



PHOTO: AFP

Nantes goalkeeper Fabien Barthez stops a penalty shot during the French cup match against Sedan at the Louis Dugauguez Stadium in Sedan on Tuesday.

Milan mired in injuries

AFP, Rome

AC Milan are faced with a crisis ahead of their crucial Serie A match away to Palermo on Wednesday with eight defenders ruled out through injury and suspension.

Captain Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Costacurta, Cafu, Kakha Kaladze and Marek Jankulovski are all carrying knocks, while Serginho and Alessandro Nesta are long-term injury victims.

Meanwhile Massimo Oddo is serving a one-match ban after being sent off in Sunday's 1-0 win against Sampdoria.

"We have an emergency at the back, but we mustn't let it get us down," said AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti on Tuesday.

"Morale is good and confidence is high. Paradoxically these problems can give you added motivation."

Daniele Bonera, Giuseppe Favalli and Dario Simic are the only three defenders with first-team experience available for the trip to Sicily.

The match is vital in the race for Champions League places next season.

Palermo are third on 44 points, eight clear of AC Milan who have played a game less than the Sicilians.

Technology on the agenda

INTERNET, undated

The issue of goal-line technology and the use of video evidence will be on the agenda when the International Football Association Board, the guardians of the game's laws, meet in Manchester on Saturday.

The IFAB will consider various amendments to the game's regulations when they hold their 121st Annual General Meeting.

The four British associations each have a vote on the board, while the sport's governing body FIFA also cast four votes. A three-quarters majority is required for a proposal to be approved.

In addition to the use of technology to assist referees, the IFAB will also consider a FIFA proposal to revise Law 4 to prohibit players from displaying any political, religious or personal statements on their equipment, and to book players who put on a mask as part of a goal celebration.

They will also look at the sanctions to be imposed on players who are guilty of intentional use of the elbow.

Final snub angered Robben

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea winger Arjen Robben has voiced his anger at being left on the bench for Sunday's Carling Cup final.

The Dutchman came on in the second half and impressed, but he admits he was frustrated to start the game from the bench.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho again opted for a 4-4-2 formation with a diamond midfield that leaves no room for Robben.

When he was told by Dutch television that there was disappointment back home over his omission from the team that eventually beat Arsenal 2-1, Robben claimed: "You can't be as angry as I was."

"I was pleased about the assist I gave for the second goal as it showed what I can do."

"But for me, it's about time I was starting games."

Robben has long been linked with a move out of Stamford Bridge as he grows ever more frustrated at his bit-part role.

FRENCH CUP

Nantes, Marseille in semis

Football

AFP, Paris

Former France goalkeeper Fabien Barthez was the hero for new club Nantes as he helped them reach the French Cup semifinals on Tuesday with a 6-5 win on penalties over Sedan, as his former club Marseille crushed Brittany minnows Vannes 5-0.

In his first penalty shootout since last year's World Cup final loss to Italy, Barthez, 35, produced the crucial save after the tie had ended

1-1 after extra time when he punched out Sedan's sixth penalty from Nicolas Marin.

Barthez has never won the French Cup being runner-up with Marseille last season. He made several key saves as the Canaries reached their sixth semifinal in nine years. They won the event in 1999 and 2000.

The loss was a blow for Sedan who had not lost a French Cup tie at home since 1995.

The hosts had taken the lead after 14 minutes when former Nantes striker Gregory Pujol's header beat Barthez.

But Sedan did not have time to savour their lead when a bad clearance saw striker Claudio Kessler grab the equaliser just a minute later.

Marseille has no such problems with Vannes with Mamadou Niang putting them ahead after just one minute at the Stade Velodrome.

Toifliou Maoulida doubled their account after 31 minutes when he converted a penalty, and scored his second after 66 minutes.

Djibril Cisse's 61 minute penalty and a Mickael Pagis effort a minute into extra time completed the scoreline.

Del Piero apologetic

Football

INTERNET, undated

Alessandro Del Piero admits he apologised repeatedly for the horrific challenge on Modena's Nicola Campedelli.

The midfielder had to be stretched off after the Juventus captain hacked him down in last night's 1-0 victory for the Bianconeri.

"It was a difficult, hard game, one in which we struggled, and I am very sorry for my foul on Campedelli," said the captain.

"Obviously I apologised to him both during and after the match,

going to check on his condition following the final whistle."

Campedelli suffered ankle ligament damage and initial reports suggest he'll be out for at least a month.

Modena Coach Bortolo Mutti slammed Del Piero for the tackle that he felt deserved a dismissal, especially as Juve went on to win 1-0 in the final minute.

"It's great to win again on our travels after a series of fairly disappointing results," continued the Italian international.

"At this stage of the season it is crucial we speed up our progress and to do that just winning at home is not enough. I'm content with the

victory and my own performance, as at the moment I am playing well."

Serie B fixtures are generally spread out over Saturday afternoon with a Friday and Monday evening game.

However, the Lega Calcio has today announced that Juventus will play on a Sunday in their top of the table clash with Piacenza on March 4.

"Now we face this appointment with Piacenza and playing on a Sunday almost gives me a sense of nostalgia," smiled the former Serie A star.

Ferguson hails United firepower

AFP, Reading



United manager was stunned by his side's early goal spree in their FA Cup win at Reading.

United scored three times in the first six minutes of a fifth round replay at the Madejski Stadium on Tuesday and eventually edged into the quarterfinals with a 3-2 victory.

Ferguson's team, who will visit Middlesbrough in the quarterfinals on March 10, went ahead through Gabriel Heinze's second minute strike before Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer increased the lead in a frantic opening.

However, Reading recovered to mount a marvellous fightback with goals from Dave Kitson and substitute Leroy Lita and they nearly got an equaliser when Brynjar Gunnarsson hit the crossbar in the last minute, leaving Ferguson to admit he had never seen anything like it.

Ferguson said: "I think it was a fantastic cup tie and credit to both sides, anyone turning up to watch that game would not have left disappointed."

"It was the best ever start I have seen and three goals in six minutes

was magnificent but sometimes that can be a problem. We gave them a goal after 20-odd minutes and that gave them a lifeline.

"In the first half we played the ball in behind them so much they did not seem to know how to deal with it but in the second we started playing across them which was not as successful."

"The way Reading play, they are a team who like to cross the ball and they are very good at it. It gave us a really hard test."

"As the clock was ticking down I was thinking to myself I would have to prepare for extra time and I told Paul Scholes to get ready."

"That was how I thought the game was going but we held on and the main thing is we are in the next round."

Despite their dream start, United's goals owed as much to Reading's defensive mistakes as it did to the visitors' ruthlessness in front of goal.

Heinze's long ranger should have been gathered by Reading goalkeeper Adam Federici but the Australian, who was named player of the Fifth Round earlier in the week, allowed it to squirm under him and roll over the line.

Saha's second was a cracking strike from what seemed a largely unthreatening angle but Andre Bikey's reluctance to close the Frenchman down gave him the chance to pick his spot.

And the Royals failed to learn their lesson for United's crucial third

as they allowed Solskjaer a clear 50-yard run on goal, forcing Steve Coppell to admit he perhaps got his early match tactics horribly wrong.

Coppell said: "I wanted to keep things tight early on and after the start we had I would question myself and maybe we should have gone gung-ho from the first whistle."

"It made me sink into my seat a little but we got ourselves back into the game and I could not question my players' efforts."

"They worked and grafted and tried to create chances and we came very close to sending it into extra time."

"I could not blame our goalkeeper because he made some good saves and some great interventions from crosses. I am not prepared to blame anybody and I have only praise for my players."

Coppell insisted Reading's fightback showed exactly why they have made such a good impression in the Premiership this season.

He added: "It is not often you say there can be honour in defeat but that is the position we are in tonight. I have to compliment my players. They are all warriors."

"They didn't lay down and die, they got back up again and fought, which is one of the best qualities to have."

GERMAN CUP

Takahara lifts Frankfurt

REUTERS, Berlin

Naohiro Takahara struck twice to lead Eintracht Frankfurt through to the semi-finals of the German Cup in a 3-0 derby win away to Kickers Offenbach on Tuesday.

Frankfurt, who lost to Bayern Munich in the final last season, took an early lead at second division Offenbach with a Michael Fink goal and Japan striker Takahara made it 2-0 with a wonderful far-post volley in the 61st minute.

Offenbach were forced to take risks and Frankfurt took advantage as Takahara tapped into an empty net at the end of a swift break 11 minutes after his first.

Nuremberg came through a tight all-Bundesliga battle to book their place in the last four, beating Hanover 96 4-2 on penalties after 120 goalless minutes.

Substitute goalkeeper Daniel Klewer was the Nuremberg hero. Coach Hans Meyer sent Klewer on with a minute to go and the penalty specialist obliged by saving two of the Hanover efforts in the shoot-out.

VfL Wolfsburg won the other all-first division tie on Tuesday, beating Alemannia Aachen 2-0 thanks to first-half goals from Diego Klimowicz and Marcelinho.

VfB Stuttgart, in second place in the Bundesliga, will look to stay on the trail of a domestic double when they play their quarterfinal at home to Hertha Berlin on Wednesday.

The semifinals will be played from April 17-18, with the final set for May 26 at the Olympiastadion in Berlin.

Keane appeal rejected

AFP, London

Tottenham's Robbie Keane has had his claim for wrongful dismissal rejected by the Football Association (FA) on Tuesday.

The Republic of Ireland international picked up the first red card of his professional career when he was sent-off for a deliberate handball in Sunday's 4-1 Premiership win against Bolton.

Keane was furious with referee Graham Poll after his 36th-minute dismissal for handling Ivan Campo's header on the line.

The ball struck Keane's chest before appearing to hit his arm as it dropped, and Poll issued a straight red card.

Keane's red card marked the end of an action-packed game from the Spurs' stand-in skipper -- he scored two goals and also set up Jermaine Jenas before receiving his marching orders.

He will serve the one-match suspension with immediate effect meaning he will miss Sunday's Premiership match against West Ham.

Gerrard looks to derail United

INTERNET, undated

Steven Gerrard insists Liverpool are determined not to allow Manchester United to 'win the title at Anfield'.

If United beat Liverpool on Saturday, it will give them a 12-point lead over current Barclays Premiership champions Chelsea and, in the Reds skipper's eyes, virtually end the race for the championship.

And although Liverpool cannot win the title themselves this term and are looking to secure Champions League qualification, Gerrard is adamant their bitterest rivals will not take their biggest step yet towards the title under the noses of the Kop.

Gerrard said on his club's official website: "They will be coming to Anfield this weekend looking for maximum points because that would virtually win them the league."

"We've got to make sure we get the points and keep the title race going for as long as possible. It's not over at the moment and that's why this is a massive game for both clubs."

He added: "It hurts to say this, but they have been playing some really good attacking football this season. They are also really hard to beat because they have some great defenders."

"The rivalry for this fixture has got bigger and bigger over the years and the games are built up more and more. As a player, these are the games you want to play in."

"But I am in the city among all the banter and I know our fans are desperate to take the three points this weekend."

Fowler considering MLS switch

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler is considering joining former England teammate David Beckham in the United States, New England Revolution coach Steve Nicol claimed.

The 31-year-old former Leeds and Manchester City forward is out of contract at Anfield at the end of the season.

And Nicol, a former Liverpool player, believes Fowler could be tempted by a move across the Atlantic, although he warned that there is not the same money on the table as Beckham is getting at Los Angeles Galaxy.

"At the moment the first thing is the financial side," said Nicol.

"We've spoken, but as of yet there's nothing been settled. He's really just dipping his foot in the water here. It's something he's thinking about."

Beckham is getting 250 million dollars over five seasons at the Galaxy and Nicol is worried that other European-based players may think they too will get big deals if they move to Major League Soccer.

However, Beckham's deal is a exception outside of the normal salary cap rules.

The salary cap is limited to one million dollars per team, per season, with each team allowed to sign one player outside the cap.

Nicol has some money to spend after selling Clint Dempsey to Fulham in January, but not the kind that was spent on Beckham.

"Through the sale of Clint we have some money available," he

said.

"But the problem we have is that, because of the type of money David Beckham has got, a lot of people think everybody has that kind of money, which is not the case."

Fowler's hopes of extending his Anfield career have been threatened by the arrival of Andriy Voronin from Bayer Leverkusen as the Ukrainian international will join a striker line-up that comprises England international Peter Crouch, fiery Welshman Craig Bellamy and Dutch star Dirk Kuyt.

And Nicol admits that Fowler is just testing the water.

"He's getting his ducks in a row. Whether he gets a contract at Liverpool or whether he moves on, he's dipping his foot in the water," said the Revolution boss.

Nadal survives Baghdatis test

Tennis

AFP, Dubai

World number two Rafael Nadal, playing his first match since finishing the Australian Open injured last month, survived a tough first round test against Marcos Baghdatis at the Dubai Open on Tuesday.

Nadal's 3-6, 6-2, 6-3 win over the in-form world number 17 from Cyprus earned him a place in the second round in defence of his title.

But for a while it looked as though the chances of a repeat encounter between the young French Open champion and triple Grand Slam titleholder Roger Federer would be halted at the first obstacle.

Baghdatis started superbly, discreetly varying the pace from behind the baseline, and suddenly pitching in with flat, flashing drives projected at sharp angles.

But after giving Nadal the chances to break early in both the second and third sets -- serving double faults in the third game of each -- he found himself increasingly under pressure from an opponent who played more aggressively than he had in Australia.

"When you have everything under control and then you put an opponent like him in the match and he gets confident and plays deeper and makes you move more, mentally you say 'shit'" said Baghdatis.

"My problem is not my tennis. My problem is consistency in the head. The head is not there. Mentally I am not tough."

There was no question that Nadal was mentally tough. He did not panic, either at getting so difficult an opponent after such a break, or at going a set down.

He concentrated on serving a little heavier and getting in with fiercer forehand follow-ups, several times making openings which he took skilfully at the net.

"This was my best match of the year," Nadal reckoned. "Getting your rhythm when you have not had competition is difficult, but I was feeling not bad."

"To start with he was playing better than me but I felt better and better and I was more aggressive with my forehand and I was serving good too. I was not too afraid

of this match because I was practising well."

Nadal next plays Igor Andreev, who was Russia's Davis Cup hero earlier this month, while Federer, who also struggled to get through the first round in three sets Monday will play Daniele Bracciali.

Another seed to go out was David Ferrer, the number four from Spain, who was beaten 7-6 (15/13), 6-1 by Robin Soderling, the improving Swede, despite having five set points in a 28-point tie-breaker.

This followed the departure the previous day of another Spaniard, the fourth-seeded Tommy Robredo, which means that both seeds in the third quarter of the draw are out. If Nadal reaches the semifinals he will have an unused opponent.

Two other seeds, Nikolay Davydenko of Russia and Tommy Haas of Germany did well to survive, after looking in trouble for different reasons.

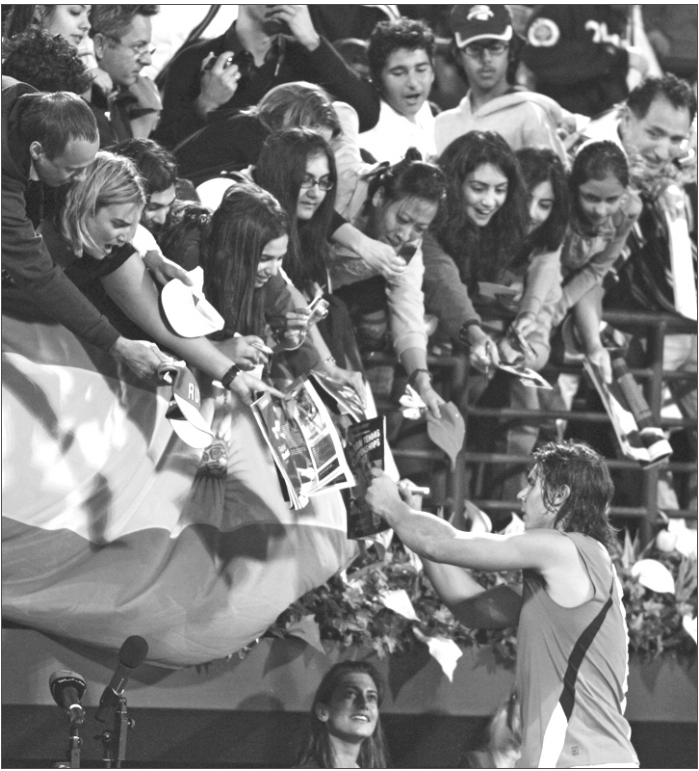


PHOTO: AFP

A relieved Rafael Nadal signs autographs for his fans after winning a closely-contested second-round match against Marcos Baghdatis in the Dubai Duty Free Open on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	43 Ant	2 Bosc or Bartlett	21 Blond shade
1 Likely	44 Choir rendition	3 "GWTW" acreage	23 Droplets on a leaf
4 Moose's cousin	46 Greek consonant	4 Recede	25 -- Kong
7 Vary	50 Goya subject	5 Bread purchase	26 Wee bit
good, in rasp	53 Taxi	6 Eucalyptus eater	27 Commotions
11 Acknowl-	55 Midday	7 Molly Ringwald movie	28 Irish dances
edge 2/29	56 "The Good Earth"	8 Scuttie	29 Tend texts
13 Greet the villain	57 Leading lady?	9 Summer-time abbr.	30 Used a loom
14 Dissolute one	58 Entangle-ment	10 Ball-bearing item	31 Cath. or Prot.
15 Gandhi wrapper?	59 Unpaid bill	11 Bally	35 Excessively
16 Ovine comment	60 Storm center	12 Critter seen by sots?	36 One is on
17 Advan-	61 Enns' neighbors	13 Crier	40 High times
18 Monkey's uncle?		14 TV show	41 VIP
20 Inspid		15 Almost black	47 Vanished
22 Youngster		16 Lycin- throe's arouser	49 Hill
24 Reason for an inhaler		17 dwellers	50 Chic, to Austin
28 Icanem?		18 Powers	51 Beerlike beverage
32 Bone that supports the tongue		19 Spoke	52 Poke
33 "American --"		20 Spelling contest	
34 Moist			
36 Grooving on			
37 Donates			
39 Relax			
41 Treeless tract			

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CRYPTOQUIP

Q B A J I D O J W C S J X K Q U D P C

M X K E T A R Q U K J T O Q N

E J B B D D M J K , Q N X D A A R Q A

I J U D C V J X P W O D V D P P X S U D W .

Saturday's Cryptquip: IF YOU'RE A BELIEVER IN HAPPY ENDINGS, YOU MIGHT SAY THAT SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT UNSAID.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: O equals B