

Fergie doesn't want Glazer

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson has waded into the take-over debate and stated that he does not want the club to be in the hands of an outside investor like American business tycoon Malcolm Glazer.

Glazer, already an unpopular figure among United supporters, has so far been thwarted in his takeover bid, despite causing a stir recently by ousting three members of the board at United's annual general meeting.

Bankers JP Morgan subsequently pulled out of plans to financially support The Tampa Bay Buccaneers owner's takeover bid.

But as Glazer is still believed to be toting round looking to raise the funds to complete a hostile 800 million pound bid, Ferguson has declared his opposition to such plans by stating the importance of the relationship between United and its fans.

"When the plc started, there were grave doubts about it - I had them myself," Ferguson told Manchester United's website on Sunday.

"But there is definitely a better balance to it now. I think the supporters have come round to that."

"There is a stronger rapport between the club and the fans than has ever been."

"I have always tried to be the bridge between the club and the fans and I have tried to support the fans in a lot of their pleas and causes."

"Sometimes we can get too emotional as a club with things that are happening but we are both of a common denominator; we don't want the club to be in anyone else's hands. That is the way that the club stands with that. I support that."

When rumours of Glazer's planned approach for the Premiership giants first surfaced, his advisors let it be known that Ferguson's position was not under threat.

But since then, the 76-year-old American has seen his plans thwarted by the club's supporters, chief executive David Gill, and bankers JP Morgan.

While Ferguson does not have a seat on the United board and his row with major shareholder John Magnier over record-breaking racehorse Rock of Gibraltar did cause the club embarrassment, after 18 years at the helm, the Scot's opinions carry enormous weight.

Scottish Premiership Derby honours Rangers'

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers won 2-0 in a heated Old Firm game at Ibrox on Saturday to narrow Celtic's lead in the Scottish Premiership to a single point.

Nacho Novo's penalty and Dado Prso's header gave Alex McLeish's side the vital three points in a game where Celtic ended with only nine men on the park following the sending off of Alan Thompson and Chris Sutton.

Celtic looked the more comfortable side in the opening stages without creating many scoring opportunities but after 15 minutes Rangers scored against the run of play. Joos Valgaeren committed a crazy challenge on Novo inside the box and referee Kenny Clark had no option but to point to the spot.

The Spaniard picked himself up and slotted the ball low into the bottom right-hand corner of the net to make it 1-0.

Sutton was becoming frustrated and gave away a needless free-kick when he went in late on Rae on 36 minutes. Fernando Rickson swung the free-kick in from the left and Prso rose above the Celtic defence to send a looping header beyond Hedman and double Rangers' lead.



PHOTO: AFP

EARN-SHOW! West Bromwich Albion's Robert Earnshaw goes for a somersault to celebrates his goal against Arsenal at Highbury.

Premiership

Tie-day at the top

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea maintained their two-point lead over Arsenal at the top of the Premiership as the two title contenders were held to hard-fought draws by Bolton and West Brom.

The Gunners briefly closed the gap on Jose Mourinho's side with a 1-1 draw over the Baggies.

Arsenal moved a point nearer to Chelsea as the Blues match against Bolton was delayed by 30 minutes because of traffic congestion in west London.

French midfielder Robert Pires opened the scoring nine minutes into the second half when his swirling shot crept into the net.

West Brom manager Bryan Robson urged his side to score an equaliser and Robert Earnshaw eventually pulled them level in the 79th minute when he drilled the ball past Arsenal keeper Jens Lehmann.

Chelsea made Bolton pay for the delay when Irish winger Damien Duff broke the deadlock in the opening minute of the match.

The pacy Duff raced clear of a stunned Bolton rearguard to slot a close-range effort past Bolton keeper Jussi Jaaskelainen.

Chelsea midfielder Cardoso Tiago then popped up in the 48th minute to double the Blues lead.

Bolton striker Kevin Davies narrowed the lead in the 52nd minute when he busied his way through a crowded penalty area to nudge the ball past Chelsea shot-stopper Petr

Cech. Radhi Jaidi took advantage of a rare lapse by the Chelsea defence to score a last-gasp equaliser in the 87th minute.

Manchester United had earlier closed the gap on the runaway Premiership leaders with a hard-fought 2-0 victory over Charlton at Old Trafford.

