

Celtic ride on Nakamura

Football

AFP, Kilmarnock

Shunsuke Nakamura revealed he achieved a long-held ambition by abandoning his usual reserved demeanour and jumping into the Celtic support to celebrate his league winning goal.

The Japanese international scored with a dramatic injury time free-kick to give Celtic a 2-1 win at Kilmarnock and clinch their second consecutive Scottish Premier League title. Nakamura - who normally celebrates his goals in a dignified and controlled manner - pulled his top off, swung it around his head while running towards the Celtic support before throwing himself into the green and white clad hordes.

During his celebrations with the adoring fans, the little Japanese playmaker received a sore face, but he revealed the pain was worthwhile.

"I've never done anything like that before but I've always wanted to run into the crowd," he said.

"My face is a bit sore now but I'm glad it did. "It was probably my most important goal as it meant we won the league, although the one I scored to beat Manchester United in the Champions League was also very important to me.

"Kilmarnock were very good and I made a few mistakes so I wanted to score to make up for them and I'm very happy we are now champions." Celtic manager Gordon Strachan was equally thrilled to have clinched the SPL title and is now aiming to complete a league and cup double by lifting the Scottish Cup in May.



Celtic's Japanese star Shunsuke Nakamura displays the trophy of the SPFA player of the year at the Park Stadium in Glasgow yesterday.

Japan hails its hero

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese dailies on Monday lauded midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura as history-making after his last-gasp goal gave Celtic the Scottish Premier League title.

"Shunsuke's victory bullet" ran the headline of the Tokyo-Chunichi Sports newspaper a day after Celtic triumphed 2-1 at Kilmarnock in injury time.

"So Dramatic, Shunsuke," the Nikkan Sports daily said. "Nakamura's name has been engraved into the history of European football."

National newspapers carried Nakamura's achievement as the top item on their sports pages.

"Shunsuke's Historic Free Kick," the Sankei Shimbun said in its headline, with a picture of the 28-year-old swinging his shirt around for joy after his winning goal.

Later in the day, Nakamura was voted Player of the Year by the Scottish Professional Footballers' Association, beating off strong competition from team mates Lee Naylor and Artur Boruc, as well as Aberdeen skipper Russell Anderson.

"The circumstances are difficult for us with the new football rules that we have to face," said Mourinho.

"It is not possible to have a penalty against Manchester United and it is not possible to have a penalty in favour of Chelsea," he added, referring to two contentious decisions within 24 hours which could yet have a significant bearing on the destination of the English game's top prize.

Middlesbrough's Lee Dong-Gook appeared to be fouled by John O'Shea in the final minute of their 1-1 draw with United at Old Trafford on Saturday but a penalty was not awarded.

After eight minutes of Sunday's scrappy stalemate at St James's Park, Mourinho felt Chelsea should have been awarded a spot kick after Salomon Kalou's cross struck the arm of Newcastle defender Stephen Carr. Again, no penalty was forthcoming as referee Mark Halsey waved away sustained claims from the agitated Chelsea players.

Refs irk Jose again

AFP, Newcastle

involving Stephen Carr," said Mourinho, who insists he has no fear of being sanctioned over his criticisms. "It was a clear penalty.

"I have the right to speak. I think nobody can punish me because I speak the truth and I am not saying the referees are not honest.

"But on Saturday it was a penalty and today it was a penalty. If somebody wants to punish me for that it means the end of democracy and we go back to old times."

Mourinho has never been afraid to speak his mind but the English Football Association will surely come down hard on him after comments which will infuriate and shock in equal measure.

Stopping short of claiming an out-right fix is surely no defence with the implication of unfairness at the root of England's national game bound to bring punishment.

And it is not as if Mourinho made his wild claims knowing he will be long gone this summer. Speaking for the first time since Chelsea's chief executive, Peter Kenyon confirmed there would be no change of management this summer, Mourinho revealed he wants to stay.

"I opened my heart and told the board that I wanted to stay," he said. "The circumstances are difficult for us with the new football rules that we have to face," said Mourinho.

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PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho.

Owen ready to return

AFP, Newcastle



England striker Michael Owen could make his long awaited debut this season in Newcastle's clash with Reading next Monday, according to his manager Glen Roeder. Owen had been slated for a possible appearance against champions Chelsea on Sunday but the 27-year-old did not even figure on the bench.

But now Roeder is convinced his star forward is ready for a return to first team action and will not play him in the reserves against Bolton on Tuesday.

"If Michael is involved in an 11 v 11 this week, it will be on the training ground against ourselves," he

said.

"In my opinion now, Michael does not need to be playing against any opposition in a friendly."

"The next time we will see Michael Owen, it will be in a competitive game."

After 10 months on the sidelines recovering from the anterior cruciate ligament rupture he suffered at last summer's World Cup finals, Owen is desperate to return and stake his claim for a place in the England squad for the friendly against Brazil and the European Championship qualifier in Estonia in June.

That is the subject of a battle between his club and the Football Association amid a row over World Cup compensation, although chairman Freddy Shepherd is adamant he has no problem with

his record 17 million pounds (34 million dollars) signing playing for England.

Roeder is concentrating solely on the task of getting the club's prize asset back on the field, and that is a process he refuses to rush as Owen attempts to shake off a minor groin strain.

"It is not a problem at all. He is just not fully-fit. It is hardly worth a mention," Roeder said of that injury.

"But he has been out for so long, it is important that when he returns, we know he is 100 percent fully fit."

"We have just got to wait until he is fully fit, and you know how much I am prepared to be patient with all players."

"I have shown that always and I will never change from being a

patient person because I know patience pays off in the long run.

"He has got a full week now ... to the Reading game, and we will certainly know by the middle of the end of the week whether he is going to make that."

While Owen will not line up against Bolton's second string, Shola Ameobi will, a week after scoring in a 5-1 drubbing of derby rivals Middlesbrough at the Riverside Stadium. Ameobi has been out of action for six months after hip surgery but, like Owen, he too could make the Reading game.

Roeder said: "Shola is going to play in the reserves and I am hoping he will be fit for the Reading game, maybe to start, maybe to be involved in some shape or form - and I would not rule Michael out at all."

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