



Chelsea's Frank Lampard (R) being tackled by Blackburn's Aaron Mokoena (C) at Ewood Park in Blackburn on February 2.

PHOTO: AFP

PREMIERSHIP

Mourinho claims title

Football

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho voiced his confidence that Chelsea will go on to claim their first league title in 50 years after a 1-0 win at Blackburn extended his side's lead at the top of the table to 11 points.

Asked if Chelsea could throw it away now, the Portuguese manager replied: "I don't think so, with this attitude I don't think so. We are showing we are ready for everything - we can play football and we can fight."

Dutch winger Arjen Robben got the crucial goal in the fifth minute. But the real Chelsea hero, as so often this season, was goalkeeper Peter Cech, who saved a first half penalty from Scotland striker Paul Dickov to preserve the three points for Jose Mourinho's side.

The penalty save gave Cech a double cause for celebration as he

extended the record for keeping a clean sheet in the Premiership having passed former Manchester United's goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel's old mark of 704 minutes in the 14th minute of the match.

It was a far from vintage performance from Chelsea and the evening was marred by the sight of Robben limping off shortly after he had waltzed past Lucas Neill and fired a low shot past Brad Friedel to put his side ahead.

But Mourinho ensured it was a night to remember for the small group of Chelsea fans who had made the long trip north by instructing his players to throw their shirts into the crowd at the end of the match.

"The spirit was absolutely amazing," Mourinho added before lambasting Blackburn for their negative tactics.

"If want to be polite I call it a special attitude," Mourinho said, before singling out Blackburn's

recently acquired midfielder Robbie Savage for particular criticism.

"He made 20 faults, not one single yellow card and after that it is difficult to control emotions," Mourinho stormed.

Everton tightened their grip on fourth place in the table - the final qualifying spot for the Champions League - courtesy of a 1-0 win over relegation candidates Norwich.

A goalless draw looked the inevitable outcome on an atrocious Goodison Park pitch before Marcus Bent drew a great save from Robert Green and fellow substitute Duncan Ferguson forced the loose ball over the line.

A stoppage time volley from Lee Clark rescued a point for Fulham at home to Aston Villa in a game that featured three missed penalties.

Juan Pablo Angel put Villa ahead ten minutes after the interval but the Colombian striker's evening was ruined by the two penalties that he failed to get past Fulham's Dutch

goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar.

Fulham's Andy Cole also failed to convert a spot-kick but it was the home side who will have ended the night the happier.

Birmingham's loan signing of Walter Pandiani proved to be a master-stroke as the Uruguayan striker marked his debut with a goal after only 11 minutes against Southampton.

Nathan Blake then doubled the lead from the penalty spot four minutes before the break. Henri Camara pulled a goal back for Southampton after the break but Harry Redknapp's side were unable to find the equaliser that would have boosted their survival chances.

"That is possibly as good as we have played all season," Birmingham boss Steve Bruce said afterwards, before paying tribute to the impact Pandiani had made since his arrival from Deportivo La Coruna with just minutes to spare before the expiry of the transfer deadline on

Monday.

"You don't play at that level for that long without having something special," Bruce said, before joking: "He doesn't understand a word of English which will probably help."

Alan Shearer scored his 250th Premiership goal when he put Newcastle ahead at Manchester City but the home side salvaged a point through Robbie Fowler's penalty.

TOP SIX										
English Premiership table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Chelsea	25	20	4	1	49	8	64			
Man Utd	25	15	8	2	41	16	53			
Arsenal	25	15	6	4	55	29	51			
Everton	25	14	5	6	29	25	47			
Liverpool	25	12	4	9	38	26	40			
Boro	25	10	7	8	40	35	37			

Ronaldo sees a chance

AFP, London

Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo said he believes his side can still overcome runaway leaders Chelsea in the English Premiership title race.

"We know things are very complicated, Chelsea have carried out a very good campaign, they have been a very steady team," the teenager told Portuguese television station SIC.

"Obviously it will be complicated to reach first place. But I think hope is the



CRISTIANO RONALDO

last thing to die and we still have not thrown in the towel," he added.

Two second-half goals from Ronaldo rallied the Red Devils to a 4-2 victory over Arsenal Tuesday, virtually ending the Gunners' hopes of defending their title and ensuring that Manchester are now the only realistic challengers to Chelsea.

The result narrowed United's gap on Chelsea to eight points and gave them a two-point lead over third-place Arsenal. Everton are a distant fourth with 44 points, with four months of the season to go.

Chelsea can lose three of their remaining 14 games and still win their first league title in 50 years.

Everything coming to light

Football

AFP, Berlin

A mass police raid on the premises of 19 football match-fixing suspects has uncovered more proof of manipulation, the Berlin public prosecutor's office confirmed on Wednesday.

Around 150 police were employed to raid 32 houses and offices between 6:00am and 11:30am on Wednesday following information given by disgraced referee Robert Hoyzer.

Hoyzer has already admitted fixing up to four matches for financial gain and other officials, players and outside parties are also involved.

"In total 25 people are suspected of playing a part in rigging football matches with players, referees and outside parties involved," read the statement.

"Along with Robert Hoyzer and the S. brothers (two Croatian men arrested in Berlin) referees Jurgen Jansen, Felix Zwayer and Dominik Marks are the accused.

"The people concerned are suspected of manipulating ten matches in the Bundesliga, second division, the regional league and cup in 2004."

Essen official Jansen was due to officiate Werder Bremen's match with Hansa Rostock on

Sunday but was removed for his own protection.

Jansen is suspected of manipulating two matches with the first fixture between Bayer Leverkusen and FC St Pauli in the 2001/02 campaign.

Underdogs St Pauli made it 2-2 in the final minute after Jansen awarded them a curious penalty kick.

"I do not want to accuse anyone but when this scandal started the St Pauli match immediately sprung to mind," explained Klaus Toppmoller, the Leverkusen coach at the time.

Paderborn captain Thijs Waterink admitted Monday to receiving a 10,000 euro bonus from an anonymous backer and other players are also being looked at.

"A total of 14 players from Ahlen, Chemnitz, Energie Cottbus, Dynamo Dresden, Kickers Offenbach and SC Paderborn are also suspects," the prosecutor's office added.

"Hertha Berlin players are not amongst the suspects."

Hertha trio Nando Rafael, Josip Simunic and Alexander Madlung have formulated a 250,000 euro legal compensation package against magazine Focus who named them in connection with the match-fixing scandal.

Better late than never

AFP, Lisbon

Chelsea's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho finally received his university diploma - 18 years after he wrapped up his studies.

The 42-year-old coach completed his physical education degree at Lisbon's sporting university in 1987 however he never picked up the diploma, saying he was too busy.

But on Wednesday a representative of the school surprised Mourinho at Chelsea's training grounds in London and personally delivered the diploma.

"I thought it was lost. It is a special feeling to receive a diploma almost twenty years later," a beaming Mourinho told Portuguese television station SIC.

"I am very pleased. I have received many trophies in in the last few years of my career as a coach but none with this significance."

Mourinho, who abandoned his career as a reserve team midfielder to study physical education, has frequently credited his higher education for his success as a coach.

"I have said this before, and I never get tired of saying it. A person who only knows football will never be a great coach," he said.

"A great coach is always someone who understands as much about football as about other areas. School is where you get that."

Mourinho joined Chelsea in June 2004 after leading Portuguese side FC Porto to the domestic league and European Champions title.

Chelsea lead with 61 points, eight points ahead of Manchester United. The team can lose three of its remaining 14 games and still win its first league title in 50 years.

England's no to racism

Football

AFP, London

England will depart from a century of tradition by wearing shirts bearing an anti-racist message when they take the field for next week's international football friendly against Holland.

The team will wear red shirts at Villa Park on Wednesday, with a slogan on the front and the badge of the 'Kick it Out' campaign, an organisation which aims to rid football of racism, on the sleeves.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said: "This is a unique opportunity for fans and players to join together to speak out against racism."

"The players are always very proud to wear the England shirt but this time it will have even more meaning for them."

It will be the first time in 133 years of international football that an England shirt has carried anything other than the three lions badge and manufacturer's logo.

Football Association spokesman Adrian Bevington said the exact wording of the message would be announced next week.

The FA's move follows an announcement by the Dutch that they intend to make their own stand against racism by playing in a black and white kit rather than their traditional orange.

England's black players have been the target of racist abuse in several of their last internationals,

most-recently when Shaun Wright-Phillips and Ashley Cole were targeted during a friendly against Spain in Madrid in November.

Last week Manchester United and England centre-half Rio Ferdinand joined France's Thierry Henry in launching an anti-racism campaign.

The Arsenal striker was also the subject of a racist jibe by Spain's manager Luis Aragones during a training-ground tirade at Henry's club-mate Jose Reyes.

FIFA have given the FA special permission to wear the shirts and fans will be asked to hold up cards with an anti-racism message during the national anthems.

The samba Beckham!

Football

AFP, Madrid

England captain David Beckham says Real Madrid's new Brazilian coach Wanderley Luxemburgo has helped him rediscover his old magic.

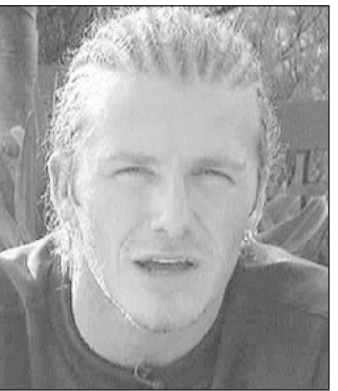
A spectacular long-range Beckham free-kick maintained Madrid's perfect league record in 2005 with a 2-1 win at bottom club Numancia on Sunday.

And Beckham feels he is doing enough to silence the critics who have called on England coach Sven Goran Eriksson to replace him with Manchester City's Shaun Wright-Phillips.

"As long as I am happy with my form for Real Madrid and England, then it does not really matter what anyone else says," Beckham told Sky Sports News.

"The most important thing is that I am comfortable with the way I am playing and the last month has been my best month for a while."

Former Brazil national coach



DAVID BECKHAM

Luxemburgo was brought in at the end of last year by Real president Florentino Perez and Beckham admits he has been a breath of fresh air at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"He has totally changed things around, as we are working a lot harder in training and we are more organised in games, and that is being shown in the games we have played under him," said Beckham.

Beckham is also happy with how things are shaping up under Eriksson in the England camp.

"It is good, we have some experience and some great young players coming through and we are very lucky as a country to have that," added Beckham.

But despite five league wins in a row, Real remain seven points behind runaway league leaders Barcelona.

SERIE A

Milan keep hopes alive

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said his team have a glimmer of hope of catching Juventus after trimming the league leaders' advantage to five points.

Juve lost 1-0 at home to Sampdoria on Wednesday, while Milan ended their two-game losing streak with an emphatic 4-1 victory at Messina, where Hernan Crespo and Jon Dahl Tomasson both scored twice for the reigning champions. Milan could even afford the luxury of a missed penalty by Andrea Pirlo.

"Five points is still a lot to make up, but it has given us some hope and this championship is full of surprises," Ancelotti said.

"Beating Messina was very important as it ended a negative run of results. Those two defeats hurt us and rocked our confidence."

"But we went out there today with the right attitude and dominated the match, apart from a brief spell when Messina scored to make it 2-1."

Juventus coach Fabio Capello defended his team's sluggish performance in chilly Turin, saying the fact Sampdoria keeper was voted man-of-the-match spoke volumes.

"Francesco Antonioli was the best player on the pitch," he said. "We played well, but didn't get the result we deserved."

Aimo Diana's close range strike in the 33rd minute condemned Juventus to their first home defeat of the season and gave the visitors their sixth away victory, which lifted them to fifth place.

Marcello Castellini's powerful header from Cristian Zenoni's cross came back off the crossbar and Diana was first to the rebound, reacting quickest to stab the ball past Gianluigi Buffon.

Juventus bombarded the Sampdoria goal in a one-sided second half, but the steely Genoans held out, thanks largely to Antonioli's quick reflexes.

In other matches, Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins grabbed the only goal as Inter

Milan edged bottom club Atalanta to hold onto third place, while Udinese beat Chievo 3-0 and remain fourth.

Juventus have 50 points from their 22 matches played, five more than AC Milan and 12 more than Inter Milan.

Roma fell one place to sixth after being held to a 1-1 draw at Lecce, while Palermo climbed to seventh thanks to a 2-1 win Fiorentina.

Elsewhere, Lazio drew 0-0 at home to Brescia, Livorno drew 1-1 at home to Reggina and Cagliari came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Siena. Bologna play at home to struggling Parma on Thursday.

TOP SIX										
Italian league table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Juventus	22	15	5	2	38	13	50			
Milan	22	13	6	3	39	15	45			
Inter	22	8	14	0	42	27	38			
Udinese	22	11	4	7	31	21	37			
Sampdoria	22	10	5	7	23	17	35			
Roma	22	9	7	6	41	33	34			



Inter Milan's Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins (L) being charged by Atalanta defender Marco at the San Siro stadium in Milan on February 2.

PHOTO: AFP