



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann (R) tries to scramble back as Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien (C) sees his shot rasp the bar during their Premiership match at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

## Honours even at the Bridge

AFP, London



Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien hit a stunning late equaliser to salvage a 1-1 draw against Arsenal on Sunday.

Jose Mourinho's side looked set for their first home league defeat in 52 matches when Mathieu Flamini put Arsenal in front late on.

But Essien rescued Chelsea with a blistering long range strike with just six minutes remaining.

However, it is Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson who will have been more satisfied by the outcome than either manager at Stamford Bridge.

United are now eight points ahead of second-placed Chelsea and the reigning champions have just one game in hand, against Newcastle on Wednesday.

But Mourinho had the following warning to the Old Trafford boss.

"Ferguson, I think he must be happy now as we dropped two points but if he thinks it's over he's in trouble!"

He praised his side's feisty reaction after Flamini had put the

Gunners ahead.

"After their goal we had a great emotional reaction. Losing at home with minutes to go, it was an incredible reaction. Essien's goal was unbelievable."

Chelsea kicked-off trailing in Manchester United's slipstream after their title rivals extended their unbeaten run to 12 matches on Saturday.

So the onus was on Mourinho's men to take the game to Arsenal and Michael Ballack did just that as he flashed a powerful drive just wide in the 15th minute.

With William Gallas ruled out of a return to his former club with a thigh injury and fellow centre-back Kolo Toure suspended, Wenger was forced to pair the relatively inexperienced Philippe Senderos and Johan Djourou at the heart of his defence.

Chelsea were quick to try and

### TOP SIX

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Man United	17	14	2	1	38	9	44
Chelsea	16	11	3	2	26	9	36
Portsmouth	17	8	4	5	23	14	28
Liverpool	17	8	4	5	23	15	28
Bolton	17	8	3	6	19	15	27
Arsenal	16	7	5	4	26	13	26

take advantage of that perceived weak spot and Frank Lampard nearly punished sloppy defending in the 17th minute.

Drogba flicked on Geremi's long throw and, as Arsenal's back four dithered, Lampard drove a shot into the turf that cannoned off a post before being scrambled clear.

Thierry Henry's absence through injury left Arsenal toothless up front and Robin van Persie had their only worthwhile attempt of the first half when his long-range shot skimmed narrowly past a post.

The most intriguing sub-plot of the day was how Chelsea left-back Ashley Cole would fare against the club he left so bitterly in August.

Cole spent eight years with Arsenal before falling out with the club's directors over their failure to meet his contract demands.

The England star's decision to turn his back on Arsenal still rankles with Gunners fans, who waved bunches of fake English pound notes with Cole's face printed on and taunted him throughout the match.

To their obvious delight Cole was booked midway through the first half for a rash lunge on Aleksandr Hleb.

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## Barca arrive in Tokyo

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Club World Cup favourites Barcelona were greeted by a scrum of about 200 fans, journalists and security guards as they arrived here on Monday.

About 100 supporters wearing Barcelona shirts and holding banners were held back by the guards as the European champions filed through Narita Airport.

World Player of the Year Ronaldinho, wearing black sunglasses after the long-haul flight, waved to the crowd but was ushered away by security guards as he made to sign autographs.

Portuguese playmaker Deco gave a thumbs-up and coach Frank Rijkaard was the last man through.

Rijkaard's men are bidding to go one better than Johan Cruyff's dream team by landing the club's

first intercontinental trophy. Cruyff's side lost 2-1 to Sao Paulo in the equivalent fixture in 1992.

The Spanish champions arrive on a high, top of La Liga and with Ronaldinho underlining his return to form by hitting the winner against Real Sociedad on Saturday.

"This competition is something that our team has never achieved," the Brazilian said before their departure.

"To sum it up, this is a great scenario for the end of the year and we are going to give the best of ourselves to end it up in a great way."

Barcelona open their campaign on Thursday, when they will play the winner of Monday's match between Jeonbuk Motors and Club America of Mexico.

If they win that match, they are likely to face South American champions Internacional of Brazil in Sunday's final.

"We are getting ready for a very prestigious event. This is a very high-level trophy and we feel very

happy to be able to participate in it," Rijkaard said.

Club president Joan Laporta said Barcelona were sharply focused on the tournament.

"We don't need motivation. It is the FIFA Club World Cup. And it is no longer just one game, but more," Laporta said.

"We have never won this title and so we are very keen to win it, because we don't have it in our trophy cabinet. We are well focused because we know it won't be easy."

"I hope we can win on Thursday and get into the final. We know that if we put the work in, we can win this trophy."

Egypt's Al Ahly beat Oceania champions Auckland City 2-0 in the opening match on Sunday.

Sao Paulo won last year's trophy, dawning Liverpool 1-0 in the final.

The tournament between six continental champions has replaced the traditional Europe-South America face-off held since 1960.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona's Brazilian maestro Ronaldinho waves to fans upon arrival at the Narita International Airport in Tokyo on Monday.

## Pardew gets the sack

AFP, London

Struggling English Premiership side West Ham on Monday sacked manager Alan Pardew.

The club are in 18th place in the Premiership after Saturday's 4-0 thrashing at Bolton with only three points separating them from bottom club Watford.

"Alan has made an important contribution since joining as manager in September 2003 but this season's results have been disappointing," the club said a statement.

"The Chairman, Mr Eggert Magnusson, and the Board have been concerned by the performances of recent weeks and feel that it is the right time to make a change in the best interests of the club."

The Hammers have lost five of their last six Premiership games including both matches since Icelandic businessman Magnusson became chairman a week ago.

"Mr Magnusson and the Board would like to place on the record their thanks to Alan Pardew for his hard work and commitment and to wish him well for the future," the club statement added.

First team coach Kevin Keen will take temporary charge of team affairs until a new appointment has been made.

## NO STOPPING INTER Lazio dent Roma's dreams

REUTERS, Rome



Inter Milan beat Empoli 3-0 on Sunday to notch up a record-equalling eighth league win in a row and open a seven-point lead in Serie A.

Second-half goals from Hernan Crespo, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Walter Samuel helped Inter equal a club record winning run dating back to the 1939-40 season.

Inter have 39 points from 15 matches, seven points more than second-placed AS Roma, whose title bid suffered a setback when they lost 3-0 to city rivals Lazio at the Olympic Stadium in Rome.

Palermo, a point further back in third, beat Livorno 3-0 at home while Catania overcame Udinese 1-0 to climb to fourth on 23 points.

AC Milan, who started the season with eight points deducted for their part in a match-fixing scandal, remain mired near the foot of the division after Alberto Gilardino missed a penalty in a 0-0 draw with Torino.

Inter lacked their usual fluency in the first half at Empoli's Castellani stadium.

The closest they came to taking

the lead before the interval was when a short clearance from a free kick fell kindly for Santiago Solari to thump the ball into the side-netting.

In the 60th minute, however, Ibrahimovic headed a free kick off the bar and Crespo reacted quickly to turn the rebound into the roof of the net.

As Empoli pushed forward for an equaliser, they left themselves exposed at the back, opening up the space for Ibrahimovic to run at goal and curl Inter's second goal in off the post.

Defender Samuel wrapped up the result three minutes from time when he headed in a Nicolas Burdisso cross.

"We played an excellent match today," said Inter coach Roberto Mancini, who identified his team's 4-3 win over Milan at the end of October as the result that gave his players the self-belief to extend

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Inter Milan	15	12	3	0	32	14	39
Roma	15	10	2	3	32	14	32
Palermo	15	10	1	4	30	18	31
Catania	15	6	5	4	21	26	23
Lazio	15	7	3	5	25	13	21
Atalanta	15	5	5	5	24	24	20

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## Jose taunts Arsenal

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho accused Arsenal of taking more satisfaction from sabotaging Chelsea's Premiership challenge than getting their own title bid back on track.

But Mourinho said: "Arsenal are 18 points behind Manchester United with one game in hand. So when I see a team happy with their result and yet they are out of the title race, it is a surprise."

"I think it was more important for them to get a positive result at Stamford Bridge than get into the fight for the title."

"It is very funny to see this kind of co-operation. It looks like they are happy not because they got a point but because we didn't get three points. They had the quality of football, organisation and control of possession. But ambition to win? No. Only one team tried to win."

"When you are in a situation when you are far from your objectives you have to go to win every game. One point is only good for one thing: your pride."

"It is good for them because it is a result at the home of your rival. But I was waiting for more because they needed to win."

"When the season starts I have to fight against Liverpool, Manchester United and Arsenal for the Premiership, but after the result today it is impossible for them to be champions in my opinion."

Chelsea are now in the unusual position of having to come from behind in the title race, but Mourinho maintains that his side have no reason to lose faith in their ability to win a third successive championship.

A victory against Newcastle on Wednesday would reduce the gap to five points and, with Ferguson's side still to visit Stamford Bridge, Mourinho is confident the battle will go down to the wire.

## Jacobsen joins Nuremberg

AFP, Nuremberg

Danish international defender Lars Jacobsen on Monday agreed a deal with German Bundesliga club Nuremberg.

The 27-year-old FC Copenhagen player will join the German side on a three-year deal from next July.

Capped six times for Denmark, Jacobsen played for two seasons with German club Hamburg before joining FC Copenhagen in 2004.

The Danish club played Champions League after winning the league title in 2004 and 2006.

## Loew hails young blood

Football

AFP, Frankfurt

Germany coach Joachim Loew on Monday hailed the young German footballers discovered during the 2006 World Cup as the dawn of a new golden age for the national side.

Germany finished third in the World Cup on home soil thanks to young players including Bayern Munich trio Philip Lahm, 23, Bastian Schweinsteiger, 22 and Lukas Podolski, 21, and Werder Bremen defender Per Mertesacker, 22.

And Loew, who took over from Juergen Klinsmann after the World Cup, believes that these are the players who could take Germany to their fourth World Cup title in 2010.

"With young players like Lahm, Schweinsteiger, Podolski, Mertesacker, we have for the coming years the equivalent of a golden generation," said Loew.

"These players have progressed

## Zidane comes to his roots

AFP, Algiers

French football star Zinedine Zidane arrived in Algeria on Monday on his first visit to his parents' homeland since he was a boy, with the government laying on a hero's welcome for the former captain of Les Bleus.

Zidane, 34, is visiting the country at the invitation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika who has laid on a programme of events, including an appearance at an Algiers stadium on Thursday when he will kick-off a local match before a 60,000-strong crowd.

His arrival at the city's airport triggered a scrum as photographers jostled to capture the moment Zidane walked onto the tarmac accompanied by his parents, who come from the country's Kabylie region.

Photographers slipped through the security net to rush onto the tarmac as Zidane's plane, in a rare move, taxied to a stop in front of the airport's VIP lounge.

Some of the visiting dignitaries were nearly squashed in the

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PHOTO: AFP

Lazio midfielder Tomaso Rocchi (in vests) goes towards the fence to celebrate the victory against city rivals Roma at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Sunday.