



Charlton hardman Amady Faye can only watch as Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard (L) fires in a trademark long-range effort to score during their Premiership encounter at The Valley on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldinho considering Brazil future

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona superstar Ronaldinho is considering his future with the Brazilian national team.

The Sunday Times says Ronaldinho arrives in London tomorrow morning to discuss his international future with Brazil coach Dunga.

The attacking midfielder has become deeply frustrated with international demands just when his performance levels have declined and is also angry with Dunga's constant sniping at the country's biggest names.

Exhausted by two-and-a-half years of constant football, and conscious of his obligations to his club side Barcelona, by mid-January Ronaldinho had resolved to quit the international game and discussed his intentions with his closest confidantes. They convinced him to think again, playing on Ronaldinho's strong relationship with the Brazilian public, his fundamental affection for the national team, and the massive investment of his personal sponsor

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Juve keen on Heinze

INTERNET, undated

Juventus coach Didier Deschamps is set to land Manchester United defender Gaby Heinze in a 5 million pound deal at the end of this season.

A pal told the News of the World: "Gabriel knows Deschamps is interested and he's a great desire to play at Juve."

"It's unfortunate the way things have gone at United but a move there will be a good solution."

AC Milan were ready to swoop for the Argentina left-back after making contact with his representatives last year.

But Deschamps sees Heinze as a key figure as Juve rebuild to mount a title challenge once promoted back to Serie A.

Heinze was United's Player of the Year in 2005.

Romania to face Moldova

AFP, Bucharest

Romania have lined up a hastily arranged friendly against Moldova on Wednesday in place of the cancelled game against Italy next weekend.

Saturday's fixture against the world champions was called off on Friday following the death of a policeman at the Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo.

Filippo Raciti's death has led to all professional and amateur football championships in Italy being suspended until further notice.

Romania, who had been due to play the Italians in Siena, will now face Moldova in Bucharest.

"Moldova are certainly a long way short of Italy in terms of ability but it was the only viable solution given the extremely short time we had to organise this game," said Romania Football Federation director off the Ionut Lupescu on Sunday.

Chelsea edge Charlton

AFP, London



Frank Lampard ensured Chelsea kept the pressure on Premiership pacemakers

Manchester United by firing the champions to a 1-0 win over Charlton at The Valley on Saturday.

The England midfielder claimed his 17th goal of the season with a trademark strike from just outside the area to cut United's lead at the top back to three points ahead of the leaders' visit to Tottenham on Sunday.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho, who dismissed fresh reports he was lining up a move to Real Madrid at the end of the season, was pleased to see Blues skipper John Terry make his comeback from back surgery, albeit only in the closing minutes of the match.

"I think now that opponents have to forget what teams have done to us over the last couple of months because now we have our defensive security back," Mourinho said.

As well as keeping the heat on United, Chelsea's win moved them seven points clear of third-placed Liverpool, whose five-match winning run had ended in a goalless draw at home to Everton earlier in the day.

A frustrating afternoon for the Reds was reflected in manager Rafael Benitez's ungracious lambasting of Everton's doggedly defensive approach to the match.

"That's what small clubs do

when they come to Anfield," moaned Benitez. "One team wanted to win and one didn't want to lose."

Arsenal came from behind with ten men to claim a 1-1 draw at Middlesbrough, courtesy of Thierry Henry's 77th-minute equaliser.

Nigeria's Aiyegbeni Yakubu had put Boro ahead quarter of an hour earlier, converting a penalty after being brought down by a Philippe Senderos challenge from behind which earned the Arsenal defender a straight red card.

At the other end of the table, Wigan opened up a five-point gap between them and the bottom three after finally breaking an eight-match losing streak in the league by beating Portsmouth 1-0 at the JJB Stadium.

Lee McCulloch, the striker who had attempted to secure a transfer to Rangers last month, scored what could prove to be a hugely significant 68th-minute winner.

One place above Wigan, Sheffield United saw their hopes of pulling further away from the drop zone shattered as a late free-kick from Morten Gamst-Pedersen allowed Blackburn to claim a last-ditch 2-1 win at Ewood Park.

The Norwegian playmaker had headed Rovers into the lead midway through the first half only to see Blades striker Jon Stead equalise three minutes later.

Pedersen's international teammate, John Carew, marked his home debut for Aston Villa with his first goal for the club to fire Martin

O'Neill's side to a 1-0 win over West Ham.

The giant Norwegian striker fired home a pass from another new Villa signing, Ashley Young, to give the home side a first-half lead and Martin O'Neill's side rode their luck to hold out under a furious late onslaught.

To make matters worse for beleaguered Hammers boss Alan Curbishley, 7.5-million-pound signing Matthew Upson was forced to limp off just half an hour into his debut for the London club.

Bottom side Watford completed a bleak day for the bottom three by slumping to their 14th defeat of the season, at home to Bolton.

