

PREVIEW: PREMIERSHIP

'Survival Sunday'

Football

AFP, London

It's no surprise that this season's final round of Premiership matches has been dubbed "Survival Sunday" with all three relegation spots still to be decided.

The Premiership has never known a finish like it and Norwich, Southampton, Crystal Palace and West Brom -- the four clubs trying to avoid the drop -- are set for a nerve wracking afternoon.

Some estimates have calculated the cost of Premiership relegation to be as high as 20 million pounds, meaning that on Sunday three clubs are set for arguably the most expensive league game in their history.

At least Norwich's fate is in their own hands. They sit one place above the drop zone and victory against Fulham would guarantee their top flight status.

The other teams need to win and hope the Canaries slip up.

Southampton appear to have the toughest task, at home to a Manchester United side likely to

have been given the 'hair-dryer' treatment by Sir Alex Ferguson after their 3-1 defeat by champions Chelsea at Old Trafford on Tuesday. But Saints have upset the odds against United before, notably in 1976 when they stunned the Red Devils in a 1-0 FA Cup final win.

Ferguson counts Southampton boss Harry Redknapp and assistant Jim Smith as two of his closest managerial mates.

But the Scot promised no let-up in a game that could see United fans protesting against the Old Trafford takeover bid launched by American businessman Malcolm Glazer.

"Football is built on competition and survival but it is horrible when you find yourself playing a part in deciding the futures of great people you count as your friends," Ferguson said.

"It is a time of year I just do not enjoy but we will be professional and do our job the right way, as always, striving to win."

Palace meanwhile travel to Charlton for what should be a passionate south London derby even though the hosts are assured of mid-table safety despite an eight-

match winless streak.

At the top of the table Chelsea can add to their list of record-breaking accomplishments away to Newcastle.

Their win over United saw them set new Premiership marks of 29 league wins and 94 points in a single season.

And Newcastle will have to score an unlikely three goals to prevent Chelsea, who have only conceded 14 so far, beating Arsenal's 1998-99 record of 17 for the fewest goals let in a Premiership term.

The all-time record for the English top-flight of 16 conceded, set by Liverpool back in 1978-79, is also in danger although that was during a 42 as opposed to 38 game campaign.

FIXTURES

(1400GMT)

Sunday: Birmingham v Arsenal, Bolton v Everton, Charlton v Crystal Palace, Fulham v Norwich, Liverpool v Aston Villa, Manchester City v Middlesbrough, Newcastle v Chelsea, Southampton v Manchester United, Tottenham v Blackburn, West Brom v Portsmouth

PREVIEW: SERIE A

Stam seeks Parma favour

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan defender Jaap Stam is hoping Parma can do his side a massive favour by denying Serie A leaders Juventus three points on Sunday.

Milan are relying on other teams to give them a helping hand in the title race after last week's 1-0 home defeat to Juve which left them three points behind their championship rivals with three games left to play.

While Juve host a Parma side still threatened by relegation, reigning champions Milan play away to mid-table Puglian side Lecce.

"Juve have a dangerous match this weekend and let's hope they drop some points," said the 32-year-old Stam, who joined Milan in the

summer of 2004.

"It's true we cannot count solely on ourselves, we need Juventus to slip up.

"All we can do is win our last three games and see what they do. We still believe we can win the title."

Stam insisted Milan would not be distracted by their Champions League final against English Premiership side Liverpool on May 25.

"We are fully concentrated on facing Lecce and then Palermo the following week," he said. "We will only think about Istanbul after that game."

Stam and his defensive partners will have to be on top of their game against a Lecce side that has scored 59 goals in 35 matches - as many as table-topping Juventus.

Juventus, who before the Milan match imposed a ban on talking to the media in response to what they

feel is a deliberate attempt by the press to unsettle the club, will be hoping their football will do the talking once again.

Third-placed Inter Milan, who need four points from the last nine to be guaranteed third place, entertain Livorno at the San Siro.

