



ONE TO WATCH: Rising Germany and Stuttgart star Mario Gomez (L) celebrates after scoring in their Bundesliga top-of-the-table clash against Werder Bremen at the Gottlieb Daimler on Saturday.

Capello praises Beckham

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Capello has praised David Beckham after the midfielder scored on his return to Real Madrid's starting line-up on Saturday night.

Beckham, 31, had been told he would never play for Capello's side again after agreeing a summer move to MLS side Los Angeles Galaxy four weeks ago.

But the former England captain re-paid the faith shown in him by netting from a trade-mark free-kick in the 2-1 win over struggling Real Sociedad.

"I have always trusted my players", all of them," said Capello. "Beckham has not played for a long time, but he was very good (against Sociedad) and his goal was excellent."

"I have spoken with Beckham twice the last week about his lack of success (on the pitch) in the past."

"I said that he does not score enough goals, but today he scored a very important one."

Capello also hinted that although Beckham's inclusion in the side was largely down to the current midfield injury worries at the side, his performance could see him keep his spot in the future.

He added: "I like to think about the future and not about the past. Beckham is an intelligent person and one who has much merit and talent."

"These last weeks he has trained very well, and today he has done a great performance. That is very good for him and the team."

Rahul blames Sachin, Sourav

PTI, Rajkot

Skipper Rahul Dravid on Sunday blamed the top-order batsmen for India's five-run loss against Sri Lanka in the second one-dayer but promised the hosts would fightback in the remaining two matches of the series.

"One of the top order batsmen needed to go on till the end. They had Sangakkara doing that. Sachin (Tendulkar) and Sourav (Ganguly) were doing well but then we lost too many wickets," Dravid said after India finished at 252-9 chasing Lanka's 257-8.

"It is disappointing to lose after restricting them to 257. The wickets fell at regular interval and that did not help," Dravid added.

"We would bounce back. Now we know what we will have to do in the series. Hopefully everyone is fit and ready to play in the next match," he said.

The win gave a 1-0 lead to Sri Lanka in the four-match series.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene said Kumar Sangakkara's 110 that rescued them from a disastrous 58-4 and brilliant fielding towards the end clinched them the match.

Drug tests on Feb 16

PTI, Karachi

Ignoring warnings of a medical expert, the Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to go ahead with its out of competition dope tests for its World Cup-bound squad and set February 16 as the date for the same.

Saleem Altarf, PCB Director of Cricket Operations, said that the tests would be conducted in Lahore despite warnings by an anti-doping and sports medicine expert that they could lead to life bans on fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif.

Akhtar and Asif tested positive for nandrolone in September and were banned for two and one years respectively, but the duo successfully appealed against the verdict.

AGENCIES, Berlin



Schalke 04 beat Hertha Berlin 2-0 on Saturday to motor six points clear at the top of the German championship.

Second-half goals from Kevin Kuranyi and former Rangers winger Peter Lovenkrands meant Mirok Slomka's men, who beat second-placed Werder Bremen 2-0 last weekend, increased their lead by three points following Werder's 4-1 defeat to VfB Stuttgart.

Schalke can now dream of winning the Bundesliga for the first time since 1958.

Slomka made just one change from the Bremen victory with Brazilian Rafinha returning after suspension at right back, relegating Tim Hoogland to the bench.

Schalke appeared to be feeling the pressure and were not playing to their potential before the break, though they turned up the heat in the second 45 minutes to finish off

Hertha with two goals in the space of 11 minutes.

Kuranyi, who scored his 15th international goal in Germany's 3-1 friendly victory over Switzerland on Wednesday, bagged his ninth club goal of the season in the 64th minute.

Dane Lovenkrands hit Schalke's second with 15 minutes to go to add to the brace he scored last weekend against Bremen in their top-of-the-table battle.

As for Werder, who led the championship at the halfway stage, they are losing their way with Bremen keeper Tim Wiese being beaten four times at third-placed Stuttgart who, admittedly, have not lost at home since August.

Roberto Hilbert, Marco Streller, Mario Gomez and Ludovic Magnin got on the scoresheet for Stuttgart who were particularly pleased with Gomez who also set up two other goals following his strike in midweek on his Germany debut.

The 21-year-old Gomez is also now the league top scorer with 12 goals and the way he grabbed his goal did well justify his man of the

moment status. Days after winning his first Germany cap, and scoring his first international goal, the Stuttgart striker put the finishing touch to a fine counter-attack.

Hilbert raced down the right wing and squared the ball to Cacau. The Brazilian's exquisite touch into the path of Gomez bisected the last line of the Werder defence and, two touches later, the ball was in the back of Tim Wiese's goal.

Bayern Munich have had Ottmar Hitzfeld, who led them to the 2001 Champions League title, back at the helm since the beginning of the month with the task of getting them back into top form after a goal-scoring slump.

The Bavarians, who host Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday, have found the net just 32 times in 20 league matches which statistically is their worst goal-scoring haul since the 1991/92 season.

And fourth-placed Bayern are already a mammoth 14 points behind Schalke and eight points adrift of Werder Bremen though they have a game in hand.

Lyon back winning

AFP, Paris



Lyon registered their first French league win since last year with a confidence-boosting 1-0 defeat of

Lorient.

Gerard Houllier's five-time champions have endured an uncharacteristic barren spell since the winter break, and they went into this game aiming to avoid a fourth defeat of 2007.

But in front of their fans at the Stade Gerland they extended their lead over Lens at the top of the table to 14 points thanks to Fred, Brazilian who produced the only goal of the game in the seventh minute.

And it was something to savour 24 hours after they became the first French club to be floated on the Stock Exchange.

Lyon's France international keeper Gregory Coupet set Fred up with a long ball and the striker produced an unstoppable drive to beat the advancing Lorient stopper Remy Riout from 30 metres.

Lorient thought they'd got back on level terms four minutes from the break only for Rafik Saifi's close range effort to be deemed offside.

Set-piece specialist Juninho went close to doubling Lyon's advantage but his floating 68th minute free-kick was punched out of danger by Riout who also had to look lively to deflect Kim Kallstrom's late angled effort.

Houllier said: "I'm very happy to have won. I'm proud and satisfied with the players' performance in tricky conditions."

"We know what we've got to do to become champions. I really liked this match because I feel Lyon's spirit has returned."

Lyon's night was made all the rosier after Lille, lying second going into Saturday, slipped to third after losing 1-0 at Toulouse, with the goal scored in injury time by their own Gregory Tafforeau.

Earlier, Paris Saint Germain beat Monaco 4-2 to register their first win since the arrival of Paul Le Guen as manager and their first since October in the league.

The valuable three points left the struggling capital side one point above the relegation zone in fifth from bottom.

The rare win was achieved with a good dose of attacking flair that will have gone down well with PSG fans.

Amare Diane opened the scoring after five minutes, with the second an own-goal from Monaco keeper Flavio Roma.

PSG's winter recruit from Argentina, Marcelo Gallardo, got the third in the 84th minute with Uruguayan Cristian Rodriguez completing a good night's work.

Monaco's second half goals came from Frederic Piquionne, who then had a penalty saved by Mickael Landreau, with Jan Koller coming up with a face savour late on.

"That will do us some good in terms of the table. We showed lots of heart against Monaco who played well," said former Rangers manager Le Guen.

He added: "We still need time as we're not out of danger yet. We still need more points."

Landreau emphasised the importance of the result.

"This is a turning point for us. A while ago this would have been a match we'd have lost. We have to build on this now, these three points are going to do us a lot of good."

On a night when the goals were raining down Valenciennes swept aside Nantes 5-2 with Steve Savidon celebrating a five-goal

Le Mans prevailed in a four-goal feast against Sedan and down in the drop zone Nice did their prospects of staying up no harm at all with a 3-0 win over Troyes to leave them third off the bottom on 23 points, one adrift of Troyes.

Barca to make audacious C'Ron bid

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona will make Cristiano Ronaldo the world's highest-paid player if he joins them in the summer, thanks to an influx of Arab oil money.

According to The News of the World, the European champions will launch a 30- million-pound bid for the Manchester United and Portugal winger and offer him wages of 160,000-pounds a week.

The money will come from Sheikh Al-Balawi, the owner of Saudi club Al-Ittihad, who has forged strong links with Barcelona president Joan Laporta through a series of football academies in the middle east.

Al-Balawi told the paper: "I will do whatever it takes to help Barcelona sign a great player, like Cristiano."

It expected that Ronaldo's agent will demand that Manchester United match Barcelona's offer if they want to keep hold of the 22-year-old player beyond July, despite him being contracted to the club for another four and a half years.

His current employers offered to double his wages to £100,000 a week two months ago to stave off interest from Barcelona and their bitter rivals Real Madrid.

But nothing has yet been agreed, and Ronaldo added his own voice to the debate over whether he will stay or go recently.

Ronaldo said: "I like Spanish football and it interests me, but if anyone wants to speak to me from Spain, they go through my agent, not me."

Asad show sinks S'wari

SPORTS REPORTER

Asadur Rahman propelled Sher-e-Bangla Ideal High School to a massive 239-run victory over Siddeshwari High School in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the Iqbal Road ground yesterday.

Young Asad struck 15 boundaries and four sixes in scoring an unbeaten 117 off 148 balls. His batting partner Selim was the more destructive, smashing 85 off only 34 deliveries. Sajjad and Rasel took two wickets each.

Siddeshwari were bowled out for only 103 runs in 20.1 overs. Ariful and Rasel scored 16 and 13 respectively, but it was Asad again who was the bane in Siddeshwari's side as he took five for 19. Rabiul Islam took two wickets too.

But the match at East End ground was different as University Laboratory School (ULS) prevailed to beat Mugdapara High School by only 10 runs. Batting first, ULS were bowled out for 233 in 41 overs. Salahuddin struck 64 while Asif scored 24. Koushik and Al-Amin took two apiece.

Koushik forged a lone battle as he scored an unbeaten 60 but Mugdapara were bowled out for 223 in 40.4 overs. Rasel and Mozammel took three wickets each.

At Uttara Friends Club ground, Dhanmondi Tutorial's Shamsul Arefin took five for 40 as his spell helped skittle Sunny Dale out for 147 in 38.4 overs. Sadman (33) and Redwan (2) were the only contributors. Somsun also picked up three wickets.

Sunny Dale pushed Dhanmondi Tutorial by taking six wickets but Sakib Chowdhury ensured a victory with an unbeaten 53. He was supported by Irfan (20). Sadman took 3 for 16 while Afnan Islam took two for 32.

Eight move to zonal final

UNB, Dhaka

Eight more teams moved into the zonal final of the third JFA Cup Under-15 Football Championship yesterday.

Habiganj, Khulna, Kishoreganj, Tangail, Shariatpur, Narail, Panchagarh and Naogaon won their respective matches to join Dhaka, Bagerhat, Jamalpur, Chuadanga and BKS.

Habiganj blanked Sylhet 3-0 to play hosts Comilla while Khulna outplayed Jhalakati 4-0 to face Bagerhat in the zonal finals tomorrow. Kishoreganj beat hosts Mymensingh by a lone goal and they will play Jamalpur, also on Tuesday.

Tangail eliminated hosts Manikganj by a solitary goal to meet BKS.

In Shariatpur, the hosts managed a final berth eliminating Barisal 4-3 in tiebreaker as the match was locked at 1-1 during the stipulated time.

Shariatpur will meet Dhaka in the zonal final on Tuesday.

Narail defeated Magura by 2-0 goals to play zonal final against Chuadanga DSA while Panchagarh eliminated Kurigram by 3-1 goals in tiebreaker after a 1-1 draw in the scheduled time.

Naogaon managed a solitary goal victory over Rajshahi.

ITALY RESUMES SOCCER

Juve caught in Vicenza



Football

REUTERS, Rome

Play in Italy's second division Serie B resumed peacefully on Saturday, with spectators allowed into just five of the 11 matches.

The rest took place behind closed doors -- the result of a tough anti-hooligan plan approved by the government in response to the death of policeman Filippo Raciti during rioting at a Serie A match last week.

Italy's Serie A resumes on Sunday with 10 matches. Fans will be admitted to at least five games with workers racing against the clock to get other grounds, including Milan's San Siro stadium, ready in line with new regulations.

Serie B leaders Juventus hung on to the top spot on Saturday despite conceding two late goals to draw 2-2 with Vicenza, whose Menti stadium was one of grounds open to the public.

The result gave them 40 points -- the same as Napoli who drew level by beating Piacenza 1-0 at a

deserted San Paolo stadium.

The day's fixtures passed off without a repeat of the violence that has ravaged the country's leagues in recent weeks.

All games began with a minute's silence in memory of Raciti and the official who was beaten to death while trying to stop a fight at an amateur league match a fortnight ago.

The visitors' stand in Vicenza was empty after the ban on the block sale of tickets to away fans, but gone too were lines of police usually required to separate rivals set of supporters.

About 100 Juventus fans gathered outside the ground to chant, wave flags, set up banners, and have an impromptu kick-about in a good-natured show of support for their team.

Juventus took a 2-0 lead with goals by Raffaele Palladino and Alessandro Del Piero, only for the home side to hit back through Evangelos Nastos and Gabriele Paonessa.

The only sign of tension came outside the San Paolo stadium, where Napoli were hosting

Piacenza.

Several hundred of the club's hard-core ultra fans protested against the closure of the stadium which failed to meet safety regulations.

The city council said it would take two months to carry out necessary works to get the venue in line with the regulations.

Napoli had something to cheer about, however, when Argentine striker Roberto Carlos Sosa headed an 80th-minute winner.

In Milan, workers continued to race to get the San Siro stadium in line with security regulations in time to admit AC Milan season ticket-holders to their team's Serie A match against Livorno on Sunday.

Italian media reported that 28 new electronic turnstiles had been installed overnight.

The government will make a final decision later on Saturday about whether to open the stadium for the match, in which Brazilian striker Ronaldo is expected to make his return to Serie A following his transfer from Real Madrid last month.



Juventus forward Alessandro del Piero (C) powers through between two Vicenza defenders to score during their Serie B match in Vicenza on Saturday.

Rafa rues profligate Reds

AFP, Newcastle



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez was dismayed by the series of chances that his players squandered as they slipped to a 2-1 defeat at Newcastle after dominating the game.

Craig Bellamy gave Liverpool an early lead against their former club and was one of the culprits as they wasted several opportunities against a Newcastle team who equalised through Obafemi Martins in a rare first-half threat.

Dirk Kuyt was guilty of another miss shortly after the interval and Newcastle made sure Liverpool paid a high price when Peru international Nolberto Solano scored the decider from the penalty spot in the 70th minute.

It was a disappointing start to an exciting new era for Liverpool in the wake of their 470 million pounds takeover by Americans George Gillett and Tom Hicks.

Benitez, who must lift his side before their next game in the Champions League in Barcelona, said: "We were certainly the best team here for long periods, so it's difficult to explain."

"We could have been 4-0 up -- then we conceded a stupid goal and a stupid penalty. When you have

three or four good chances away from home, you must finish the game. Instead, Newcastle started thinking in the second-half that they could win."

"It is disappointing because we were getting closer to the top two, but we know we have to keep improving."

The match was only given the go-ahead when the referee Mark Halsey inspected the rain-soaked pitch 90 minutes before the kick-off and Benitez admitted: "The conditions were not the best."

"But I can't complain about them because I thought we adapted much better than them in the first-half."

Goalscorer Bellamy, jeered by Newcastle fans after leaving the club in acrimonious circumstances two years ago, was responsible for most of Liverpool's misses, but his manager said: "I was pleased with Craig. He tried to do his best and stayed calm and steady."

Newcastle are now unbeaten in eight Premiership games at home, but even manager Glenn Roeder admitted that they lived dangerously.

"Liverpool started better than us and handled the conditions better," he said.

"We gifted them a goal which Craig stuck away very well and had to survive some heavy pressure before Obafemi scored. He deserved the goal because he

chased down the ball down and harassed them."

"Then I thought our second-half performance was fantastic and everybody played their part. We've come back and shown a lot of bottle -- and there's not a cooler man in the house than Nobby Solano when you have a penalty."

"It's always nice to come from behind and even better when it's against a good team like Liverpool who have been in great form."

Celestine Babayaro played for Newcastle only hours after the death of his younger brother.

Roeder revealed after the game that the Nigerian defender's 26-year-old brother had been suffering from tuberculosis and died in London on Friday night.

But Babayaro decided to play after talking to his other brother. "They told him that he would have wanted him to play, so he came out and played," said Roeder.

"I know how he felt because I did exactly the same the day that my father died. That's why I went for him as he came off the pitch at the end."

"It is important for people to know this because it took courage. It puts things in perspective."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	35 Under-	54 Despon-	19 Bashful
1 En-	stand	dent	21 Society
grossed	36 Llamas'	55 Entrance	newbie
5 Pussy-	territory		23 Poet's
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CRYPTOQUIP

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" UK UXGJE ERP KVV. "
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU'RE GRATING A CERTAIN KIND OF CHEESE, THAT MIGHT MAKE YOU A CHEDDAR SHREDDER.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals W