

## 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.

Gunner 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.

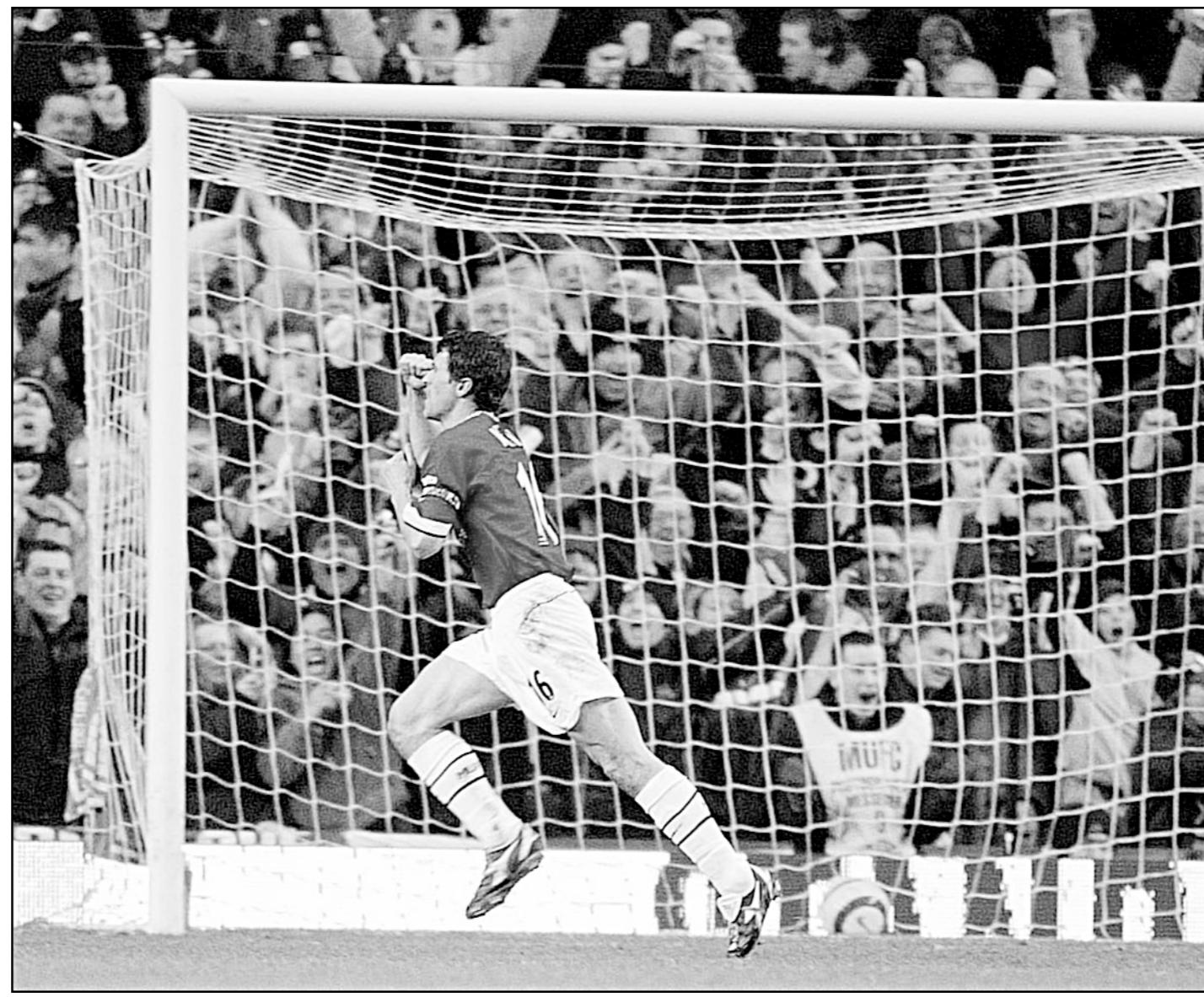
At Old Trafford, Keane's 55th minute strike was worthy of the landmark it represented.

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.



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

United saying the proposed move was "not in the best interests" of the club because it relied too much on borrowed money.

Glazer retaliated the next month by using the voting rights allowed by his stake in the club to remove three Manchester United directors from the club's board at its annual general meeting.

This move prompted Glazer's investment bank in the planned deal, JP Morgan, to drop him as a client amid reports it had urged him not to remove the directors.

There was swift condemnation from United fans.

"Will this man not take no for an answer," said Jules Spencer, chairman of the Independent Manchester United Supporters' Association.

"We will fight this man. We've already proved in the past we can defeat predators as BSkyB found out," Spencer added.

## 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 outfoxed 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 pace-setters if they win at home to Lazio on Sunday.

Franco 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 curler back past the outstretched hand of Juve keeper.

Midway through the second-

half Corini nearly turned Marcelo Zalayeta's cross into his own net and was indebted to his keeper Matteo Guardalben for pulling off a superb reflex save.

Eleven minutes from time, Palermo almost made it 2-0, but Mario Santana's delicate chip past Buffon curled the wrong side of the post.

In Saturday's early match, Fiorentina had two players sent off inside the first 10 minutes before losing 3-0 away to in-form Sampdoria.

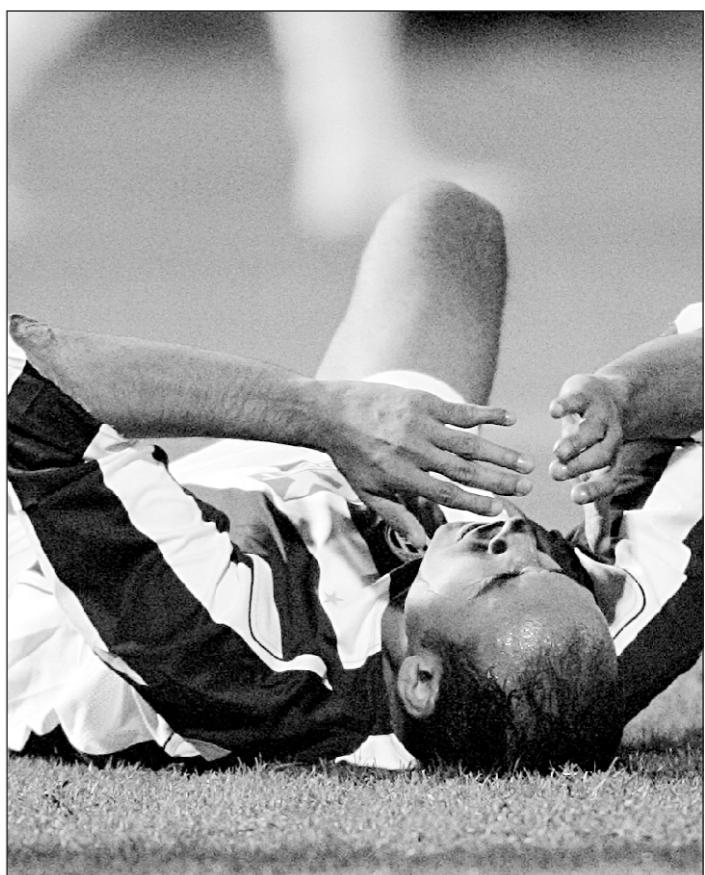
Victory for Sampdoria, who won away to league leaders Juventus on Wednesday, lifted the Genoa club up to fourth place and keeps them in contention for a place in Europe next season.

Fiorentina, with only one point to show from their last seven matches, remain fifth from bottom.

## TOP SIX

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

	23	15	5	3	38	14	50
Juventus	23	15	5	3	38	14	50
Milan	22	13	6	3	39	15	45
Inter	22	8	4	0	42	27	38
Sampdoria	23	11	5	7	26	17	38
Udinese	22	11	4	7	31	21	37
Palermo	23	9	8	6	22	16	35



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

## TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Saturday's 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	40
Boro	26	11	7	8	41	35	40

## PRIMERA LIGA

## Real on a roll

## Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid notched their sixth win in a row on Saturday with a 4-0 victory over Espanyol that narrowed Barcelona's lead at the top to four points.

An unstoppable drive from Zinedine Zidane, two trademark opportunist strikes from skipper Raul and a debut goal from midfielder Thomas Gravesen sealed an emphatic victory. Barcelona host Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

The race for the title has been effectively reduced to a two-horse affair after champions Valencia could manage only a 3-3 draw at struggling Real Sociedad, a result that left them nine points adrift of Real in third place.

Espanyol are three points further back in fourth and are likely to drop down the table after Sunday's matches.

Turkish forward Nihat Kahveci capped a brilliant performance with a classy last-gasp strike to earn Sociedad their first point in six outings.

Valencia took the lead against the run of play when Italian striker Marco Di Vaio fired home in the 10th minute before Nihat made it 1-1 with a spectacular Volio on the stroke of halftime.

Former Everton midfielder Gravesen wrapped up a comprehensive victory five minutes from time when, after coming on as substitute, he guided a shot past Kameni from the edge of the area.

A Ruben Baraja header and a superbly struck Xisco volley in the 89th minute gave the visitors an undeserved lead until the brilliant Nihat intervened again to earn his side a vital point.

"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

break, Robben is resigned to being sidelined for some weeks - just as the league leaders' season goes into overdrive.

Chelsea had initially been optimistic that he would make a quick recovery but the extent of the swelling and bruising have made it impossible for scans to establish the precise nature of the injury.

"There are no conclusions for the moment," manager Jose Mourinho said on Friday. "The only conclusion is big, big pain. Arjen cannot walk, he cannot put his foot on the floor and he is immobilised."

Mourinho's big fear is that Robben will miss the club's Champions League second round tie with Barcelona and the League Cup final at the end of this month.

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

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