

I'm a disaster at headers: Ronaldo

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldo looked back at the 1998 World Cup Final, his past and future as Il Fenomeno. "But I'm still terrible at headers!"

"It's been 10 years since I first wore the Inter jersey in Serie A. I'm still very motivated and eager, which is why I came to Milan. This is my biggest challenge and that's what makes football such a passion," he told Sky Italia.

Many doubted whether Ronaldo's move from Real Madrid in January was a good business decision by the Rossoneri, as he had become more famous for his weight and string of glamorous girlfriends than his sporting achievements.

"It's true I have lost some of my pace, but I can still do some pretty good stuff in a brief sprint. I'm still a disaster at headers, though. I train on it so much, but I can't seem to improve!"

In the interview he also looked back on perhaps the darkest moment of his career -- the mystery illness that struck him just before the 1998 World Cup Final.

"I remember all of it. I came back to my room after lunch and I felt ill. I fainted for around five minutes, I believe. Then the doctors arrived and Leonardo was there too," he explained.

"I was out cold and didn't know what was going on, so when I came to it was as if nothing had happened. I remember Leo was walking with

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Trouble precedes derby

REUTERS, Madrid

Police used rubber bullets and baton charges to disperse fans before Saturday's derby between Atletico and Real Madrid, Spanish media reported.

El Pais said the trouble started when a group of Atletico's ultra fans threw bottles and other objects at the police who responded by trying to disperse the crowd.

The fans reacted by destroying cars belonging to the local media that had been parked alongside the stadium.

Local emergency services said that the disturbances had resulted in minor injuries to 17 people, four of whom were taken to hospital.

In a separate incident around a dozen Atletico fans fell some two metres on to the ground at one end of the stadium when a barrier collapsed while they were celebrating the opening goal in the 1-1 draw. No one was reported hurt.

Riise-Bellamy settle their differences

INTERNET, undated

John Arne Riise has admitted he wants to see Craig Bellamy stay at Liverpool and claims the pair have put the incident that marred the build-up to their Champions League victory over Barcelona behind them.

Riise and Bellamy were involved in a row at the club's training camp where it was alleged the Wales striker had threatened the Norwegian defender with a golf club.

It has emerged since that nobody was hit by a golf club, but the pair had to be reprimanded by manager Rafael Benitez.

Then the same players scored the goals that beat Barcelona in the Nou Camp.

Now Riise insists in a News of the World article there is no longer animosity.

He said: "Craig is a great player and we all want great players at this club. He always works very hard for the team.

"It is not up to me to decide what the future is for Craig at Liverpool. My job is to focus on what I am doing for the team.

"But I would like to see him stay here. It was destiny that it should be me and Bellamy who scored the goals."

He added: "We both had a tough week after Portugal but we had the courage to put all the problems behind us. Craig and I are men, we are mature, we are team players.

"We spoke about what happened but the important thing was we agreed we could put it behind us and we are happy. To score against Barcelona was great but we did it for the team not for ourselves.

"The spirit is strong between us. We knew everyone would expect us to fail after what happened in Portugal.

"But it wasn't about John Arne Riise or Craig Bellamy. It was a victory for Liverpool."



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid forward Gonzalo Higuain goes airborne in ecstasy after scoring the equaliser in the local derby against Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon stadium in Madrid on Saturday.

All square in Madrid

REUTERS, Madrid



the Calderon on Saturday.

A dominant Atletico looked to be heading for a first home victory in nearly eight years against their neighbours when the Spain international put them in front with a coolly taken strike in the 11th minute.

But they were unable to press home their advantage and paid the price when Real's Argentine teenage striker Gonzalo Higuain equalised just after the hour with his first goal since joining the club from River Plate in the January transfer window.

Real were reduced to 10 men for the final six minutes when their out-of-sorts Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro was sent off after picking up a second yellow card, but they weathered a late storm to hold on for the point.

The result meant Real moved up to third place, one point ahead of Valencia and three behind leaders

Barcelona who play their respective matches on Sunday.

Atletico remain fifth, two points behind Valencia and two ahead of Real Zaragoza.

"We were by far the better side and it's a shame," said Atletico coach Javier Aguirre. "There are times when you play worse and win the game, but in football some things can't be explained.

"If it was like science it would be less fun and less controversial."

Atletico were rewarded for an impressive high-tempo start when skipper Torres broke his duck against Real with a classy strike.

He steered an angled shot past goalkeeper Iker Casillas after he had pulled down a cross from winger Luciano Galletti a metre inside the area.

Atletico looked to have doubled their lead when Colombian centre-back Luis Perea poked into the net from close range after a shot spun off the post, but the referee appeared to rule the goal out for offside.

They would have gone into the break 2-0 up had it not been for a great save from Casillas, who got a hand to a shot from Galletti after the Argentine winger was put clear by Torres.

With leading striker Ruud van Nistelrooy pulling out at the last minute because of injury, Real

coach Fabio Capello threw on the out-of-favour Antonio Cassano in the second half for the ineffective Jose Antonio Reyes.

The Italian, who had not featured in the league since falling out with Capello in October, played a decisive role in Real's equaliser when he threaded a superb pass through the Atletico back four just after the hour.

Higuain raced clear, rode a challenge and clipped the ball over keeper Leo Franco to score his first goal for the club.

Atletico laid siege to the Real area in the final minutes, but the visitors managed to hold on thanks to several more outstanding saves from Casillas.

In the build-up to the match a number of cars belonging to the media, which were parked alongside the stadium, were destroyed by congregating fans.

Earlier, relegation-threatened Real Sociedad slumped to a sixth defeat in seven games when they lost 1-0 at home to Deportivo Coruna, former Atletico striker Angel Arizmendi scoring the winner just before the half hour.

The Basque side's chances of remaining in the top flight look increasingly slim as they remain 11 points adrift of safety with all their immediate rivals yet to play.

Rijkaard allays Ronaldinho fears

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard has downplayed concerns about star player Ronaldinho's fitness.

The Brazilian's form has not matched his own high standards this season and he was photographed after Wednesday's Champions League defeat by Liverpool apparently looking overweight.

Rijkaard does not believe the matter to be a major issue and feels the photographs published were misleading.

The Dutchman said: "When the photo is taken quite close by, with inadequate light or if there is some movement, it can vary the reality a lot and, in this instance, for me there are doubts.

"In any case, we have a medical team who always control the physical state of the players and, when there is something brought to their attention, they work with the player to resolve it.

"The player has always given great performances, and I have total confidence in him and we should be happy to have him with us. I think he is as he always is, cheerful and unaffected. For me, there's no problem."

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San Siro given all-clear

REUTERS, Rome

Milan's San Siro stadium will be open to both home and away fans for AC Milan's match against Sampdoria this weekend following an inspection of newly-installed electronic turnstiles on Saturday.

The news was conveyed to fans on Milan's Web site.

Only Milan and Inter Milan season-ticket holders have been allowed to watch Serie A matches at the ground since new nationwide anti-hooligan plans were introduced after the death of a policeman outside a match in Catania earlier this month.

Saturday's decision by government inspectors means Italy's most famous ground will also be open to fans who want to buy a ticket.

The San Siro is the 10th Serie A stadium to be fully reopened to the public. A further six are open only to season-ticket holders while works to improve safety controls are carried out.

Only two grounds -- Catania's Massimino stadium and Ascoli's Del Duca stadium -- remain closed.

L'pool thrash Sheffield

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson believes Cristiano Ronaldo's late winner at Fulham could be a turning point in the race for the Premiership title.

Ferguson's side are now nine points ahead of second placed Chelsea after Ronaldo hit his 16th goal of the season with just two minutes remaining at Craven Cottage.

"We scored so late on, it could be significant," Ferguson said. "We are in a fantastic position but we have some difficult away games left.

"Liverpool will be hard for us next week. I am not saying we are going to win but I know for certain we will not play as badly."

United had fallen behind when Brian McBride took advantage of a mix-up between goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar and Nemanja Vidic to fire home after 17 minutes.

Ryan Giggs equalised in the 29th minute when he volleyed past Jan Lastuvka from Wayne Rooney's cross.

It took until the 88th minute for a below-par United to snatch the winner when Ronaldo's surging run and shot, which deflected off Philippe Christianval, sparked wild celebrations among Ferguson and his players.

Ferguson added: "Ronaldo was fantastic and showed courage. I don't know how many times he was fouled, but he kept going and he deserved man of the match and the goal."

Chelsea have a game in hand on United, but they could be 12 points behind by the time they play their next league match at Portsmouth on Saturday as the leaders face Liverpool earlier the same day.

Charlton boss Alan Pardew told his players not to let their standards slip after they boosted their survival bid with a 4-0 rout of his former club West Ham.

Pardew was sacked by the Hammers in December and replaced by former Charlton boss Alan Curbishley.

But a Jerome Thomas double and goals from Darren Ambrose and Darren Bent gave him a measure of revenge as they closed the gap on fourth bottom Wigan to three points.

Pardew said: "The performance was good but today the win was all-important no matter how it came. We've set our standards for the rest of the season with this win.

"It's been a difficult day, a difficult week leading up to it for me because I have a genuine love for West Ham and their fans which will never die."

Curbishley has won just one league game since taking over but he was given a vote of confidence

after the match when West Ham issued a statement saying his job was safe.

Curbishley said: "I'm as devastated as the fans are. We are getting problems time and again but West Ham were losing games before I came and I just haven't been able to change it.

"The question is are we going down with a fight or a whimper? There are still 10 games left, lots of points at stake. The first thing would be to get a settled side and a result."

Sheffield United manager Neil Warnock accused Steven Gerrard of diving to win the penalties that set up Liverpool's 4-0 win over the Blades at Anfield.

The Liverpool captain earned two first half spot-kicks that were converted by Robbie Fowler, before Sami Hyypia and Gerrard scored to complete the rout.

Warnock said: "I told him I was disappointed with him. He was looking at the referee Steve Bennett, almost asking for the penalty.

"Some referees would see that Steven Gerrard used everything he had to get the penalty.

"Steve Bennett just rules by the laws of the game, he says that is consistency. He needs to understand the game more."

Australia striker Mark Viduka scored Middlesbrough's opener and made their second in a 2-1

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Bayern back on track

REUTERS, Berlin



Bommel.

The result means Bayern make up a couple of points on second-placed VfB Stuttgart, who were held to a goalless draw at home to Hertha Berlin on Friday.

Bayern took the lead when Podolski stroked home a penalty in the 26th minute and Dutch midfielder Van Bommel struck the second from long range in the 56th.

Wolfsburg got one back when Cedrick Makiadi scored on the rebound with 11 minutes to go.

Schalke 04, who host Bayer Leverkusen on Sunday, are top with 49 points from 22 games ahead of

Stuttgart on 45 from 23.

Werder Bremen, third with 42 points, are also in action on Sunday at bottom club Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Bayern stay fourth on 40 points. The champions wanted a convincing win to boost morale after a 3-2 Champions League defeat at Real Madrid in midweek -- their third loss in four games under recalled coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

As it was, they were grateful just to get the three points since Wolfsburg enjoyed the better of the first half and came back strongly at the end.

Oliver Kahn made a good save from a Marcelinho free-kick in the 10th minute and from the ensuing corner the former Germany keeper had to pull off an even better one from a point-blank Alexander Madlung header.

Bayern then looked a bit lucky to win a penalty decision, as Claudio Pizarro fell under Madlung's challenge.

Podolski stepped up to score only his second league goal of a disappointing first season at Bayern.

Wolfsburg continued to make the better chances and only a miraculous tackle stopped them equalising just before halftime, Andreas Goerlitz somehow managing to tackle cleanly from behind to stop Diego Klimowicz walking the ball into the net.

Bayern played much better at the start of the second half and cooler finishing from Podolski would have put them clear.

They eventually doubled their lead with Van Bommel's low drive but continued to miss chances and when Makiadi pounced on a block from Philipp Lahm and beat Kahn from close range it made for a tense final few minutes.

"The important thing is the result," said a relieved Hitzfeld. "Oliver Kahn kept us in it at the start and in the end we deserved it because we had far more chances."



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich striker Lukas Podolski (R) shrugs off the attentions of Wolfsburg midfielder Jacek Krzynowek during their Bundesliga encounter at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday.

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Football

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid's director of sport Predrag Mijatovic admits the team will need to raise their game if they are continue their challenge on both the domestic and European fronts.

Real have only won once in five Primera Liga outings and looked off the pace in Saturday's 1-1 draw against local rivals Atletico, who threatened to overwhelm them in the first half at the Vicente Calderon.

Atletico striker Fernando Torres struck after just 11 minutes and defender Luis Perea had a second

disallowed four minutes later, before Gonzalo Higuain snatched a 61st-minute equaliser for Real against the run of play.

It was Higuain's first goal for the club since he moved from River Plate in the winter transfer window.

"It was a vital goal for Higuain and for the team. We haven't played a good game, but I think it was a fair result overall," Mijatovic said.

"The point is very important. We have key games coming up and need to recover our injured players. "Between now and the end of the season we have to play well in the league and the Champions League."

With some uncertainty still surrounding the future of Real

coach Fabio Capello, Mijatovic's words made it clear an improvement was required.

Despite their problems, Real climbed to third in the Primera Liga following the draw, three points behind leaders Barcelona.

Barca, second-placed Sevilla and fourth-placed Valencia all play on Sunday.

Having complained about refereeing decisions going against them all season, Real defender Michel Salgado admitted their luck had changed in that respect on Saturday.

Match official Arturo Dauden Ibanez disallowed Perea's goal in the first half for an apparent offside, when television replays sug