

Lampard writers' choice

AFP, London

Chelsea's England midfielder Frank Lampard has been named Football Writers' Association player of the year.

The 26-year-old scored both goals during Chelsea's 2-0 win over Bolton last weekend which gave them their first Premiership title in 50 years.

That double took the former West Ham player's tally for the season to 18 with three games still to play.

He was selected ahead of his Chelsea team-mate John Terry, who picked up the Professional Footballers' Association player of the year award last month.

Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher came third in the poll.

Lampard is the second Chelsea player to win the prestigious award, following Gianfranco Zola in 1997.

Only top four allowed

AFP, London

Only the top four teams in the English Premiership will qualify for next season's Champions League, the Football Association (FA) announced Thursday dealing a fresh blow to Liverpool's hopes of playing in the competition next season.

Liverpool, who have already reached this season's final, are three points behind fourth placed local rivals Everton in the race for qualification.

Liverpool face AC Milan in the final in Istanbul on May 25 and there has been speculation over whether they would be allowed to defend the trophy even if they finished fifth or worse in the league.

The FA, while saying they would stick to their original ruling, also stressed they would be pressing European soccer governing body UEFA for an extra place were Liverpool to win the title but finish outside the Premiership's top four this season.

"The FA confirmed today (Thursday) that the top four teams in the Premiership at the end of the season will enter next season's UEFA Champions League," said a statement by the FA.

"The decision follows a recommendation from this afternoon's Professional Game Board meeting, which has been endorsed by The FA Main Board.

"This will not be changed whatever the outcome of Liverpool's Champions League Final in Istanbul on May 25.

"However, The FA also believes that if Liverpool win in Istanbul and do not finish in the top four in the Premiership, an extra place should be allocated to them in the Champions League next season.

"This is ultimately a matter for UEFA, but The FA will continue to make representations on this issue at the highest level."

End of a Barca legend

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona's oldest paid-up fan Miquel Botey has died aged 97, the club said on Thursday.

Botey joined Barcelona's members at the age of 10 in November 1917, 18 years after it was founded by Swiss businessman and football fanatic Hans Gamper.

Botey was given a card bearing the number one in 2001 to signify the fact that he was the club's longest-serving member.

Barca are close to winning their first trophy in six years. They lead the Primera Liga by six points with four games left.

Inzy spills

FROM PAGE 12 would find no difficulty in captaining the side.

"Even if I'm not playing I'll be there involved in everything and the planning. As far as Younis Khan's ability to lead the side is concerned, he is a good future prospect and will be an asset for the team in future."

Hinds found

FROM PAGE 12 Smith was found not guilty of "conduct unbecoming (to his) status which could bring himself or the game into disrepute".

"No evidence was produced or found to support the serious nature of the alleged breach. We must now look forward to a positive ODI series," said Crowe in an ICC statement.

Windies going

FROM PAGE 12 "Will the region be stumped by the aftermath of the Cup? Cricket World Cup will bring a surge of tourism dollars and development to the Caribbean, but will it also bring great social and economic costs?"

The 2007 World Cup is expected to pump approximately \$300 million into the Caribbean economy but the region may have to pay an even higher price for the privilege of hosting the showpiece tournament.

PREVIEW: PRIMERA LIGA

Another nervy week



REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona could either win the Spanish title this Sunday or find arch-rivals Real Madrid breathing down their necks depending on the results of the two teams' respective matches against Valencia and Racing Santander.

If Real suffer a shock home defeat against Racing on Saturday and Barcelona win their tough away match against Valencia and Racing Santander, the Catalans would wrap up their first league title in six years with three games to spare.

However, victory for Real and defeat for Barca would leave just three points separating the two sides at the top of the table and herald a nerve-racking run-in to the end of the season.

Barca will be comforted by the knowledge that their better head-to-head record against Real would give them the title if the two sides

finished level on points at the end of the season.

No one at Real is entertaining the prospect that they might lose to lowly Racing, instead the players have spent much of the last week building up the prospects of a Valencia victory over Barca.

"We are hoping Barca lose and if that happens they are going to start getting nervous and it will take its toll on them as they have to play two other away games before the end of the season," said Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

Both sides had to dig deep to win their respective matches last time out.

