



An agitated Chelsea frontman Didier Drogba (R) shouts at referee Philip Dowd during their Premiership encounter against Aston Villa at Villa Park on Tuesday.

Villa frustrate champions

AFP, Birmingham



Jose Mourinho's public rage at his malfunctioning Premiership champions failed to have the desired effect when Chelsea dropped more valuable points in the title race after a goalless draw at Villa Park on Tuesday.

Chelsea's inability to record their first win at Villa Park since 1999 left the champions for the past two seasons six points behind Premiership leaders United and in the unusual position of having to play catch-up with Alex Ferguson's men.

To make matters worse for Mourinho he looks likely to be extended for an extended period of time.

The Dutch defender lasted only 33 minutes of his return from suspension before he left the field with suspected knee ligament damage following a challenge with Northern Ireland midfielder Steven Davis.

Juve give up on Mascherano

INTERNET, undated

Juventus have revealed they have given up on signing West Ham midfielder Javier Mascherano.

Juve coach Didier Deschamps has admitted he would like to add the Argentinian star to his squad as the fallen giants look to return to the top flight of Italian football after being relegated for match-fixing.

However, Juve sporting director Alessio Secco told an Italian newspaper that the deal was too complicated, apparently due to the fact Mascherano is owned by investment group MSI.

Secco told *La Stampa*: "That (Mascherano deal) will not be possible."

"We have pursued this until the day the market opened, but we have had to renounce because of the complicated contract situation."

Mascherano, along with compatriot Carlos Tevez, has failed to settle at West Ham and has been linked with a host of clubs, including Liverpool.

Secco also revealed that Juve would not be making many moves in the transfer window with "The Old Lady" sitting just a point off the top of Serie B.

"We have the idea of loaning (Tomas) Guzman and perhaps (Paolo) De Ceglie -- but other than that nothing will happen," he said.

David Trezeguet will be given time to decide over a new contract, however, Gianluigi Buffon, Mauro Camoranesi and Alessandro Del Piero are ready to sign new deals regardless of whether Juve are promoted or not.

Secco said: "With David we are already speaking, but he wants to see what Juve will be next season."

"We may need to give him more time than others, but we will offer all a contract extension."

"For them (Buffon and Camoranesi) they have enough optimism to sit and speak now," Secco continued.

"I believe Buffon has already accepted that he will respect this current contract which expires in 2011 and also the same with Camoranesi."

"Alex was the first one to accept us in Serie B and therefore we recognise that part but we will look at the issue of the future with him."



Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova flashes the victory sign as she poses for pictures with kids at a tennis clinic in Hong Kong on Wednesday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Coach embroiled in match-fixing

AFP, Singapore

A former coach of Malaysia's national football team went on trial Wednesday charged with match fixing in Singapore.

Chow Kwai Lam could face up to five years in prison if convicted.

He is accused of bribing Paya Lebar-Punggol FC goalkeeper Zulkifli Zainolabidin to let in two or three goals during a local professional league match in June 2005, according to the charge sheet.

Chow, who is also a former coach of the Singaporean club, is alleged to have offered 200-300 dollars (131-196 US) plus a further unspecified amount.

His lawyer Hamidul Haq told AFP at the conclusion of the hearing that court heard testimony from three witnesses including a newspaper reporter and a player.

Haq said he will cross-examine the key prosecution witness when court resumes Thursday.

The subordinate court trial is scheduled to last until Friday.

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Blues to curb spending

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho says Chelsea won't pay over the odds for players in the January transfer window.

The Blues boss continues to be linked with a big-money move for Manchester City defender Micah Richards.

He said: "I want to go into the market but I have told my top people that it is time for other clubs to look at us as a normal club.

"People want my players on loan or at sale prices. When I go for a player it is like being told an Aston Martin worth 250,000 pounds will cost me 1 million pounds. Then tell them 'goodbye'."

"I am not speaking about Micah Richards. I am speaking generally. We are waiting and watching to see the reactions of other people and we are not crazy."

Terry expects to be fit for Chelsea's next Premiership game against Wigan -- but will miss the League Cup semi-final against Wycombe Wanderers.

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Nevertheless, after venting his "anger and frustration" after Chelsea's 2-2 draw with London rivals Fulham last week, Mourinho was in more conciliatory mood in Birmingham.

"I'm happy with my team," Mourinho told Sky Sports afterwards. "The team played as a team."

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Villa manager Martin O'Neill might have equalled his worst ever run as a manager, by completing his 10th game without a victory, a sequence he endured when in charge of Leicester City, but he was pleased by his team's resilience.

"Our players worked tirelessly and they stuck at it until the end. We've played better and lost," said O'Neill.

Only Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba escaped Mourinho's outburst after the draw with Fulham.

The forward is one of the few Portuguese coach feels he can

rely upon at the moment.

Mourinho's faith is hardly misplaced as Drogba sits at the top of the Golden Boot charts, but he could have increased his lead over Manchester United's Ronaldo in the eighth minute at Villa Park.

His movement to lose his marker, Gary Cahill, was exemplary, but his attempted volley after Shaun Wright-Phillips' cross was nowhere near as good, bouncing into the ground and over the crossbar from six yards.

Without suspended German international Michael Ballack, Mourinho put the onus firmly on Frank Lampard to inspire his faltering team, but the England international appeared jaded once again, apart from one long-range effort which flew fractionally wide of Gabor Kiraly's cross-bar.

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