

Luck matters: Carvalho

INTERNET, undated

Ricardo Carvalho believes luck will play a crucial role in Chelsea's bid for Champions League glory.

Chelsea face Porto over two legs and Carvalho, who won the competition with the Portuguese club before arriving at Stamford Bridge, knows there is no margin for error in the last 16.

"We've done well so far but we are now through to the knockout stage, where it is much easier to be eliminated," he told Sky Sports' Sport Magazine.

"You still play each team twice, as you do in the group stage, but now you have to be on top of your game over both legs.

"It's no good playing one good game and one not so good, like you can probably afford to do in the group stage. If that happens now, we'll go out.

"To win the Champions League, we will need to be at our absolute best from now on - and we will need a bit of luck on our side as well."

Victory at the Estadio do Dragao on Wednesday night would see Chelsea put one foot into the quarter-finals.

The fact Carvalho, manager Jose Mourinho and defender Paulo Ferreira all left Porto for the Blues in 2004 adds spice to a potentially tricky encounter against the Portuguese league leaders.

Carvalho, 28, admits he is fortunate to have won the Champions League once already and knows a second European crown would be a remarkable achievement.

"When I won the Champions league with Porto I was young so of course I want to win it again with Chelsea," he said.

"Some players will play nine or 10 years at the top level and never win the Champions League.

"If I can win it for a second time, it will be fantastic."

Chelsea will benefit from the return to fitness of defenders John Terry, Wayne Bridge and Khalid Boulahrouz while Carvalho has overcome a recent bout of fever.

With a near-full complement of defenders to select from, Chelsea will be able to start with Michael Essien in midfield and assistant manager Steve Clarke highlighted the Ghana star's importance to the team.

"Michael Essien is a great player."

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Mancini wants to continue run

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini has vowed that his side will not give an inch to rival Serie A teams as it looks to continue its 15-match unbeaten league streak.

"Inter is a team that is always seeking to do its best and give nothing to anyone," Mancini said ahead of Inter's home game against Cagliari on Saturday.

"We have a chance of doing that."

"It's therefore normal to push as hard as possible in a bid to win the championship and the Champions League," added the former Italian international striker, whose success with Inter has seen him linked with a possible move to Premiership champions Chelsea should Jose Mourinho move on at the end of the season.

Inter host Valencia in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday.

If Inter beat Cagliari on Saturday the club will surpass the best winning sequences recorded in the Spanish and German leagues.

Spain's Real Madrid won 15 games on the trot in the 1960-61 season, while Germany's Bayern Munich equalled the feat in the 2004-05 and 2005-06 seasons.

In fact, Inter have not lost for 28 matches in all competitions with their last defeat coming back on September 27 when they lost 2-0 at home to Bayern Munich in the

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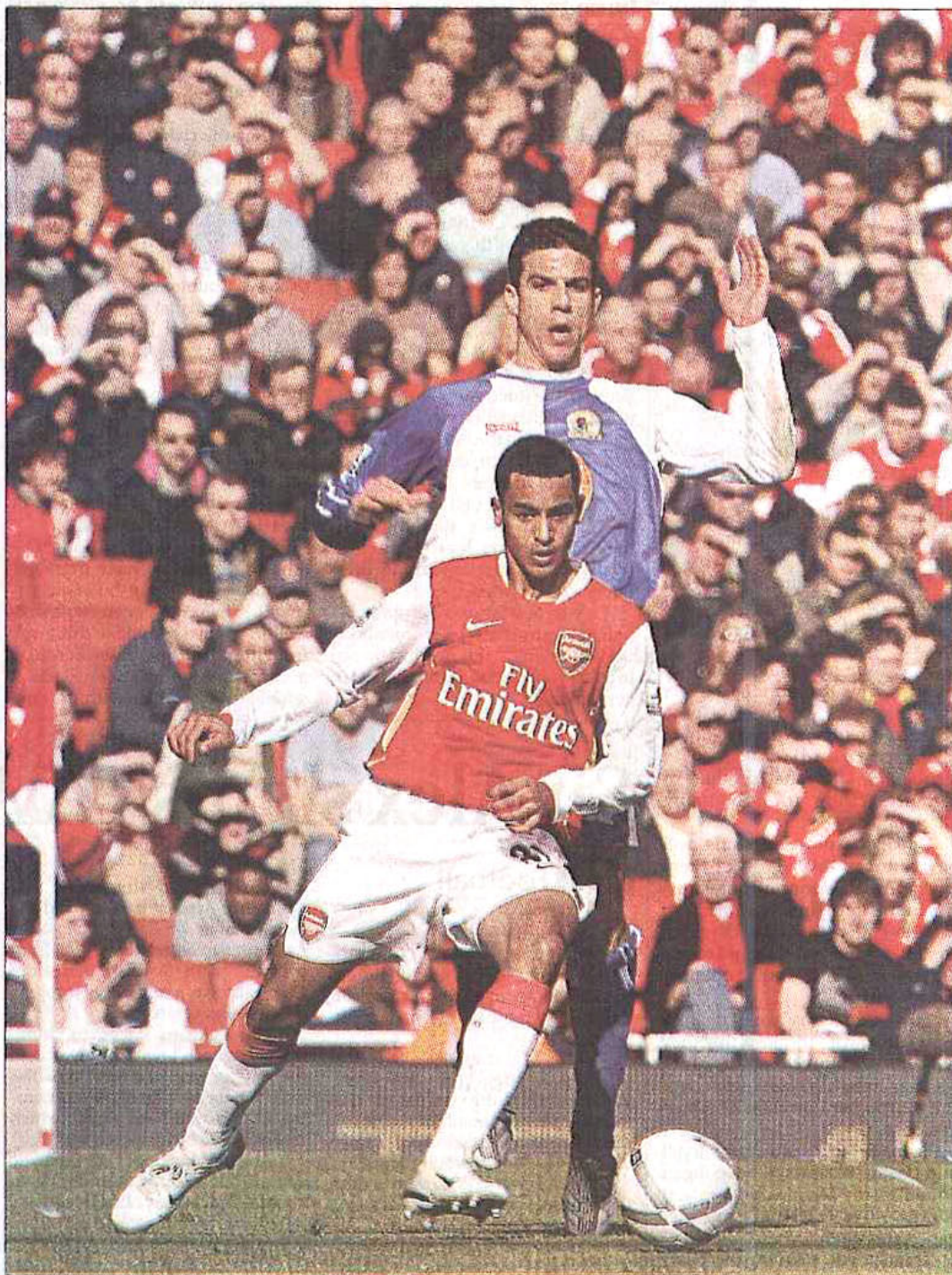