Real were on the ropes for much of their game at Real Sociedad and only managed to emerge with the three points and their sixth consecutive win following a late double from Ronaldo. The champion striker is back to his frightening best and has notched up six goals in his last four outings.

Barcelona also had their leading scorer Samuel Eto'o to thank for

breaking the deadlock in their 2-0 victory at home to struggling Albacete.

Real will have Zinedine Zidane, Michel Salgado and Walter Samuel back from suspension, while David Beckham appears to have recovered from an inflamed toe and will also play.

Barcelona welcome back influential playmaker Xavi from suspension and versatile Brazilian international Edmilson could return to the squad after seven months out with a serious knee injury.

FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off times in GMT): Osasuna v Real Mallorca (1600), Athletic Bilbao v Real Zaragoza (1600), Real Madrid v Racing Santander (1800), Real Betis v Sevilla (2000)
Sunday: Albacete v Levante (1500), Espanyol v Numancia (1500), Getafe v Real Sociedad (1500), Malaga v Villarreal (1500), Valencia v Barcelona (1700), Athletic Bilbao v Sevilla (1900)

Not guti-nough?



FOX SPORTS, Madrid

The flowing-haired, fleshy-thighed number 14 has been somewhat left out in the cold since Wanderlei Luxemburgo's arrival as coach but, introduced 56 minutes into last Saturday's must-win contest against Real Sociedad at the hostile Anoeta stadium, Guti showed just why many experts believe he should be a starter ahead of Raul, Zidane & Co.

Guti played 34 minutes, made an astonishing 33 passes (26 of which were completed) and turned around a lost cause, making eye-catching assists for the two invaluable Ronaldo goals that brought them back from the brink of defeat in the championship race.

A draw would have all but relinquished the title to Frank Rijkaard's Barcelona, who beat Albacete 2-0 with goals from Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi.

In the 82nd minute 'Guti' Gutierrez picked up a pass from Raul and split open the Sociedad defense, leaving Ronaldo to waltz around goalkeeper Riesgo. Guti's second assist was a moment of magic. Receiving the ball out wide,

he twisted past two defenders and crossed low across the box. Riesgo could only parry and in the confusion Ronaldo initially sat on the ball, before recovering his poise to backheel it into an empty net.

Let's face it the only two guaranteed names on any Madrid team sheet are Iker Casillas and Ronaldo. Then maybe Raul, Ivan Helguera, Walter Samuel and David Beckham. More recently, midfield holding man Thomas Gravesen has made himself indispensable and Michael Owen has enjoyed a stint up front at the expense of Luis Figo, once irreplaceable himself.

Guti, however, no matter how well he performs, just cannot establish himself in the team. During Luxemburgo's tenure, Guti has been in the starting lineup nine times and a substitute in six, playing for a total of 835 minutes in 15 games.

What do Spaniards think? Let's put it to the men in the know. According to J.J. Santos of Antena 3 TV, "Guti should be in the team, in the hole behind Ronaldo and Owen."

Cadena Ser's Manolo Lama thinks "Guti should play ahead of anyone except Ronaldo or Casillas maybe in the hole behind Raul and Ronaldo."

ABC's Enrique Ortega offered: "I would leave Owen on the bench and stick Guti in the hole behind Raul and Ronaldo... he's a massively important player for Madrid."

What do fans think? In a vote conducted by the newspaper Marca, 79% of Madrid fans believe the silly-haired utility player should be a regular starter.

For a player who has been right through the ranks, or canterano, for Madrid, his inability to hold down a place must rankle. After all, as we have seen, half of Spain chokes on it's tapas in admiration when asked for an opinion on the Spanish striker/playmaker/defensive midfielder.

But maybe the striker/playmaker/defensive midfielder thing is the problem. He's a utility player. Jack of all trades, master of none so the saying goes. In a forward role, as the anchor man, on the left, in the hole. Whichever position you care to think of, I'm sure you can come up with a couple of more suitable options than Guti.

Up front, Raul, Ronaldo, Owen. In the hole behind the strikers, Zidane, Figo, Raul. On the left, Zidane, Solari. In the holding role, Gravesen, Beckham, Borja. And so on and so forth...Guti's a special player, but where does he fit in?

PREVIEW: SERIE A

Semifinal hero's dilemma



AFP, Rome

AC Milan's Champions League hero Massimo Ambrosini insists he will have no axe to grind should he find himself back on the substitutes' bench for Sunday's crunch Serie A title showdown against Juventus.

The combative midfielder made a rare start in Holland on Wednesday where his dramatic 91st minute goal against PSV Eindhoven took Milan through to the Champions League final.

Milan lost 3-1 on the night for a 3-3 aggregate score and it was Ambrosini's crucial away goal that clinched a meeting in Istanbul on May 25 with English Premiership side Liverpool.

But his heroics may not be

enough to earn him a place in Carlo Ancelotti's starting side at the San Siro this weekend where three points for Milan would put them in a strong position to retain the championship.

Milan are tied for first place with Juventus on 76 points with four games of the season left.

"In football, you cannot dwell on the past, you must always look to the future," said the 27-year-old Ambrosini.

"I'm just thinking about the final five games of the season. Everyone wants to be involved and play a part.

Ambrosini, who has not been able to hold down a regular place in the team in his seven seasons with Milan, said the lowest point of his career was when he was told by Ancelotti he would not be playing in the 2003 Champions League final against Juventus, which Milan won

after a penalty shootout.

Milan captain Paolo Maldini is expected to lead his team out on Sunday, despite suffering a kick to the head in Eindhoven.

The Italian league title cannot be decided on goal difference, so should the teams end up with the same number of points on the final day, then a two-legged play-off would ensue.

The last time a title play-off took place was in the 1963/64 season when Bologna defeated Inter Milan.

FIXTURES

Sunday (all 1300 GMT kick-off): AC Milan v Juventus, Atalanta v Messina, Brescia v Inter Milan, Cagliari v Palermo, Chievo v Fiorentina, Lazio v Udinese, Livorno v Siena, Parma v Roma, Reggina v Bologna, Sampdoria v Lecce

Don, Packer honoured



BBC ONLINE, Undated

Sir Don Bradman and Kerry Packer have been named as Australian cricket's most influential men of the past 100 years.

Bradman is widely regarded as the best player in history, while Packer revolutionised the game in the 1970s with his World Series Cricket.

They were praised by Cricket Australia chairman Bob Merriman as the board prepared to celebrate its centenary.

"Kerry still has a deep passion for cricket. He still wants laws changed to make it more entertaining," he said.

"He's proactive and his ideas are very sensible."

Packer has not always had such an amicable relationship with administrators.

Leading players were banned from their respective Test sides after signing big-money contracts to play World Series, which ran from 1977 to 1979 and saw the introduction of coloured clothing and floodlit matches.

But once the two sides had reached a settlement, Packer's TV network Channel Nine became the home of Australian international cricket.

Hewitt skips Hamburg Masters

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's Lleyton Hewitt has pulled out of next week's Hamburg Masters because of a toe injury, further disrupting his preparations for the French Open.

The world number two has not played since losing to Roger Federer in the final at Indian Wells in early March and then undergoing toe surgery.

The Australian Open finalist said he was practising on clay in Sydney and planned to make his comeback at the World Team Cup in Dusseldorf starting on May 15.

Mukti, Russel

FROM PAGE 12 before the final whistle after dodging past the whole Army backline.

Mohammed Sporting Club will take on Arambagh Kira Sangha in a battle of two Dhaka clubs today. Yellow Cards: Sharif (Russel) and Shahidul (Army).

TEAMS
RUSSEL KC: Biplab, Deen Mohammed, Pradeep (Jet), Aminul, Mishu (Yusuf), Tanveer, Sharif, Maruf, Hanif, Eghir and Rachid.
ARMY: Monirul, Tutul, Faruk (Atik), Kabirul, Mizanur, Didarul, Rezaul, Anwar, Ripon, Shahidul and Monwar (Tofazzal).



VALERY GAZZAYEV

Close shave for Gazzayev's moustache!

REUTERS, Moscow

Reaching his first ever European cup final won't, after all, make CSKA Moscow coach Valery Gazzayev sacrifice his beloved moustache.

When CSKA ended up in the UEFA Cup as a consolation for finishing third in their Champions League first-round group last December, Gazzayev promised Moscow fans he would shave off his bushy moustache if the army club reached the final.