The match between Udinese and Sampdoria, tied for fourth place on 59 points, could go a long way to deciding who claims the final Champions League place.

FIXTURES

Sunday's fixtures (all 1400 GMT kick-off): Bologna v Brescia, Fiorentina v Atalanta, Inter Milan v Livorno, Juventus v Parma, Lecce v AC Milan, Messina v Cagliari, Palermo v Reggina, Roma v Lazio, Siena v Chievo, Udinese v Sampdoria

Arjuna back from exile

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Former Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga on Friday agreed to represent his country on a key International Cricket Council (ICC) committee, ending a self-imposed five-year exile from the game.

Ranatunga, who quit international cricket in 2000, replaced former teammate and deputy Aravinda de Silva as Sri Lanka's representative on the ICC Cricket Committee.

"It's been a while since I visited this place," Ranatunga told AFP after arriving at Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) headquarters in downtown Colombo.

"I have tried to distance myself with the board politics because I was disgusted with what was going on and did not want to tarnish my image. So much has changed in the board offices over the years, it's like a five-star hotel now."

Ranatunga, captain of the 1996 World Cup-winning squad, will

attend the ICC Cricket Committee meeting chaired by former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Monday and Tuesday.

He is also tipped to take over as chairman of the Sri Lanka's cricket committee and expected to play a significant role in picking the next



ARJUNA RANATUNGA

coach of the national team.

"I am looking forward to give something back," said the 41-year-

old, who is also Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Tourism.

"This Sri Lankan team has enormous talent and I was very keen when (interim committee chairman) Jayantha Dharmadasa approached me and asked for my services."

Ranatunga's appointment is likely to evoke mixed response in the ICC. He has a good knowledge of the game, but is also a critic of the sport's world governing body.

Recently, when teammate Muttiah Muralitharan was ignored for the inaugural ICC awards in London, he called the event a "farce" and a "joke".

Sri Lanka's cricket administration was in turmoil last month when the government sacked the elected members of SLC, headed by Thilanga Sumathipala, and appointed an interim committee to run the sport.

Ranatunga's appointment to the ICC body is seen as a political move since he is part of the government and De Silva was vice-president of the erstwhile elected SLC.

No cricket

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"The ECB will be making no further comment on this case at present."

Piper had already been suspended by Warwickshire on Monday pending the outcome of his ECB hearing.

Back in 1997 Piper failed an in-house drugs test for which he served a one-match ban.

His fellow Warwickshire players Paul Smith, now retired, and Graham Wagg have also served drugs-related bans.

Last season Wagg was given a 15-month ban by the ECB after testing positive for cocaine and, as a consequence, saw Warwickshire terminate his contract.

Inzy eyes

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two different skippers for the different formats of the game.

And an ICC spokesman confirmed the job could be given to a player who is not currently captain of his national team.

Paceman Shoaib Akhtar, meanwhile, is hoping for another chance to take on the Aussies after a hamstring problem cut short his tour there last winter.

"If I get a chance to represent the World XI, I would do my best to upstage them. When you play against Australia, it brings the best out of you."

"I can't wait for the day when I play a lead role in beating Australia," he said.

Federer on course

REUTERS, Hamburg

World number one Roger Federer swept through to the Hamburg Masters semifinals with a resilient 6-4, 7-6 victory over Argentina's Guillermo Coria on Friday.

The 23-year-old top seed, who also beat Coria in last year's Hamburg final, was a break down in both sets and behind in the tiebreak but recovered to quell the Argentine 10th seed and set up a semifinal against Russian Nikolay Davydenko.

Federer, who will be attempting to win the only Grand Slam title missing from his collection at the French Open starting in 10 days, wowed the Rothenbaum crowd with some breath-taking groundstrokes on a sun-kissed centre court.

Having trailed 3-1, the Swiss wrested the initiative from last year's French Open runner-up, flourishing his backhand to devastating effect. He forced the decisive break at 5-4 when Coria twice hit forehands out to lose the set.

Tigers at ease

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but there is a good chance that some key players will be rested. We have already given (Khaled) Mashud the option to skip one match from the next two and it is now up to him to decide," said Bashar adding that middle order batsman Aftab Ahmed had recovered from the fever that kept him out of the first warm-up and was likely to play against Sussex.

Zvonareva,

FROM PAGE 12

Zvonareva, who lost to Frenchwoman Mauresmo in the Rome semi-finals 12 months ago.

"We usually have tough matches -- we've been to three sets a couple of times. I'll have to give it my best."

Zvonareva last played Schiavone in last year's Rome quarter-finals, winning 6-3, 6-3, but the Italian had been in excellent form this week, beating former world number one Serena Williams and 15th seed Ai Sugiyama in the previous two rounds.

Neither player managed to impose any consistency on their game in a see-saw start, which included six breaks of serve in the first eight games.

PCB boss wants

FROM PAGE 12

written off Shoaib completely for the future. Everyone just feels that he should play more cricket and regain his fitness before he makes himself available for Pakistan again," Shaharyar was quoted as saying in local daily 'The News' today.

"My advice to him at this stage is very clear -- that he should continue training hard and go and play for Worcestershire without a break and get back into top form. When he is 100 per cent match fit, he'll be considered for selection again," he added.

Shaharyar said he was not happy with the reports on Shoaib or with some of the comments made by the fast bowler himself on this issue.



PHOTO: AFP

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION ON OUR TACTICS FOR SATURDAY? Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o talks to his son during a training session in Barcelona on Thursday.

Joaquin, Cristiano Ronaldo interest Luxemburgo

MADRID

Real Madrid coach Wanderley Luxemburgo would like to sign Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese international has been linked with Los Merengues in recent weeks as the Spanish giants search for a replacement for Luis Figo, who looks certain to leave the club at the end of the current season.

They have also been linked with Betis winger Joaquin Sanchez and the Madrid coach has made it clear he would be happy to have the pair of them working under his charge.

"Of course I like players such as Joaquin or Cristiano Ronaldo," he said on Real Madrid television.

Luxemburgo was also critical of the duo's current management, claiming neither Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United or Lorenzo Serra Ferrer at Betis are getting the best out of the players.

"I believe that leaving them to play out on the wing limits their capacity to perform," he said, using Betis as an example.

"Who is more skilful, Joaquin or (Ricardo) Oliveira? Joaquin.

"However, who has scored most goals? Oliveira (with 19 this season).

"That is because he plays more centrally and is not wasted on the wing. I like my strikers to participate in the game from the wings," said Luxemburgo. (Internet Source)

Real, Carlos punished

AFP, Madrid

The anti-violence commission of the Spanish Football Federation on Thursday handed down a 3,001-euro (3,813-dollar) fine to Real Madrid after a racist banner was unfurled at last Saturday's match against Racing Santander at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

The slogan included the words "they are invading us, they are killing us," in reference to the fatal stabbing of a Spaniard on May 2 by a youth from the Dominican Republic, a killing that sparked an outbreak of racial violence.

The commission, an offshoot of the education ministry, also reprimanded Real's Brazilian international wingback Roberto Carlos, who following the match gave his shirt to a leading figure in the club's hard-right Ultra Surfan faction.

ITALIAN CUP

Inter get away goal

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan are well placed to reach the final of the Italian Cup after snatching a 1-1 draw away to Cagliari in the first leg of their semi-final.

Cagliari took a 50th minute lead when former Chelsea striker Gianfranco Zola curled a free kick into the top corner after Inter keeper Fabian Carini had handled the ball outside the penalty area.

But the visitors grabbed a precious away goal less than 60 seconds later when Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins bundled the ball home after Sinisa Mihajlovic's right-wing corner had caused panic in the Cagliari defence.

Despite spending close to 300 million euros on players in the last

decade, Inter have not won a trophy since 1998 when they lifted the UEFA Cup. On Wednesday, Roma were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Udinese.

French defender Philippe Mexes gave Roma a 37th minute lead, rising high at the back post to head home Antonio Cassano's crossed free-kick.

But Udinese equalised five minutes from time when a 25-yard drive from defender Valerio Bertotto flew into the top corner.

Roma, Italian champions in 2001, have endured a difficult season and are desperate for cup success to lift some of the gloom hanging over them.

They were knocked out in the first round of the Champions League and are currently languishing in 14th place in Serie A, just four points clear of third-from-bottom Chievo with three games remaining.

Shepherd's last bow July 12

Cricket

AFP, London

David Shepherd confirmed Thursday he will retire from the International Cricket Council (ICC) elite panel of umpires in July.

The popular Englishman's final international match will be the one-day international between England and Australia at The Oval on July 12 before he bows out from all senior umpiring at the end of the English county season.

Shepherd, 64, will retire with an umpiring world record of one-day matches, having already stood in 165 limited overs contests, and 92 Test matches.

His final Test match will be the second game of the series between West Indies and Pakistan in Jamaica next month.

"Cricket has been my life for 40 years as a player and then umpire," said Shepherd who played first-class cricket for Gloucestershire between 1965-79.

"I have enjoyed a wonderful career and it has been a very difficult decision to leave a job that I love. I seriously believe, however, that it is better to go at five to nine rather than five past," added Shepherd, who has also stood in the last three World Cup finals in India, England and South Africa.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed added: "David Shepherd has consistently been one of our sports top officials for over two decades.

"His astute decision-making and

cheerful manner earned him the respect of players throughout the cricket world and he will deservedly be remembered as one of our sport's greatest ever umpires."

The portly Shepherd's habit of hopping from one foot to another when the score rests on 111 brought the English cricket superstition of 'Nelson'



DAVID SHEPHERD

to a wider international audience.

His retirement comes 200 years after the death of British admiral Lord Horatio Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Nelson is said to have inspired the nickname for 111 on account of the mistaken belief he had lost one eye, one arm and one leg in battle even though, despite his other injuries, he retained the use of both legs.

PREVIEW: PRIMERA LIGA

An early start to the party?

Football

AP, Madrid

After leading the Spanish league for much of the season, Barcelona may take to the field at Levante's Ciudad de Valencia stadium on Saturday as champion.

Second-place Real Madrid, which trails by six points with three games remaining, must avoid defeat at Sevilla earlier the same day to keep alive its slim hopes of winning the championship.

If Madrid wins or draws, Barcelona needs only to match its rival's result to secure its first trophy in six years.

But players say they're not relaxing yet.

"I don't know whether it's going to end this weekend or when it's going to end," Brazil forward Ronaldinho said. "I don't feel a champion because I'm not a champion. The day we win the league, I'll be a champion."

Barcelona's last trophy was the 1999 league title, when it was led by Louis van Gaal. Now coached by another Dutchman, Frank Rijkaard, the club has laid plans for celebrating its likely success.

The players are to parade through the Catalan capital on Sunday, with the club's 98,000-capacity Camp Nou stadium open to supporters for concerts and fireworks.

Yet Ronaldinho, who scored a spectacular goal against Valencia last week, said the team is focused only on Saturday's game.

"No one's talking about celebrations or parties," FIFA's World Player of the Year said. "We're only talking about the way we have to play and keep playing. We're working just like before but even harder because we know there's a little bit to go before we can achieve our objective."

Levante, with six defeats in seven matches, is unlikely to delay the party, especially as Barcelona has won its past four games without conceding a goal.

Even if the Levante gets a surprise victory and Madrid stretches its seven-match winning streak, Rijkaard's side will still have two games - against Villarreal and Real Sociedad - to gain the three points it needs to make sure of the league

title. And if Madrid manages to pull level on points, Barcelona will stay above its rival because of its superior record in the clubs' meetings this season.

But Madrid coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo isn't so sure things are decided yet.

"Of course the league is still possible," Luxemburgo said. "It's difficult, but I have seen so many things in soccer. Madrid players can't say that the league is over just because Barcelona has maintained its lead. I would be very annoyed if we let our heads drop."

