



Manchester United defender John O'Shea (R) scores a last-gasp winner against Liverpool in their crucial Premiership tie at Anfield on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Blatter blasts Swiss malaise

AFP, Zurich

FIFA boss Sepp Blatter hit out at his Swiss countrymen Friday for failing to get excited about next year's European Championships to be held jointly in their country and Austria.

Speaking at a seminar organised by the Swiss Sport Forum here, Blatter said: "I'm horrified by the lack of enthusiasm that prevails as much in German Switzerland as in western Switzerland."

"Since we gained the right to host Euro 2008 the first thing Swiss think of is: 'how much will this cost us? That's a lot.'"

But Blatter added a rallying call to his comrades, saying: "Let's roll up our sleeves."

Blatter also said players at the tournament should pay taxes on their Euro 2008 earnings in the two countries hosting the event.

Recalling last year's World Cup, Blatter said: "FIFA took away tax at source and paid it to the German authorities. Where you earn your money is where you should pay taxes, that is correct and fair."

The question of where tax should be imposed is at the centre of a dispute between UEFA, who organise the European Championships, and the town of Berne.

UEFA believes players should pay their taxes where they live whereas Berne is asking for their Euro 2008 taxes to be paid in Switzerland and Austria.

3-match ban for Betis

AFP, Madrid

Real Betis received a three-match stadium ban on Friday after a fan threw a bottle during Wednesday's Cup tie with city rivals Seville, knocking the visitors' coach unconscious.

Betis will also have to replay the remaining 33 minutes of their Spanish Cup quarterfinal return leg behind closed doors at first division side Getafe, who are based in the Madrid suburbs, Spain's football competition committee ruled.

The body also decreed that disciplinary proceedings should be launched against Jose Maria del Nido and Pepe Leon, chairmen of Seville and Betis respectively, whom they accused of whipping up longstanding bad feeling between the two clubs beforehand. Spanish media had earlier suggested that Betis' stadium could be closed for 12 matches.

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos said earlier Friday he was still in shock two days after a full bottle of water hit him in the back of the head during the match, which had to be abandoned in the second half with Seville leading 1-0.

"I'm still in shock and I'm trying to get over it. The match was heated but I never could imagine that something like that could happen," Ramos told radio Cadena Ser.

"I don't remember anything after being struck, nor what happened on the pitch," he added.

Wednesday's incident occurred a month after a policeman died in crowd trouble in Sicily following a game between Catania and Palermo.

United conquer Anfield

AFP, Liverpool



Substitute John O'Shea hit a dramatic stoppage time winner as 10-man Manchester United beat Liverpool 1-0 at Anfield to take a huge step towards securing the Premiership title on Saturday.

Former England midfielder Paul Scholes was shown the red card five minutes from time by referee Martin Atkinson after aiming a punch at Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso.

But Ireland international O'Shea pounced unmarked in the first minute of stoppage time following a free-kick by Cristiano Ronaldo to give Sir Alex Ferguson's leaders a crunch victory.

United had failed for long periods to produce the form which has taken them top of the summit yet they were denied what looked a certain penalty when Daniel Agger brought down French substitute Louis Saha in the 78th minute.

In addition they lost Wayne Rooney to injury after he was involved in a crunching challenge with England teammate Jamie Carragher which has left the striker doubtful for Wednesday's Champions League tie with Lille on Wednesday.

With Barcelona coming to Merseyside in the Champions League on Tuesday, desperate to overturn Liverpool's 2-1 first-leg lead, Benitez had more reasons than ever to indulge in the kind of rotation that frustrates many of the club's supporters.

He made 99 consecutive team changes up until last October and many feel the early-season tinkering was partly to blame for a lack of consistency that meant his team's Premiership title challenge was over before it had begun, with Liverpool suffering five of their seven league defeats to date before mid-November, all away from home.

But these are not normal circumstances and, with Steven Gerrard having expressed his disgust at the idea of United "virtually" securing the title at Anfield, the Spaniard was in no mood to play into Ferguson's hands.

Xabi Alonso, Momo Sissoko, Dirk Kuyt and Craig Bellamy were all restored to the starting line-up, but there was no place for Javier Mascherano, the Argentinian, in Carragher's 16-man squad.

The return of those key players created the desired effect as the hosts made the brighter start with Agger going close from distance while Chile international Mark Gonzalez forced the game's first save after connecting with Steve Finnan's 16th minute cross.

Jose Reina did not have a save to make in a scrappy first-half although Ronaldo, with 16 Premiership goals to his name already this season, was threatening in spells and blazed his side's best chance before the break over the bar in the 23rd minute after good work by Henrik Larsson.

Liverpool continued to carve out the better chances in a fixture regarded as one of the most fiercely contested in the English calendar.

John Arne Riise, one of the goal heroes in Barcelona last month, almost found the net after letting fly with another spectacular left-foot effort from 20-yards following good work by the busy Gonzalez in the 27th minute.

United fans had to wait two

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Ferguson lucky again

AFP, Liverpool



Sir Alex Ferguson admitted Manchester United have got lucky in the Premiership title race after his 10-men snatched a dramatic 1-0 win at Liverpool on Saturday.

United were under pressure for long spells of the second half at Anfield and were clinging on for a point after Paul Scholes was sent off with eight minutes remaining for aiming a punch at Xabi Alonso.

But John O'Shea fired home from close range in the 90th minute after Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina spilled Cristiano Ronaldo's free-kick.

United, who won at Fulham last week thanks to a late Ronaldo goal, are now 12 points ahead of second-placed Chelsea and Ferguson has no doubts that his team are getting the rub of the green at the right time.

"Without question this is a massive result for us," Ferguson said. "We were very lucky today. Liverpool upset our rhythm a bit and we had a lot of narrow escapes."

"But that happens in championships. Last week at Fulham was a great example of that when we broke away and scored in the last couple of minutes. Today we've broken away and scored in the last minute or so."

"You need that bit of luck to win a championship, there is no question about it and we've got that in the last couple of weeks."

Although Chelsea can cut the gap back to nine points with a win at Portsmouth in Saturday's late match, Ferguson believes his team are equipped to hold off the reigning

champions.

"I don't think anything is impossible in modern-day football," he said. "We experienced that in 1998 with a great lead. But we had horrendous injuries then and we have a stronger squad now."

That squad strength will be tested as Scholes will now serve a three-match ban and England striker Wayne Rooney could be sidelined with a knee injury suffered at Anfield.

With Ole Gunnar Solskjaer injured and Henrik Larsson's loan spell expiring soon, United will be short of attacking options.

Ferguson added: "Wayne has a got a knee injury. We will just have to see how it is tomorrow."

"Paul Scholes will miss the next three matches as well. I will have to see the incident again. I'm not sure what happened."

Der Vaart was gifted the chance to put Hamburg in front.

Fabian Ernst and Rodriguez both left the ball for each other, allowing the Dutch midfielder to collect Rost's kick in front of Manuel Neuer and fire into the bottom corner from 10 yards.

A similar defensive error allowed Olic to double the visitors' lead 10 minutes later.

Marcelo Bordon and Mladen Krstajic were both attracted to David Jarolim, leaving Olic free to the Hamburg midfielder's left.

Jarolim was first to the ball and immediately slid it into the path of Olic, who coolly beat Neuer from 10 yards.

Kobiaschwili's last-minute free-kick, which deflected just inches wide of the post, was the closest the hosts came to providing any joy to their fans.

Saturday, Schalke coach Mirko Slomka had demanded a win from his side to "send out a warning" to their title rivals.

And Hamburg goalkeeper Frank Rost, who joined the north Germany club from Schalke in January, was given his first warning from a Hamit Altintop free-kick which he did well to palm on to the post.

Dario Rodriguez also tested Rost in a bright start for the home side.

Hamburg were able to contain the pressure though, and slow down the tempo of the game to suit their style.

After an hour of tight battles in midfield, the game sprang into life inside the last 20 minutes with the home side the first to come close to breaking the deadlock.

Rost was called into action to thwart the home side's first really dangerous attack of the second half, and from his long punt forward, Van

Hamburg's fourth consecutive win lifted them further away from the relegation zone and left a large dent in Schalke's hopes of winning the Bundesliga this season.

Goals from Rafael van der Vaart and Ivica Olic inside the last 20 minutes took the visitors up to 10th in the table and four points clear of the drop zone.

Schalke, on the other hand, could see their lead at the top of the table cut to a single point this weekend after losing their third game in the last four.

Stuttgart, Werder Bremen and Bayern Munich will all be looking to close the gap when they play on

Real just need a trophy: Zidane

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid just need to win a trophy to reclaim their rightful place at the top of the game, according to the Spanish club's former player Zinedine Zidane.

The former three-time world player of the year and French World Cup winner retired from football after last year's World Cup and following three baron years at Real.

Madrid are again struggling in the league this season, six points off pacesetters and bitter rivals Barcelona, out of the Spanish cup and with a precarious 3-2 lead from the home leg of their Champions League last 16 clash with Bayern Munich.

But Zidane, who scored the winning goal in the final last time Madrid won the Champions League in 2002, believes his old teammates are close to reclaiming their glory years.

"When we don't win we think changes need to be made because Real Madrid is not a small club but once they win a trophy, they'll be right back up at the top," said Zidane.

The former Madrid number 5 said he believes his old team can play better than they have done this season but still feels that Barca are the title favourites.

Real have not won the title since 2003 when Zidane was orchestrating things from midfield.

He won one title and one Champions League crown in his five years at the club, which some felt was underachieving given the number of galactico stars at Real during Zidane's time.

But Zizou has no regrets.

"I'm very proud of my five years (at Real), we won titles and we also lost some but the most important thing was the people I met, they helped me a lot," added the former France captain.

Trezeguet commits to Juve

INTERNET, undated

After so much transfer gossip, David Trezeguet has surprisingly announced he will stay with Juventus.

"My intention is to stay at Juve," he told the Gazzetta's 'Sportweek' magazine in the edition that will hit the stores on Saturday.

"My teammates have asked me to remain and I feel as if this side truly belongs to me."

The news comes as a surprise hot on the heels of seemingly endless speculation on the Frenchman's future.

Trezeguet has been linked with a summer switch to Milan, Barcelona, Inter, Chelsea, Arsenal, Manchester United and Olympique Lyonnais in recent weeks.

He sparked the rumours when he commented that his decision to stay at Juve was based on how competitive the team would be on its return to Serie A.

The Bianconeri are on track for automatic promotion, but the club has warned a scudetto challenge will probably take a few years yet.

However, it's believed Trezeguet was encouraged by the arrival of out of contract players Zdenek Grygryer from Ajax, Bayern Munich's Hasan Salihamidzic.

Vice-captain Flintoff will inevitably be a key figure if England are to go a long way in the tournament and he is delighted there has been a trouble-free build-up after off-the-field problems ahead of the last two World Cups.

"The one in 1999, there was a pay dispute. I was 20, a new boy, and kept my head down -- but it was not an ideal way to behave."

"Then the Zimbabwe issue in South Africa [four years ago] was a bit of a nightmare. I have no fond memories of that World Cup, even though it probably did kick-start my career again," he told The Sun newspaper.

Flintoff believes the recent success in Australia has instilled new self-belief in the squad and the timing may be right for them to go a long way in the tournament.

"This England team have a habit of making history and the World Cup is another milestone because we've not won it -- and we haven't really competed since 1992," he said.

The International Cricket Council has confirmed, meanwhile, that Rudi Koertzen and Asad

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Down The World Cup Lane

1992: Roar of cornered tigers

After the manner of the Olympic Games, cricket's World Cup quadrennially grows larger and more spectacular. The event, staged in Australia (25 matches) and New Zealand (14 matches) in 1992, featured, for the first time, all eight Test-playing teams, with aspiring Zimbabwe taking the number of competing sides to an unprecedented nine. The final was the 39th match. The first two tournaments, in 1975 and 1979 in England, featured only 15 matches, while in 1983 (England) and 1987 (India and Pakistan) there were 27.

Pakistan won the World Cup for the first time, beating England (twice previous finalists, never winners) by 22 runs on a memorably dramatic autumn night in Melbourne, before an Australian limited-overs record crowd of 87,182 who paid 2 million Australian dollars. Almost half of them sat in the newly completed Great Southern Stand, which cost 140 million Australian dollars and is the largest construction ever conceived for Australian sport. It was further claimed that the global television audience exceeded one billion, in 29 countries. In Pakistan, where it was still early evening, jubilation verging on the hysterical splashed over into the streets, and upon their return the players were placed on the highest pedestals of heroism.

Imran Khan, the captain, in his 40th year and nursing a troublesome right shoulder, unsurprisingly declared this as his finest hour, a claim clearly supported by the pictures of him holding the 7,500-pound Waterford crystal trophy, eyes wide with exhilaration, after International Cricket Council chairman Sir Colin Cowdrey had presented it to him on the Melbourne Cricket Ground dais. This accomplished all-rounder, top-scorer in the final with a measured 72, had urged his young team on through times when it

seemed that qualification for the semifinals was out of the question. They were, he said, to take on the stance and response of the cornered tiger. He dedicated the victory to the cause of a cancer hospital in Lahore for which he was fund-raising in memory of his mother. The World Cup organisers seemed content to overlook Imran's earlier remark that it was the worst-organised of all the World Cups. He and Javed

Miandad (who became the highest overall run-scorer) alone have played in all five tournaments.

The odds after two weeks of competition were affected by the vacillating form most particularly of India and West Indies, both past winners. Reshaped after the jettisoning of several

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: INTERNET

Pakistan captain Imran Khan gives his much publicised World Cup speech after his 'cornered tigers' beat England in the final by 22 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on March 25, 1992.

Flintoff full of hope

BBC ONLINE, undated



England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff is determined to make an impact at the forthcoming World Cup following disappointments in 1999 and 2003.

"Winning this would be on a par with winning the Ashes [in 2005]," he said.

"You want to look back on your career and see a World Cup winner's medal along with everything else."

"It would be fantastic to walk out at Lord's at the start of the English summer with the whole country in cricket fever again."

The England team arrived in the Caribbean on Friday and have two days to shake off the effects of the journey before taking on Bermuda in their opening warm-up game.

A more meaningful test comes on Friday when they face Australia again after beating them 2-0 to win the recent Commonwealth Bank series final.

Vice-captain Flintoff will inevitably

England captain Michael Vaughan put behind his weight in the campaign against drug offenders, saying he wanted life ban for cricketers found guilty of indulging in doping.

"If there's drugs been taken that have hugely affected your performance in a positive way I'd go for a ban for life."

"You don't want cheats in the game. You want people who are playing to (show) their talents, mental strength and the work they've done," Vaughan was quoted by BBC Five Live.

England chairman of selectors David Graveney concurred with Vaughan, even though he was not sure life ban should be handed out to the drug cheats.

"I don't know whether it should be a life ban, I don't know whether that stands up legally," he said.

"I agree with him in principle that people who are prepared to cut corners illegally to give themselves an advantage must face a very heavy penalty," Graveney added.

Vaughan all for life ban

PTI, London



PHOTO: AFP

Hamburg captain Rafael van der Vaart (C) jumps for joy in the air after scoring against Schalke in their Bundesliga match in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.