

Premiership
Okocha's happy birthday

Football

AFP, London

Djibril Cisse eased Liverpool fans' pain over the loss of Michael Owen to Real Madrid with his first goal in English football as the Reds kicked off a new era with a 1-1 draw at Tottenham on Saturday.

The opening day of the 2004/05 Premiership season was also one to remember for Jay-Jay Okocha.

The Nigerian playmaker celebrated his 31st birthday with two goals -- the first a spectacular free-kick -- as Bolton ran up the biggest win of the day with a 4-1 rout of Charlton.

Aston Villa were the only other team to get their campaign off to winning start.

Goals from Darius Vassell and Carlton Cole, on his first appearance since joining on a season-long loan, earned David O'Leary's side a 2-0 win over Southampton at Villa Park.

The most entertaining match of the day came at the Riverside, where Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink scored a

It was a goal Owen, unveiled as a Real player on Saturday, would have been proud off.

But the Frenchman's effort was cancelled out by Jermain Defoe's late equaliser as Spurs battled back for a well-deserved point in their first match under new boss Jacques Santini.

Benitez was delighted with the way his team had started the match, less pleased with how they faded but philosophical overall.

"It is always difficult when a new manager arrives for the team to do everything perfect," the Spaniard said, before spelling out exactly how he wants Cisse to fill Owen's boots.

"I would like him to score 20 goals and he has the potential and the capacity to do it."

Okocha, who failed to score a single goal in the Premiership last season, needed only 11 minutes to open his account for this term, rifling home a 25-yard free-kick which Dean Kiely could only touch into the top left-hand corner.

The Nigerian added a second in the second half and Henrik Pedersen also

Downing had cancelled out Craig Bellamy's early opener for the visitors.

First division champions Norwich shared the points with fellow top flight newcomers Crystal Palace in the first Premiership match at Carrow Road in nine seasons.

Andy Johnson earned Palace their first point of what promises to be a tough season when he cancelled out Darren Huckerby's first-half opener for Norwich.

West Brom, the third promoted team, got off to a perfect start when Neil Clement fired them ahead in the 33rd minute at Blackburn. But the home side managed to salvage a point thanks to Craig Short's equaliser 20 minutes from the end.

Manchester City picked up where they left off last season, frustrating their long-suffering fans by squandering a string of chances before settling for a 1-1 draw with Fulham.

After taking a first half lead thanks to a clever overhead finish from Robbie Fowler, City should have gone on to win comfortably but instead conceded an equaliser to Collins John

Now it's the
'Hand of
Hasselbaink!'

AFP, London

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson was fuming at what he described as Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's "Hand of God" goal which allowed Middlesbrough to earn an injury time equaliser at the Riverside on Saturday.

Television replays indicated that Hasselbaink had scored with his hand as he stooped low at the back post to bring the match level at 2-2.

Newcastle had looked set for all three points thanks to an 83rd minute penalty from Alan Shearer after Stuart Downing had cancelled out Craig Bellamy's early opener for the visitors.

An angry Robson said afterwards: "He has done the hand of God again - or the hand of Hasselbaink I should say. He has handled it, he has not headed it and don't let them tell you anything different.

"We are upset of course and the players are as well as we were twice in the lead and we lost it late on, and it's something we did so many times last year.

"But I have to be satisfied with the performance of the team especially as we had a makeshift back four."

US eves in
quarters

AFP, Athens

Former world champions the United States qualified for the quarter-finals of the Olympic Games women's football tournament Saturday after beating Brazil in an ill-tempered clash.

A second-half penalty from skipper Mia Hamm and a superb individual effort from striker Abby Wambach secured a place in the last eight for the Americans, who beat Greece 3-0 in an earlier Group C match.

Elsewhere Saturday hosts Greece were left staring down the barrels of elimination from the competition as they were beaten 1-0 by Australia, their second defeat of the tournament.

In other games China were held to a disappointing 1-1 draw with Mexico in Group F, a result that assures Germany of their quarter-final berth, and Nigeria beat Japan 1-0 in Group E.

Brazil had the better of a bruising first half against 1996 Olympic gold medalists the USA which saw players from both teams flying into tackles.

USA midfielder Shannon Boxx was lucky to escape punishment for one wild two-footed challenge that left Brazilian skipper Julian a writhing agony.

Brazil twice hit the woodwork in the first half and carved out several goalscoring chances. Two of them fell to inspirational striker Marta, who tested Briana Scurry in the US goal with a firm low drive on 18 minutes before having a curling free-kick comfortably gathered.

