



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.

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 league wide.

"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 the 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

Football

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

though, as he feels Fulham's physical approach took its toll on his players.

Xabi Alonso claims to be the victim of a headbutt from Fulham captain Michael Brown, while Alvaro Arbeloa picked up an ankle problem, Mohamed Sissoko has a knee injury, and Jose Reina strained his shoulder.

"Michael Brown's headbutt was clear," Benitez said. "I don't know if the FA will take action when they see the replay."

"I have four players in the dressing room now who are injured now. We spend a lot of money in this league on electronic assistance. We have four referees and no one saw anything."

"We might as well save money on the fourth referee and spend it on the academies. I have Reina, Sissoko, Arbeloa and Alonso all injured. Some of them will need to have scans."

"It is still possible that we could be relegated," he said. "But all the teams below us would need to win on the last day of the season. I will not be celebrating until we are safe."

"I told the players that before today they had only played well in one half of all the games so far but we put it together for all of this game. We also kept a clean sheet, which was nice. It is all about doing those things right."

Liverpool rested nine players from the side which defeated Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals during midweek, with only Jermaine Pennant and Jose Reina keeping their places.

Reds manager Rafael Benitez was left furious after this encounter

Fulham not safe yet'

Football

Fulham caretaker-manager Lawrie Sanchez insists his latest success over Liverpool does not guarantee Premiership survival.

Sanchez famously scored the winning goal for Wimbledon over the Reds in the 1988 FA Cup final, but it was USA international Clint Dempsey who made the vital breakthrough at Craven Cottage to move Fulham four points clear of the relegation zone.

If Charlton do not win against Tottenham on Monday then Fulham will be definitely be playing in English football's top division next campaign.

However, Sanchez is not taking his side's position for granted ahead of their final match of the season at Middlesbrough next weekend.

"It is still possible that we could be relegated," he said. "But all the teams below us would need to win on the last day of the season. I will not be celebrating until we are safe."

Fulham's Italian forward Vincenzo Montella had an overhead kick diverted away from goal on 22 minutes, but it was an overall disappointing half for the home side.

Robbie Fowler missed Liverpool's best opportunity of the first half, as he diverted the ball away from goal just five yards out.

Montella was replaced by Dempsey on 52 minutes as Sanchez attempted a new approach in breaking down Liverpool's defence.

Rafael Benitez

Fulham not safe yet'

BBC Online, undated

"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.

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Sunderland back to Premiership

Football

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-offs 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.

Takahara serves a warning

Football

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.

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