

PREMIERSHIP

Keane's half century

Football

AFP, London

Roy Keane's long wait for his 50th goal for Manchester United finally came to an end as the Red Devils overcame Birmingham at Old Trafford to maintain their pursuit of Premiership leaders Chelsea.

Keane, who had been stuck on 49 goals since November 2003, ended the longest goalscoring drought of his career to help United to a 2-0 win that cut Chelsea's lead at the top of the table back to eight points.

United must now hope that local rivals Manchester City, the only English side to have beaten Chelsea this season, can repeat the trick at Stamford Bridge on Sunday and breathe new life into the title race.

United boss Alex Ferguson hailed Keane as one of United's greatest players after the match.

"When you are talking about Manchester United 30 or 500 years from now, Roy Keane will still be regarded as one of the greatest players ever at this club," said Ferguson.

"Some people are capable of revisiting old times and he is one of them. That was the Roy Keane of 10 years ago out there."

Arsenal bounced back from their midweek defeat by United -- which effectively ended their hopes of catching Chelsea -- by blitzing Aston Villa.

It finished 3-1 at Villa Park but it could easily have been a much more convincing win for Arsenal, for whom Thierry Henry, Freddie Ljungberg and Ashley Cole scored in the first half hour.

Juan Pablo Angel got Villa's consolation effort.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger admitted that his team's defences have proved their undoing this season.

"It's never frustrating to see the team play well, it is always enjoyable. We've played 26 games now and scored 58 goals. We scored much less last year with the same number of games, it's just we're less efficient defensively," said the Frenchman.

At Old Trafford, Keane's 55th minute strike was worthy of the landmark it represented.

Latching on to a backheel from Cristiano Ronaldo, the Irish midfielder evaded two challenges before driving a low shot into the bottom corner of the net from just inside the box.

Any hopes Birmingham had of getting back into the match were killed off by Wayne Rooney with a 78th minute goal.

Liverpool closed the gap on Merseyside rivals Everton in the race for fourth place and the final Champions League qualifying spot with a 3-1 win over Fulham at Anfield.

Fernando Morientes scored his second goal in as many games only to see his ninth minute header cancelled out seven minutes later by Andy Cole's 11th strike of the season.

Liverpool, however, ran out comfortable winners thanks to Sami Hyypia, who got his head to a free-kick from Steven Gerrard just after the hour mark, and Milan Baros, who finished off a John Arne Riise cross to kill the contest 13 minutes from time. Everton will be looking to regain a seven-point cushion over their local rivals when they travel to Southampton on Sunday.

Bolton extended their winning run in the league to five matches courtesy of Kevin Nolan's first half strike in their lunchtime clash with Crystal Palace.

Palace remain just above the relegation zone but they could yet regret the numerous chances they wasted on Saturday, with 15-goal striker Andy Johnson the biggest culprit on the day he was named in the England squad for the first time.

The defeat left Palace with just a two-point cushion over Norwich, who twice came from behind to beat West Brom 3-2 in the day's big relegation battle.

Damien Francis was the Canaries' hero with the decisive goal five minutes from the end of an extraordinary see-saw encounter.

West Brom had led twice through Robbie Earnshaw and on-loan Manchester United winger Kieran Richardson.

But Earnshaw's strike was equalised on the stroke of half-time by Craig Fleming and a glancing header from Gary Doherty levelled things up for a second time just after the hour mark, setting the stage for Francis's late show.

Middlesbrough drew a line under their recent slump in form with a 1-0 home win over Blackburn that keeps them firmly in the hunt for a European place.

French left-back Franck Queudrue provided the only goal of the game, ten minutes before half-time.

Newcastle looked on track to take the points against Charlton when Kieron Dyer put them ahead seven minutes after the break.

But the lead lasted barely a minute before Danish winger Dennis Rommedahl capitalised on an error by Andy O'Brien to equalise.

Egyptian striker Mido marked his debut for Tottenham with a double that earned a 3-1 win over Portsmouth, who had taken the lead through Diomansy Kamara.

Robbie Keane, with an elegantly executed lob, completed what was an ultimately comfortable win for Spurs.

TOP SIX

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

Chelsea	25	20	4	1	49	8	64
Man Utd	26	16	8	2	43	16	56
Arsenal	26	16	6	4	58	30	54
Everton	25	14	5	6	29	25	47
Liverpool	26	13	4	9	41	27	43
Boro	26	11	7	8	41	35	40

Robben headache for Chelsea

Football

AFP, London

Arjen Robben has made a massive contribution to Chelsea's push for their first Premiership title in 50 years but a suspected broken foot could spell the premature end to his season.

Robben was caught by a mis-timed tackle in Chelsea's 1-0 win over Blackburn last Wednesday and the Dutch international fears he has a repeat of an injury that kept him sidelined for almost three months in pre-season.

"This is a disaster - everything was going so well," the Dutch winger told the News of the World on Sunday.

"It is a massive blow and comes just at the moment when I was in top shape and very fit.

"But now it is worthless and I have to fight back for the second time this season."

A medical examination was inconclusive because the swelling was so bad and Robben is bracing himself for the worst when he returns to hospital for further tests.

"I hate it because I know I am probably out of the game for weeks and weeks. Even now, I feel that one of the bones in my foot is broken again."

Even if there has not been a



ARJEN ROBBEN

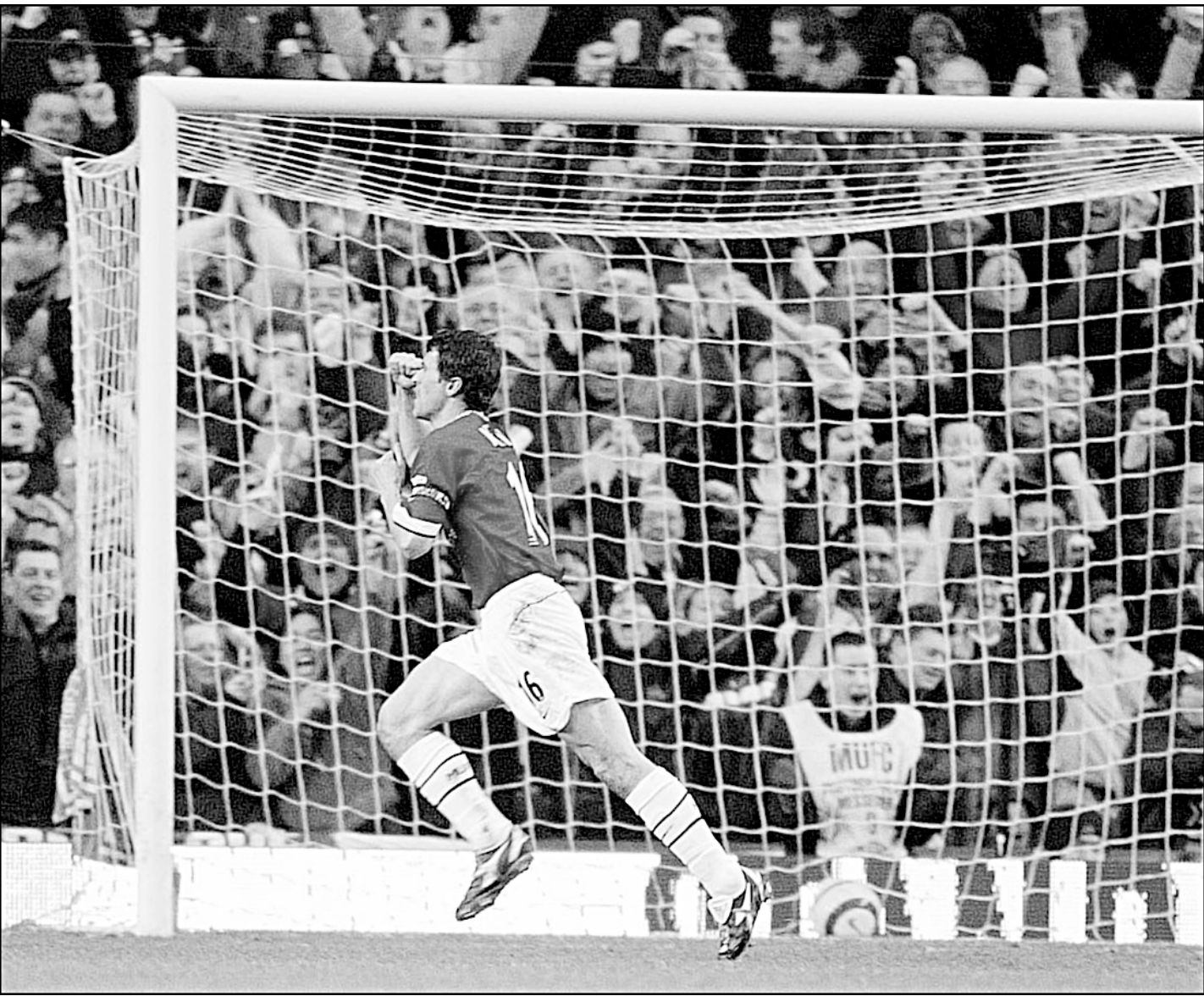


PHOTO: AFP

FINALLY! Manchester United's Roy Keane (C) celebrates after scoring his 50th goal for the club during the match against Birmingham City in Manchester on February 5.

If at first you don't succeed...

Football

AFP, Manchester

Tycoon Malcolm Glazer has approached Manchester United with "detailed proposals" which could lead to an offer to buy the English Premiership side, the club said in a statement on Sunday.

Glazer, the owner of the NFL franchise Tampa Bay Buccaneers, has been stalking the club, in which he owns just over 28 percent of the shares, for a year but has thus far been rebuffed.

In December, Glazer told the club he was willing to make a series of changes to earlier takeover plans which had prompted worries about the amount of debt involved in order to finance the purchase.

"The board of Manchester United stated on December 20

that the Glazer Family Partnership had indicated potential revisions to its previous proposal and that Manchester United did not intend to open discussions on this matter until it had received a definite proposal," the brief club statement said.

"The board can confirm it has now received a detailed proposal subject to various preconditions which may form the basis of an offer for Manchester United from Glazer.

"A further announcement will be made in due course."

The statement gave no details of what changes had been made to Glazer's previous offers, which also attracted vehement opposition from fans of the club.

Glazer's attempts to buy one of the most successful football clubs in the world, both in terms of on-the-pitch success and commercial profit, has proved

highly controversial.

After gradually building up his stake in the club, Glazer made a formal takeover approach in October, which press reports said was worth around 650 million pounds (952 million euros, 1.22 billion dollars).

However, it was rejected, with



MALCOLM GLAZER

BUNDESLIGA

Peruvian ignites Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich opened up a three point lead at the top of the Bundesliga courtesy of a 2-0 victory over Bayer Leverkusen at the Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Bayern tasted a 4-1 defeat at Leverkusen earlier in the campaign but Peruvian sensation Paolo Guerrero turned in a fantastic display on his full Bundesliga debut to ensure sweet revenge for Bayern.

Guerrero, 20, won a penalty kick which Dutch international Roy Makaay converted on the chime of half-time and then netted himself after 68 minutes as Bayern surged clear at the summit.

Second-placed Schalke 04 needed a last minute equaliser from Brazilian Ailton to net a 2-2 draw at bottom side Hansa Rostock.

Ailton struck three minutes into stoppage time to snatch a point for Schalke but the 1997 UEFA Cup victors lose further ground on Bayern in the title race.

VfB Stuttgart also slipped further behind Bayern following a 1-1 draw with ten-man Kaiserslautern leaving them six points adrift of the table-toppers.

Referees have been the talk of German football since official Robert Hoyzer admitting to match-fixing and referee Michael Weiner was the centre of attention in Munich when he awarded Bayern a very generous penalty kick.

Seconds before the half-time interval Guerrero controlled the ball in the box before collapsing into man marker Jens Nowotny.

Weiner pointed to the penalty spot prompting mass complaints from Leverkusen players but Makaay was unfazed coolly converting.

Guerrero then crowned a fine performance with a 68th minute goal inadvertently using his thigh to nudge the ball home.

Stuttgart are also struggling to click into gear after the winter break failing to break down ten-man Kaiserslautern in a 1-1 draw at the Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium.

SERIE A

Juve falter again

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus could see their lead at the top of Serie A trimmed even further this weekend after they lost 1-0 away to Palermo on Saturday.

Shaken by their defeat at home to Sampdoria on Wednesday, which enabled second-placed AC Milan to close the gap to five points, Juve were outfought by the pink-shirted Sicilians and rarely looked like a team capable of winning the championship for a 28th time.

A second defeat in four days for the Turin club, who sorely missed injured playmaker Pavel Nedved, means title-holders Milan can move to within two points of Fabio Capello's pacesetters if they win at home to Lazio on Sunday.

Francisco Brienza's superb 13th-minute strike decided a pulsating contest and lifted Palermo to the lofty heights of sixth place.

Gianluigi Buffon could only punch Eugenio Corini's free-kick out as far as the edge of the box where Brienza was standing unmarked to send a left-footed curlier back past the outstretched hand of the Juve keeper.

Midway through the second-



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus' Brazilian midfielder Emerson is dejected after losing to Palermo at the Renzo Barbera stadium in Palermo on February 5.

'Ronaldo could be the greatest ever'

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Wanderley

Luxemburgo has adopted a vow of silence about his club's arch rivals Barcelona but the message was still loud and clear, the Spanish league leaders had better look out.

Barcelona top the Spanish first division with 51 points from their 21 games, and play host to Atletico

both teams," added Luxemburgo.

Nevertheless, club captain Raul Gonzalez, the author of two of Real's quartet of goals, wasn't following Luxemburgo's orders about their opponents on Sunday.

"We are now in the fast lane with our winning streak. This was an important victory over a direct rival and we've kept up with Barcelona," said Raul.

"I'm not sure whether we've played better this season. Now I want to win the league as well as the

Worried about his fitness and form, Real Madrid have refused Ronaldo permission to play for Brazil in Wednesday's friendly international against Hong Kong.

Several banners in the Santiago Bernabeu crowd called for England striker Michael Owen to be given another chance instead of Ronaldo.

Owen has only started one league game since the arrival of Luxemburgo at the start of the year, a match against bottom club Numancia last week when Ronaldo was away on family business in Brazil.

"Yes, I saw the banners," said Owen ruefully after Saturday's game, in which he got on the field for just 13 minutes, acknowledging again that he is frustrated with his role at Real.

Real Madrid coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo has revealed a challenge he has made to Ronaldo - to become the greatest player in history.

But anyone who understand football would know that it's foolish to dwell too much on Ronaldo's form for the man still is a phenomenon. And Luxemburgo thinks he could be the greatest ever.

Waving away claims he does not get on with Real's striker ace, Luxemburgo instead revealed to AS: "Ronie has a history of playing very attractive football, but he can still do more.

"He was champion of the world in '94, finalist in '98 and champion again in 2002. Next year he could win his third World Cup, three out of four, more than Pelé (champion in 1958, 60 and 70, but without any runners-up medal).

"I want that Ronie reaches his potential and I have made him a personal challenge: to be the greatest in history. I have spoken with him about that. He is a good boy, a great character... it is important to know how to handle him."



RONALDO

Madrid later on Sunday in the Nou Camp stadium where they have not lost for a year.

However, Real Madrid closed the gap on the Catalan club to four points after their emphatic 4-0 victory over Espanyol on Saturday night.

"I've said to my players that I don't want them talking about Barcelona. They just have to keep on winning games," said the former Brazil boss after Real's sixth straight win.

"We have to hope they trip up but everything is down to what they do. That's pressure every weekend for

Champions League and I'm an optimist, I think we can do it," added the Spanish international striker.

The big question that Luxemburgo has to answer ahead of next Sunday's trip to Osasuna is whether or not to keep faith with his faltering forward Ronaldo.

The former World Player of the Year had another right to forget despite Real's memorable victory.

Giving him zero points in their match assessment, Spanish sports daily AS commented, "What a day! He played the entire game but it was all in vain as he squandered three clear chances in front of goal."