French striker Nicolas Anelka kept Bolton in the hunt for a possible top four finish by scoring a 63rd-minute winner against the run of play.

Two late strikes from Leroy Lita earned Reading a 2-0 win at Manchester City that enabled Steve Coppell's Premiership newcomers to take advantage of Portsmouth's defeat to move up to sixth in the table.

Fulham continued their fine home form with a 2-1 win over Newcastle at Craven Cottage.

Second half goals from strike pair Heidar Helguson and Brian McBride put Chris Coleman's side in control before Obafemi Martins snatched a late consolation effort for the visitors.

Platini backs Italian ban

AFP, Nyon

Newly-elected UEFA president Michel Platini on Saturday backed the Italian football federation's decision to suspend all matches after the death of a policeman at a Serie A match.

All football in Italy was shelved indefinitely after 38-year-old Filippo Raciti was killed by an explosive device as security forces battled rioting fans at the Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo on Friday.

"Firstly I extend my heartfelt personal condolences, together with those of the entire European football family, to the family of the police officer, Filippo Raciti, who lost his life," said Platini.

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Docked points for Hammers?

INTERNET, undated

West Ham United are seriously facing the prospect of being docked points over their fielding of Argentine pair Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano this season.

Club chairmen and chief executives will discuss the eligibility of the Argentina pair in London on Thursday and there is a groundswell of support for action to be taken if it is shown West Ham broke rules by fielding players owned by a third party, says the Mail on Sunday.

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Catania violence was 'planned'



Football

INTERNET, undated

Catania director Pietro Lo Monaco has revealed disturbing details of the riot that killed a police officer. "It was an ambush."

Trouble broke out when the Palermo fans arrived at the Stadio Massimo 55 minutes into Friday night's match.

The supporters and the police escort were attacked by local Ultras and 38-year-old Chief Inspector Filippo Raciti was killed when a homemade bomb exploded nearby and he was allegedly also struck in the chest by a rock.

The combination of the two events saw him unable to breathe and he was declared dead in hospital. Another 100 people were injured in the riots that carried on after the final whistle.

Late Saturday night over 250 policemen staged raids on several organised

Catania fan clubs in the city.

"We've had three years of our hard work taken away," said director Lo Monaco, who helped the club to its first promotion in 20 years.

"I wouldn't even say that this was a moment of insanity, because what happened looks to be a premeditated attack. They staged an ambush on the police and Palermo fans."

This is not the first time that Catania have been involved in crowd trouble, as this season they had already received a two-match ban behind closed doors after fighting broke out with Messina and Palermo supporters in the space of a week.

"Something is wrong, quite beyond this particular incident. There are areas of the stadium that have become the Ultra territory, where rules no longer apply and you cannot enter."

Lo Monaco urged for a change to the current laws, as at the moment hooligans are released almost immediately, but clubs are forced to pay

large fines for crowd trouble.

"The whole issue of 'responsibility' of the clubs is incorrect and we cannot carry on like this. When someone breaks the law, he has to be locked behind bars and the key thrown away."

The FIGC has ordered the immediate suspension of all football activity in Italy, but the Catania representative remains pessimistic over what this will achieve.

"I know full well that now we'll spent 10 days at round table committees, making programmes, symposiums and then we will forget all about Raciti. It'll start again, business as usual."

Lo Monaco was the man who broke the news of Raciti's death to the media and said at the time he was ready to leave this profession.

"I confirm what I said on Friday. I don't recognise myself in this sport, but I repeat, that goes beyond what happened here. It's a world where there is a lot of talk, smoke and mirrors, but nothing ever gets done."

Wenger irate at ref

AFP, Middlesbrough



Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger was furious with referee Mike Riley after his team

were reduced to ten men by the dismissal of Philippe Senderos before fighting back to clinch a 1-1 draw at Middlesbrough.

Thierry Henry, so often a goalscorer against Middlesbrough in the past, led the revival and was on target again in the 73rd to wipe out a penalty from Yakubu ten minutes earlier.

The penalty came after Senderos was sent off for the challenge that brought down Yakubu as he bore down on goal, but Wenger was not happy with the decision by Riley.

Wenger said: "I have seen penalties given for that kind of challenge and many not given as well. I don't

think that Senderos wanted to make a foul.

"I thought the red card was hard, but what can you say about that situation - nothing. I don't know what a professional foul is. I've never understood what it means. For me, a foul is unprofessional."

Wenger was also unhappy about two challenges by Middlesbrough and viewed a tackle by Julio Arca on Fransesc Fabregas as worthy of a red card.

"There was no attempt to play the ball," he claimed.

Wenger was even more furious about a Mark Viduka aerial challenge on Kolo Touré.

"I was very upset about Viduka's elbow in the first-half. It seems to be accepted that you are supposed to put an elbow in the face of defenders," he said.

"We have nothing against the physical side of the game. I want the

referees to do their jobs, that's all."

Middlesbrough manager Gareth Southgate defended Viduka. "I think Mark led with his arm and caught Senderos, but I know Mark very well and he's not a dirty player."

"I'm not prepared for one of my players to be criticised like that because I know he's a fair player."

The managers were more in agreement over the match that featured few chances until to burst into life in the second-half.

Wenger said: "We deserved a point in the end when you realise we were 1-0 down with ten men. Even with ten men, we were always in control of the game and showed great quality and character to come back."

"Perhaps we didn't create enough in the first-half, but we slowly took over afterwards and would have won if it had been one against 11."

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Morientes weaves magic

AFP, Madrid



Valencia notched up their seventh win in eight league games and moved up to third in La Liga after a 3-1 win over Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

Two second half goals from former Real Madrid and Liverpool striker Fernando Morientes, after Roberto Ayala had opened the scoring, were the crucial factors in the 2002 and 2004 Spanish champions' victory.

Ayala headed Valencia ahead after 14 minutes from a David Villa corner.

Morientes added a second seven minutes after the break by firing home a Vicente Rodriguez pass from

close range when the Atletico defence were caught napping.

Atletico narrowed the gap three minutes later when Mista Ferrer, the man who Morientes replaced in the summer, scored from 20 metres against his old club where he had spent the five previous seasons.

The relationship between Morientes and Vicente then provided its second dividend of the day after 67 minutes with the Spanish international again finding the net from just inside the six yard box.

The defeat, Atletico's worst in the league this season, means they remain in fifth place.

Sergio Garcia scored both of Real Zaragoza's goals in their 2-1 win at Espanyol.

The victory means that Zaragoza stay in sixth place and still in the hunt for a European place next season.

Garcia had two good opportuni-

ties to open the scoring during the first half but it proved to be third time lucky after 54 minutes.

The product of the Barcelona youth system connected with a cross from Oscar Gonzalez from 10 metres out, sliding onto the long pass to edge the ball past the on-coming Espanyol goalkeeper Carlos Kameni.

Espanyol equalised through Luis Garcia after 85 minutes but it took less than two minutes before Garcia restored Zaragoza's lead, firing home unmarked from in front of goal after a Ewerthon pass.

Deportivo La Coruna extended their unbeaten run in 2007 to eight games in both La Liga and Cup games with a 1-0 win over Real Mallorca.

Fabian Estoyanoff got a penalty one minute into injury time at the end of the first half after Jordi Lopez

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Australia courting Klinsmann



Football

AFP, Sydney

Germany's World Cup coach Jurgen Klinsmann has been sounded out by Australia to lead their 2010 World Cup campaign, reports said Sunday.

Klinsmann, who led host nation Germany to third place at last year's World Cup, met Peter Lowy, son of Football Federation Australia chairman Frank Lowy, for lunch in Los Angeles last Tuesday, the Sun-Herald newspaper said.

The newspaper quoted one observer who said of the meeting: "Real estate was one subject they discussed but coaching opportunities with Australia were tossed around."

"The meeting was definitely business and not at all a social call," FFA officials Sunday declined to confirm that the meeting had taken place and Klinsmann could not be immediately contacted for comment.

But the former German striker is known to favour coaching international football over taking on the day-to-day grind of club duties.

"I'm preparing myself for something new that might come along," Klinsmann said last week. "It could

happen in a month or two, or a year or two."

"You have to be open to a lot of things. There is not an endlessly long list of job options at this level. The air is pretty thin up there."

"And if it's the right fit with the family and the right challenge, you go to the country where you might have once never thought you'd go."

Peter Lowy runs the US arm of his family's Westfield property



JURGEN KLINSMANN

group, and according to the Sun-Herald, he is known to unofficially conduct FFA business when he can.

Klinsmann has lived in California with his wife and children since he retired from playing in 1998.

He was in discussions with the

US Soccer Federation last year about coaching its national team but ended talks in December when it became clear he wouldn't have control of team matters.

Frank Lowy has told coach Graham Arnold he will be in charge of the Socceroos until after the Asian Cup in July, but his future beyond that tournament is unclear even if Australia win the competition.

The FFA wants a full-time replacement for Dutchman Guus Hiddink to take charge of the team before the 2010 World Cup qualifiers kick off next year.

Klinsmann won massive public support in Germany after selecting a young squad that played attractive football at the World Cup.

The Sun-Herald said under any deal with Australia, Klinsmann would continue to live in the United States.

A Hiddink return to Australia is possible, but reports continue to link him to European clubs when his contract with Russia expires after the 2008 European Championships.

Dutchman Leo Beenhakker, now coaching Poland after leading Trinidad and Tobago at last year's World Cup, is another FFA coaching option, the newspaper said.



Valencia striker Fernando Morientes (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring the first of his two goals against Atletico Madrid during their Primera Liga clash at the Mestalla on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP