



Benfica striker Nuno Gomes strikes a spectacular bicycle-kick against Boavista during their Premiership match at the Luz Stadium in Lisbon on Friday.

Wenger unsure of Lehmann future

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger admitted on Friday that he is still unsure whether German goalkeeper Jens Lehmann will be with the Gunners next season.

The 37-year-old Lehmann will be a free agent in the summer and, as such, could sign a pre-contract agreement at another foreign club. Formal talks over a new deal have not yet taken place, with the player keen on the security of a deal longer than the 12 months the Gunners appear set to offer.

Wenger would like Lehmann to stay at the Emirates Stadium but he insists the club will not waiver from their normal stance of one-year extensions for their senior players.

"I had a meeting with him. At the moment, we have to sit down again to decide about that (contract)," said Wenger.

"Ideally, I would like him to stay. But I do not know yet. You have to wait."

"He will not get more than one year. What can change is somebody can offer him three years."

Wenger accepts it is a risk to leave negotiations so late, but maintained off-field issues would not hamper the German's performances.

"That is a risk I take," said the Arsenal manager, who knows there are plenty of clubs ready to offer Lehmann his preferred terms.

Terry issues battle cry

AFP, London



Chelsea skipper John Terry has echoed Jose Mourinho's warning that the champions cannot afford the slightest slip-up as they enter the final stretch of their tussle with Manchester United for the Premiership title. Chelsea's morale will receive a huge boost when the inspirational England captain returns to action against Charlton on Saturday, finally ending a six-week lay-off for back surgery and related calf problems.

Mourinho's men have looked defensively fragile in his absence and dropped points have allowed United to open up a six-point lead at the top.

"We've got to make up six points on Manchester United in 13 games -- seven really to go ahead," Terry said on the eve of his comeback.

"What that means is that we've just got to go on winning games because we can't really afford to lose points."

"If we do go on winning games, they can't afford to lose points. The race is on."

Despite being beset by behind-the-scenes wrangling between Mourinho and club owner Roman Abramovich and a string of serious injuries, Chelsea remain in the hunt for four trophies and Terry believes a clean sweep is a genuine possibility.

"We're in the final of the League Cup," he said. "We entered the competition to win it and that's still what we intend to do."

"There's a real feel for the League Cup at this club, success in it sets up your season as it did two years ago for the winning of our first Premiership."

"So we want to win it and then we want to win more. We're in the fifth round of the FA Cup and we've been drawn at home against lower-league opposition."

"If we are not lazy or arrogant or stupid, or extremely unlucky, we ought to go into the quarter-finals. The FA Cup is the only English competition that we haven't won in Roman and Jose's time and we owe it to both of them as well as ourselves."

"The Champions League returns this month and although Porto maybe a better team than when we played them two years

ago, we are the group winners and they are the runners-up and we have enough quality and commitment in our squad to win the round."

"So this is the way it is. We believe that we can continue to compete in all four competitions."

Mourinho echoed the bullish tone of his skipper, insisting he was not concerned that Liverpool's strong run would carry them past the champions and into second place in the league.

"I look to Manchester United, I don't look to Liverpool," Mourinho insisted. "Liverpool have a good team and they are winning matches but I don't look back, I look up."

"We are currently on a run in which we have lost just once in 18 matches. We had a little spell with a lot of injuries in which we drew a number of games."

"Apart from that we have been doing fine and even with that, we have not been losing. So we have to feel good about the rest of the season."

"We will be trying to win in every competition. We must play a lot of football -- maybe more than anyone else."

Lucky goalie!

AFP, Besancon

Former Sochaux goalkeeper Vincent Fernandez has been awarded more than a million euros from his ex-employers for wrongful dismissal, the player's lawyer said Friday.

The Besancon appeal court ordered Sochaux, a French first division club, to pay damages of 1,052,606 euros for firing Fernandez in 2002.

Lawyer Samuel Chevrete said Sochaux failed to follow proper procedures when giving Fernandez the sack after he refused to play in the reserves.

The 32-year-old currently plays for second division outfit Chateauroux and previously played for Strasbourg and Paris St Germain.