PHOTO: AFP
Arsenal forward Theo Walcott (front) gets ahead of Blackburn Rovers defender Bruno Berner to receive the ball during their FA Cup clash at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday.

Rovers frustrate Gunners

INTERNET, undated



replay at Ewood Park.

The Gunners pressed hard throughout and carved out nearly all of the game's chances, but they could not break down Blackburn's resistance.

Blackburn paid a heavy price for taking the game to Arsenal when they were hammered 6-2 in the Premiership before Christmas, but there was never any danger of a repeat scoreline as they set their stall out to contain and frustrate the Gunners.

Thierry Henry and Cesc Fabregas were among those recalled to the Arsenal starting line-up after the midweek victory over Bolton, but they were not able to inspire their team-mates in a drab first half.

Henry was presented with one good opportunity after just six

minutes when Justin Hoyte lifted the ball over the Rovers defence and into his path, but the Frenchman sent his volley over the crossbar from eight yards.

Arsenal found it much harder to penetrate Blackburn's defence thereafter and, although they dominated possession and engaged in some typically neat one-touch passing, they were restricted to shooting from distance.

Mathieu Flamini struck one long-range effort wide when he had options left and right, while William Gallas also threatened the goal with a curling shot from the edge of the box.

Shabani Nonda was Blackburn's sole attacking outlet but he received little service and his midfielders were set too deep to offer any significant support when he did pressurise Arsenal's back-line.

The one-way traffic continued in the second half as Arsenal looked to up the tempo, but Blackburn's defence was once again organised and committed.

Theo Walcott came off second best in his duel against Stephen Warnock but did provide one flash of excitement just before he was

replaced by Emmanuel Adebayor, when he combined with Jeremie Aladiere and shot wide from a narrow angle on the right.

Adebayor's introduction helped to add impetus and the Togolese striker immediately set off on a rampaging run down the left wing, only to be muscled out by Aaron Mokoena.

Blackburn won their first corner of the afternoon 20 minutes from time when Matt Derbyshire's hooked shot almost surprised Manuel Almunia, as the game finally opened up in the closing stages.

Arsenal then saw a penalty appeal waved away by referee Martin Atkinson when Aladiere twisted away from Warnock and was tripped.

Brad Friedel almost lasted the whole game without having to pull off a save of note but that changed in the final few minutes as he earned his side a replay with a series of stunning stops.

First the goalkeeper used his feet to deny Rosicky from close range and then moments later he produced a remarkable double save.

Henry flicked the ball towards

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Ruud slams Ferguson

Football

AFP, London

Ruud van Nistelrooy has hit out at Alex Ferguson, claiming he "kicked

his soul" during their major rift which saw him leave Manchester United last summer to join Spanish giants Real Madrid.

The 30-year-old Dutch international striker joined Madrid for 10 million pounds (14.8 million euros)

and van Nistelrooy talked down the Red Devils, claiming Real Madrid were a bigger club.

