



Tottenham striker Dimitar Berbatov (C) celebrates with his teammates after scoring the first of his two goals in their UEFA Cup match against Club Brugge at White Hart Lane on Thursday.

Gerrard wants to make amends

AFP, London

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard admits a fierce desire to make amends for letting down Rafa Benitez is driving him out of his personal slump.

Gerrard believes Anfield boss Benitez is not to blame for Liverpool's unconvincing start to the season and insists the players must take the rap for the club's midtable league position.

Liverpool finally began to hit form in the last week as they recorded three consecutive home wins to help ease the pain of a dismal defeat at arch rivals Manchester United that left them 11 points behind the Premiership leaders.

Gerrard has been criticised for some lacklustre displays himself but he was instrumental in those victories against Reading, Aston Villa and Bordeaux.

And the England midfielder is determined to carry on leading from the front when Reading return to Anfield in the Premiership on Saturday.

Gerrard said: "It's away from home that we've really been letting ourselves, the manager

and the supporters down.

"Being in mid-table as we head into November is a major disappointment.

"I needed to find my own form first, but as captain I have to help other players find their best form."

Gerrard admits he has been below his best this season and claims the World Cup played a major factor in his jaded performances.

"I've been missing something since the start of the season and I have not had that spark to my game. I think coming back from the World Cup has been a factor," he said.

"I've heard it all, my body language isn't right, there's a problem and I am not happy at the club, I've got problems off the field, my head's not in it. "I'll say now that it is just not the case."

Elsewhere in the Premiership, leaders Manchester United host the league's surprise team Portsmouth on Saturday.

Harry Redknapp's side will start the day in fourth place but United striker Wayne Rooney has set his sights on staying top of the pile for the foreseeable future.

Rooney, who ended his 10-game goal-drought with a hat-trick at Bolton last weekend, said: "It's much better when you are at the top and looking down on teams,

we want to stay there for as long as we can and remain there until the end of the season.

"A lot of people talked about my form and lack of goals. But, as long as the team wins that's the important thing. But, since the Wigan game, I think my performances have been good and I always knew the goals would come.

"I was glad the goals came against Bolton because it shut a few people up. There's no better way to do than with a hat-trick. And you saw with (Paul) Scholes that once one comes, more will follow."

Champions Chelsea, currently behind United only on goal difference, face Tottenham on Sunday looking to extend their remarkable record against their London rivals.

Tottenham have not beaten Chelsea in the league since 1990 and Jose Mourinho's men will be desperate to maintain that run as they try to keep pace with United.

Also on Sunday Arsenal will try to improve their finishing and pile the pressure back on under-fire West Ham manager Alan Pardew.

Tomas Rosicky and Cesc Fabregas posed two contenders for misses of the season as

Arsenal squandered a host of chances during a goalless Champions League draw against CSKA Moscow on Wednesday.

Arsene Wenger's side will try to reproduce the fluent play that carved open the Russians against a West Ham team whose win against Blackburn last weekend was their first since the opening day of the season.

At the bottom of the table Newcastle manager Glenn Roeder desperately needs a victory against fellow strugglers Sheffield United after a run of six league games without a win.

FIXTURES	
(1500GMT kick-off unless stated)	
Saturday	
Bolton v Wigan, Charlton v Manchester City, Fulham v Everton (1245GMT), Liverpool v Reading, Manchester Utd v Portsmouth, Newcastle v Sheffield Utd (1715GMT), Watford v Middlesbrough	
Sunday	
Aston Villa v Blackburn (1400GMT), Tottenham v Chelsea (1600GMT), West Ham v Arsenal (1330GMT)	

Lyon reject allegations

AFP, Paris

The president of Lyon, Jean-Michel Aulas, has strongly rejected a suggestion which he described as vicious by a Rennes player that referees were indulgent towards them.

Champions Lyon travel to Rennes in a French league match on Saturday searching for their 15th consecutive victory in all competitions this season.

Aulas, reacting to the comments by 20-year-old Sylvain Marveaux that referees were lenient to Lyon, said: "I think his comments are biased and vicious, all the more so as they come from a young player."

The incredible run of the French champions of the last five seasons continued in midweek with a 1-0 Champions League win over Dynamo Kiev and, on current form, Rennes should be yet another victim.

Lyon have only failed to win

once this season in their second French league match, a 1-1 draw at home to Toulouse.

However Marveaux had his own theory on what has helped Lyon dominate this season, saying referees often favoured them.

"Of course it's easier to whistle a penalty for Lyon than for a small team," he said when asked at a press conference whether officials were indulgent towards Lyon.

"That's the strength of a big club which is normal," he added. "Their president (Jean-Michel) Aulas has lots of influence and his club is getting more and more prominent on the European football scene."

Marveaux, who joined the pro ranks this season, has scored one goal in the league, against Auxerre, and another in the League Cup against Lille.

Aulas replied by saying: "He is young and lacks experience. He needs to know how to control his nerves before a match as big as Saturday. To criticise referees and attack Lyon is not a sign of confidence.

"And for his information, I

would remind him that Lyon have only had one penalty awarded this season, from which they did not score, while Rennes have had three."

Lyon's failed penalty attempt came against St Etienne on October 14 which was taken by Juninho Pernambucano and saved by Jeremy Janot.

Lyon's Brazilian defender Cris will be suspended for the match while Fred, Patrick Muller and Claudio Cacapa are unavailable. Brazilian Fred will be out until after the winter break after tearing a hamstring against Marseille 11 days ago.

Meanwhile defenders Muller and Cacapa are on the mend after dislocating the right shoulder and tearing a right thigh muscle respectively.

Rennes player Youssouf Hadji, who hurt his left knee in their 1-0 defeat at Paris Saint Germain on Saturday, is out of the reckoning though apart from that the squad is fully fit.

Second-placed Marseille, who have 20 points from their 11 matches -- a mammoth 11 points behind runaway leaders Lyon who

have earned 31 points out of a possible 33 -- have Argentine defender Renato Civelli as a doubt for their home match against Lorient with a calf injury.

However Marseille coach Albert Emon can count on Nigeria's Taiwo, who returns from suspension, and midfielder Wilson Oruma, though midfielder Mathieu Valbuena has a hamstring pull and is out of the frame.

In other matches, bottom club Monaco must do without midfielder Jaroslav Plasil and defender Sylvain Monsoreau for their home match against Nice on Saturday and Paris Saint Germain entertain Lens in Sunday's late game.

FIXTURES	
Saturday	
Rennes v Lyon, Auxerre v Le Mans, Marseille v Lorient, Monaco v Nice, St Etienne v Toulouse, Sedan v Nantes, Sochaux v Troyes, Valenciennes v Lille	
Sunday	
Nancy v Bordeaux, Paris Saint Germain v Lens	

Arsenal ready to explode

AFP, London

Thierry Henry has warned the rest of Europe that Arsenal are ready to explode in the Champions League.

The London club face a tense scramble to qualify for the second round of the competition after they were held to a 0-0 draw by CSKA Moscow on Wednesday.

Henry and his team-mates were guilty of wasting a series of chances to win the match and they must now beat Hamburg later this month and avoid defeat in their last Group G

match in Porto to be sure of reaching the knockout stages.

But Arsenal captain Henry is convinced his young side's attacking play against the Russians proves they are close to fulfilling their undoubted potential.

Henry said: "In a game like that you are closer to exploding into a great team than not heading in the right direction.

"We did not play at our best against Everton (at the weekend) and did not show our class, but the commitment was there from the start against Moscow and we had opportunities to score a goal from every angle of the pitch.

"We have won games in Europe

during my time when I did not know how we won. Against Moscow, I do not know how we did not.

"As the skipper, when I walked back into the dressing room I could not say anything to the team. We had the right aggressiveness, the right attitude and played good football.

"We created chances once again and did not put the ball in the back of the net... Cesc had one, Robin (van Persie) had three. We had so many opportunities.

"How the shot from Tomas (Rosicky) did not go in, I still ask myself -- but sometimes football is a bit weird."

Arsenal reached the Champions

League final last season after an impressive run that included victories against Real Madrid and Juventus, so to be eliminated at this stage is unthinkable for France star Henry.

"It is difficult to have a go at the team with the way we played against Moscow. Although I know there is frustration that the result was not there, we are still in a good position to qualify," he said.

"If we now have to go to Porto needing a win, that is the way we are going to have to do it.

"We would rather not go there needing a win or draw but if it goes down to that, so be it."

Barca, Chelsea in UEFA's line of fire

AFP, London

The on-field conduct of Champions League rivals Barcelona and Chelsea could be investigated, said Lennart Johansson, the president of European football's ruling body.

Johansson, who is aiming to win re-election ahead of French legend Michel Platini next January, said that behaviour on the pitch is a "crucial issue" for the game and has warned players to improve their on-field conduct.

A case in point, he said, was the Barcelona v Chelsea Champions League match in midweek.

Johansson repeated that both clubs should face a disciplinary investigation following their match, despite neither the referee nor match delegate recommending any action be taken.

A UEFA spokesman has admitted that an investigation could still be launched into the conduct of both clubs.

In an interview with the Press Association, Johansson said: "On the crucial issue of behaviour in the game I do think there were issues at the recent Barcelona v Chelsea match which will need to be looked at by the UEFA disciplinary bodies in relation to both clubs.

"It's a matter for the UEFA disciplinary process, not for me personally, but I do want to emphasise the importance of good standards of behaviour and proper conduct in the game.

"This applies to every club, coach and player and it's not my intention to single out any individual.

"Like many in the game I think improving standards of conduct is an important issue which must not be dependent on the disciplinary process."

Kaka rules

INTERNET, undated

A survey in Brazilian newspaper O'Globo insists Milan ace Kaka is better than Barcelona star Ronaldinho.

A massive 82 per cent have backed the Rossoneri sensation with the stuttering European Footballer of the Year winning just 18 per cent of the vote.

Kaka has been in fine form for the Italian club this term and netted a hat-trick in the 4-1 win over Anderlecht in the Champions League last night.

Meanwhile, Milan target Ronaldinho has struggled to live up to his billing as the best player in the world.

The former Paris Saint-Germain ace endured a disappointing 2006 World Cup and has started the season slowly at the Nou Camp.

Ole sidelined

AFP, London

Manchester United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will be sidelined for several weeks after suffering a hamstring injury in his side's Champions League defeat against FC Copenhagen.

Solskjaer, who had only just returned from two years out with a series of knee problems, was forced off in the last minute of the match in Denmark and is likely to miss United's forthcoming matches against Portsmouth, Southend, Blackburn and Sheffield United.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson admitted he was relieved the injury was not more serious and said: "It's unfortunate for Ole. It is a hamstring and he will be out for a few weeks. But I am actually quite happy.

"Given his previous history of knee problems, I was a bit concerned when he came off but, fortunately, it is only a hamstring."

Amelia savours strike

INTERNET, undated

Marco Amelia will be remembered by many as one of the few goalkeepers ever to score during a Uefa Cup game, a goal which proved vital for his side's chances to remain in with a chance of qualifying to the next round of the Uefa Cup.

The Livorno goaltender admitted that it was his own decision to go upfront for the corner and maybe his opponents did not notice him, that's why he ended up scoring.

"No one asked me to go forward, on the contrary my team-mates did not want me to go up. It was my decision, a decision I took by instinct because I did not want to lose, then as a child I use to play in attack.

"There were a few minutes remaining till the end, so I thought of going forward. Maybe the opponents did not notice me, so I could head without any problem.

"I'm very happy for this incredible epilogue, as we did not deserve to lose."

Bremen setting the placemark

AFP, Berlin

On current form Werder Bremen are the favourites to lift the German championship this season and they have the chance to crank up the pressure on reigning champions Bayern Munich this weekend.

League leaders Bremen have a three-point cushion at the summit and a home victory over Energie Cottbus on Saturday can make it a six-point gap with Bayern and Schalke 04 facing off 24 hours later.

Bremen have won their last four league games, scoring a staggering 18 goals in the process, to see their title odds cut to 6/5.

Brazilian playmaker Diego, 21, has been a key figure behind the surge and has earned a recall to the Brazilian national team after scoring five goals to top the Bundesliga scoring charts.

"They always had faith in me here at Bremen and gave me responsibility," said Diego. "I always said it was my aim to get back in the Brazil fold.

"Now I want to keep playing well and help Bremen stay on top for the remainder of the season."

Promoted Energie Cottbus look



Livorno goalkeeper Marco Amelia (L) celebrates after scoring the equalising goal in their UEFA Cup match against Partizan Belgrade in Belgrade on Thursday.

like lambs to the slaughter but the East German club have started the season impressively and lie sixth in the standings.

If Bremen can win the pressure would be on Bayern to respond and they have a tough fixture against Schalke who are level with them on points.

"Bremen are going so strong at the moment and are playing the best football in Germany but that can all change with a few injuries," said Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer.

"We have a few of them at the moment and I think we will get better when some players come back."

Bayern are still without first teamers Owen Hargreaves, Lucio, Valeriy Ismael and Lukas Podolski while Dutch midfielder Marc van Bommel is rated 50-50 for the Schalke trip.

A 0-0 draw with Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League on Tuesday was enough to see Bayern into the last 16 of the competition but the performance prompted a chorus of jeers after the final whistle.

"The fans pay their hard-earned money for goals but it was just not our day," said Belgian defender Daniel van Buyten.

With three league defeats already this season Bayern can not afford to slip up again against Schalke or the

FIXTURES

Saturday

Werder Bremen v Energie Cottbus, Bayer Leverkusen v Mainz 05, Hertha Berlin v FC Nuremberg, Borussia Dortmund v Arminia Bielefeld, VfL Wolfsburg v SV Hamburg, Alemannia Aachen v VfB Stuttgart

Sunday

Schalke 04 v Bayern Munich, Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia Monchengladbach

EPL, Bundesliga in YouTube

AFP, Paris

The English Premier League and German Bundesliga are unhappy at Google's use of exclusive images to their respective leagues on the internet search engine's YouTube video exchange site.

Dan Johnson, spokesman for the Premier League, told AFP on Thursday that a letter was sent last week asking Google to take down any material that infringed their property rights and the rights of their holders.

And the German football league (DFL) is considering taking legal action against the company for the unauthorised use of images from the Bundesliga.

In Germany the rights to the Bundesliga are controlled by the DFL who said they were taking any illegal use of images very seriously.

"We sell our rights, which include internet rights, to our partners very expensively. These rights are being flouted by YouTube."

Similar legal action is not being considered as an option at the moment in England, according to Johnson.

"Usually the problem is solved with the letter," he said. "The impact it has is not that significant. It is not affecting our ability to sell our rights. We have to defend our rights otherwise others will come and say why can't we use them."