Kalou tips Gallardo to shine

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain forward Bonaventure Kalou believes Argentine playmaker Marcelo Gallardo will be the team's key player when the Ligue 1 strugglers travel to arch-rivals Olympique Marseille on Sunday.

"His arrival is a good thing for the club. He is kind of player we were missing in the squad," the Ivory Coast international told OM's Web site on Saturday.

The former Argentine international, who played in Ligue 1 with Monaco from 1999 to 2003, joined the Paris side from River Plate during the January transfer window.

Fourth-placed Marseille, who trail third-placed RC Lens by one point, will have an eye on the top three, four days after beating Olympique Lyon 2-1 in a French Cup last-16 tie.

"We come here to bring something back home but it will be hard," said Kalou.

"Marseille are one of the most dangerous teams of the moment."

Helton extends Porto contract

AFP, Lisbon

Brazilian international keeper Helton da Silva Arruda has extended his contract with FC Porto until 2012, the Portuguese champions said Friday.

The 28-year-old replaced Vitor Baia as FC Porto's first-choice keeper shortly after he joined the club from Portuguese side Uniao Leiria in 2005. His previous contract was due to expire in 2010.

FC Porto lead the Portuguese first division standings with 40 points from 16 matches, five points ahead of their nearest rivals Benfica.

Merseyside derby draws blank

AFP, Liverpool



Rafa Benitez's third-placed side failed to turn possession into goals on a frustrating afternoon which could have finally ended their hopes of getting back into the title race.

And they went close to paying the ultimate price as Andy Johnson almost snatched victory for the visitors with a 60th minute effort which Liverpool keeper Jose Reina did well to save with his feet.

The result leaves Liverpool 10 points behind leaders Manchester United with 12 games remaining and Benitez will regard this as a case of two points dropped by his side.

The Spaniard made one change to the side which defeated West Ham in midweek to stretch their Premiership winning run to five games.

Sami Hyypia made way for the return of Jermaine Pennant yet the biggest surprise was on the Everton teamsheet with England striker Johnson made a quicker than expected return from injury.

Johnson was expected to be out for six weeks after suffering an ankle injury in last month's 2-0 win at Wigan, but nine-goal marksman passed a late fitness test to complete a rapid return one month ahead of schedule.

His appearance provided Everton, who started five places and 14 points adrift of their Merseyside neighbours, with a massive boost as they looked to complete the 'double' over

Liverpool for the first time since 1984-85 season following a comprehensive 3-0 triumph over Benitez's side at Goodison Park in September.

Yet the visitors found themselves on the defensive for much of the first-half despite Steven Gerrard almost stabbing the ball into his own net inside the opening minute while trying to make a clearance.

Liverpool's best effort of a niggly first-half fell to leading scorer Peter Crouch but the England striker was denied his 14th goal of the season after Tim Howard managed to get his body in the way of his acrobatic effort from 12-yards.

United States keeper Howard denied Dirk Kuyt when the Holland striker tried to place his effort in the top corner of the net in the 26th minute after good work by Gerrard before Xabi Alonso went close from 30-yards.

Yet that was as good as it got in a first half littered with fouls and niggly incidents. This is one of the most competitive fixtures in the English calendar with Gerrard and Everton's Dutch winger Andy van der Meide both dismissed in the corresponding fixture last season.

Referee Alan Wiley did not have to dish out any red cards this time but he still had his work cut out with Everton's Leon Osman cautioned while Australian international Tim Cahill was fortunate to escape with a caution for a crunching challenge on Jermaine Pennant which set the tone for the match.

The second-half proved just as meaty as the first 45 minutes with Everton skipper Phil Neville booked for a cynical challenge on Craig Bellamy along with Arteta for a foul.

But the free-flowing football which had helped Liverpool sweep back into the top three was once again missing as Everton went

closest to snatching all three points on the hour mark.

An error by the usually reliable Steve Finnan let in Johnson who forced Jose Reina into the best save of the match after his initial effort was blocked.

Crouch failed to connect with a late close-range chance but a goal at that stage would have been harsh on the visitors, who defended resolutely enough to earn their point.

Stankovic extends Inter deal

INTERNET, undated

Dejan Stankovic has ended speculation over his future by renewing his Inter contract until June 30, 2010.

The Serb's status was in doubt as negotiations dragged on, but he has seemingly put that behind him with this new deal.

