

Juventus stalled

AFP, Rome

Juventus saw their lead at the top of Italy's second division cut to four points on Friday after they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to mid-table Albinoleffe.

Francesco Ruopolo's right-footed strike put the visitors ahead in the 32nd minute before Federico Balzaretti levelled the score with a lobbed shot five minutes later.

Juve came close to snatching victory in the last five minutes when Bulgarian international Valeri Bojinov saw his angled header clip the post.

Albinoleffe have been stubborn opponents for Juve, having also held them to a 1-1 draw earlier in the season.

Juve coach Didier Deschamps admitted Albinoleffe were a hard nut to crack.

"They kept things really tight at the back," said the former France international.

"I don't want to make excuses, but they didn't allow us any space to play. In any attacking situation we had, they had eight men behind the ball."

Second-placed Genoa moved closer to Juve after their 2-1 win at local rivals Spezia.

Juve have 59 points from their 30 matches played, while Genoa, who have played a game more, have 55 points. Napoli are third on 53 points after their 3-2 victory at promotion rivals Bologna.

The top two in the division qualify automatically for promotion.

Ranieri to keep on tinkering

INTERNET, undated

Claudio Ranieri has explained just why he is called 'The Tinker Man' and promised he'll continue to keep Parma on their toes against Livorno.

"I cannot give an advantage to my opponents by revealing my tactics beforehand. I have a few different solutions and strategies, so I hope to choose the right one."

If he doesn't, as he has already proved in recent weeks by making several first half tactical substitutions, then there's no shame in admitting to a mistake.

"I don't know why you ask me about my system, as you know that if I see the situation isn't going well, then I'll change it," the former Chelsea boss told journalists.

"A coach plays the game out in his head and expects certain things from his own players and those on the other side. If the opponents take control, then I have to make reparations to try and help the lads out."

The Giallorossi are struggling to get out of the bottom two, but the match with Livorno could be a turning point in their campaign.

"This could be our moment to shine, as we have three consecutive games on home turf. We have to make the most of them and pick up as many points as possible."

Wenger not concerned

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said the multi-million pound investment of American entrepreneur Stan Kroenke will not be decisive in changing the club's "basic human values".

Kroenke, who owns several major sports franchises in the United States, on Thursday completed the purchase of a 9.99 percent shareholding in Arsenal from ITV, and also secured a 50 percent stake in Arsenal Broadband Ltd for a combined total of 65 million pounds (127 million dollars).

Arsenal appear to be going down the road of fellow Premier giants Manchester United, Liverpool and Aston Villa, who are all already in American hands.

However Arsenal's major club shareholders, which include vice chairman David Dein and director Danny Fiszman, have no intention of selling up.

And Wenger maintains it is the quintessential feeling within the club which makes Arsenal so special.

"It is just somebody who has bought shares. You have to wait in the future to see what his intentions are," said the Gunners manager.

"At the moment, he has come out and said he does not want to buy the club, he wants just a partnership and that should not change anything inside the club at the moment."

"At the moment, 60 percent of shares are in the hands of three people and he has just put 10 percent, so that means nothing will change for us."

Wenger added: "It is important Arsenal maintains its values because they are what makes the club so popular and that is beyond any investment."



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan forward Adriano is flanked by a host of Reggina players during their Serie A match at the Reggio Calabria Stadium on Saturday. Inter were held to a goalless draw.

Everton up to fifth

AFP, London



Everton bounced back from conceding an early goal against visitors Fulham with a dominant display which ended in a deserved 4-1 win for the Merseysiders on Friday.

Ahead of Saturday's remaining fixtures the result moved David Moyes' side up two places to fifth in the Premiership and in sight of European football next season.

Fulham, who were largely outclassed in a pulsating encounter despite taking an early lead through Carlos Bocanegra, went one place in the other direction dropping to 15th.

Chris Coleman's side are only four points better off than third-from-bottom Sheffield United and could soon find themselves fighting relegation.

gation.

Fellow Londoners Charlton, however, moved out of the bottom three for the first time since September when they grabbed a precious point from a scoreless draw at Manchester City.

City created the best chances of a largely forgettable encounter but failed to capitalise.

Emile Mpenza and Joey Barton went close before the interval but it was Nedum Onuoha who missed the best opportunity, nodding tamely over from seven yards despite being totally unmarked.

Charlton then threatened to sneak a win 18 minutes from time when Darren Bent crossed low to unmarked Chinese forward Zheng Zhi, who lost out to Onuoha sliding tackle before he could unleash his shot.

Meanwhile, Fulham had a great start at Goodison Park when Bocanegra struck the simplest of

goals in the 22nd minute.

However, Everton went in for the break 3-1 ahead after Lee Carsley side-footed a neat equaliser and Alan Stubbs rose to meet a corner to head past flailing keeper Antti Niemi.

Everton's James Vaughan handed the hosts their third on the stroke of half-time, and another teenager, Victor Anichebe, rifled home the fourth soon after coming on as a second-half substitute.

Moyes later indicated that European football was now in their sights.

But the Scot offered a word of consolation to under-pressure Fulham manager Coleman.

"All credit to Fulham. They made it difficult in the second half, and it was only when we got the fourth goal that we began to feel comfortable," said Moyes.

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Ferguson defends Scholes

INTERNET, undated



Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson has defended Paul Scholes' and blamed Roma defender Cristian Chivu for his midweek dismissal. Scholes was sent off for two yellow cards in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg defeat in Rome last week -- but wants Scholes to carry on tackling.

"I don't look upon what happened to Paul on Wednesday and feel he let us down," said Ferguson. "He won the game for us against Blackburn last weekend with a magnificent performance. If he had stayed on the pitch on Wednesday, we might have won that game too."

"But these things happen," Ferguson continued. "Paul is a very influential player for us and I am not going to turn round and tell him not to tackle."

"It was Chivu who got Paul sent off on Wednesday, I have no doubt about that at all," said Ferguson. "It was a very minor foul but Chivu went charging up to the referee and then, after Paul had been sent off, he clapped the decision and patted the referee on the back. That is unacceptable."

"Roma as a club I have no problem with but Chivu is a different breed. It was poor stuff and very disappointing."

The second leg of the tie will be played at Old Trafford next Tuesday.

Ferguson also blamed Romania international Chivu's encourage-

ment of the referee for Scholes' dismissal after he had fouled Roma captain Francesco Totti.

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PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich midfielder Andreas Ottl (R) and Hanover striker Jiri Stajner in tussle for the ball during their Bundesliga match at the AWD-Arena Hanover on Saturday.

Chelsea need me: Mourinho

INTERNET, undated

In the face of mounting rumours that Roman Abramovich is set to pay him off in the summer, Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has warned that the Blues will suffer without his leadership.

Abramovich is said to be growing frustrated at the Blues' pragmatic, uninspiring playing style, and is ready to replace him in the summer, while also bringing in Portsmouth's Avram Grant as technical director.

But Mourinho highlighted what he believes is his impact to be at Chelsea, telling his official biographer Luis Lourenco:

"Leadership can be felt in the smallest of things as, in the smallest details, with a look from, or just the presence of, the leader himself.

"I have players who say to me that when they do a drill in which I do not take an active part my absence makes all the difference.

"For a period at Chelsea I deliberately stopped acting and thought 'let's see what's going to happen'. I came to the conclusion that it is not possible for me to step away. My leadership has to be applied every day."

The outspoken Portuguese also considers senior figures in the team to have improved under his tutelage.

"Who were (Frank) Lampard, (John) Terry and (Didier) Drogba two years ago?" he said. "They were certainly not world stars. And in this moment who are they? They are like (Andrei) Shevchenko and (Michael) Ballack."

Trez staying in Turin

INTERNET, undated

David Trezeguet has ended his uncertainty over the future by declaring he wants to stay with Juventus next season.

The Frenchman had continually hinted at offers from Barcelona, Arsenal and other big European sides, noting that he had been in Turin for seven years and was eager for a change of scenery.

However, after today's 1-1 Serie B draw with Albinoleffe, he made a surprise announcement:

"I feel very close to this jersey after seven years at the club and I want to stay here," Trez told journalists.

"Even if we do not reach the Champions League, that does not matter. I knew this was the situation and am ready to accept this sacrifice."

"In fact, if we don't have European commitments, it will be easier for us to challenge for the Scudetto next season."

The Bianconeri are not yet certain of promotion into Serie A, as today's draw cut their lead at the top of the table to just four points.

"It's a shame we were unable to beat Albinoleffe. Unfortunately we met with a side that decided not to play, preferring instead to close down all our spaces."

Pepe out for the season

AFP, Lisbon

Brazilian defender Pepe is out for the rest of the season with a knee injury, his Porto coach Jesualdo Ferreira said Saturday.

Pepe was injured towards the end of a championship match Friday against Vitoria Setubal, which the reigning champions won 5-1.

"This injury will probably keep him off the field until the end of the season," said Ferreira.

"I realised straight away that it was serious. A twisted knee can have many consequences."

The 23-year-old, who joined Porto from Corinthians in 2001, has been an important part of the league leaders' squad this season and is also close to securing Portuguese-Brazilian nationality.

Milan not letting Gila go

INTERNET, undated

Milan have confirmed their trust in Alberto Gilardino by dismissing reports that his future at the club was in doubt.

President Silvio Berlusconi released an interview to the outfit's website on Thursday where he listed a number of players who he deemed as untransferable.

But the absence of Gilardino's name fuelled speculation that the World Cup winner may be on his way out after a problematic campaign at the San Siro.

"Since the summer of 2006, many haven't missed a chance to attack Milan and today is no exception to this rule," read a statement posted on the club's website.

"They say that Gilardino wasn't on the list of confirmed Rossoneri. The reason is very simple and obvious."

"Yesterday in an interview President Berlusconi confirmed the players that some newspapers had previously reported as being on a list of possible departures."

UEFA plans Euro force

Football

INTERNET, undated

UEFA are planning to set up a pan-European police force to deal with the alarming rise in violence seen in UEFA Cup and Champions League matches, according to British press reports.

The Daily Telegraph claims that European football's governing body are planning to consult with police chiefs from across the continent, in order to establish the unit.

UEFA have admitted their concern at the number of riots seen over the last six months, with the latest two episodes coming in midweek as

Manchester United fans clashed with police in Rome, and Tottenham Hotspur fans clashed with police in Seville.

Accusations have flown back and forth over who was to blame for the ugly scenes, with the English sides blaming foreign forces for over-reacting, and Spanish and Italian authorities insisting they were attacked by, in many cases, drunken English fans.

Sevilla appeared to back the claims of the Premier League side on Friday though, admitting their worry at the level of force used by riot police in dealing with the trouble.

"We think this small incident could have been handled and peace restored without the use of police

batons," the club stated. "We are investigating the reason for the police action."

Meanwhile, with Chelsea due to face Valencia in the Champions League quarterfinal second leg at the Mestalla stadium next week, officials from the West London club are set to meet with Tottenham officials ahead of the two sides' Premiership match at Stamford Bridge to discuss measures to avoid a repeat situation.

Over 2000 Chelsea fans are expected to make the trip to Valencia next Tuesday, while security measures are likely to be increased in and around the ground.

C'Ron's no Totti: Zola

Football

INTERNET, undated

Gianfranco Zola has shot down suggestions Cristiano Ronaldo is on the same level as Francesco Totti.

The Champions League quarterfinal with Manchester United was painted as a duel between the two talented stars, but Zola insists there is simply no competition.

"If you could mix the characteristics of the two, then you would come up with the ideal player," he told 'Il Romanista'.

"But the Portuguese international does not have the tactical intelligence and vision of Francesco. Besides, he is still in his first real year of confirming his qualities.

"For me Ronaldo remains a man