Ryan Giggs' shot bounced off Charlton defender Luke Young to wrong-foot goalkeeper Dean Kiely after 41 minutes.

United's Paul Scholes then struck a spectacular volley five minutes after the interval to complete the scoring.

At the Riverside Stadium, Middlesbrough moved to fourth in the Premiership after they overpowered a lacklustre Liverpool.

Excellent work by Stewart Downing resulted in a pinpoint cross that Chris Riggott diverted past Liverpool goalkeeper Chris Kirkland.

Boudewijn Zenden doubled Boro's lead in the 62nd minute when he ghosted clear of Liverpool backline before lifting the ball over Kirkland.

An injury ravaged Liverpool side failed to trouble the Middlesbrough goal and the only consolation for Reds' manager Rafael Benitez was the return of talismanic midfielder Steven Gerrard.

Duncan Ferguson made sure Everton stay third in the Premiership as his looping second-half header earned the Toffees a narrow 1-0 victory over Fulham.

Newcastle boss Graham Swann can breathe a sigh of relief as his side romped to a 2-0 victory over Crystal Palace.

Dutch striker Patrick Kluivert had deservedly given Newcastle the lead in the 79th minute when he backheeled Craig Bellamy's low cross past Eagles goalkeeper Gabor Kiraly.

Bellamy then made sure of victory two minutes before the end, as he jinked through the Palace defence before drilling the ball past Kiraly.

Newly-promoted Norwich were celebrating as they held on for a nervous 2-1 victory over fellow strugglers Southampton.

The Saints took the lead in the 24th minute through James Beattie's arrowed shot, but the lead lasted just four minutes as burly midfielder Damien Francis fired the Canaries level.

Francis then made sure Norwich earned their first top-flight victory since 1995 with a close range effort seven minutes after the interval.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Chelsea 14 10 3 1 23 6 33
Arsenal 14 9 4 1 38 18 31
Everton 14 9 2 3 16 11 29
Boro 14 7 4 3 24 16 25
Man Utd 14 6 6 2 16 10 24
Bolton 14 6 5 3 22 8 23

Pele is jealous!

INTERNET SOURCE

Golden Ball contender Adriano has accused Pele of jealousy after he was criticised by the Brazilian legend.

Adriano's 17 goals in 18 games in both the Champions League and Serie A this season have been crucial in Roberto Mancini's outfit progressing to the knockout stages in Europe's top competition and their unbeaten start to the league campaign.

His efforts have earned him a nomination for the prestigious European Footballer of the Year award, but compatriot Pele was recently quoted as saying the 22-year-old is not a great player.

"I've read what Pele has said," Adriano admitted.

"Maybe he hasn't seen me play. We, the Brazilian players, always speak fondly of Pele - he has been a great player."

"But he always fears someone might take his place. Jealousy!"

Barca simply

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Michael Owen nine minutes after the break, but the former Liverpool man could not stem the tide.

Former Real player Eto'o scored his tenth goal of the campaign on 28 minutes after a dreadful blunder by the visitors' Brazilian wingback Roberto Carlos, who let a through ball from compatriot but rival on the night Ronaldinho carry towards keeper Iker Casillas.

As the two Real men looked aghast Eto'o had the simple task of prodding the ball into the empty net.

Two minutes before the break the contest was as good as over as Van Bronkhorst found Ronaldinho marauding on the left, and after a smart interchange via Portuguese playmaker Deco, it was the Dutchman who drove home low and true.

The off-form Ronaldo had only a booking in the final moments of the opening half for a foul on Cutiliano Belletti to show for his pains as the white machine failed to get out of first gear.

After the break Zinedine Zidane shaved a post and Owen headed off target when he should have done better before, at the other end, Casillas did well to tip over a rising Ronaldinho effort.

But the long-haired Brazilian had the last laugh on 75 minutes, striking home the penalty for the clincher after Guti tussled with Eto'o, whose speedy runs into the box gave Real's rickety backfour a torrid evening.

On the downside for Barca, their former Celtic striker Henrik Larsson went off with a knee injury after tumbling awkwardly on 69 minutes chasing a pass from the impressive maulerauder Xavi.

Such was the lamentable nature of Real's showing that frustrated coach Mariano Garcia Remon hauled off both Zidane and Raul in the closing stages and sent on Santiago Solari and Albert Celades.

In Saturday's remaining game inconsistent Deportivo La Coruna went sixth, level on points with Valencia, after Diego Tristan and Luque brought a 2-0 win at Villarreal.

TOP SIX

Spanish football league standings after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Barcelona 12 9 2 1 24 7 29
Real 12 7 1 4 16 9 22
Spainol 11 6 2 3 13 6 20
Valencia 12 5 4 3 19 11 19
Levantis 11 6 1 4 15 13 19
Deportivo 12 5 4 3 14 15 19

Italian Cup

Crespo to Milan's rescue

Football

AFP, Milan

Argentine striker Hernan Crespo scored his first goal for AC Milan as the reigning Serie A champions won 2-1 away to Palermo in their Italian Cup third round, first leg tie on Saturday.

Crespo, on a season-long loan from English Premiership side Chelsea, put Milan ahead in the 53rd minute in Sicily, side-footing home Clarence Seedorf's low cross.

The goal will prove a massive boost to Crespo's confidence which has been flagging following a string of missed chances since his arrival from London.

Dutch international Seedorf netted Milan's second goal 16 minutes later, firing in from the edge of the penalty box after good work from Vikash Dhorasoo.

Palermo halved the deficit 11 minutes from time when Luca Toni cashed in on an error from Milan keeper Christian Abbiati.

Abbiati atoned for his blunder moments later, tipping Toni's header over the bar.

Florentina took a step towards the quarter-finals after beating Parma 2-0.

Former Real Madrid star Javier Portillo gave the Florence club a first half lead with a close range header, before Chilean midfielder Jaime Andres Valdes scored with an angled drive.

Florentina will now fancy their chances of reaching the last eight when they visit Parma for the second leg in January.

Daivide Di Michele scored twice and then saved a stoppage-time penalty as Udinese fought back bravely to win a nine-goal thriller at Lecce.

Udinese were 3-0 down inside the first 31 minutes, but hauled themselves back from the dead with Di Michele and Antonio Di Natale grabbing two goals apiece for the visitors.

Trailing 5-4, Lecce had the chance to earn a draw when Udinese keeper Samir Handanovic brought

down Valeri Bojinov to concede a penalty in stoppage time.

Handanovic was sent off and because Udinese had used all their substitutes, Di Michele went between the posts.

The 28-year-old capped a memorable match by saving Mirko Vucinic's penalty with his outstretched leg to give Udinese victory.

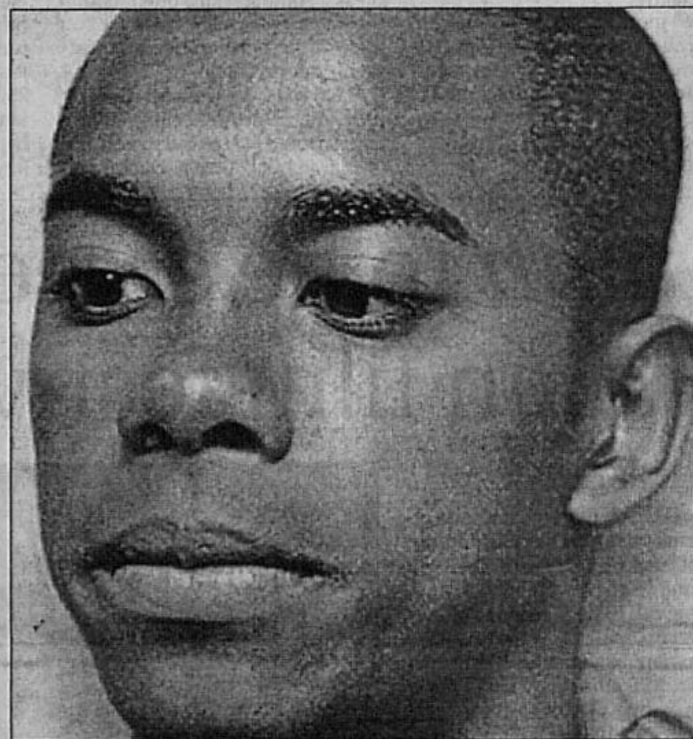
On Sunday, Cagliari take on Lazio and Inter Milan entertain Bologna.

In Friday's matches, league leaders Juventus were surprisingly beaten 2-0 at Atalanta, crisis-ridden Roma lost 2-1 at home to Siena and Sampdoria won 2-0 at Torino, the only second division side left in the competition.

Midfielder Andrea Lazzari scored a goal in each half for Atalanta, who are anchored to the bottom of Serie A and still looking for their first league win since being promoted.

Two headed goals from Tore Andre Flo gave Siena a narrow victory in the capital. The Norwegian striker struck the winner four minutes from time after Francesco Totti had equalised for the home side.

Chelsea favourites for Robinho?



ROBINHO

Football

BBC ONLINE

Chelsea are leading the chase to sign Brazilian youngster Robinho from south American side Santos, according to a newspaper report.

Real Madrid had been favourites to snap up the 20-year-old, £14m-rated forward.

But the player's agent, Wagner Rubiero, told the News of the World: "Chelsea are the only team who have confirmed they are prepared to pay £14m."

"Rubinho is excited at the prospect of the move and we are trying to make sure everything is okay."

According to Rubiero, the Blues are keen to seal the deal when the transfer window re-opens in January.

He added: "We are following Chelsea very closely in order to give Robinho all the information, so he is not scared of going to a country so different to Brazil."

"But Robinho asked me to check clubs in Europe after what happened with his mother. Chelsea have made an offer and that is encouraging."

Robinho, who plays for Santos, wants to leave Brazil in order to avoid a repeat of the recent kidnapping of his mother, who was snatched during a barbecue.

The player has been dubbed by Brazilian legend Rubinho as "my successor".

He has been pivotal at Santos and has already attracted interest from other top European clubs, including AC Milan, Bayern Munich and Barcelona.

Rijkaard taking it cool

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard warned his team to keep their feet on the ground after the comprehensive 3-0 win over arch-rivals Real Madrid at the Nou Camp on Saturday.

"We've got to keep working hard and not get carried away just because we've won this match," the Dutchman told reporters. "The result shows us the way forward but we mustn't start thinking we are unbeatable."

Barca's victory put them seven points ahead of Real at the top of the Primera Liga after 12 matches this season.

"I was very happy with our performance because of the fact we scored three goals against a quality team, and I was delighted with the effort of all our players," said Rijkaard.

"We put Real under pressure throughout the game and our defence gave them no room to attack."

Real Madrid coach Mariano Garcia Remon said his side's defeat could have serious consequences on their morale ahead of Tuesday's Champions League match against Bayer Leverkusen.

"I'm worried about how this defeat could affect us because we've got a game on Tuesday that is a vital one for us," said the Real coach.

"We lost because Barca were the better side but the main problem was that we didn't know how to react after they took the lead." Barca went in front on 28 minutes when former Real player Samuel Eto'o pounced on a defensive mix-up between fullback Roberto Carlos and goalkeeper Iker Casillas to run the ball into an empty net.

"It was an infantile error that led to their first goal and it came at the worst time for us," said Garcia Remon. "After that we just couldn't cope with the pressure."

"But we'll keep fighting for the title and postpone our contest against them until we meet at the Bernabeu later in the season."

Bundesliga

Bayern get there

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich reached the Bundesliga summit for the first time in 18 months following a convincing 3-1 win over Kaiserslautern at the Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

May 24, 2003 was the last time Bayern occupied top spot but they ended that 47-game wait with a comeback victory over struggling Kaiserslautern.

While Bayern will be elated to finally be top of the pile they know it could be for just 24 hours with VfL Wolfsburg ready to leapfrog them if they beat SV Hamburg on Sunday.

The Bundesliga race is certainly hotting up and defending champions Werder Bremen have left themselves a mountain to climb to defend their title.

Ten-man Bremen dropped precious points after a surprise 2-1 defeat at promoted Arminia Bielefeld and now lie eight points behind Bayern.

Schalke 04 sit in third, two points adrift while VfB Stuttgart are fourth, trailing by three points.

Magath had called for an early goal to settle his team but the Bayern manager did not expect it to come from the visitors.

With just seven minutes gone Oliver Kahn, making his 450th Bundesliga appearance, failed to hold a cross cum shot from Ferydoon Zandi and Thomas Riedl stroked the ball in from close range.

Kaiserslautern started dreaming of an historic win but Bayern's Peruvian international Claudio Pizarro equalised barely five minutes later.

