



Manchester United goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo (R) is hustled by Manchester City defender Nedium Onuoha during the Mancunian derby at the City of Manchester stadium on Saturday.

## FOUR YEAR WAIT NEARLY OVER MU on the brink

APP, Manchester



Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty left Manchester United with one hand on the Premiership trophy as his side earned a crucial 1-0 win at crisis-ridden Manchester City on Saturday.

Ronaldo scored from the spot on 34 minutes to notch his 23rd goal of the season after he had been tripped by Michael Ball.

It was the perfect response from United in the wake of their humbling 3-0 Champions League semifinal defeat to AC Milan in midweek - losing 5-3 on aggregate - and increased their lead over Chelsea at the top of the table to eight points.

United will be crowned champions for the 16th time unless Chelsea beat Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

The writing was on the wall for Manchester City - who are subject to two rival bids to buy them and also had to suspend their star midfielder Joey Barton earlier in the week after a training ground altercation with Frenchman Ousmane Dabo - once they had fallen behind as Stuart Pearce's side finished their home campaign having scored just once at Eastlands in the Premiership since New Year's Day.

But City still contrived to miss a penalty 10 minutes from time when Darius Vassell saw his spot kick saved by Edwin van Der Sar after Wes Brown had tripped Ball. United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was able to recall influential defender Rio Ferdinand, badly missed in the San Siro, while Alan Smith was recalled in attack

alongside Wayne Rooney.

Eastlands' biggest crowd of the season generated a tremendous atmosphere, not least because the home side could hammer a huge dent in United's title aspirations.

This was arguably the greatest incentive of all for the majority of the 47,000 inside the ground, but in order to do this City would have to end their woeful home goal drought.

Ball was guilty of a nasty stamp on Ronaldo in the opening minutes, which combined with Ferguson's irate reaction towards a linesman did little to ease the tension as it became evident United were not going to have things their own way.

Pearce's decision to select a five-man midfield did little to enhance his side's chances of scoring, but the purpose was to stifle the forward runs of Michael Carrick, Ryan Giggs and Ronaldo.

United had to wait 20 minutes for their first opening, Ferdinand finding Ronaldo with a precise ball but his control let him down.

Moments later Ronaldo flicked Giggs's corner to the back post where Ferdinand was waiting, but his header back rebounded off the crossbar and was gratefully gathered by Andreas Isaksson.

The home team were happy to sit back and try and hit their opponents on the counter attack.

Emile Mpenza stung the palms of Van der Sar with a powerful turn and volley on 16 minutes, while Demarcus Beasley did the same with a similar effort from the edge of the penalty area 13 minutes later.

Just when United's frustrations were beginning to surface, however, the breakthrough came when

Ball's outstretched foot was enough to send Ronaldo crashing to the turf.

Referee Rob Styles pointed to the spot, from where the Portugal international lashed a clinical penalty into the bottom corner to secure the advantage.

His strike was to prove more than enough as the visitors cruised through the second half without their lead being threatened.

Pearce threw on Trevor Sinclair

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## Fergie wants favour from old foe

APP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has called on his old rival Arsene Wenger to hand him the Premiership title.

Ferguson's league leaders will be crowned champions for the first time since 2003 if Chelsea fail to win at Arsenal on Sunday.

United moved eight points clear of second-placed Chelsea with a 1-0 win at Manchester City on Saturday and now Gunners boss Wenger, who has been involved in a series of spats with Ferguson, is in a position to send the title to Old Trafford.

Ferguson, who insists he would rather play golf than watch the Emirates Stadium clash, knows that even if Chelsea do win on Sunday, United can clinch the league with a draw at Stamford

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## Hannover up to seventh

INTERNET, undated

Hannover moved up to seventh in the Bundesliga with victory over Energy Cottbus on Friday night.

The creative Szabolcs Huszti was the star of the show, creating goals for Vinicius in the 37th minute and Arnold Bruggink in the 84th.

Cottbus were never in the game at all and were fortunate to lose by only two goals, but since they ensured their future in the Bundesliga last weekend they will be too worried about losing games between now and the end of the season.

It was a convincing display from the home side from start to finish.

The fans were on their feet after four minutes when Huszti's free-kick rippled the top of the net.

Everything was passing via the Hungarian's feet, and he was producing chance after chance for his team-mates.

Bruggink reached a Huszti cross in the 10th minute, but volleyed his shot over the crossbar.

In the 37th minute, Vinicius did better and finally converted one of Huszti's many assists.

Huszti delivered a cross from the right which Vinicius flicked into the far corner with his head from 10 yards.

Vahid Hashemian had chances to double the hosts' advantage before half-time, but the former Bochum and Bayern Munich striker was not on top of his game.

That was also the case after the

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## Hammers in a limbo

APP, London

Six Premiership clubs are mulling legal action against the Premier League for failing to deduct points from West Ham over the Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano transfer dispute, according to Wigan's owner Dave Whelan.

The Premier League last week handed West Ham a 5.5-million-pound fine instead of a points deduction, for irregularities over the two Argentinians last August.

"There's six clubs involved and I know there are three at present receiving legal advice," Whelan, whose club is in a fight with West Ham for Premiership survival, was quoted as saying in The Guardian newspaper.

"Obviously we hope that we don't suffer as a result, but we felt this needed to be done."

Whelan feels the situation could be avoided if West Ham go down - which he sees as a fitting punishment for breaking the rules and their "blatant lies".

"Football should be decided on the football field, and I'm a big believer in that," remarked Whelan.

"If we have to go to court then it will be a shame, but this is a very serious offence West Ham

have committed.

"I've no anger directed towards West Ham or their fans, apart from the fact they told lies."

"Whether the people who told these lies are still there or not, I don't know."