"I want to thank President Massimo Moratti and all the directors who worked to make our common goal become a reality, both for me and the club," said Stankovic on the official Inter website.

"I must also reserve a thought for Giacinto Facchetti, who greeted me when I first arrived. I was, and still am, tied to him by a very special bond."

Former President Facchetti died of cancer in 2006 and the midfielder wanted to thank the legendary figure who helped him make the move from Lazio.

"Now I want to share my satisfaction and happiness with everyone who loves Inter as much as I do," concluded Stankovic.

Messi raring to go

REUTERS, Madrid



The 19-year-old Argentine international broke the fifth metatarsal in his left foot during the 3-1 win over Real Zaragoza at the beginning of November.

He returned to Barcelona on Friday from a month working on his recovery in Argentina, and is scheduled to be ready in just over a week's time for the league match with Racing Santander.

"I feel the complete opposite of pressure. I am simply keen to get back on the field of play again," Messi told a news conference.

"If everything goes well the doctors have agreed I will return to training with the team on Monday."

"I am feeling good but have not played football for three months and this is all I lack now."

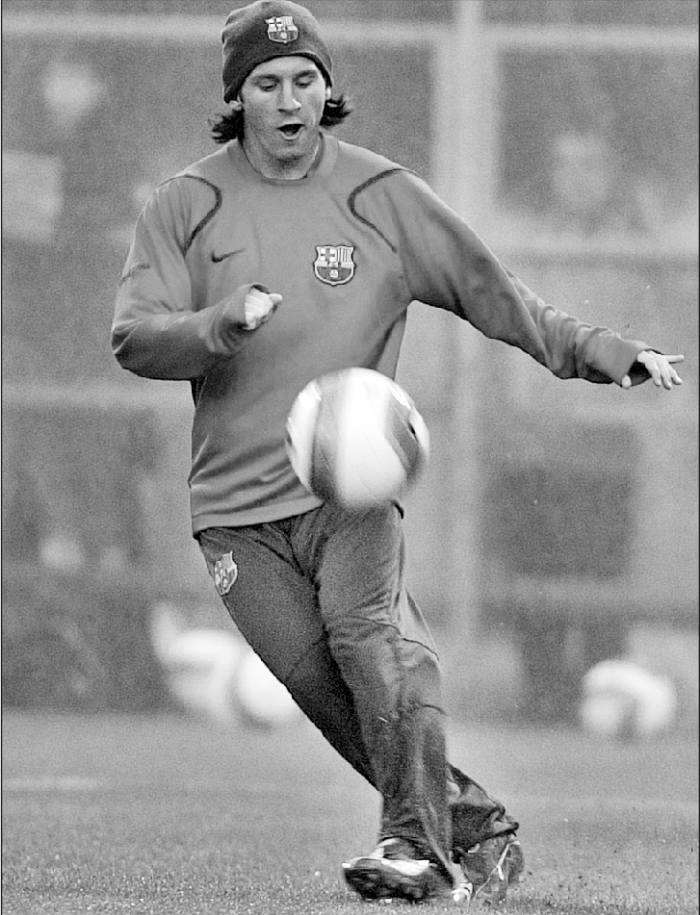
With Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o close to returning after four months out with a knee injury, Barcelona are set to receive a major boost.

Although they top the Primera Liga by a point from Sevilla they have failed to find top form since losing in the Club World Cup final in December.

They have only two wins from

their last six league games and trail Real Zaragoza 1-0 from the first leg of their King's Cup quarterfinal.

The European and Spanish champions host Liverpool in the Champions League first knock-out round on Feb. 21.



An eager Lionel Messi trained at the Nou Camp on Friday for the first time after recovering from injury.

Tacchinardi blasts Capello



INTERNET, undated

Former Juventus midfielder Alessio Tacchinardi has blasted Real Madrid boss Fabio Capello. "I left Turin because of him," he stated.

The 31-year-old join Villarreal on loan in 2005 from the Old Lady, a transfer which he would have never agreed to had it not been for the Pieris tactician's presence at the club.

"I would have never left Juventus, not even after their demotion to Serie B," said Tacchinardi in an interview to newspaper Libero.

"I was forced to leave town

because of Capello. Instead, he was the first one to abandon the ship while it was sinking last summer," he noted just days after Villarreal defeated Real in La Liga.

"Then when he was at Roma he publicly declared that he would never coach Juventus..."

"Capello's tactics, which consist of scoring and then defending a lead, don't work in Spain any more."

"Real did not play well on Sunday against us and seeing a mad Capello was a double joy for me."

"I criticise him mainly for the way in which he treats his players. Now half of the Real Madrid squad are against him."

Stevens takes over at Hamburg



REUTERS, Berlin

Bundesliga strugglers Hamburg said on Friday they had appointed Dutchman Huub Stevens to replace Thomas Doll as coach after Felix Magath, fired by Bayern Munich on Wednesday, ruled himself out.

Stevens is to leave Roda JC Kerkrade to sign a contract lasting through to June 2008, Hamburg said on its Web site.

Doll was sacked on Thursday after Hamburg, in Germany's top league since it was formed in 1963, slipped to the bottom of the table with just one victory this season.

Magath had ruled out a return to Hamburg for ethical reasons, saying the club should stick with their original choice of Stevens.

Stevens, 53, led Germany's Schalke 04 to victory in the UEFA Cup in 1997 and has also coached Hertha

Berlin and Cologne. He said he was looking forward to his new task and was certain that the team had the necessary quality to get out of the relegation zone.

"With Huub Stevens we have taken on an experienced coach who knows the Bundesliga well," Hamburg chief executive Bernd Hoffmann said.

"We are convinced he will get the team off the bottom of the table," he added.

Magath had looked a logical choice to go back to the club where he won the European Cup as a player, and also later coached, but he said he knew Hamburg already had a deal with Stevens and did not want to see it broken.

"My professional ethics mean I could never take away a colleague's job," Magath told the Hamburger Abendblatt newspaper in an interview to be published on Saturday.

"Stevens is the right man for the job and will save Hamburg from relegation."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	40 Type squares	DOWN	16 Stomped (on)
1 Jogging gait	41 "Cheers" actor	1 Explorer	20 Chop
5 Muppet eagle	43 Tenet Roger	2 Four-star review	23 Pump, up the volume
8 Woods' specialty	45 Henchman	3 Couturier	24 "Le Coq ..." Coq
12 Head light?	47 More cancelled	4 Pen-ta-teuch	25 Shade
13 Cravat	51 Many	5 Pupil	27 Succor
14 Say	52 Tie-break	6 Football filler	29 Energy
15 Prelude	54 Somme-lier's session	8 Street girls	30 Halves of 40-Across
17 Apportion	55 Lubricate	7 Holds a session	32 Put forth strength
18 Esteem	56 Okla-homa	9 Pass	34 Without sophistication
19 Need for libation	57 Progeny	10 Reply to	37 Verily
21 Weeding	58 Crucial	11 Guitar neck feature	39 Despot
22 Faxed	59 Pied		42 Haunt
23 Commotion			44 With
26 "CSI" evidence			45-Down, some power tools
28 Use a loom			46 "It's a Sin to Tell" —
31 Relocate			48 1492 vessel
33 Haley's Oz costume			49 Send out
35 Epidermis			50 Cincinnati team
36 College boss (Sl.)			53 Compete
38 "Can't Help Lovin' — Man"			

Solution time: 21 mins.

LOVE	POP	FAME
18 IS	EGG	ORAL
FOUR	TAIL	OTING
EE	ORE	STING
	FRY	PAS
ORION	FOOTMAN	
FIDO	SEX	OUST
FOOTSHOE	BOOMPH	
TAIX	PAL	
STOOP	YES	RIP
TIPO	FOOTNOTE	
TRES	OWN	ONCE
ROBE	PLY	DAHL

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12					13			14		
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51					52	53				
54					55			56		
57					58			59		

CRYPTOQUIP

AJSQ FBT VISGU TM GIWSQKO
ODTRMW AKYJ G RKQSI'W
YBBD, RKNJY FBT VS
MKOUKQN FBTI MBKWBQ?
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF YOU WERE TO RUSH TO GET TO A BIDDING SALE, YOU PROBABLY WANT A PIECE OF THE AUCTION.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: F equals Y

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.