



Benfica players celebrate a goal against Paris Saint Germain during their UEFA Cup match at the Luz Stadium in Lisbon on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

### Lampard in Juve talks

AFP, Rome

The agent of Chelsea's England international Frank Lampard held talks with Juventus in London this week, according to a newspaper report here on Friday.

Steve Kutner appeared in a photograph in La Gazzetta dello Sport in discussion with Juventus' sporting director Alessio Secco and Roberto Bettiga, the club's transfer consultant. The meeting reportedly took place on Wednesday.

Kutner told the paper: "When Lampard signed his last contract with Chelsea Juventus were pressing hard to buy him.

"But he held firm as he didn't succeed in getting the same treatment as players of the calibre of (Juan Sebastian) Veron and (Hernan) Crespo.

"It's good when a team succeeds in putting pressure on your employers."

He added: "Peter Kenyon (Chelsea's chief executive) knows what we want and knows that Frank has enormous potential."

Lampard, 28, is currently in negotiations with Premiership champions Chelsea about extending his existing contract beyond 2008.

The England midfielder grabbed his 20th goal of the season in Wednesday's 1-0 Premiership win at Manchester City, underscoring again how important he is to the club.

But Friday's report points out that Lampard's fee could prove a sticking point again for a club that is sitting top of Serie B after last season's relegation.

Juve will also be deprived of money spinning appearances in the Champions League next season.

### Ronaldo makes Ronaldinho call

GALILEI, undated

Ronaldo has urged Brazilian international teammate Ronaldinho to join him at Milan next season.

The Barcelona star is a known Rossoneri transfer objective and reports are gathering pace that Ronaldinho is on the verge of what would be a sensational switch.

"Ronaldinho is a friend of mine and I would be happy to have him here," said Ronaldo in an interview to AS.

"I am sure he would like it at Milan and he would adapt well to the club's way of working," added the former Real Madrid man.

"I haven't spoken to him personally, but I know that both (President) Silvio Berlusconi and (Vice-President) Adriano Galliani have stated that Milan would be in pole position if Ronaldinho were to leave Barcelona."

Ronaldinho's brother and agent Roberto Assis was in Milan on Tuesday and met Rossoneri officials, fuelling speculation that the player might be close to moving to Italy.

"Nothing has changed between us and Barcelona, the relationship remains excellent," noted Assis. "Everyone knows that I was in Italy, but only to talk about Ricardo Oliveira."

Meanwhile, Ronaldo has dismissed speculation that Kaka could consider a move at the end of the season to Real Madrid.

"I think that transfer would be impossible," noted the former Barcelona star.

## MAGPIES SHOT DOWN Sevilla squeak thru'

AFP, Paris



Holders Sevilla edged through at Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine on Thursday to move into the UEFA Cup quarterfinals along with other winners on the night, AZ Alkmaar, Espanyol and Benfica.

Sevilla won 5-4 on aggregate due to their extra-time winning goal from Uruguayan striker Ernesto Chevanton after his teammates Daniel Maresca and goalkeeper Andres Palop scored in regulation time.

Brazilian midfielders Matuzalem and Blumer Elano were on target for the hosts.

In other matches, Benfica knocked out Paris Saint Germain with a late penalty from Simao to win 3-1 on the night and 4-3 on aggregate, Espanyol thrashed Israel's Maccabi Haifa 4-0 to go through on aggregate by the same scoreline, and AZ Alkmaar turned round a 4-2 first leg deficit to sneak through on away goals against England's Newcastle.

Paris Saint Germain's Portuguese striker Pauleta told French television on the final whistle: "We started well and the team was very organised. In the second half we played well." And on the late penalty decision, Pauleta said: "That's how it is. I think we gave our all but it wasn't enough."

PSG are having a tough time this season and lie second from bottom in the French league.

Sevilla, who desperately needed to win after last week's 2-2 home draw, looked more focused from the start and seized the initiative soon after the kick-off.

Shakhtar went ahead in the 49th minute when skipper Matuzalem sent the ball into the net with an overhead heel shot from Olexiy Belik's precise left-handed cross.

But Sevilla replied positively and levelled just four minutes later through Maresca, who converted Daniel Alves's right-handed cross past an unguarded post with a 12-metre header.

After the visitors threw caution to the wind trying to score the winning goal and allowed late substitute Elano to beat their defence on a breakaway to send the ball home with a close-range shot from a tight angle.

The hosts were ready to celebrate their first ever UEFA Cup quarterfinal, when 'keeper Palop levelled again with a header from a well-placed corner in the fourth minute of injury time.

Second-half substitute Chevanton netted the winning goal just before the end of the first extra-time period, sending the ball in from close range past the helpless Shust from Luis Fabiano's razor-sharp ball into Shakhtar's box.

AZ Alkmaar turned round a 4-2 first leg deficit to sneak through to the quarterfinals on the away goals rule at home to England's Newcastle.

Alkmaar won 2-0 on the night for a 4-4 aggregate score to complete a remarkable turn around having been down 3-0 after just 23 minutes of the away leg.

Alkmaar coach Louis van Gaal said he felt his side were the better over the two legs. "We scored two chances but we had three or four one-on-ones against the goalkeeper so we could have decided the match earlier," he said.

"Newcastle are a top team and this match was the best match we could have played because they know how to defend."

THURSDAY'S RESULTS	
At Donetsk, Ukraine	Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 2 (Matuzalem 49, Elano 83) Sevilla (ESP) 3 (Maresca 53, Palop 90, Chevanton 105) Sevilla win 5-4 on aggregate
At Alkmaar, the Netherlands	AZ Alkmaar (NED) 2 (Arveladze 14, Koevtermans 56) Newcastle (ENG) 0 4-4 on aggregate, Alkmaar go through on away goals
At Barcelona, Spain	Espanyol (ESP) 4 (De la Pena 51, Tamudo 59, Luis Garcia 60, Pandiani 90) Maccabi Haifa (ISR) 0 Espanyol win 4-0 on aggregate
At Lisbon	Benfica (POR) 3 (Simao 12, 89-pen, Petit 27) Paris Saint Germain 1 (Pauleta 32) Benfica win 4-3 on aggregate

## Little too late for Ascoli?

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan's relentless march towards the Serie A title is unlikely to lose momentum on Sunday when the run-away leaders visit second-from-bottom Ascoli.

Inter are 16 points clear of second-placed Roma with just 11 games left to play, while Ascoli have won only one of their 13 home matches.

Inter, the reigning champions and unbeaten in the league this season, also have a superb away record, dropping just four points in 14 games and scoring a staggering 32 goals.

But Ascoli are, by their standards anyway, on a bit of a roll at the moment. The club based in the Le Marche region near Italy's east coast looked certain to go down at the halfway stage of the season.

FIXTURES	
(1400GMT kick-offs unless stated)	
Saturday	Sampdoria v Palermo (1930)
Sunday	AC Milan v Atalanta, Ascoli v Inter Milan, Cagliari v Chievo, Catania v Reggina, Fiorentina v Roma, Lazio v Empoli (1930), Messina v Torino, Parma v Siena, Udinese v Livorno

But a win and four draws in their last five matches have given them some hope of survival.

The run has lifted them off the bottom and within three points of third from bottom Reggina and five points from Messina and Chievo.

One of the main factors behind their mini-revival has been the solid goalkeeping of Dimitrios Eleftheropoulos.

The 30-year-old Greek has kept his place for four matches after Gianluca Pagliuca was forced to miss the trip to Livorno last month because of flu.

Eleftheropoulos made his name with Greek side Olympiakos and his performances earned him a place in the national team.

But since arriving in Italy in 2004 he has failed to nail down a regular place with Serie A sides Messina, AC Milan and Roma.

But Eleftheropoulos now seems reborn after dislodging Pagliuca, Italy's keeper at the 1994 and 1998 World Cups, with Ascoli coach Nedo Sonetti keeping faith with the man known simply as 'Ele.'

"It's just like my days at Olympiakos," he said. "I feel good, I'm in form and I'm very motivated. After such a long time on the sidelines, I am really happy."

While Inter have a seemingly straightforward task, Roma face a difficult trip to Fiorentina who have lost just once at home.

Fiorentina midfielder Fabio

PRIMERA LIGA FIXTURES	
Saturday (Kick-off times in GMT)	
Valencia v Racing Santander (1700), Real Mallorca v Real Betis (1900), Recreativo Huelva v Barcelona (1900), Athletic Bilbao v Osasuna (2100)	
Sunday	
Deportivo La Coruna v Getafe (1600), Espanyol v Levante (1600), Villarreal v Real Sociedad (1600), Real Zaragoza v Atletico Madrid (2100), Real Madrid v Gimnastic Tarragona (1800), Sevilla v Celta Vigo (2000)	

### Lehmann to join Hertha

AFP, Berlin

Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann, whose contract at Arsenal is up at the end of the season, was reported Friday to be eyeing a move back home to Bundesliga side Hertha Berlin.

While Hertha don't have the financial means to pay Lehmann's reported four million euro annual salary the club hopes to secure a private investor to meet the outlay, according to the report in Friday's Bild newspaper.

If the move goes ahead the 37-year-old will replace Hertha keeper Christian Fiedler.

None of the parties concerned were willing to comment on the move to the newspaper but last month Lehmann told Kicker magazine that "the Bundesliga and Spain are the alternatives" if as expected he quits the Gunners.

### Sevilla face Spurs in qtrs

AFP, Glasgow

Holders Sevilla take on Tottenham Hotspur in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup, the draw for which was made here on Friday.

Sevilla remained on course to become the first side since Real Madrid in 1986 to successfully defend their title with a dramatic come-from-behind win against Shakhtar Donetsk on Thursday night.

Spurs, winners of the first edition of the UEFA Cup in 1972 and again in 1984, booked their place in the last eight by beating Portuguese side Braga in the fourth round on Wednesday.

Martin Jo's side are the only British club left in the competition after Newcastle were knocked out by AZ Alkmaar on Thursday.

The Dutch outfit's reward was a quarter-final match-up against Werder Bremen.

Werder's Bundesliga rivals Bayer Leverkusen, winners in 1988, face Spanish side Osasuna who enter uncharted territory as this is the first time they've made it this far in a European competition.

The final last eight pairing pits another Spanish side, Espanyol, against Benfica of Portugal.

The first legs will be played on April 5 with the return legs the following Thursday.

The winner of the headline tie between Sevilla and Spurs will face either Bayer Leverkusen or Osasuna in the first semi-final with the second semi contested by Espanyol or Benfica against AZ Alkmaar or Werder Bremen.

The draw was made in Glasgow where the final will be staged at Hampden Park on May 16.

## Becks dreams of England

### Football

AFP, London

David Beckham, axed by England coach Steve McLaren following last year's World Cup, says he'd walk back from the United States if he was given the chance of playing for his country again.

The former England captain was tipped to be in line for a recall ahead of next week's Euro 2008 qualifiers against Israel and Andorra after a series of spirited showings for Real Madrid.

But an ill-timed knee injury scuppered that hope and with Beckham due to take up a lucrative contract with Los Angeles Galaxy in the summer, it appears his England days are now firmly over.

The 31-year-old accepts the situation is not in his hands, with the odds heavily against him wearing the England shirt again.

But, in an interview with Sport magazine on Friday Beckham confirmed he has not totally given up hope and feels his move to the USA should be no barrier.

"I would walk back from the United States to play for England again," he said.

"I am sure if I am doing well over there, it will not go unnoticed. I will always be available to play for my country if I am needed. I am a fit person and a fit player."

"Getting a recall is not my decision is it?"

"If it does happen, then amazing. But, if it doesn't, then I am honoured to have played the games I have played, and to have captained my country so many times."

With numerous offers to continue

his career in Europe, Beckham stunned the world when he announced he was going to move across the Atlantic. Critics have claimed the Londoner has taken the easy option at a time when he could still have been competing at the highest level in one of the major leagues.

However, as he sets about using his vast fame to try to raise the profile of Major League Soccer, Beckham has admitted playing against his beloved Manchester United, where he made an emotional non-playing return in midweek, was something he just could not contemplate.

"I don't really want to name the clubs I spoke to, because it wasn't only in England -- there were two big clubs in Italy, and one big club in France as well, and they were all very tempting."

"But I have always said that I am a Manchester United fan -- that is how I was brought up, and that is how I will always be."

"I feel so passionate for United, even now, that it would have been virtually impossible for me to play for another English team."

"They are my team and I don't think I could have brought myself to play against them for anyone."

Having seen Real crash out of the Champions League to Bayern Munich last week and watched his teammates suffer another untimely stumble in the league, it appears Beckham will end his four-year stint at Real empty-handed.

However, even if such a scenario eventually arises, Beckham will not look back on his time in Spain with regret.

"We might still win something this season, and it would be amazing to go out on a high," he said.

"But if that is not the case I won't

look back and think of my time at the club as being anything other than successful.

"I have spent four years at one of the biggest clubs in the world, and I have been able to play with so many great players, Zinedine Zidane to name but one."

"Just to be on the same pitch as Zidane was an absolute honour for me. I have had an incredible time and will have no regrets at all."

It has been suggested in some quarters Beckham will pocket a staggering 125 million from his time in Los Angeles, rocketing him into the echelons of the highest-paid sports stars of all time.

Yet he insists money is not a prime motivating factor in his life and that his desire to play remains as strong as it has ever been.

"I always dreamt of wearing the number seven shirt for United and England, and I have achieved that. Everything else has been more than I could have ever dreamt about," he said.

"I know it is easy for me to say at this stage of my career and in the position that I am in, but at no point has money been my motivation for playing football."

"I dreamt about being a professional footballer from the age of six or seven. That is why I got into the game, and that is what continues to drive me on."

"Obviously it is an amazing -- and groundbreaking -- contract they have offered me, but the challenge of making a difference was far more important."

## MU face Bolton test

AFP, London



Manchester United's resilience as Premiership pacesetters will come under scrutiny when Bolton visit Old Trafford on Saturday.

While Chelsea, who trail the leaders by six points, will be confident of securing maximum points at home to Sheffield United, United face a testing lunchtime date with Sam Allardyce's awkward squad.

Any slip-ups on Saturday will be of added value because the upcoming break for international matches means that, after this weekend, there will be no Premiership matches until March 31.

United midfielder Paul Scholes sits out the Bolton clash as the second game of a three-match ban. But the former England star insists the Red Devils are in no mood to let Chelsea get any closer to them.

"After not doing so well in the Premiership over the last couple of years, we are more determined than ever to lift the trophy this year," Scholes said.

"We have not had that trophy for four years now -- that's too long. It is a trophy we desperately want to win back."

Scholes could be one of half a dozen United players missing this weekend. Darren Fletcher, Mikael Silvestre, Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer are ruled out through injury while Patrice Evra is also a major doubt as well.

With Henrik Larsson now back in Sweden, Ryan Giggs could be

pressed into service as an emergency striker alongside Wayne Rooney, with Park Ji-Sung occupying a wide role with Cristiano Ronaldo.

Allardyce has seen his side's form dip in recent weeks but the Bolton boss always relishes crossing swords with the league's big boys.

"We have to try to get our act together as my team have been under-achieving," Allardyce said.

Liverpool's visit to Aston Villa on Sunday will bring them up against Anfield old boy Patrick Berger.

The Czech winger's days had looked numbered at Villa Park after he refused to play in a reserve match in December and was loaned out to Stoke after being fined by Villa boss Martin O'Neill.

But the 33-year-old has recently forced his way back into O'Neill's plans and could yet win himself a new deal at the club.

"Will Berger be given a new contract? I wouldn't rule anything out," said O'Neill. "I have an open mind. It has been a big turn-around for him and at the end of it all, he is a good player."

Liverpool striker Dirk Kuyt will be aiming to improve a goal strike-rate that he admits could be better.

Kuyt, who has found the net ten times since joining from Feyenoord last summer, said: "I expected to have scored more by now than I have. The boss gave me an 18-goal target for the season when I joined and I still believe I can achieve that by the end of the campaign."

Peter Crouch will miss the match as he is recovering from an operation on his broken nose.

FIXTURES	
(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)	
Saturday	
Blackburn v West Ham (1715), Chelsea v Sheffield Utd, Manchester Utd v Bolton (1245), Middlesbrough v Manchester City, Reading v Portsmouth, Tottenham v Watford, Wigan Athletic v Fulham	
Sunday	
Aston Villa v Liverpool (1335), Charlton v Newcastle (1330), Everton v Arsenal (1600)	



Sevilla (L) players huddle in celebration after they scored against FC Shakhtar in Donetsk in their UEFA Cup match on Thursday. Sevilla won 3-2.

PHOTO: AFP