But after his team crushed Italy's Parma 3-0 in Thursday's UEFA Cup semi-final Gazzayev said: "I have received numerous messages from our fans in the last few days, urging me to keep my moustache and bring the cup home to Moscow instead."

Gazzayev, 50, has had his moustache since his playing days with Moscow clubs Lokomotiv and Dynamo.

Mourinho's shopping list

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho revealed Friday that he has targeted three new summer signings to boost the newly-crowned Premiership champions' squad.

"The priority is to keep the champions and make sure you don't lose the important players," the Portuguese coach told the London Evening Standard.

Mourinho said that he would be looking to sign a left-back, a midfielder and a striker.

The Chelsea boss, who has already been linked with Arsenal defender Ashley Cole and Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard, refused to be drawn on his intended targets.

"We will keep our group of champions and improve it. If we look at the left-back position for example, we have only Wayne Bridge. We can improve on that place before next season."

"To win the championship after 50 years was a fantastic achievement. We must look forward now to win more silverware, not after another half a century but year after year."

"When you look at the attacking players we can say we need another one. In midfield we can keep them all and maybe add another one."

UEFA not amused

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has been slammed by European soccer's governing body UEFA for claiming the linesman "scored" Liverpool's winner in their Champions League semi-final.

A controversial winner by Luis Garcia sent Chelsea crashing out of the competition on Tuesday, leading Mourinho to claim: "They scored, if you can say that they scored, because maybe you should say the linesman scored."

Lars-Ake Bjorck, vice-chairman of UEFA's referee committee, believes that Mourinho's remark, directed at linesman Roman Slysko, "damages football".

And he hinted that Mourinho, who led Chelsea to their first top-flight title in 50 years and Cup success this season, could face further action.

"It's unbelievable he hasn't got the brain to learn from his mistake last time," said Bjorck, referring to Mourinho's recent two-match UEFA ban for bringing the game into disrepute by falsely claiming that Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard was seen leaving referee Anders Frisk's dressing room during the interval of their Champions League clash at the Nou Camp in February.

As well as his two-match ban, the Portuguese boss was fined around 9,000 pounds for his comments.

"It's incredible, especially when you put in mind he recently was punished hard with both suspension and payment charges," said Bjorck.

"If UEFA get a report we will treat it rapidly. This kind of statement damages football and everything around football."

Frisk received death threats and retired, and Swedish head of referees Bo Karlsson hopes Slysko does not suffer a similar fate.

"I hope with all my heart this linesman will not get the same terrible threats Anders got," said Karlsson.

"We can only hope Mourinho's words will not bring the same, bad, sad consequences as last time."

A Lisbon - Moscow final



AFP, May

Sporting Lisbon scored a dramatic last minute extra-time winner to beat AZ Alkmaar on Thursday and set up a UEFA Cup final clash with CSKA Moscow.

The Russian side beat Italian outfit Parma 3-0 but the Moscow club could be in trouble with the European governing body after Parma goalkeeper Luca Bucci was hit on the head by a firework thrown by the crowd.

While there was controversy in the Russian capital, there was high drama in the tiny stadium at Alkmaar.

A goal from defender Miguel Garcia in injury time at the end of extra time put Sporting into the final which will be played at their own Jose Alvalade stadium on May 18.

The Dutch side thought they had done enough to make the final themselves when defender Kew Jaliens gave them a 3-1 lead on the

night, and 3-2 on aggregate, in the ninth minute of extra time.

But in an astonishing climax, Garcia headed in a corner in the second minute of injury time at the end of the extra period to make the final score 3-2 to Alkmaar and 4-4 on aggregate but Sporting, who won the first leg 2-1, went through on away goals.

Alkmaar, who were runners-up to Ipswich Town in the UEFA Cup in 1981, stunned Sporting with an opening goal after just six minutes.

Moroccan international Tarik Sektioui got to the byline and his cross was met by Sebastian Perez who headed in past Ricardo in goal.

Sporting equalised on the stroke of half-time through Brazilian striker Liedson but Alkmaar then took the lead on the night and levelled the tie on aggregate when substitute Stein Huysegems scored in the 78th minute.

