

## Hiddink denies Chelsea move

AFP, London

Russia coach Guus Hiddink insists he has not been approached by English Premiership champions Chelsea to replace Jose Mourinho.

Hiddink had been linked with a move to Stamford Bridge after reports that Mourinho was planning to quit at the end of the season following his dispute with the club's owner Roman Abramovich.

But the former South Korea manager, who is adamant there has been no contact from Chelsea, maintains he is happy to stay in his post with Russia until the European Championships in 2008.

"I have definitely not spoken to Roman Abramovich about moving to Chelsea this summer," Hiddink told The Mail on Sunday.

"I am coach of the Russian national team and will continue in that job until the summer of 2008."

"I am satisfied with my current job and very busy at the moment. I have other things to concentrate on. How do you think it would go down if I were to leave this job after a year and join Chelsea?"

## Babayaro shows resolve

AFP, Newcastle

Celestine Babayaro played in Newcastle United's 2-1 win over Liverpool on Saturday only hours after the death of his younger brother.

Manager Glenn 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."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## Violence in German soccer

AFP, Berlin

Thirty-eight people, including 32 policemen, were injured in crowd trouble after a regional football cup match between two amateur teams in the eastern city of Leipzig, police said Sunday.

Police horses and dogs were also targeted by hooligans in Saturday's trouble, which saw 21 police cars damaged.

The trouble broke out at the end of the game between Lokomotive Leipzig and Erzgebirge Aue II, won 3-0 by the latter.

According to police, some 800 troublemakers started to attack 300

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



BANISHING EXILE MEMORIES: Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham is overjoyed after scoring from a free-kick in his comeback match against Primera Liga rivals Real Sociedad at San Sebastian on Saturday.

## Failure no option for McClaren

AFP, London

Under-fire Steve McClaren insists England will make it through the Euro 2008 finals despite his side slipping to third place in their qualifying group.

Croatia and Russia lead the way in Group E with England facing an awkward trip to Israel on March 24 where defeat could signal almost certain elimination.

England last missed out on a major finals in 1994 after a hapless World Cup campaign which cost Graham Taylor his job.

Many expect McClaren will also be axed if the European Championships pass England by, a fear which only increased following the dismal friendly 1-0 defeat to Spain at Old Trafford on

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

## Gerrard impressed by new owners

AFP, London

Steven Gerrard claimed he was mightily impressed by Liverpool's new American owners George Gillett and Tom Hicks as they prepared to make the club the biggest in the world, the News of the World reported.

Gillett and Hicks will replace David Moores as co-chairman at Anfield promising a massive investment into the team and their new stadium.

The duo met Gerrard and fellow home-grown star Jamie Carragher this week to discuss the plans and the Reds captain was hugely impressed.

"After 15 minutes, we had been blown away by the plans they have

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

## Nightmare revisited for Mendes

Reuters, London

Pedro Mendes, knocked unconscious when Portsmouth played Manchester City in August, was stretchered off again when the teams met in the Premier League on Saturday.

The Portuguese international dominated the midfield after giving Portsmouth an early lead with a brilliantly-taken left-foot shot from 20 metres.

But Mendes was carried off after 43 minutes when City midfielder Joey Barton caught his Achilles tendon and was booked for the foul.

Mendes was knocked unconscious earlier in the season when Ben Thatcher caught him with a flying elbow that earned the then-then City defender an eight-match ban from the English FA.

Thatcher joined Charlton

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## MU keep Chelsea chasing

REUTERS, London

Premier League leaders Manchester United beat Charlton Athletic 2-0 at Old Trafford to stay six points clear of Chelsea on Saturday after the champions beat Middlesbrough 3-0 at Stamford Bridge.

South Korea midfielder Park Ji-sung and Scotland's Darren Fletcher scored in each half to take Alex Ferguson's side to 66 points and a step closer to their first league title since 2003.

Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba scored twice for Chelsea from free-kicks and Boro defender Abel Xavier gifted them the other by deflecting an Arjen Robben effort into his own net.

Liverpool lost 2-1 at Newcastle United, Reading were 2-0 winners over Aston Villa, Sheffield United beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-1 and Watford won a relegation scrap at West Ham United 1-0 after Marlon

Harewood missed a penalty for the hosts.

Striker Andy Johnson celebrated his 26th birthday by scoring Everton's winner as they beat Blackburn Rovers 1-0.

Though Manchester United's victory did not increase their lead, Ferguson's men will at least be comforted by knowing there are now only 11 games left in the season.

Park delivered the killer blow with a header from French wingback Patrice Evra's cross in the 24th minute and Fletcher wrapped up the win with another header off a Wayne Rooney cross in the 82nd.

"Credit to Charlton...they made it difficult for us," Ferguson told Sky Sports News.

"There wasn't any great goal threat from them but when you're 1-0 in front it only takes a second to lose a goal and that was worrying for me and probably for everyone watching."

Chelsea lacked fluency against

a Boro side who had beaten them 2-1 at the Riverside in August but made the breakthrough with Drogba's free-kick on the stroke of halftime.

Xavier put the result beyond doubt by turning in a wayward shot by Dutch substitute Robben, who had only arrived a minute earlier, and Drogba finished the job to become the Premier League's leading scorer with his 17th of the season.

Along with the points, Chelsea also made sure of a three-year run without a home league defeat--the last coming against Arsenal in a London derby on Feb 21, 2004.

Their next home fixture is next month against Sheffield United.

Asked about the title race, Chelsea's assistant manager Steve Clarke told Sky Sports: "We're enjoying the chase, and I think you can see that."

"We're winning the matches we have to win, we know we have to

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

## Becks back to save Real

REUTERS, Madrid

David Beckham scored on his return after a month on the sidelines to inspire Real Madrid to a 2-1 comeback win at Real Sociedad in the Primera Liga on Saturday.

The former England captain netted his third league goal of the season when he sent a 25-metre free-kick skidding under goalkeeper Claudio Bravo and inside the far post to cancel out an early header from Sociedad midfielder Mikel Aranburu.

Beckham's former Manchester United colleague Ruud van Nistelrooy grabbed the winner three minutes after the break when he headed in a cross from right back Miguel Torres.

It was the first time in 11 outings Real had scored more than one

goal in a game.

The victory, coming after back-to-back defeats by Levante and Villarreal, lifted Real to third place in the table with 41 points from 22 games.

It also eased the pressure on coach Fabio Capello, who backed-tracked on his decision to leave out Beckham following the midfielder's announcement last month that he would be joining Los Angeles Galaxy at the end of the season.

"I'm happy he scored a goal from a free-kick as he hasn't scored many this season," Capello told reporters. "He played a great game today."

Sociedad remain one point off the bottom and eight from safety with all their immediate rivals yet to play this weekend.

Sevilla missed the chance to take over from Barcelona at the top when they were held to a 0-0 draw by city rivals Real Betis in Saturday's late match.

The Real Madrid goalkeeper misjudged a deep seventh-minute cross from Xabi Prieto, palmed the ball into the path of Aranburu and the midfielder headed home.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

have now won just one of six league games this year.

The draw keeps them in second spot, level on 43 points with Barca who host Racing Santander on Sunday.

Betis striker Robert spurned the chance to give Luis Fernandez's side the lead when he skied an 11th-minute penalty over the bar after Fernando appeared to dive in the area.

The Brazilian missed another opportunity to put his side ahead when he was put clear late on in the game, but he fired straight at Sevilla keeper Andres Palop.

Beckham, in the starting line-up for only the sixth time this season, hardly got a touch before his team fell behind after an uncharacteristic error from Iker Casillas.

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