



Pachuca players celebrate after winning a penalty shootout against Chivas in the final of the CONCACAF Champions Cup in Pachuca on Wednesday.

Jose rues missed chances

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho admitted that Chelsea had blown a chance to put the outcome of their Champions League semifinal clash with Liverpool beyond doubt after his side emerged with only a 1-0 lead to take into the second leg.

The Chelsea boss insisted however that he was confident of his side's ability to keep their lead in an unprecedented quadruple on track next Tuesday at Anfield after Joe Cole scored the only goal of the game here on Wednesday night.

"It is a positive result. It is a victory, we are in front and when the game starts in Liverpool, Chelsea are winning 1-0 so I think it is a positive result."

Mourinho suggested Chelsea

might have had a penalty when the ball appeared to strike the hand of Alvaro Arbeloa at the start of the second half, though television images clearly showed it was outside the area.

"It is a handball for sure," Mourinho said. "That is no doubt. If he is inside the box it is a penalty, outside it is a free-kick, but it was handball 100 percent."

That claim drew a predictably withering response from Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez. "I've not seen the replay, but if he (Mourinho) said it was a penalty, I'm sure it was a penalty."

Such sniping adds to the edge of the encounters between these two clubs and Benitez was quick to point out that Liverpool had produced the 2-0 win they will require next week when Chelsea last visited Anfield, in the Premiership in February.

"We know playing at Anfield with our supporters behind us will

be really good for us. Of course two goals is possible. We did it in the league and we can do it again, although we know they are really good on counter attack and need to be aware of that.

"I was disappointed with our first half. We were giving the ball away too easily. I don't think it was they were playing really well, it was just because we were giving them the possibility of going forward on the counter attack."

"But we showed in the second half that we can score against them and beat them which is the most important thing when thinking about the second leg."

Mourinho however played down the extent of Liverpool's second-half chances and it was true that Petr Cech had only one significant save to make, diving to his right to keep out Steven Gerrard's left-foot volley from the edge of the area.

"In the first half we did more

than enough to score two, three four goals," Mourinho added. "Chelsea deserves the victory, no doubt about it. And in my opinion more than one goal would be fair, football is not about what is deserved, it is about what is and this is a 1-0 result."

"Liverpool are a strong side at home and they have that historical advantage of success in the Champions League over decades but we think we have a chance, a real chance."

Unlike Chelsea, who must beat Bolton on Saturday to keep their pursuit of Manchester United in the Premiership on track, Liverpool can afford to rest players against Portsmouth in their league fixture.

"Liverpool's next important game is against us while we have a final to play against Bolton. The power is not the same but we played very well as a team and the players have that dream and we go there to try and be in the final."

"In the first half we did more

than

Bayern Klose-ing in

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen's German international striker Miroslav Klose held talks with out of form defending Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich according to Thursday's edition of Bild.

The 28-year-old Polish-born marksman -- leading scorer at last year's World Cup finals -- apparently met with Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld and general manager Uli Hoeneß.

However, Bayern Munich refused to confirm the report with their spokesman claiming it was mere speculation.

Nevertheless the Bavarian powerhouses have made no secret of their admiration for Klose, who was also the leading scorer in the 2005/06 domestic season.

"It is no secret that I have a lot of respect for Klose," said Hitzfeld recently.

"He is an outstanding striker and he has everything in his game to help out Bayern," added Hitzfeld, who returned to the helm after Felix Magath was sacked in January.

While Hitzfeld's return marked a

slight upturn in their fortunes Bayern will still end the season without a trophy -- they are nine points adrift of leaders Schalke 04 -- and are in danger of missing out on the Champions League next term.

Klose, who ended a long goal drought when he scored twice earlier this month in the second leg of their UEFA Cup quarterfinal with AZ Alkmaar, is under contract at Bremen till 2008, though, the board has indicated they would let him go.

He has indicated his preference would be to move abroad with AC Milan apparently interested.

Nadal carries on clay charisma



AFP, Barcelona

Rafael Nadal extended his record run on clay to 69 straight wins as he moved a step closer to a title hat-trick at the 900,000-dollar Barcelona Open on Thursday.

The Spanish top seed beat former Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson 6-1, 6-4, but not without a spirited comeback from the Swede in a combative second set of the third-round contest.

After riding roughshod over the number 73 in a 21-minute opener, Nadal looked like having things all his own way.

But Johansson, 32, showed

nerves as he re-discovered his survival instincts to turn the second into a struggle at the Real Club.

Johansson fired six aces and held serve in a marathon sixth game featuring eight deuces.

But Nadal had the last word in front of his home public, breaking for victory in the final game after Johansson followed an ace with a run of errors.

It took 69 minutes for Nadal to go through.

The Spaniard is bidding to collect a hattrick of Barcelona titles, aiming to become the second man after Swede Mats Wilander (1982-1984) to win the event three times as a teenager in the second round by Alex Corretja.

"I controlled the game in the first set but he played well in the sec-

ond," said the winner. "I tried not to let up after winning the first easily."

"It's unbelievable to win 69 on clay and it's especially nice to play here, where I have so much support."

Nadal next faces Italian surprise packet Potito Starace, the number 72 who beat Argentine eighth seed Juan Chela 6-4, 7-6 (12-10) in their third-round encounter.

Fifth seed David Ferrer flew the flag for Spain as he hammered Serb Boris Paes 6-2, 7-5.

Nadal improved his Barcelona career record to 13-1, his lone loss coming in 2003 when he was beaten as a teenager in the second round by Alex Corretja.

"I controlled the game in the first set but he played well in the sec-

Ranson steps up City bid



AFP, London

Ray Ranson has stepped up his bid to secure control of Manchester City by submitting revised takeover proposals to the Premiership club.

City have so far rebuffed approaches from their former defender and both an American-based consortium and former Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra are reported to be watching developments closely.

Ranson claimed his revised proposal addresses the issues raised by the current City board and called for a face-to-face meeting with current chairman John Wardle to thrash out a deal.

"I first contacted City in 2004, long before I was associated with a move for Aston Villa," Ranson said. "Now I have the financial backing to be successful."

"City have huge potential, on and off the pitch. I believe I am in a unique position to drive that forward having played the game at the top level and then never left it."

If Ranson does succeed in his

takeover move, the future of manager Stuart Pearce will be in doubt. The businessman has refused to confirm that Pearce will be kept on if he is in charge.

Speculation over the future ownership of City has been rife since Wardle announced last month that he wanted to sell his 29 per cent stake, which is owned jointly with business partner David Makin.

So far there has been no sign of a deal being concluded although the chairman has been involved in talks with the unnamed American consortium for nearly a month.

Podolski out for three months

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's drive for a Champions League place suffered a massive blow on Thursday with the news German international striker Lukas Podolski is out for six months.

The 21-year-old needs an operation to repair his injured left knee and will miss his side's final four Bundesliga matches as the German giants attempt to avoid missing out on a Champions League place for the first time in 11 years.

"Lukas has damaged the cartilage in his left knee and will have an operation on Thursday and will be out for the next six months," it was announced on Bayern's website on Thursday.

"Podolski will make his comeback at the start of the 2007-08 season."

Podolski, who was voted the best young player of the 2006 World Cup and has scored 22 goals in 38 internationals, will also miss Germany's Euro 2008 qualifiers against San Marino and Slovakia in June.

Germany's coach Joachim Loew was disappointed by the news and will be looking for a new striking partner alongside Schalke 04's Kevin Kuranyi.

"Lukas told me on Wednesday night," said Loew.

"This is a great shame for him personally, of course, but also for the national team, because we will miss Lukas for the European qualifiers."

"I wish him a quick recovery and hope that he is fit at the beginning of the new season again."

Despite being a first-choice striker for Loew, Podolski has failed to live up to expectations since joining Bayern at the start of the season from Cologne -- scoring just four goals in 22 games.

Bayern are fourth in the Bundesliga and five points adrift of the Champions League qualification spots.

Lehmann stays with Arsenal

AFP, Berlin

Former Germany international goalkeeper Jens Lehmann extended his contract for another year with Premiership side Arsenal, he told German daily Bild on Wednesday.

The 37-year-old's decision to stay at Arsenal until 2008 will disappoint Bundesliga side Hertha Berlin, who had been favourites to seal his transfer at the end of this season.

"I am going to stay an extra year," said Lehmann, who has been at the Gunners since signing from Borussia Dortmund in 2003.

"Arsenal is a great club with a good sporting outlook and I want to play in the Champions League next season," added Lehmann, who was sent off early on in last season's Champions League final which Arsenal lost to Barcelona.

The fiery goalkeeper, who previously had spells at Schalke 04 and AC Milan, had wanted a two-year extension but Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger only offers one-year extension to players aged over 30.

United, Roma both fined

AFP, Geneva

Manchester United and AS Roma were both fined by UEFA on Wednesday over the violence which erupted during their Champions League quarterfinal in Rome this month.

European football's governing body acted after rival sets of supporters threw missiles at each other and clashed with Italian police, who were heavily criticised for their behaviour by United supporters following the incident at Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

Roma were fined 47,000 euros with United having to pay 21,300.

The clubs have the right to appeal the decision imposed by UEFA's control and disciplinary body.

Roma won that first leg 2-1 before a 7-1 drubbing in the second leg at Old Trafford.

At a separate hearing UEFA announced that European champions Greece must play their next two Euro 2008 qualifiers against Hungary and Moldova at least 250km away from the Greek capital Athens.

This punishment follows trouble at the Georgios Karaiskakis stadium during Greece's 4-1 defeat by Turkey which included fireworks and missiles being thrown, racist banners displayed and a general lack of organisation.

The Greek football federation has also been ordered to ban extremist supporter groups from matches of the Greek national teams and to pay a 61,000-euro fine.

And the Norwegian Football Association and the Football Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina picked up fines of 18,300 and 36,600 euros respectively after crowd trouble at their Euro qualifier in Oslo which Bosnia won 2-1.

Saviola set to defect

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's Argentine forward Javier Saviola is set to defect to arch-enemies Real Madrid, sports newspaper Marca said on Thursday.

The 25-year-old has agreed to join the nine-time European champions having not received any firm offers on a contract renewal at Barca, according to Marca.

Saviola had been told at the beginning of the season by coach Frank Rijkaard that he was surplus to requirements at Barca and should look for another club.

An injury crisis in attack forced

the Dutch coach to recall his diminutive striker and Saviola responded admirably, turning in some impressive displays.

But since star strikers Samuel

Eto'o and Ronaldinho have returned to fitness, Saviola has again found himself out on the sidelines.

Real and Barca refused to comment on the reports but Marca claimed that the capital club had pulled off a transfer coup as Saviola will be out of contract at the end of the season and will cost nothing.

The last player to move from Barcelona to Real was Portuguese winger Luis Figo (now at Inter Milan) and his transfer caused much controversy.

Afterwards the two clubs came to an agreement not to poach each other's players in the future as such moves incensed their fans.

Meanwhile, Marca also claimed

that Valencia striker David Villa is set to join Juventus next season, despite interest from Chelsea.

Marca said Juve are expecting

to lose French striker David Trezeguet, despite his insistence

recently that he will stay with the club who will almost certainly play in

the Italian top flight next season, and will replace him with Villa.

English newspaper The Sun had claimed on Tuesday that the 25-year-old Spanish international would join Chelsea for 45 million pounds (about 67.5 million euros).

The Spanish press has reported that Valencia would be willing to accept 70 million euros for Villa.

"If the Chelsea offer suited us, we would not be able to refuse it," Valencia were quoted as saying according to AS newspaper.

However, Villa himself said he has no intention of leaving the Spanish champions in 2002 and 2004.

"I have said 70 times, I feel good at Valencia, otherwise I would never have signed a seven-year contract."

He said his only focus was the last seven matches of the season, with Valencia still harbouring an outside chance of winning the title.

Klinsmann shuts door on clubs



AFP, Berlin

Former Germany boss Juergen Klinsmann has accepted a job with German TV, apparently ruling himself out of becoming coach of English Premiership champions Chelsea, a report said on Thursday.

Klinsmann will work for as an analyst and commentator for pay-TV channel Arena for the next two years, Bild newspaper reported.