The US came out much stronger in the second half and took the lead when Hamm converted from the spot after being brought crashing down in the box on 58 minutes. Wambach wrapped up the points when she cut in from the right, beat two defenders and drilled in from six yards out.

Elsewhere, Australia kept their hopes of a quarter-final berth alive after Heather Garrook's 27th minute goal downed Greece.

In Group F, China, still reeling in shock from their 8-0 trouncing by Germany, found themselves a goal down after just 11 minutes when Mexico striker Maribel Dominguez tucked away a low shot on the rebound.

The Chinese were stunned by the strike but slowly came back into the match to level when Zhang Ming's shot from the edge of the area flew in on 34 minutes.

Despite dominating for long periods thereafter China struggled to hit the target and now face almost certain elimination unless Germany defeat Mexico by a cricket score in the final group game.

Japan meanwhile went down to Nigeria when Vera Okolo netted on 55 minutes in the night's other game in Group E.



PHOTO: AFP

TEVEZ AIR! Argentina's Carlos Tevez scoring with a flying header against Tunisia in Patras, during their Group C match on August 14.

Argentina in last eight

AFP, Athens



Argentina locked up a quarter-final berth in the Olympic football competition with a dominating 2-0 Group C win

over Tunisia here on Saturday.

The Argentines scored two delightful goals through Boca Juniors striker Oscar Tevez in the first half and Barcelona ace Javier Saviola 17 minutes from the end to wrap up a conclusive victory.

"I am very satisfied with the result," said Argentinian skipper Roberto Ayala. "We have to continue in the same way if we are to reach our targets."

Argentina, following their 6-0 rout of Serbia and Montenegro in Wednesday's opening game, will finish top of their group, irrespective of the outcome of their final game against Australia on

Tuesday.

The Tunisians, who were held 1-1 by Australia in their first game, doggedly stuck to the South Americans in the first half.

The deadlock was broken by Tevez in the 39th minute, netting with a superb diving header after a wicked cross swung in from the left flank by Inter Milan star Kily Gonzalez.

Argentina made the game safe in the 73rd minute when Saviola, a 56th-minute substitution, clinically finished off a sparkling piece of skill by Gonzalez.

Gonzalez put his foot on the ball and deftly spun his marker on the edge of the Tunisian box to play Saviola in on goal and give the goalkeeper no chance.

Australia will need a draw against Argentina to ensure they go through to the last eight after cruising past Serbia and Montenegro 5-1 with Spanish-based striker John Aloisi and Ahmad Elrich each scoring twice after Everton midfielder Tim Cahill opened the scoring.

South Korea virtually made sure of a

place in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 win over Mexico in Athens.

But they were indebted to a fine performance from skipper and goalkeeper Kim Young-Kwang, who pulled off a string of fine saves to guarantee the three points which put them on top of Group A with four points from two matches.

They share top spot with Mali who beat hosts Greece 2-0.

Korea and Mali meet in the final group match on Monday.

"It was a very tough match for us," said Korean coach Kim Ho-Kon. "But we gave our best to overcome the difficulties. Our next match is against Mali which will be very hard as all African sides are tough."

The Koreans are making their fifth successive appearance at the Games and went into the match under pressure having squandered a two-goal lead in their first match when they were held 2-2 by Greece in Salonika.

But Kim Jung-Woo gave them a spectacular lead after just 16 minutes

with a 30-yard piledriver set up by Kim Do-Heon.

Mexico, held to a 0-0 draw by Mali in their opener, would have felt aggrieved to have still been down at the break after Diego Martinez and Omar Bravo had both brought saves out of Kim Young-Kwang.

Israel Lopez also went close with a shot which just drifted wide of the target.

The Koreans pressed for a second goal after the break and Lee Chun-Soo was unlucky to have a fierce, long range drive deflected behind for a corner by Aaron Galindo.

But back came the Mexicans and once again Kim Young-Kwang needed to be alert to push an Antonio Zinha drive around the post and the goalkeeper then denied the same player in injury time to ensure Korea's three points.

Mali beat Greece with first-half strikes by Mamadi Berthe and Teneman Ndiaye.



PHOTO: AFP

Middlesbrough's Dutch striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink (R) heading in the second goal against Newcastle United at Riverside Stadium in Middlesbrough on August 14.

controversial injury-time goal to earn Middlesbrough a 2-2 draw at home to Newcastle.

Cisse, Liverpool's 14-million-pound record signing, put the Reds on course for victory in Rafael Benitez's first Premiership match in charge with an instinctive shot on the turn 12 minutes before the break at White Hart Lane.

claimed a double for Sam Allardyce's men with Kevin Lisbie getting Charlton's only goal.

Television replays indicated that Hasselbaink's late equaliser for Boro had been scored with his hand as he stooped low at the back post.

Newcastle had looked set for all three points thanks to an 83rd minute penalty from Alan Shearer after Stuart

just before the hour mark.

A Robbie Savage free-kick gave Birmingham an early lead at Portsmouth but the Wales midfielder saw his

effort quickly cancelled out by a David Unsworth penalty as the two sides settled for a 1-1 draw in a fiercely contested encounter at Fratton Park.

Haiti braces for Brazil

Football

INTERNET SOURCE

Rarely has an international friendly upstaged a World Cup qualifier in the Caribbean, but then again, Brazil has never played Haiti in Port-au-Prince.

On Wednesday, just hours before Jamaica hosts the United States in a 2006 qualifier in Kingston, the bigger spectacle will be in Haiti, where the reigning world champions will double as diplomats and peacekeepers. In a gesture designed to reduce gun violence in Haiti, the Brazilians will play a friendly in which the price of admission to the 25,000-seat Silvio Cator Stadium will be a firearm.

The tariff may prove steep to some, but considering how much Haitians love Brazilian soccer, the historic opportunity to see Ronaldo, Ronaldinho et al may prove persuasive. Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and soccer federation president Ricardo Teixeira will be in attendance for a cause to which the Brazilians have warmed wholeheartedly. "Ronaldo insists on being there,

[coach Carlos Alberto] Parreira insists on going," Teixeira said. "All of us in Brazil have to do our bit to end the years of fighting."

The game was the brainchild of Haiti's interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, who assumed the post after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a coup last February. Brazil has 1,200 soldiers in Haiti as part of a United Nations force.

The game nearly afforded South Floridians a chance to catch a glimpse of Brazil before Wednesday's match. The Brazilians had agreed to stay at the Hilton Soccer Complex in Sunrise and stage a practice for public viewing at Lockhart Stadium before choosing a less complicated itinerary.

"They were all set to practice at Lockhart but decided it would be easier to go straight to the Dominican Republic before flying to Port-au-Prince," said local promoter Eddie Rodger, who books the Hilton site.

Rodger said five levels of security will be employed to assure Brazil's safety in Haiti, with U.S. and Brazilian forces

helping provide order. The team will fly helicopters to the stadium for the 2:30 p.m. match and depart the same way. Field turf has been placed over the playing surface, which might otherwise be unplayable.

The Brazilian army, in charge of security for the game in Port-au-Prince, has the main task of ensuring idolation of the visiting team by locals does not cause problems.

General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, commander of Brazilian UN peacekeeping troops on Haiti, told Friday's O Globo newspaper. "The people here are just mad about our team and it's this huge adoration which could cause problems." The Brazilian army, which has 1,200 men involved in the UN peacekeeping mission, has formed a rapid reaction force which could be deployed inside the stadium to help the 100 Brazilian soldiers and 100 Haiti policemen which were originally designated for the game.

The Brazilian army will also have 360 men outside the Sylvio Cator stadium during the match which is likely to have just 15,000 spectators.

Eriksson on the attack

Football

AFP, London

A defiant Sven-Goran Eriksson has defended his right to earn more than four million pounds a year and called upon his unnamed detractors on the Football Association board to confront him face to face.

The England coach also spoke to defend his record as England coach so far, describing the Euro 2004 quarter-final defeat by Portugal on penalties as "unlucky" and insisting that only bad results would force him out of his post.

Eriksson, who has clearly been angered by the controversy which has raged at the FA in the wake of his affair with secretary Faria Alam, described the events of the past few weeks as a "soap opera" and a "mess". However, he made it clear that he

never considered stepping down from his post, especially after receiving support from David Beckham and fellow England players.

"I want to go on working for this organisation. I want to go on working with the England team. I want to qualify for the 2006 World Cup and to do a better tournament than in the past two tournaments," he declared.

"I have always hoped in this country that I am judged on football results and that is it. I can quit if we don't qualify for the World Cup but that is football."

Eriksson's first test comes in next week's friendly against Ukraine in Newcastle, although his real challenges are the first two World Cup qualifiers away to Austria and Poland early next month.

Failure to secure at least three points from those two games would provide extra ammunition to those members of the FA board who still seem

to have reservations about him as England coach.

But while one FA board member, Dave Henson, put his name to concerns about Eriksson's conduct in his private life, other critics have hidden behind the protection of being 'unidentified sources' in off-the-record briefings.

The England coach insisted: "Un-named board members? I could not care less about that. If someone has something to tell me then they should tell me (to my face)."

"If I have an opinion about a person, I prefer to go to that person and tell them whatever it is. No one in this building (the FA's Soho Square headquarters) or on the board has ever told me anything about that."

The reservations about Eriksson are understood to stem from his salary rise to more than four million pounds (7.3 million dollars) a year only a few

months before he failed to take England past the quarter-finals of a second consecutive major tournament.

But the Swede, who gained that rise after resisting overtures from Chelsea, insisted: "I can't do anything about it. I will not quit the job for that reason, I will not ask for less money."

"I don't know if I am paid too much or not. I know what other managers are earning and I don't think I am the highest-paid manager in the world. In fact, I know that I am not."

"If it is too much or not, that is up to other people to judge. But I have never understood in this job why you are not judged as other football managers are."

"I have never read a word about how much Fabio Capello, Marcello Lippi, Jose Mourinho or Sir Alex Ferguson earn. But in this job, I see it every day."

"If it is the biggest job, then it should be the best paid, shouldn't it?"

Bundesliga
Makaay to the
rescue

AFP, Berlin

Dutch international Roy Makaay scored his first goal of the 2004/05 Bundesliga season to save 10-man Bayern Munich from an early season defeat in a 1-1 draw with Hertha Berlin on Saturday.

Makaay, who scored 23 Bundesliga goals in his debut season, struck in the 46th minute to open his account for the campaign and cancel out Marcelinho's opener at the Olympic Stadium.

While Bayern stumbled champions Werder Bremen made light work of dismissing Hansa Rostock at the Ostseestadion in a 4-0 win.

Hansa defeated Bremen 3-1 in the corresponding fixture last term but three goals in nine second half minutes saw Bremen coast to victory and to the top of the table.

Ligue 1
Champions held

Football

AFP, Paris

Champions Lyon did well to earn a 1-1 draw against lively visitors Sochaux in the second round of the French football championship on Saturday.

Paris Saint Germain were another team to have trouble, only drawing 2-2 against promoted Caen, but Monaco managed to beat another promoted side, Istres, 2-1.

Sochaux deservedly went ahead six minutes before the break with a near post header from Lionel Potillon in-off the post from Mathieu freckie.

Lyon got their equaliser from a penalty kick in the 72nd minute. Juninho sent keeper Teddy Richard the wrong way to spark celebrations in the Gerland stadium.

French giants Paris Saint Germain's stuttering start to the new season continued when they were held by first division new-

comers Caen.

Monaco's Mohamed Kallon, who scored twice in Monaco's 3-0 Champions League victory at Slovenia club Nova Gorica in midweek, found the net against Istres after just six minutes from a near post header after a cross from the right by Douglas Maicon.

His goal celebrations were cut short however when he was immediately handed a yellow card by referee Dominique Fraise for taking his shirt off.

Marouane Chamakh was Bordeaux's hero as he notched up a hat-trick in their 5-1 win over Nice at the Jacques Chaban-Delmas stadium.

In other matches, 1998 French league champions Lens had a 3-0 victory over Saint Etienne, Nantes drew 1-1 with Bastia, Auxerre beat Rennes 3-1, Toulouse thumped hosts Strasbourg 4-1 and Metz were away day winners at Ajaccio.

Rookies earn
England call

AFP, London

England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson injected youth into his squad by calling up Shaun Wright-Phillips, Glen Johnson, Chris Kirkland and Jermain Defoe for next Wednesday's friendly against Ukraine.

That left Phil Neville, Joe Cole and Ian Walker sweating on their immediate international futures after being the most obvious casualties from the Euro 2004 squad.

Cole has been struggling for full fitness lately, but Wright-Phillips and Jermaine Jenas now have a chance to impress Eriksson next week after being preferred to Chelsea's Scott Parker for the St James' Park clash.

Neville, meanwhile, has also been left out, while Chelsea's Glen Johnson, who looks set to start the season as the club's second-choice right-back, has been given the boost of another senior call-up.