German international Torsten Frings then shot Bayern ahead on 26 minutes after latching onto an intelligent flick then showing great poise to chip the ball in.

Peruvian international Paolo Guerrero then enhanced his superb reputation, replacing Dutch international Roy Makaay in the 63rd minute and scoring less than sixty seconds later.

It was the 20-year-old Guerrero's fourth goal in his last three league matches for Bayern.

Last season Bremen led from the front but they must come from behind to retain their crown after their 2-1 reverse at Bielefeld.

Goals from Fatmir Vata (45) and Marco Kuentzel (77) cancelled out Ivan Klasnic's strike and more misery was piled on Bremen when Paraguayan Nelson Haedo Valdez was red-carded late on.

Schalke 04 stayed firmly in the title race courtesy of a 3-0 triumph over Bayer Leverkusen.

Brazilian pair Ailton (37) and Lincoln (71) were both on the scoresheet as Schalke inflicted a first home defeat on Bayer to stay within two points of Bayern.

Leverkusen must now lift themselves for Tuesday's vital Champions League trip to Real Madrid.

At the bottom end of the table fallen giants Borussia Dortmund registered a crucial 2-0 win at

home to SC Freiburg.

Dortmund are now six points clear of the relegation trapdoor handing manager Bert van Marwijk some breathing space.

New Hansa Rostock manager Joerg Berger endured a painful debut as his team conceded a late equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Hertha Berlin.

Brazilian Marcelinho equalised with virtually the last kick of the match to deny Hansa the spoils and ensure they remain bottom of the 18-strong table.

TOP SIX

German football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):
Bayern 14 9 2 3 25 14 29
Wolfsburg 13 9 0 4 23 18 27
Schalke 14 9 0 5 22 19 27
Stuttgart 14 8 2 4 25 15 26
Hannover 13 7 2 4 21 14 23
Bielefeld 14 7 2 5 17 15 23

Football

AFP/REUTERS, London

Brazilian football legend Socrates made a muted comeback with English non-league side Garforth Town in the 2-2 draw with Tadcaster Albion on Saturday.

The 50-year-old midfielder, who retired 14 years ago having skippered Brazil to two World Cups, came off the bench in the 78th minute for a 12-minute appearance at Wheatley Park.

Famous for his incisive passing, the Brazilian managed a stinging shot and three neat lay-offs in his brief appearance for the non-league side. Socrates admitted he was shocked by the brisk pace of the match and concerned by the extreme British weather.

The legend was clearly troubled by the bracing wind and sat on the bench buried under a collection of coats, hats and gloves.

"It was far too cold," Socrates said through an interpreter. "The second I got out I had this incredible headache. "I'm just not used to it. The last time I saw snow was years and years ago," he joked.

"It was much faster than what I am used to. In Brazil games just aren't that fast. It was good fun and a good game," added the former sambastar.

More than 1,300 supporters crammed into Garforth's stadium to catch a glimpse of a player who captained the classic 1982 Brazil World Cup side that included the likes of Zico



PHOTO: AP

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES: Brazilian legend Socrates takes a shot while playing for English non-league side Garforth Town against Tadcaster Albion on November 20.

and Junior, and at the final whistle the Brazilian was mobbed by fans and photographers.

The Brazilian's re-appearance on a football pitch in the former pit village near Leeds was the brainchild of Garforth's businessman owner and manager Simon Clifford -- a self-confessed addict of Brazilian football.

After meeting former Middlesbrough player Juninho, Clifford became involved with Futebol de Salao -- a game played extensively in Brazil which encourages technique and skills.

The ambitious Clifford now runs a network of Futebol de Salao schools around the world and hopes some of it may rub off on Garforth. He says he has a 25-year plan to get them into the Premier League.

His audacious signing has sparked tremendous interest in the town, and Clifford has not ruled out another appearance by Socrates.

"It's brilliant, all these people just for a non-league game," said spectator Mark Smith.

"It was amazing, him being here," added Tadcaster coach Jim Collins. "We said if he needs tackling, he will get tackled."

"I'm a bit shocked he came down to this level."

Asked what he thought the difference was between Brazilian and English football, Socrates said: "What the Brazilians have that Britain doesn't is creativity and a happiness in playing."

"But what Brazilians don't have is an organisation, hopefully we can help each other improve."