In the 19th minute of extra-time, Jaliens buried what the Dutch hoped would be the winner but just as the little Dutch side were dreaming of the final, up popped Garcia to deliver the killer blow.

In Moscow, CSKA Moscow

reached their first ever European final with a 3-0 second leg win over cash-strapped Parma.

After a goalless draw in Italy last week, the Russians were indebted to two goals from Brazilian midfielder Daniel Carvalho who scored in the ninth and 53rd minutes while Vassili Berezoutski added the third on the hour mark.

The win means CSKA are the first Russian side to reach a European final since 1972, but the tie was overshadowed by the injury to Bucci who was forced to leave the field in the 20th minute when he was injured by the flare thrown onto the pitch and was replaced by veteran Sebastian Frey.

inute of the match for a foul on Milos Krasic.

UEFA have already cracked down on crowd trouble this season.

They handed Inter Milan a six-match stadium ban after their Champions League quarter-final second leg with AC Milan in April was abandoned when Inter fans threw flares on to the pitch.

Inter were also hit with a fine of 300,000 Swiss francs (250,000 dollars).

PREVIEW: PREMIERSHIP

Race for second spot



AFP, London

Chelsea may have wrapped up the Premiership title but there is still plenty to play for at the top, as well as the bottom of the division - and Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp knows that better than most.

The Gunners are currently second, four points ahead of Manchester United, with the league runners-up guaranteed direct entry into next season's Champions League.

Finishing third means having to play a pre-season qualifying match, which could scupper the north London club's hopes of landing European club football's biggest prize before the tournament proper has got underway.

"If you finish third, you have to play such an important game so early in the season, Bergkamp said.

"So it can really hurt you and frustrate you. If you can get automatically qualified, it's better for the whole club," the Dutch striker told

Arsenal's official website www.arsenal.com, ahead of Sunday's match at home to Champions League finalists Liverpool.

Arsenal will again be without injured duo Thierry Henry and Freddie Ljungberg through injury, while Sol Campbell still faces a battle to regain his first-team place.

Bergkamp, meanwhile, will be hoping for a recall to the side, in what is Sunday's lone Premiership match, although compatriot Robin van Persie impressed in Monday's win at West Brom.

Liverpool must raise their game after their midweek Champions League heroics against Chelsea took them into the May 25 final in Istanbul against Italy's AC Milan.

Throughout the season Liverpool, fifth and three points behind local rivals Everton, have struggled to maintain their form in the Premiership immediately after a Champions League game.

And with the FA declaring that, regardless of whether Liverpool win the tournament, it will only allow the top four clubs in the Premiership to

compete in next season's Champions League, the Anfield club badly need a win.

Everton, who have a game in hand, can pile the pressure on Liverpool and fellow fourth-place rivals Bolton, by beating Newcastle at Goodison Park 24 hours earlier.

Chelsea meanwhile will be presented with the Premiership trophy at their Stamford Bridge home before Saturday's match with London rivals Charlton.

Down at the bottom three teams from the quartet of Southampton, Crystal Palace, West Brom and Norwich will be relegated.

FIXTURES

(1400GMT unless stated)
Saturday: Aston Villa v Manchester City, Blackburn v Fulham, Chelsea v Charlton (1130GMT), Crystal Palace v Southampton, Everton v Newcastle, Manchester United v West Brom (1615GMT), Middlesbrough v Tottenham, Norwich v Birmingham, Portsmouth v Bolton
Sunday: Arsenal v Liverpool (1505GMT)



PHOTO: COURTESY
Players and officials of Dhaka East Zone pose with the winner's trophy after becoming under-13 age group champions of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Tournament 2005 at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Nadal moves into qtrs



AFP, Rome

Fifth seed Rafael Nadal remains on course for a fifth singles title this year after sweeping into the quarterfinals of the Rome Masters here Thursday.

The red-hot 18-year-old Spaniard overpowered Argentine 11th seed Guillermo Canas 6-3, 6-1 to set up a last eight meeting with Czech Radek Stepanek, who beat Nicolas Almagro.

Other seeds to fall in Thursday's third round matches were Andy Roddick, French Open champion Gaston Gaudio and Tim Henman, leaving Nadal, who won in Barcelona and Monte Carlo last month, as the highest seed left in the clay court tournament.