"But West Ham have broken the rules and they should have had a much stiffer penalty than 5.5million pounds - a figure that is peanuts to the 35million pounds they will get if they stay up."

"We took this course of action independently of anyone else in an attempt to try and protect ourselfes should we suffer as a consequence of this bizarre decision."

"We have some excellent and reputable lawyers who have already been looking at this matter for us for a week."

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wages.

Dabo was quoted in The Times

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## Milan opt for all-white strip

APP, Rome

AC Milan have opted to wear their all-white strip for the Champions League final against Liverpool in Athens on May 23, a repeat of the 2005 final which the English Premiership side won on penalties.

Milan were drawn as the home side for the final and could have worn their famous red and black striped shirts.

But just as in the 2005 final, Milan have chosen their second strip, allowing Liverpool to wear their traditional red kit.

Milan's white strip had proved lucky before they lost the Istanbul final two years ago.

Before that the Serie A giants had won four European Cups wearing white, in 1963, 1990, 1989 and 2003.

Liverpool were 3-0 down at half-time in the 2005 final but pegged Milan back with three goals in a six-minute spell.

Extra-time failed to separate the two sides and Liverpool won the shoot-out to lift the trophy.

"They have every right to take

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## Mourinho paints bright future

Football

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho has outlined his vision of Chelsea's future to captain John Terry and midfielder Frank Lampard.

Chelsea crashed out of the Champions League to Liverpool on penalties on Tuesday night and, in his first interview since that crushing blow, Mourinho hailed his team as winners and insisted the future begins with Sunday's clash against Arsenal.

Mourinho has already pinned the team's pre-season plans on the dressing room wall and spent time talking to Terry and Lampard about what the future holds.

The duo have yet to sign contract extensions but now that Mourinho's position is assured, both are expected to pledge their futures to Chelsea in the coming weeks.

Mourinho insists he does not anticipate any mental scars or loss of confidence against the Gunners because of their semifinal League exit at Anfield.

"Our team is full of winners and you don't become a loser just because you lost an important game or are not as successful as you were in previous seasons," he said.

"Winners are always winners and the mentality is inside. The future is more important than the past, as it is when we win, but when we lose, we have even more reason to say it strongly. And we look forward to the future."

"We are having our meetings and I have been speaking with players. Today I was trying to explain the vision of the future and the vision for next season."

"We already have the pre-

season plans on the walls of the dressing room so they can think about it. But this season is not over."

Chelsea face Arsenal at the Emirates in their first visit to the new stadium and Mourinho wants the players to show the nature of their mentality against the club they beat to win the Carling Cup back in February.

He added: "We have four



JOSE MOURINHO

## Is tiredness a proper excuse?

Football

THE GUARDIAN

The post-mortem to Chelsea and Manchester United going out of the Champions League has been a bit like a competition to see who can sound the more exhausted.

"Milan have been able to rest players recently and we have not,"

Sir Alex Ferguson complained, echoing Jose Mourinho's tut-tutting about having to play to quite so many games in so many different glamorous competitions.

This is a slightly strange approach, given that feeling tired is the excuse least likely to draw any kind of public sympathy. Being tired is, after all, the basic definition of a sport. If it involves vigorous activity, we'll give it a referee and build a stadium around it.

Wenger said: "I want us to respect Ashley for what he has done for this club. But I don't know what to expect from the supporters."

Even snooker, with its "mental demands", is - if the haunted expressions of most of the field at the world championship are anything to judge by - extremely tiring. Let's face it, at least half of any snooker match is spent sitting in a comfortable chair, staring into space and wondering what dogs dream about.

There are other reasons tiredness doesn't really wash. For a start everybody's tired. I'm exhausted all the time. Aren't you? This is why we get all husky voiced talking about Frank Lampard's 60 games a season. Sportsmen are the opposite of tired people. They walk up the escalator. They can be bothered to take the rubbish out. As soon as they complain about being tired they stop being proper athletes.

It's like the marathon runner who tells you the only thing - the SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

## Hoaxer targets Man Utd

INTERNET, undated

A hoaxter has targeted Manchester United players for the second time in a week after sending a suspicious package to the club's training ground, police said today.

Officers were called to the team's Carrington training ground on Wednesday after a member of staff opened a parcel containing an "unidentified substance".

The previous day the complex was at the centre of a security scare after a similar package was received.

Police said they believed the same person was responsible for both incidents.

A spokeswoman for Greater Manchester Police said: "Further suspicious packages were discovered on Wednesday May 2 at the Manchester United training ground at Carrington."

"This followed a call on Tuesday May 1 following reports that an unidentified substance had been discovered in an envelope delivered to the address."

"At this stage it would appear that all of the packages have been sent by the same person."

"Tests have been carried out on the substance and it has now been sent to the laboratory for analysis."

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## Barton reported to police

Football

APP, Manchester

England international midfielder Joey Barton could face criminal prosecution after it was reported on Saturday that Manchester City teammate Ousmane Dabo asked police to press charges over an alleged assault.

The 30-year-old French midfielder was hospitalised for injuries to his eye, nose and lip after an altercation at the club's training ground on Tuesday.

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) have confirmed the incident has been reported to them.

Barton - no stranger to violent incidents with teammates including one especially unsavoury one where he put a light cigar into the eye of a youth team player - has been suspended by the club and it is widely believed that he will be sold in the summer.

"GMP has received a report from a 30-year-old man that he was assaulted," said a GMP spokesman.

"Inquiries are ongoing." Such a move could have serious consequences for the 24-year-old midfielder, who has attracted unwanted publicity on a regular basis down the years and is presently thought to be out of the country.

Among the most unsavoury incidents were Barton stubbing a cigar out in the eye of teammate Jamie Tandy during a players' Christmas party - for which he was fined six weeks wages - and also attacking a schoolboy Everton fan.

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