Van Nistelrooy said in an interview with World Soccer reprinted in the Daily Mail: "United were big, but Real Madrid are on another level. The club has a special allure - everything about it oozes elegance, style and pure class," and further comments showed his rift with Ferguson still rankles.

"In Spain, we saw a lot of United matches. The first time I watched them, I found myself thinking, 'There is he that ...' and that felt good."

The relationship finally broke down for good during United's 4-0 League Cup final win over Wigan last year.

Van Nistelrooy continued: "After an hour we were 4-0 up and I was desperate to go on, maybe score a goal, and be able to lift the trophy. First Kieran Richardson was brought on, then Nemanja Vidic and Patrice Evra, who had only arrived two weeks before."

"I exploded and began swearing at Ferguson because I felt he had kicked my soul. That was the moment things died. After that they could never be good, never be the same again. I find it rather tragic."

"This was the man who visited me in hospital when I had my bad knee injury while I was with PSV. It was because our relationship through the years was so warm that the situation was so painful."

Cryuff wary of the Kop

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona legend Johan Cruyff has warned his old team that they must stifle Liverpool's aerial threat if they are to beat Rafael Benitez's side.

Liverpool meet the reigning European champions in the Nou Camp on Wednesday in the first leg of their last-16 encounter and Cruyff, who managed the Catalan side to a European Cup win in 1992, believes their forward line could cause Barca problems.

"Barcelona against Liverpool is the absolute top match in the Champions League and, normally speaking, it shouldn't be a problem for Barca," Cruyff told The Sun.

"But the last time I saw Liverpool playing, I have to say that with [Dirk] Kuyt and [Peter] Crouch up front, they played some excellent stuff."

"The two of them form an enormously good partnership."

"Crouch is better technically than folk think and Kuyt is good in positional play."

"And in the air nobody wins anything against them."

But despite Cruyff's admiration for the Anfield club's strike pairing, he still believes Frank Rijkaard's side have the necessary talent to secure victory.

"The Barcelona trademark is a high-speed game which could break down the Liverpool lines," he told the Daily Star.

"Then the middle line, with dangerous men like Steven Gerrard, cannot link up with Kuyt or Crouch."

"By doing that you take the sting out of the English."

Jol plans Spurs dynasty

AFP, London

Martin Jol believes he can emulate Sir Alex Ferguson's success at Manchester United if he is allowed enough time to finish developing his youngsters.

For the first time in Jol's two-and-a-half-year reign, serious questions have been raised about his ability to turn Tottenham into consistent challengers for major honours.

A dispiriting run of six league games without a win, combined with a League Cup semi-final exit against Arsenal, has put the Dutchman under pressure to ensure his side advance to the FA Cup quarter-finals with a win at Fulham on Sunday.

But, while sections of the club's demanding fanbase are growing disenchanted, Jol is not concerned about his job security because he believes his squad's blend of youth and experience is close to blossoming.

All he wants to be given is a chance to reap the rewards in the same way that Ferguson and Arsene Wenger were at United and Arsenal.

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Inter want De Rossi

INTERNET, undated

Inter Milan are preparing a mega offer for Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi.

If Roberto Mancini is to sign a new contract with Inter, he wants to see the club push the boat out for the Italy international when the summer market opens.

Roma are reluctant to lose the midfielder and have concerns over a supporter backlash should they indicate a willingness to consider Inter's stunning bid.

River Plate receive stadia ban

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine giants River Plate will not be able to play at their home ground of Monumental Stadium for five home matches after the Argentine government decided enough was enough regarding fan violence there.

Argentinian Interior Minister Anibal Fernandez announced the measure following the latest incident involving rival groups of River Plate fans when they conducted a running battle last Sunday.

The trouble occurred within a stand that held dozens of families and saw three people wounded, one by a gunshot wound and two by stab wounds.

"There will be no matches at the stadium for the next five games," said Fernandez.

"This is because of a number of reasons, notably the level of violence at the heart of the club which is a well known fact."

River Plate are by no means unique in suffering from the plague

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Reds warn Barca

AFP, Liverpool



Refreshed by a sunshine break in Portugal, Liverpool's strikers are in the mood to cut Barcelona's

feuding superstars down to size in the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

Last month's FA Cup exit at the hands of Arsenal has ensured that Rafael Benitez's side will go into the first leg of their Champions League knockout clash on the back of a rare ten-day break from competitive football.

That should ensure that they are all fresh for what is certain to be an exhausting evening's work in Catalonia as they attempt to stifle Ronaldinho and co, and ensure the tie is still alive for the return leg at Anfield.

Strikers Peter Crouch, Dirk Kuyt and Craig Bellamy are expected to find themselves vying for the role of solo striker as Benitez adopts a cautious approach to the encounter.

But Kuyt sees no reason why Liverpool should not expect to come away from Barcelona with a positive result, particularly given the recent signs of disharmony in the Catalan

camp, with coach Frank Rijkaard apparently at odds with star striker Samuel Eto'o.

"There is no doubt that Ronaldinho is the best player in the world, but the best players do not always make the best teams," said the Dutch striker.

And Crouch echoed the confident tone.

"Barcelona cannot just go into these two games thinking they are going to win because they are the holders," said the England forward.

"We think we have got a good chance of getting decent results in both matches. They are certainly not unbeatable."

"You have to beat the best to win competitions, and that is what Liverpool did to win the trophy in 2005."

"They beat Juventus, Leverkusen, Chelsea and AC Milan. Liverpool were the underdogs in all those games and look what happened."

"Everyone is talking about the danger of Ronaldinho, but we will not get too wrapped up with him. He is one of the best in the world, when he is on form but Barca can hurt you from all over the pitch."

"They have got Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi coming back from injury and there is Deco as well."

"But I hope they are looking at us and saying the same things about our players."

"A good result for us would be a draw, scoring a goal, and we believe with our defence and the players we have who can attack on the break, we can surprise them."

"We won our group quite comfortably, and we have played well in Europe. So we are full of confidence going into a game of this stature," added Crouch.

Kuyt believes Barcelona will be wary of the second leg at Anfield, where the intense atmosphere helps elevate Liverpool's performances above the sum of their parts, particularly on European nights.

"That will be a challenge for them," Kuyt said. "Okay, Arsenal beat us at home recently but before that we were pretty much unbeatable. Only Benfica had beaten us at home in more than a year."

"What we have to do is make sure we get a good result in the Nou Camp. It will be difficult but it is a challenge for all of us and it is a chance to show people how good we are."

"If we can draw and score then we have a great chance in the second leg, and they will not relish that in front of our fans, who are great

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Beckham retains Real spot

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Fabio Capello, who last week backed

tracked on his decision to sideline US-bound David Beckham, has

named the former England captain in his squad for Saturday's match against Real Betis.

Beckham marked the equalizer in Real's 2-1 win over Real Sociedad in the Spanish League match on February 10 that marked his return to the club after spending a month

on the sidelines.

The 31-year-old had been out of favour with Capello since he announced he would leave the Spanish giants to play for LA Galaxy in the United States once his contract with Real finishes at the end of this season.

Beckham had last played in the 2-0 defeat against Deportivo La Coruna on January 7. But Real's title hopes had continued to nosedive and that helped pave the way for his return.

Asked if he brought Beckham back into his starting line-up out of conviction or out of obligation, Capello said: "No one has ever forced me to do anything. I am a free man that makes up his own

mind about things."

The atmosphere in the team since Beckham's return is "very positive", the Real Madrid coach added. "I see this in the efforts they make during training," he said.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas said meanwhile that Beckham's return to the squad had given the team a boost.

"He is a great professional and the coach has realised that he is a very influential and very important player for the team," he said in an interview published in sports daily Marca.

"As a person he is an example for many. He was always respectful and polite throughout the situation in which he found himself," he added.

Slick Stuttgart go second

AGENCIES, Berlin



Glassy VfB Stuttgart

strengthened their claims to a Champions League place with a 4-0 win at Eintracht Frankfurt on Friday.

Roberto Hilbert swept in the opener in the second minute, Mario Gomez and Ricardo Osorio made it 3-0 by halftime and Thomas Hitzlsperger completed the rout when he scored on the rebound after his penalty had been

saved 12 minutes from time.

Victory took Stuttgart up to second place for at least a night.

With 22 games played, they have 44 points while Werder Bremen slip to third on 42. Werder can reclaim second spot by winning at home to Hamburg SV on Saturday.

Schalke 04, who lead the table on 48 points, travel to VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday. Champions Bayern Munich, struggling in fourth place on 37 points, visit Alemannia Aachen.

The top two in Germany go straight into the Champions League, with third place enough for a qualifying berth.

Stuttgart looked well worth one

of those places as they took Frankfurt apart.

Cacau started the move for the opening goal after 100 seconds. He played the ball out wide to Gomez, who in turn set up Hilbert to score.

Gomez then netted his 13th league goal of the season to further enhance his burgeoning reputation.

Cacau was involved again as he played Gomez in with a wonderful back heel which the striker took on and passed out to Tomas Hitzlsperger in one action. The German duo played a neat one-two before Gomez pushed past two defenders to slide the ball home

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PHOTO: AFP
Stuttgart shooting star Mario Gomez (top) hurdles over the challenge of Frankfurt midfielder Alexander Meier during their Bundesliga clash in Frankfurt on Friday.



Ferguson (L) and Ruud van Nistelrooy in happier days...

PHOTO: INTERNET