

Juventus on threshold of Serie A

AFP, Rome

Disgraced former Italian champions Juventus moved a step closer to a swift return to the top flight with a 1-0 Serie B victory at Verona on Friday. French defender Jean-Alain Bounsong scored the only goal in the 43rd minute, heading home Alessandro Del Piero's corner kick. The Turin-based side top the table with 72 points from their 35 matches played, eight ahead of Genoa who climbed above Napoli into second place after their 2-1 win at home to Treviso.

Napoli, who have 62 points, can reclaim the runners-up spot if they win their home match against Cesena on Saturday. The top two in the second division win automatic promotion to Serie A.

Juve coach Didier Deschamps admitted his team performed below their best.

"We weren't as good as we have been in recent weeks, but I felt we had a bit extra to give than Verona and deserved the three points," said the Frenchman.

"Now we are in the final straight and eight points from our final seven matches should be enough to secure promotion."

Last summer Juventus were demoted from Serie A and given a nine-point handicap in Serie B for their role in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

Neuville out injured

AFP, Monchengladbach

Veteran German international Oliver Neuville will miss the final three games of Bundesliga bottom-side's Borussia Monchengladbach's relegation battle, it was revealed on Saturday.

The 33-year-old's season came to a premature close when he tore a groin muscle in training last week and will be operated on in Munich on Monday.

"We think Oliver will be out for four to six weeks and we decided to have the operation now, so that he will be fit for pre-season training," said 'Gladbach's doctor Stefan Hertl.

Neuville, who has scored nine goals in 65 internationals and was a member of the German side that reached the 2002 World Cup final, has had a terrible run of luck with injuries.

The Swiss-born forward, who was also a member of the Bayer Leverkusen side that reached the 2002 Champions League final where they lost to Real Madrid, had an operation in January for an adductor injury and has played in less than half of Gladbach's games this season.



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus Frenchman Jean allain Bounsong (C) is congratulated by teammates Mauro Camoranesi (L) and Nicola Legrottaglie after he scored the only goal of their Serie B fixture against Verona at the Bentegodi Stadium in Verona on Friday.

Klose apologises for Bayern talks

AFP, Bremen



Werder Bremen's top striker Miroslav Klose on Friday apologised to his club for holding talks with directors from Bayern Munich.

"The meeting with Bayern was purely informal and didn't involve negotiating a contract," the 28-year-old Polish-born marksman – leading scorer at last year's World Cup finals, said.

Klose's explanation followed talks with Werder's general manager, Klaus Allofs, who had sum-

moned the player to explain Thursday's report in Bild which claimed he had met Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld and general manager Uli Hoenes.

Klose added: "The meeting only lasted 20 minutes, but it was inappropriate – that's why I've apologised to the directors and supporters of Werder.

"I should have told the coach and manager about it."

Allofs said Klose's version of events had been accepted.

"But we explained clearly to him that while he's under contract with Bremen (until June 2008) he cannot join another German club," warned Allofs.

Before holding clear the air talks with his star asset Allofs had insisted: "He's going to need to explain this, I want to speak to the player and his agent urgently."

"I really want to know what happened with Bayern."

Klose, who ended a long goal drought when he scored twice earlier this month in the second leg of their UEFA Cup quarter-final with AZ Alkmaar, has indicated his preference would be to move abroad with AC Milan apparently interested.

According to his club there is a gentleman's agreement in place that he won't approach any other Bundesliga clubs.

Park out until August

AFP, London

Manchester United midfielder Park Ji-sung will be sidelined until August after undergoing knee surgery in the United States.

South Korean winger Park faces a race to be fit in time for the start of next season after being operated on by knee specialist Dr Richard Steadman, who helped save the careers of Alan Shearer and Michael Owen.

The procedure, which was completed on Saturday morning, means Park will also miss South Korea's Asia Cup campaign in July.

Park, who suffered the injury against Blackburn in March, will now begin an extensive rehabilitation period before being examined again later this year.

"Ji-sung Park has had a complicated cartilage operation that required an expert in his field," a United spokesman said.

"He will be out for the remainder of the season and we will assess the situation again in August."

Czech consortium buys Nantes

AFP, Nantes

Nantes football club has reportedly been sold by the French aviation group Dassault to a consortium from the Czech Republic for between five and 10 million euros, according to a report in France Football magazine. "An indiscretion convinces us that Nantes has already been sold. The aviation company has reached agreement with a Czech business consortium," the magazine stated.

Club president Rudi Roussillon was unavailable for comment. Nantes are bottom of the French first division.

Sunderland closer to Premiership

AFP, Sunderland

Carlos Edwards produced a stunning late goal to lift Sunderland to a 3-2 win over Burnley and one step closer to a return to the Premier-ship here on Friday.

Roy Keane's Black Cats moved four points above third-placed Derby in the Championship after Edwards' effort 10 minutes clinched a vital three points.

Daryl Murphy gave them the lead in the 14th minute before David Connolly had a penalty saved five minutes later.

Andy Gray levelled for Burnley before the break with a spot kick and the visitors took control with Wade Elliott's long-range shot in the 50th minute.

Gunners too tempting for Lehmann

AFP, London



Gunners, admits he was tempted by a move back home to Germany.

Speaking publicly for the first time since ending speculation over his future Lehmann, 37, says last year's stint in Germany for the World Cup did whet his appetite for a return to the Bundesliga but he found it impossible to call time on his Gunners career.

The Germany goalkeeper told Arsenal TV Online on Saturday: "I am staying for another year and I'm delighted about that."

"I said I always loved it here but, of

course, I had to make a decision.

"I could have gone somewhere else but in the end I think there is a good possibility to harvest something at this club, particularly next season. I want to be a part of that."

"For a while I considered going back to Germany because we (Lehmann and his family) loved it there during the last World Cup. My wife and children are very happy here but they could have imagined going back to Germany and that is why we considered leaving."

"But at the end as I said before the quality of the football here, the club, the stadium and the fans – I know that and I like that. It is the perfect environment for me to play football. I don't know if I would have found that somewhere else."

Hammers keep precious points

AFP, London



West Ham's chances of surviving in the Premiership were increased on Friday when the east London club escaped a points deduction over the controversial signings of Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano. West Ham's chances of surviving in the Premiership were increased on Friday when the east London club escaped a points deduction over the controversial signings of Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano.

The Hammers were hit with a fine of 5.5 million pounds (11 million dollars) after a disciplinary panel established by the FA Premier League (FAPL) found that the two Argentinians were effectively owned by a third party and that the club had acted with "dishonesty and deceit" to disguise that fact from league officials.

West Ham said it accepted the ruling but will consider an appeal over the amount of the fine. While it is a record financial penalty for an English club, it will be regarded as a price worth paying if West Ham go on to retain their top-flight status.

In it's ruling, the panel concluded that the conduct of West Ham amounted to "an obvious and deliberate breach of the rules" and "a grave breach of trust as to the FAPL and its constituent members."

The seriousness of the charges meant that "normally" a points deduction would have been applied but it was decided that this "would not be proportionate" in this case.

This was because of a number of mitigating factors, including West Ham's recent change of ownership, their guilty plea and the fact that the season is at such a crucial, late stage where the impact of a points deduction would be greater than if it had been imposed mid-way through the campaign.

Wenger faces balancing act

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger faces a challenge that will define Arsenal's future as he tries to balance the expectations of his star players with the need to develop his young prodigies.

Arsenal will finish without a trophy for the second successive season and, while a victory over Fulham on Sunday would clinch a Champions League place, Wenger knows the likes of Thierry Henry and William Gallas won't be satisfied if the Gunners' barren run stretches to a third year.

With Cesc Fabregas, Emmanuel Eboue, Denilson and Robin van Persie all showing signs of becoming top-class players, Wenger has the tools to build another title-winning team.

But Chelsea and Manchester United pose a formidable barrier to his ambitions and Gallas has already expressed his frustration at Arsenal's failure to mount a serious challenge for silverware, while Henry admits his future at the club is tied to Wenger.

The prospect of his senior players beginning to doubt whether Arsenal can seriously compete for major honours is a

concern for Wenger, but he is adamant success is just around the corner.

"I feel it has been an interesting season, a season full of promise, full of tests for the club and I am confident that it will help us to be stronger next year," he said.

"It is not enough, do not take me wrong, but it is not a super disaster. We moved to a new stadium, and when you move to a new stadium, you drop points."

"We had big, big long-term injuries, yet despite this we still finish fourth, or maybe third, in the league and just having lost in the Carling Cup final with a very, very young team."

Wenger played down suggestions that Gallas wanted to leave after reportedly falling out with several teammates. "He has had a difficult season this year because he's a very ambitious player," Wenger said. "There are no special differences other than the usual ones every player has with his partners, there are no problems with him at all."

Fulham manager Lawrie Sanchez has prepared for the daunting trip to the Emirates Stadium comforted by his ability as Northern Ireland coach to upset supposedly superior opponents.

Sanchez has masterminded shock victories over England,

Sweden and Spain and desperately needs a similar result on Sunday as he tries to stop Fulham slipping into the relegation zone.

Sanchez insists he will feel responsible if Fulham go down, even though he has only been in charge for two matches.

"Some people have said I'm in a win-win situation here but I'm not," he said. "My reputation is on the line and I don't want to see that sullied by relegation."

"I'll blame myself if we do go down. If we can get three draws from our three remaining games and limp over the line that would be enough, and I'd take that because this is not about me."

"It's about the club and the players, who represent the fans, making sure we're in the Premiership next year."

Sanchez, who spent a day picking up training tips from Wenger last season, is not short of confidence and is convinced he will succeed in the Premiership whether or not he gets a permanent post at Fulham.

"It would be nice if we beat Arsenal and everyone said well done to me, but it's not about that," he said.

"Sixteen days into the 32-day contract I believe I'm up to managing in the Premiership. If it's not here then it will be somewhere else."

Schalke slip up at Bochum

AFP, Berlin



Bundesliga leaders Schalke 04 slipped up in their bid to clinch the German title with a 2-1 loss away to VfL Bochum on Friday.

Schalke remain two points clear of second-placed Werder Bremen who have a chance to take the lead with a win over Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday.

Schalke went in front with an eighth minute goal from Germany international Kevin Kuranyi.

But Bochum hit back, with Zvezdan Misimovic bagging the

33rd minute equalizer and Theofanis Gekas, the Bundesliga's top scorer, coming up with the winner for his 19th goal of the season four minutes before the break.

Schalke dominated the second period but were unable to find a way to break down Bochum's defence.

Fourth-placed Bayern Munich host Hamburg on Saturday aiming to atone for last weekend's defeat to third-placed VfB Stuttgart.

Bayern have a five-point gap to close to secure a top-three finish which will guarantee them a Champions League place next year.

Failure to do so would mean they miss out on a place in

Europe's premier tournament for the first time in 11 years and the German giants would have to swallow the bitter pill of life in the UEFA Cup.

Bayern have injury problems with German striker Lukas Podolski out for the rest of the season with a knee injury, while Mark van Bommel (ankle), Owen Hargreaves (knee) and Claudio Pizarro are all struggling to be fit.

But Bayern's Brazilian defender Lucio insists the fight for a Champions League place is not over, even though the German giants are running out of games, with four left including Saturday's visit of Hamburg.

India to bid for 2020 Games

AFP, New Delhi

India will make a pitch for the 2020 Olympics after deciding not to bid for the 2016 Games, a top sports official said on Saturday.

"We will start our (bid) preparations as soon as the 2010 Commonwealth Games (being hosted by New Delhi) are over," Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Suresh Kalmadi said at a news conference.

"New Delhi will bid for the 2020 Olympic Games," Kalmadi told reporters in the presence of International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge, who was here to inaugurate an Olympic facility.

India dropped plans to bid for the 2016 Olympics after failing to secure the 2014 Asian Games last week.

"We thought of bidding for the 2016 Olympics because we already have the Commonwealth Games in 2010 and were planning to host the 2014 Asian Games," Kalmadi said after the defeat.

"So by 2016 we could have had an Olympics for free, since by then infrastructure would have been in place," he said.

New Delhi lost out to the South

Korean port city of Incheon in the race for the 2014 Asian Games last week, a defeat Kalmadi blamed on Indian Sports Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar.

Aiyar had said a day before the vote that running major sports events did not benefit ordinary people.

Kalmadi said the remarks cost India the games, although New Delhi's pollution and congested roads were reported to have played a big part.

IOC president Rogge supported the Indian bid for the 2020 Olympic Games, which has received the backing of the Indian government, saying the nation of 1.1 billion people would become a "sporting tiger" by then.

"I am impressed to see your prime minister so committed to sports. New Delhi should bid for the 2020 Games," Rogge said.

"We have a lot of expectations from India and we in the IOC think that India have great potential in sports."

"You have a young population of 70 percent under 25 (and) good infrastructure..."

The IOC chief also promised to support India "in its training,

expertise and financial resources."

Rogge, on his first visit to India since 1986, said it was imperative for a bid to have the "best possible collaboration" between the government and all other concerned parties.

"It is for the prestige of organization that all governments try to do their best. Sport is a force for good in every country," he said.

Rogge's previous visit was in connection with India's bid for the 1992 Games which was later withdrawn by the Indian Olympic Association after the government cancelled its support.

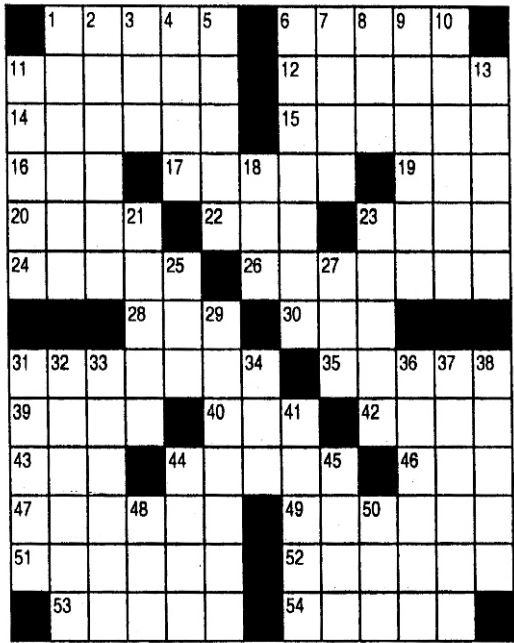
The games were eventually hosted by Barcelona.

Asked about India's chances of winning the 2020 games, Rogge said: "It is a different and very tough competition..."

"The bid is always awarded seven years in advance. So for 2020 the bid will be awarded in 2013. You have six years to prepare an impeccable bid. You have to unite for it," he said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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WBE-EDNDOX DJO SNHDE? Yesterday's Cryptiquip: ANY PERSON WHO WENT WITH ACTOR HARRISON TO SOCIAL FUNCTIONS WOULD PROBABLY BE A FORD ESCORT.

Today's Cryptiquip Clue: S equals F