

Pearce vows to fight on

AFP, Blackburn

Stuart Pearce vowed to battle on as the pressure on his position increased following Manchester City's 2-0 FA Cup quarterfinal defeat at 10-man Blackburn.

Pearce's fate at Eastlands, where he has been in charge since replacing former England coach Kevin Keegan in March 2005, could be decided in the next few days after another poor performance by his side.

City, with four defeats in their last five games, entertain Chelsea on Wednesday before visiting Middlesbrough at the weekend. Defeat in those two games could spell the end for Pearce, whose team are fourth from bottom of the Premiership with a six-point safety cushion.

The club's fans are clearly growing frustrated with Pearce and his players.

Some of the 7,000 travelling supporters at Ewood Park on Sunday chanted "You're not fit to wear the shirt," as City slipped to defeat, while Pearce was confronted by one angry supporter in front of the opposition dug out.

The fan was wrestled to the ground before being dragged away, but not before telling Pearce exactly what he thought of his side's performance as City failed despite playing with an extra man advantage for more than 20 minutes.

"Believe me, I'm as frustrated as that fan is," said Pearce. "It's disappointing to hear the fans making those chants. They have got to get behind me and the team."

"The fans at the moment are going to be very vocal and call for the manager's head if we don't win games."



PHOTO: AFP

Bremen's Brazilian defender Naldo (R) is staved off by Bayern Munich midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger during their top-of-the-table Bundesliga clash at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Sunday.

Bremen hold Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld praised his side's effort in a 1-1 draw with second-placed Werder Bremen on Sunday which keeps the two German giants in the hunt for their 21st Bundesliga title.

Striker Lukas Podolski grabbed an early goal for Bayern, but substitute striker Markus Rosenberg headed home five minutes after his second half introduction to level for Bremen and end Bayern's three-game winning run.

Having knocked Real Madrid out of the Champions League in midweek, Bayern had second-placed Bremen under pressure from the start, but failed to convert their chances and remain six points behind leaders Schalke 04.

"We dominated Bremen in all areas during the first half and it was one of the best performances I have seen since coming back

here," said Hitzfeld, who returned to Munich in February to replace sacked Felix Magath.

"My only criticism would be that we must be more clinical in our finishing."

"Our primary goal now is to get into the Bundesliga's top three to make sure we qualify for next season's Champions League, if we do that anything can happen."

German international Bastian Schweinsteiger was a constant thorn in the Bremen defence and his pass to Mark Van Bommel set up Podolski's goal after seven minutes, but the trio then wasted chances in front of a crowd of 69,000.

But Rosenberg equalised for Bremen after 66 minutes when Hugo Almeida's looped a header beat Bayern goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and the Swedish international striker nodded home.

In the day's other game, Bayern Leverkusen drew 0-0 with Hamburg.

The weekend's results mean things remain tight at the top with the chasing pack of Werder Bremen, VfB Stuttgart and

Bayern hard on the heels of leaders Schalke 04, who are three points clear of Bremen.

At the other end, seven teams are all just one defeat off the relegation zone and only six points separate ninth-placed Alemania Aachen and bottom side Borussia M'gladbach.

On Saturday, Schalke striker Halil Altintop finally broke his 12-match goal drought as the Bundesliga leaders took their first points in three games with a 1-1 draw at Hanover.

Altintop was delighted to find the net again before former Manchester City defender Michael Tarnat put Hanover back on level terms just two minutes later.

Stuttgart's push for a Champions League place next season suffered a setback when the Bundesliga's leading goalscorer Mario Gomez was ruled out for six weeks because of a knee injury picked up in Saturday's 0-0 draw with Wolfsburg.

The injury will rule him out of the Euro 2008 qualifier against the Czech Republic later this

month having only made a goal-scoring debut last month in Germany's 3-1 win over Switzerland.

Bottom side Moenchengladbach enjoyed a rare 3-1 win in front of a home crowd of 40,000 over mid-table Hertha Berlin as striker Nando Rafael scored twice with bullet headers either side of half-time.

Aachen poached a 2-0 win at Cottbus with goals by forward Sascha Roessler and midfielder Sergio Pinto either side of half-time.

But the guests found themselves down to 10 men when Sascha Dumm was shown a red card for abusing the referee just before half-time.

Mainz, seemingly doomed to relegation before the winter break, have now pulled themselves up to 10th with a 1-0 win at home to Arminia Bielefeld with a 51st minute penalty by Danish defender Leon Andreasen.

Bochum's Greek striker Theofanis Gekas bagged two goals in his side's win at home to Borussia Dortmund.

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Marseille snatch a point

AFP, Paris

crisis.

Following the game winner by Auxerre defender Younes Kaboul, PSG are now second-from-bottom of the French championship.

PSG's confidence level has been declining in recent weeks, apart from their 2-1 UEFA Cup victory over Benfica three days ago, and with just 10 matches to go things are not looking good with perilous away trips to negotiate at both Rennes and Lens.

Under-fire coach Le Guen, a former player with PSG in happier days, admitted his players were beginning to form a complex about a possible relegation to the second division.

"It's a worrying time. We all know that. But we have to free ourselves from the burden and try to look ahead with confidence," said Le Guen.

"I'm behind the players 100 percent. We can all be annoyed by their mistakes, but we have to put ourselves in their position."

"I know what it's like to play for Paris. Determination itself is simply not enough, but we have to fight with everything we've got."

Second-placed Lens could only draw 1-1 at home to Sedan in Sunday when victory would have further consolidated their prospects of Champions League football next season. Sedan striker Gregory Pujol found the

net in the second minute before midfielder Seydou Keita equalised for Lens on the half-hour.

Though Lens are on a run of seven matches without defeat, they have lost a significant number of points at home where they have only won once -- against Sochaux -- in 2007.

Lille, one of the surprise last 16 teams in the continent's top club competition, lost 1-0 to Manchester United on Wednesday for a 2-0 aggregate defeat.

Baros spurned an injury time chance to pull Lyon ahead after being through with just Cedric Carrasco to beat, but the Marseille keeper made an impressive reflex save diving low to his right.

It has been a disappointing week for Gerard Houllier's men who exited the Champions League on Tuesday at the hands of Roma.

And they emerged feeling cheated of the three points after former Arsenal striker Sylvain Wiltord fluffed an easy chance on the hour and Juninho failed to find the net from the several free-kick chances at his disposal.

Lyon however still lead the table with 62 points, 13 ahead of second-placed Lens and 19 in front of third-placed Lille.

Earlier, Paris Saint Germain, one of only two French clubs to have won a European competition, fell 1-0 to Auxerre for their seventh home defeat of the season leaving them on course for relegation.

The 1996 Cup Winners Cup champions, whose appointment of former Rangers and Lyon boss Paul Le Guen was expected to boost their league credentials, find themselves once again in



PHOTO: AFP

Lyon's Czech forward Milan Baros is ecstatic after scoring against Marseille in their crucial Ligue 1 match at the Gerland stadium in Lyon on Sunday.

Alex faces season heartache

AFP, The Hague

PSV Eindhoven defender Alex could be out for the rest of the season after sustaining a leg injury over the weekend, the Dutch giants said on their website.

The Brazilian international is set to undergo scans on Monday, however the club already fear he will not play again this campaign, meaning he will miss their upcoming Champions League quarter-final against Liverpool.

"Alex felt a tear in his thigh after he struck the ball with his left foot. He could have a torn hamstring," said PSV coach Ronald Koeman.

"If that turns out to be the case he will not play again this season."

The injury occurred in PSV's scoreless draw away to Excelsior Rotterdam.

Van Gaal set for Australia?

AFP, Sydney

Dutch Champions League-winning coach Louis van Gaal has been linked with Australia's coaching vacancy after July's Asian Cup, reports said Monday.

Football Federation Australia confirmed Monday that it has spoken with the Dutchman, who took Ajax Amsterdam to European Champions League glory a decade ago and led Barcelona to back-to-back Spanish Primera Liga titles.

But van Gaal is only one of a number of high-level candidates for FFA chief executive Ben Buckley, The Age newspaper said.

Van Gaal is interested in the Australian job, but with certain provisos.

He wants to go all the way in the World Cup, suggesting in an interview on SBS television that Australia would struggle to achieve that goal.

"I am always interested in a very good job and I think the coach of the Australian team is a very exciting job because I have failed with the Netherlands in 2002 and I want to participate in a world championship because I have won everything else," he said in the interview.

"I have other options, so I have to decide because I always want to win."

"I think it's not possible to win with the Australian team the world championship."

"It's interesting to do that (coach Australia), but I want to win the World Cup and maybe there are other countries at a higher level than the Australian team is."

"The level in Australia is not so high as, for example, Argentina and Spain."

FFA is not rushing a coaching appointment, having opted to leave Graham Arnold, Guus Hiddink's assistant at the World Cup in Germany last year, in charge through the Euro 2008.

The organisation believes there are three windows when it could hire a high-profile, Hiddink-style coach, The Age said.

The first is after the European club season ends in May, the second is October-November, when the qualifying for Euro 2008 is over and the third is when Euro 2008 concludes in July next year.

Ideally, FFA said it would like to have its man in place by November, so he could work with the national team ahead of the opening qualifiers for the 2010 World Cup early next year.

The aim of the next coach would be to better the feats of Hiddink, who took Australia to the last 16 in Germany last year.

"That would be very difficult because I believe that Hiddink did a marvellous job," van Gaal said.

Milan suffer Maldini blow

INTERNET, undated

Milan have suffered a severe blow, as captain Paolo Maldini will be sidelined for at least six weeks after damaging his meniscus.

The Rossoneri, who celebrated his 600th Serie A appearance in Sunday's derby defeat to Inter, might need to undergo surgery after the problem in his left knee deteriorated recently.

The former Italy international, in his 23rd season at Milan, has been suffering with knee problems for some time, fuelling speculation that he might end his extraordinary career at the end of the current term.

Maldini, 38, is expected to undergo additional scans on Monday, although it seems likely that the defender will need to be operated on and is set for a six-week stop.

Reports suggest that the player could be treated by doctor Marc Martens, an orthopaedics specialist who already operated on him last season.

The legendary stopper, who has not yet decided what he will do after hanging up his boots, has won seven Scudetti with the Rossoneri and 126 caps for the Nazionale over 14 years, an all-time Italy record.

Mourinho blasts Riley

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has accused referee Mike Riley of spoiling his side's 3-3 FA Cup draw against Liverpool on Sunday.

Mourinho claimed Riley's fuzzy display had stopped Chelsea building up any momentum, although they still managed to fight back from 3-1 down to earn a quarterfinal replay at White Hart Lane on March 19.

"In one week's time it will be another great game if both teams perform with the same spirit," he said. "And if Mr Riley has a better performance than he did today."

"In my opinion there were too many mistakes and too many mistakes against Chelsea."

"I am not saying big, big decisions, I don't want to say it was a penalty for us in the last part of the game. I don't want to say that because I am 40 metres away from it."

"But all the small decisions went against Chelsea. (Michael) Dawson jumps with Didier (Drogba) and

comes with everything and it was a free-kick against Didier. (Ricardo) Rocha comes with elbows against (Andriy) Shevchenko and it was a free-kick against Chelsea."

"Every free-kick in the middle of the pitch, free-kicks that are important for you to keep the intensity of your game, every free-kick was against us."

"I am not happy with his performance but because he is a good referee I hope he can reach a higher level."

The Portuguese coach denied claims that he had called Riley a 'puta' -- which translates as 'bitch' in Portuguese -- when he spoke to the official in the tunnel at half-time.

"I approached the referee at half-time, always in a polite way," Mourinho said. "That's the way I do it, when I do it. But it worked in another way because the second half was worse than the first."

"He replied by asking me to let him do his work, that kind of stuff. I am polite, he was polite. There were no confrontation problems."

"If you listen to me speaking, I say the kind of word you mention 10 times in every 15 words."

Mourinho's Tottenham counterpart Martin Jol agreed that the replay is too far for his over-worked squad.

Tottenham play on Wednesday against Braga in the UEFA Cup, while Chelsea travel to Manchester City. Then both teams are in league action on Saturday before they meet for the replay two days later.

Jol, who revealed Dimitar Berbatov had been forced off in the second half with a groin injury, would prefer the match to be moved back 24 hours.

He said: "There were some pleasing things but the thing that is gutting us is we gave away a 3-1 lead."

"It is a horrific scenario to have to play Wednesday, Saturday and Monday. I spoke to Jose before the match and they have the same problem."

"Hopefully they will make a decision to play it on Tuesday. That would be better. It is a problem because we are killing our top players when we play so many matches."

"I have six or seven players who play every match and they are in the dressing room now nursing a few bumps."

"Braga on Wednesday is an important match and we have to win on Saturday in the league, so Monday is not ideal to say the least."

Nastic shock Sevilla

REUTERS, Madrid



Sevilla missed the chance to regain top spot in the Primera Liga by slipping to a shock 1-0 defeat at relegation