

Beckhams in trouble?

Football

AFP, Madrid

England football captain David Beckham joined his wife Victoria in Switzerland for a skiing holiday after denying newspaper reports he had had an affair with his Spanish interpreter in Madrid.

Beckham has joined his former Spice Girl wife Victoria Adams and family on holiday after labelling newspaper claims about his private life as "ludicrous".

The player, who moved from Manchester United to Real madrid last July in a 25 million pound (45 million dollar) deal, insisted Monday that he was happily married after the News of the World story published claims he had a fling with former personal assistant Rebecca Loos.

The 25-year-old Loos is the daughter of a Dutch diplomat employed byu Beckham's former agents. She had been chaperoning Beckham because his wife had refused to move permanently to the Spanish capital.

Newspapers carried claims by the woman's brother and Beckham's former chauffeur in Madrid backing up the claims on Monday.

The 29-year-old singer and her parents, brother and two sons Brooklyn and Romeo flew out from

Heathrow airport for an Easter break on Sunday.

Beckham, 28, was able to take time off from Real Madrid as he is suspended for their Champions League quarter-final with Monaco on Wednesday.

In a statement, released through his agent, Beckham said on Sunday: "During the past few



DAVID BECKHAM

months I have become accustomed to reading more and more ludicrous stories about my private life.

"What appeared this morning is just one further example.

"The simple truth is that I am very happily married, have a wonderful wife and two very special kids.

"There is nothing that any third party can do to change these facts."

Aspokeswoman for the News of the World insisted the paper's story was true.

Beckham, made an OBE by Queen Elizabeth last November, could yet take legal action against the News of the World.

The Beckhams released statements in September and November denying claims their marriage was in trouble.

The former Manchester United midfielder married Adams when she was a member of the pop group the Spice Girls.

Last month Beckham, the world's best-paid footballer, opted for Queen Elizabeth's stockbroker to manage the fortune he has built up with his wife.

Beckham signed a deal for Cazenove to manage around 40 million pounds (73 million dollars) of the couple's wealth.

He earns more than 5 million pounds (9 million dollars) a year with the Spanish champions.

But he is reported to earn another 10 million dollars a year from off-pitch sponsorship deals.

His earnings currently dwarf those of his wife who is trying to revive her pop career.



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia players converge in celebration of Miguel Angel Mista's (on the ground) goal against Murcia during in on April 4.

Primera Liga

Valencia stay close

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Valencia kept the pressure on leaders Real Madrid after second-half goals from Mauricio Pellegrino and leading striker Mista gave them a 2-0 win at home to basement side Murcia on Sunday.

Rafa Benitez's side looked as though they were going to be frustrated by their ultra-defensive opponents until Argentine defender Pellegrino broke the deadlock with a powerful header 17 minutes from time and Mista secured the all-important win with a late volley.

With seven matches remaining Real, who claimed a somewhat fortunate 2-1 win at Albacete on Saturday, lead the table on 67 points. Valencia are hot on their heels on 66, while Deportivo Coruna are a distant third on 57.

Depor effectively waved goodbye to their title hopes after surrendering a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 at home to Real Betis.

Barcelona, who were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Villarreal on Saturday, are fourth on 56 but have a game in hand after last week's game with Betis was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch.

Atletico Madrid took an important step towards securing a place in next season's UEFA Cup with a 2-1 win at home to Valladolid, a victory

that leaves them in fifth place three points clear of Osasuna.

Valencia, who went into the game at Mestalla on a four-match winning run, found it hard to open up a crowded Murcia defence.

In-form winger Vicente made room for himself on the left on several occasions, but a forest of Murcia defenders were always on hand to clear the danger when he neared the area.

Without playmaker Pablo Aimar, who picked up a groin injury while on international duty with Argentina in midweek, Valencia appeared to lack the ideas needed to unpick the defence.

The home side had a strong appeal for a penalty turned down when Mista was bowled over in the area at the end of the first half, but it was not until 28 minutes into the second half that they got the breakthrough.

With his first touch of the ball, substitute Jorge Lopez swept a corner in from the right and Pellegrino burst through the defence to score with a bullet header.

The goal immediately settled a nervy Valencia and Mista grabbed his 18th goal of the season when he volleyed in from eight metres out after Murcia failed to clear a Vicente cross.

Earlier neatly fashioned first-half strikes from forward Albert Luque and midfielder Victor had put Depor 2-0 up against Betis after just 17

minutes, but the visitors pulled one back when Marcos Assuncao scored with a spectacular free kick just after the half hour.

Depor, who appeared to have their minds on the Champions League quarter-final second leg against AC Milan, eased up after the break and paid the price when substitute Dani bundled in 19 minutes from time after another free kick.

At the other end of the table Celta Vigo, whose coach Radomir Antic quit at the start of the week saying he felt overwhelmed by the team's problems, drew 0-0 at Athletic Bilbao.

But the Galicians are still four points adrift of Real Mallorca, who sit just above the relegation zone after a 1-1 draw at home to Real Sociedad.

TOP SIX

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

Real	31	20	7	4	65	37	67
Valencia	31	20	6	5	62	21	66
Deportivo	31	17	6	8	50	30	57
Barcelona	30	16	8	6	48	32	56
Atletico	31	13	9	9	38	36	48
Osasuna	31	10	15	6	32	27	45

Serie A

Roma sniff a chance

Football

AFP, Rome

Leaders AC Milan were held for a second successive to give championship rivals Roma a glimmer of hope in the race for the Italian league title.

A disappointing 1-1 draw away to relegation-threatened Modena enabled Roma, 3-0 winners at Lecce, to reduce Milan's lead at the top of Serie A to nine points.

Although Milan remain firm favourites to land their 17th Scudetto and their first since 1999, Roma do have a game in hand on Carlo Ancelotti's men and have to play the European champions at the San Siro on May 2.

In Sunday's late match, title-holders Juventus missed out on the chance to close the gap on Milan to seven points after losing 3-2 at Inter Milan, still firmly in the hunt for a place in next season's Champions League.

Inter's win, which completed a league double over their fierce rivals, saw them cement sixth place and move to within a point of fourth spot.

Milan have 69 points from their 28 matches played, 10 more than third-placed Juventus, who trail Roma by a point.

Jon Dahl Tomasson, in for the injured Andrei Shevchenko, gave Milan a first-half lead, snapping up the rebound after goalkeeper Adriano Zancoppe had failed to hold Clarence Seedorf's stinging shot.

But Nicola Amoroso denied the Champions League holders an 11th away victory with a 51st minute equaliser, side-footing home Diomansy Kamara's cross.

Two goals in a four-minute second-half spell helped Roma to a comfortable victory in Puglia.

Brazilian midfielder Emerson headed the visitors into a 51st minute lead before Cesare Bovo deflected Gaetano D'Agostino's free-kick into his own net. Roma captain Francesco Totti completed the scoring with a stoppage-time penalty after Antonio Cassano had been fouled in the box.

In Milan, Inter tore into Juve from the very start and their adventurous

approach paid dividends in the sixth minute.

Dejan Stankovic was fed by Christian Vieri and the Serb's square pass was poked into the net by Bafemini Martins off the glove of Gianluigi Buffon's glove.

But Inter sat back and allowed Juve to draw level in the 26th minute.

David Trezeguet's run towards goal was halted by Carlos Gamarra's sliding tackle, but the ball fell kindly for Mauro Camoranesi whose cross was headed into his own net by Kily Gonzalez.

Juve dominated the remainder of the half but a moment of madness from defender Gianluca Zambrotta restored Inter's lead.

The Italy international scythed down Stankovic in the box with an poorly timed challenge and Vieri drilled a powerful penalty straight down the centre of goal past Buffon for his 13th goal of the season.

Inter pulled further clear in the 47th minute when Stankovic stabbed home from three yards out Juve were left chasing the match but they did manage a late consolation goal through Marco Di Vaio.

Lazio held on to fourth place after defeating strugglers Siena 5-2 at the Olympic stadium.

Parma stay fifth behind Lazio only on goal difference after winning 2-0 at Chievo.

Down at the bottom, Ancona were relegated after going down 1-0 at home to Sampdoria.

TOP SIX

Italian football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, for, against, points):

Milan	28	21	6	1	56	19	69
Roma	27	18	6	3	59	13	60
Juventus	28	18	5	5	56	34	59
Lazio	27	14	5	8	43	30	47
Parma	28	13	8	7	44	37	47
Inter	28	13	7	8	47	29	46

Highly charged Highbury

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, London

The all-London clash between Arsenal and Chelsea at Highbury on Tuesday is the highlight of this week's Champions League quarter-final, second-leg games.

Delicately poised at 1-1, it is the only one of the four ties level after the first leg and comes hard on the heels of Arsenal's FA Cup defeat by Manchester United on Saturday.

Tuesday's other game looks much more straightforward as Real Madrid take a 4-2 lead to Monaco in the fight to meet the winners of the London derby in the semi-finals.

Holders AC Milan also look likely to progress as they visit Deportivo Coruna with a 4-1 lead.

Wednesday's other game sees Olympique Lyon trying to overturn a 2-0 deficit at home to Porto.

The forthcoming fixtures appeared to be on the minds of many of the teams involved at the weekend as only two of the eight quarter-finalists managed domestic victories.

Arsenal's hopes of a treble disappeared with their 1-0 FA Cup defeat to Manchester United on Saturday but manager Arsene Wenger would happily swap domestic success for an elusive taste of glory in Europe's premier competition.

The Frenchman's north London side, who have never gone beyond the last eight, have the advantage in terms of the away goal secured by Robert Pires in a tight, cagey first leg and Chelsea have to score to have any chance of progressing.

That has not proved a problem in the four games between the two teams this season but keeping goals out has -- Arsenal won the three previous domestic encounters 2-1.

However, Saturday's defeat to United, and the injuries to striker Jose Reyes and midfielder Freddie Ljungberg that came with it, have dented Arsenal's confidence.

Chelsea warmed up with their 12th premier league away win of the season, 1-0 at Tottenham Hotspur courtesy of a Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink goal.

With clean sheets in an unblemished record of five wins on the road in Europe this season, leaving Stamford Bridge has not been a problem.

Highbury, however, remains an exception. Chelsea lost there in league and FA Cup this season and have not won a major game at the ground since 1990.

As if trying to turn round a 4-2 deficit against Real Madrid was not a tough enough prospect, Monaco

will have to attempt it without several key players.

Midfield duo Lucas Bernardi (suspended) and Andreas Zikos are both out, as is outstanding centre back Sebastien Squillaci.

The French league leaders came from 3-0 down at halftime to draw 3-3 with AC Ajaccio on Friday and will need to show similar tenacity to have any chance of getting the minimum two goals required.

Real, who will be without suspended England midfielder David Beckham, beat Albacete 2-1 away on Saturday with two deflected Roberto Carlos free kicks.

Milan chose to rest Brazilian Kaka for most of Sunday's 1-1 draw at Modena but the on-song midfielder, who scored twice in first leg against Deportivo, should return to the starting lineup on Wednesday.

Andriy Shevchenko, who missed Sunday's game with a broken nose sustained playing for Ukraine last week, remains a doubt and Danish striker Jon Dahl Tomasson, who scored at Modena, is standing by to partner Filippo Inzaghi.

The Spaniards, who led in the San Siro before a 15-minute, four-goal blitz turned the tie around, drew 2-2 at home with Real Betis on Sunday.

Porto perhaps had an eye on Wednesday's trip to Lyon as they suffered their first league defeat of the season on Saturday, 2-0 at Gil Vicente.

Coach Jose Mourinho rested defender Nuno Valente and midfielder Costinha ahead of the European game.

Lyon also lost at the weekend, 2-1 at home to Olympique Marseille, and look certain to be without France striker Sidney Govou, who picked up an injury against Marseille. x

FIXTURES

Fixtures of this week's second leg matches in the quarter-finals of the Champions League:

Tuesday, April 6

At Highbury, London
Arsenal v Chelsea
First leg result: 1-1
At Monaco
AS Monaco v Real Madrid
First leg result: 2-4

Wednesday, April 7

At La Coruna
Deportivo Coruna v AC Milan
First leg result: 1-4
At Lyon
Olympique Lyon v Porto
First leg result: 0-2

AFP, London

Michael Owen's brace of goals kept Liverpool firmly in the hunt for a Champions League place as Gerard Houllier's men beat Blackburn 4-0 at Anfield.

Victory saw Liverpool go fourth - the last spot available to English clubs for next season's premier European club competition, a point clear of Newcastle and two ahead of Birmingham.

As well as Owen's double, Liverpool also netted late on through his fellow England striker Emile Heskey and an Andy Todd own-goal.

"It was a strong, powerful, determined performance. We have performed very well at times and not got the result but today we have got both the performance and the result," said Liverpool's French manager Gerard Houllier.

Defeat took Blackburn to the edge of the relegation zone and their manager Graeme Souness, the former Liverpool captain, said: "Long before today we realised how dangerous our position is.

"We have seven games to go and we need to win three of them and there is no hiding from that fact."

Also on Sunday, Aston Villa were left two points behind city rivals Birmingham following a 1-1 draw at home to struggling Manchester City.

On Saturday, high-flyers Chelsea assured themselves of a place in next season's Champions League with a 1-0 win over London rivals Tottenham thanks to Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's first-half goal.

The result saw Chelsea close to within four points of leaders Arsenal. The two London clubs meet again on Tuesday at Arsenal's Highbury ground



MICHAEL OWEN

TOP SIX

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

Arsenal	30	22	8	0	58	20	74
Chelsea	31	22	4	5	58	24	70
Man Utd	30	19	5	6	56	30	62
Liverpool	31	13	10	8	46	31	49
Newcastle	31	12	12	7	45	33	48
Birmingham	31	12	10	9	37	36	46