



Chelsea's Salomon Kalou (R) watches as teammate Michael Essien (L) celebrates after scoring to equalise during their Premiership match against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium yesterday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw which means Manchester United win the Premiership title with two games in hand.

PHOTO: AFP

## Wide salary disparity in MLS

AFP, New York

David Beckham's 6.5 million-dollar 2007 salary from the Los Angeles Galaxy dwarfs the wages of his new Major League Soccer colleagues, figures released by the MLS Players Association show.

A total of 57 MLS players will earn just 12,900 dollars in 2007, data from the association said. The salary figures given are the average guaranteed annual compensation for a player, including a percentage of any signing bonus but not performance bonuses.

Beckham, the former England national team captain who will leave Spanish League giant Real Madrid in June, signed a five-year contract with the Galaxy that could be worth 250 million dollars, including lucrative sponsorship deals.

While Beckham prepares for his Galaxy debut around early July, 25 percent of MLS players are on the so-called "development roster" of teams, earning 12,900 dollars and 17,700 dollars a year.

All are young Americans just starting their professional careers, according to the union, which would like to see salaries at the lower end of the scale bumped up leaguewide.

"It's a big, big problem," Bob Foose, the executive director of the players' union, told the Los Angeles Times. "A third of the league has to ask their parents for money to pay their rent."

Foose would like to see players on development rosters brought to the senior roster minimum of 30,000 dollars per year, which he believes could be accomplished for little more than 100,000 dollars per team, per year.

"It's imminently doable," he told the Times.

While Beckham leads the salary stakes, the new rule allowing teams to offer greater compensation to lure international stars can be seen in action elsewhere.

## Fan gets hold of Dhoni

PTI, Kolkata

An over-enthusiastic woman caused a flutter by managing to hug Mahendra Singh Dhoni while the Indian cricket team was boarding a bus back to the hotel after the conclusion of a conditioning camp for Bangladesh tour here on Sunday.

The woman, who had been seen in the stands during the team's training session for the past three days flashing Dhoni's poster, suddenly lunged towards the dashing cricketer as he was approaching the team bus outside the Eden Gardens.

Stunned security personnel immediately swung into action and freed a bewildered Dhoni, who had reportedly come down to meet her after noticing her during the camp.

When contacted later, deputy commissioner (headquarters) PK Chatterjee told this news agency the woman was probably known to Dhoni and no action would be taken against her.

## Rangers win prestige tie

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers may have won their second consecutive Old Firm league match on Saturday but they are still playing catch up with Celtic for next season -- according to Walter Smith.

Goals from Kris Boyd and Charlie Adam handed the Ibrox side a comfortable 2-0 victory at home to their Glasgow rivals in the Scottish Premier League.

This followed a 1-0 win for Rangers at Parkhead in March and Smith is now undefeated in 13 games since replacing Frenchman Paul Le Guen as manager in January.

Saturday's victory also means the Ibrox side will finish as runners-up to Celtic to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The Rangers support are hoping this latest Old Firm victory is a sign the balance of power in Scottish football is now turning in their favour and that they can lift the SPL title next season.

However, Smith says the latest win means little in terms of his team's chances of finishing ahead of Celtic next season.

The Rangers manager said: "I don't think the fact we've had a

stronger second half to the season while Celtic have had a difficult end to the season, in terms of motivation after winning the league, will have any bearing on next season.

"Celtic will know it's our job here to make sure they are not as far ahead again next season, or indeed not ahead at all.

"That's the pressure that's on Old Firm managers and we both know that.

"So this win is nothing to do with setting a marker for next season. There was an acknowledgement from both sides that Rangers had to improve.

"Gordon has already made it quite clear that he wants Celtic to improve next season so we have the bigger task on our hands."

Smith's opposite number at Celtic Gordon Strachan shared the view that the end of season result would matter little for the 2007-2008 campaign.

The Celtic manager said: "We got beat 3-0 by Hearts at the end of last season but it's not affected us too much this season. We've finished a long way in front of Hearts in the league so we're not going to get too worried about this defeat in terms of what it means for next season.

"Rangers have become more consistent in recent months and I'm sure they will want to improve

further.

"But we too are looking to improve and I'm sure every manager in the Scottish Premier League will want to improve their team for next season so I'm not too worried about losing this game to Rangers.

"In the two years I've been here Rangers have always been the favourites at the start of the season. If that's the case again and we win the league then that's fine."

With Rangers already eight points clear of third placed Aberdeen before the match and Celtic champions, there was little at stake for either side and it showed in what was a poor first-half.

It was the home side, however, who were doing most of the running and it was no surprise when they took the lead in the 34th minute.

A lobbed pass from Rangers' Spanish forward Nacho Novo wrong-footed the Celtic defence to leave Kris Boyd in space and he sent a left-foot volley past Polish goalkeeper Artur Boruc for his first ever goal against the Parkhead side.

Rangers continued to be the better side after the break and in the 55th minute they doubled their lead when Charlie Adam's free-kick went under Celtic's defensive wall into the bottom corner of the net.

## Moody set for talks

BBC ONLINE, undated

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody is set to decide his future in the next week.

He is currently on holiday in England and due back in Sri Lanka to meet with the board on May 14.

The 41-year-old has been credited with Sri Lanka's improved performances which led them to the World Cup final against Australia at the end of April.

But after two years in the job Moody could move on and is favourite to take over as coach of Western Australia although he has not commented on it.

He revealed last week he would have been interested in discussing the England coaching role had the England and Wales Cricket Board contacted him.

Moody told BBC Radio: "The England job is one of the few big jobs in cricket.

"I am sure a number of international coaches would have been interested, but England decided to move quickly."

He continued: "I was never contacted by England, but I was not exactly sitting by the phone waiting for a call. "My focus was always on Sri Lanka during the World Cup. It was important to stay professional for them -- my future had nothing to do with this tournament."

The former World Cup winner said his decision would be a balance between professional and family commitments.

His family still live in Worcestershire, where he was director of cricket before taking up the Sri Lanka job.

# Sunderland back to Premiership

AFP, London

Sunderland will return to the Premiership as winners of the Championship after Roy Keane's side completed a remarkable season with a 5-0 win over Luton on Sunday.

The win allowed Sunderland to leapfrog Steve Bruce's Birmingham, who had to settle for the second automatic promotion slot after being beaten 1-0 at Preston.

That win was not enough to earn Preston a place in the play-offs as all four teams above them won their final matches. Third-placed Derby will take on sixth-placed Southampton while West Brom will play Wolves in the play-off semi-finals.

The winners of those two

matches then face each other for the right to join Sunderland and Birmingham in the Premiership -- a match involving estimated stakes of 60 million pounds which is considered the richest in world football.

Southend, Luton and Leeds will all be playing in League One, the third tier of English football, next season after being relegated.

Luton were already condemned to the drop and Sunderland quickly demonstrated why the two clubs are at opposite ends of the table.

Former Arsenal striker Anthony Stokes opened their account in the fourth minute and it was only another two minutes before Daryl Murphy had doubled the lead.

Murphy's second, just after the restart, and late strikes from Ross Wallace and David Connolly kickstarted the title party at a club that lost its first four games of the

season before Keane was installed as manager.

Birmingham had a much tougher task on the final day against a side that was in the play-off positions for most of the season. But they generated enough chances to have won at a canter before finally succumbing to Simon Whaley's 85th-minute winner.

It was not enough to earn Paul Simpson's men a shot at the top flight however as Southampton hammered Southend 4-1 to claim the final play-off spot.

Derby beat already-relegated Leeds 2-0 to clinch third spot but it is West Brom who look to have the greatest momentum going into the play-offs after they crushed Barnsley 7-0 to clinch fourth place.

Wolves had to come back from a goal down to beat Leicester 4-1 and finish in fifth.

AFP, Tokyo

Japan striker Naohiro Takahara has issued a warning ahead of the Asian Cup finals in July that he is looking to boost the defending champions' feeble firepower.

Takahara, who failed to score in Japan's winless exit from the World Cup first round last year, netted his 11th Bundesliga goal of the season in Frankfurt's 4-0 home win over Alemannia Aachen on Saturday.

"I was really determined to get the goal. I had not been able to produce results for quite a while and it was great that I scored a goal at last. It will give me confidence," Takahara said, according to Japanese press reports.

Takahara, 27, thus set a record

for goals in a single season by a Japanese player in European first-division football, beating the 10 scored by midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata for Perugia in the 1998-1999 season.

Takahara's 10th goal came in the 2-2 draw away to Nuremberg in March.

Nakata, now 30, retired after the World Cup in Germany, ending a career which had taken him to five Serie-A clubs and English Premiership side Bolton.

Takahara moved to Frankfurt in mid-2006 after struggling to get playing time at Hamburg for three seasons. He scored only one goal for Hamburg last season.

"I have finally found a place since moving to Germany. I want to play here next season," Takahara added.

His 11th goal may boost

Frankfurt's struggle to avoid relegation to the second division, Japan Football Association president Saburo Kawabuchi told Japanese media here on Sunday.

"It is also a welcome boost for our effort toward the 2010 World Cup in South Africa," he added.

Takahara scored a goal in Japan's 2-0 friendly home win over Peru in late March, in a warm-up in their bid for a third straight Asian Cup.

Playmaker Shunsuke Nakamura, who has powered Celtic to their second straight Scottish Premiership title, set up both goals.

Takahara and Nakamura were the first Europe-based players to be called up for international duty since Bosnian Ivica Osim took over from Brazilian legend Zico as Japan coach after Germany 2006.

# A lifeline for Chievo

AFP, Rome



Chievo came through their must-win clash against fellow relegation battlers Parma with a 1-0 win on Sunday to move them out of the Serie A drop zone with three games to go.

The men from Verona, who achieved promotion to the top flight six years ago, grabbed the precious three points after Sergio Pellissier's fifth minute goal which lifted them into fifth from bottom.

Parma, who went into this fixture on a three-match winning run, are level on 35 points with Chievo but one place behind on inferior goal difference. Basement boys Ascoli's hopes of launching an unlikely 11th hour rescue bid to stay in the top flight were dashed when they fell 1-0 at Torino to ensure their relegation to Serie B.

Second from bottom Messina will

join Ascoli after going down 1-0 to already crowned champions Inter Milan.

Messina had a superb chance of taking the lead in the second half when Marco Andreolli used his arm to block an Andrea Giallombardo cross. Arturo Di Napoli stepped up to take the spot-kick only to see his effort saved by Francesco Toldo.

Then Hernan Crespo, back from injury, was brought on to the pitch in place of Santiago Solari in the 72nd minute and produced the only goal of the game with his first kick.

Champions League finalists AC Milan returned to domestic duty after their midweek success against Manchester United with a controversial goalless draw against Fiorentina at the San Siro.

Kaka, hero with three goals in the two-legged semifinal against United, missed a penalty, the ball striking the inside post and going across the face of the goal.

Earlier the Brazilian appeared harshly treated when he had a header

disallowed in the sixth minute when he was deemed guilty of pushing his marker.

The stalemate left Milan on 60 points and in fourth, one point behind fellow Champions League battlers Lazio, who defeated Livorno 1-0 thanks to Luis Jimenez's 27th minute goal.

But the game was marred by racist chanting from a section of the Lazio supporters.

Roma mathematically guaranteed their place in the Champions League next season with a 2-1 victory over Palermo to keep them in second place.

Roma, who have a date against Inter in the Italian Cup final, took control when Francesco Totti produced a sublime freekick for his 22nd goal of the campaign in the 17th minute.

Marco Cassetti doubled their advantage on 36 minutes with Giovanni Tedesco halving the deficit four minutes from time.



AC Milan's Brazilian star Kaka (R) walks back dejected, as is his teammate Ricardo Oliveira, after missing a goal against Fiorentina during the Serie A clash at the San Siro in Milan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP