20 Make up your mind  
21 Stool  
22 Pigeon  
23 Super-man foe  
24 Luther  
25 A mean Amin  
26 Hero filler, maybe  
28 Wine vessel  
30 Do penance  
33 Earth  
34 Wild cards, sometimes

36 Lottery participant  
37 Epoch  
38 Slick figure?  
39 Body pack  
40 Trail the pack  
41 Monad  
42 Ostlich's cousin  
43 Emanation  
44 Enrapture  
45 Docket entry  
46 Anderson's "High"  
47 Con-motion  
48 Potter's fixture  
49 Out a living  
50 Docket entry  
51 Anderson's "High"  
52 Con-motion  
53 Potter's fixture  
54 Out a living

55 Radiator product  
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DOWN  
1 Midi term minus  
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3 Tibetan priest  
4 Emergency vehicles  
5 Mississippi city  
6 On  
7 Putrefactive  
8 Pinafore letters  
9 Music lover's hookup  
10 Green acres  
11 Fringe benefit  
12 Emergencies  
13 Vehicles  
14 Mid-eastern title  
15 Librarian's gadget  
16 Despondent  
17 Caused corrosion  
18 Skip to My --  
19 Illustrative  
20 Back  
21 Listening device  
22 Hail  
23 Bacall's partner  
24 Apportion  
25 Uncontrollable  
26 Foolproof  
27 Met melody  
28 Maniculist's concern  
29 Capri, e.g.  
30 Nurse  
31 Blond shade

Solution time: 27 mins.

ASH FOO TICE D  
SPY ABET NOD  
PASSWORD SAGE  
TINE OTTER  
SHEDS WOLE  
WIRE WORDPLAY  
ALL ARIAS TIRE  
PLAYBILL GAGA  
ALTA PRIOR  
ATONE PEAS  
RACK BILFOLD  
WILE ALIT NEO  
STOIE ALPS SOW



CRYPTOQUIP

S A Y Z S Y K Y C E N C H O S K Y -  
C E O T O Y V C N T O N J C V  
P M T Z H L Y Z G G Y M G Z Y

PTOA CEYSO NGGYCSCYV  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: SINCE MY CAREER INVOLVES SELLING TOPSOIL, YOU MIGHT SAY I'VE TRULY HIT PAY DIRT.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: O equals R

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.