Madrid faces a tough test against Sevilla, which is bidding to secure a debut spot in next season's Champions League. Defeat would mean a second straight season without a trophy for the star-filled team.

Madrid striker Ronaldo has scored eight goals in his past five matches, taking him to 20 for the season. That's still three behind the league's top scorer, Samuel Eto'o of Barcelona.

Sevilla defender Javi Navarro is set to return from a five-game suspension for elbowing Mallorca midfielder Juan Arango, a blow which caused the Venezuela international to suffer respiratory failure.

After 35 games, Barcelona has 81 points to Madrid's 75.

Sevilla and Villarreal, both out of the title reckoning, have 58 points each, followed by Espanyol with 56 and Real Betis with 55. Last season's champion, Valencia, has 53.

At the foot of the table, Numancia became the first of the three teams to be relegated at the end of the season when it lost to Espanyol last Sunday. Two teams from Albacete, Mallorca, Levante and Racing Santander will share the same fate.

FIXTURES

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

Zidane won't change plans

Football

AFP, Madrid

French World Cup winner and Real Madrid veteran Zinedine Zidane is sticking to his guns on retirement, both at club and international level, according to statements carried Thursday on Real's official website RealMadrid.com.

"I'll certainly retire in 2007, though I don't rule out it could maybe be earlier. I will take the decision when I believe the appropriate time has come," said Zidane, whose scintillating two-goal showing in the 1998 World Cup final brought vic-

tory over Brazil.

Les Bleus have struggled in the qualifiers for next year's finals in Germany in Zidane's absence but he ruled out pulling on the national shirt again.

"France will qualify. The situation is difficult but I am sure they will make it. My decision to quit international football is irreversible," the 32-year-old insisted.

He added that "it hasn't been a good season on a personal level" but that he would return motivated after the summer break to help Real reassert themselves at home and in Europe after two seasons without silverware.

Glazer's MU bid sparks

FROM PAGE 12

founding of AFC Wimbledon by fans of south London club Wimbledon when the team was taken over and moved out of the city.

"I think a lot of the fans would be behind a move like this," said spokesman Mark Longden.

Manchester United's board of directors has also been wary of Glazer's overtures, labelling an earlier takeover plan "aggressive".

Britain's Sports Minister Richard Caborn warned that while the takeover was a "commercial decision" it would be "foolish" of any prospective buyer not to take account of fans' views.

The club have won an astonishing eight league titles, five FA Cups and one European title during manager Sir Alex Ferguson's 19-year tenure with the club.

Fans fear that he, along with a string of the club's leading players, could depart if Glazer takes over, although some reports Friday said the US businessman wanted the manager to remain.

Ferguson had been expected to address the issue at a press conference on Friday, but the club announced that the event would instead be hosted by his deputy, assistant manager Carlos Queiroz.

Newspapers on Friday largely sympathised with the fears of United fans, but some noted that the club had made a lot of money

by floating on the London Stock Exchange, and thus had to face the consequences.

"Manchester United 'belongs' in a real sense to its fans, for it is they who are the ultimate soul of a modern football club," the Guardian said.

"The trouble is that the club itself mortgaged its future to the vagaries of market forces by going public 14 years ago."

Ntini, Langeveldt

FROM PAGE 12

over as India's first foreign coach in 2000, quit after the home series against Pakistan in April to devote more time with his two children.

India's next international assignment is in August when they travel to Sri Lanka for a triangular one-day tournament, also featuring the West Indies.

Haynes

FROM PAGE 12

breach." The charge was brought to Crowe's notice by Darrell Hair, Eddie Nicholls and Billy Doctrove, the three match umpires.

West Indies: Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Chris Gayle, Xavier Marshall, Ramnareesh Sarwan, Brian Lara, Dwayne Smith, Runako Morton, Dwayne Bravo, Courtney Browne, Corey Collymore, Daren Powell, Fidel Edwards, Ian Bradshaw.