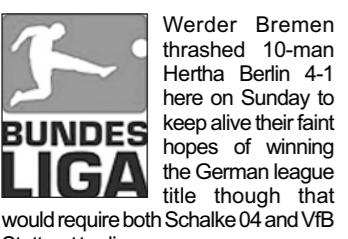


Bremen ride on Rosenberg

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen thrashed 10-man Hertha Berlin 4-1 here on Sunday to keep alive their faint hopes of winning the German league title though that would require both Schalke 04 and VfB Stuttgart to slip up.

Markus Rosenberg notched a hat-trick for Bremen and Brazilian playmaker Diego netted the other as they bounced back from the UEFA Cup semifinal exit at the hands of Espanyol on Thursday.

Werder were helped however by the sending off of Croatian Josip Simunic in the first half.

With just two matches left, three teams could still win the title - leaders Schalke 04 on 65 points, second-placed Stuttgart on 64 and Bremen on 63.

Kevin Kuranyi kept Schalke 04 on course for a first Bundesliga crown since 1958 with the winning goal in a 1-0 victory over Nuremberg on Saturday.

Stuttgart, however, are keeping close to the German league leaders, a 2-0 victory over Mainz 05 leaving them just a point adrift and well on target for automatic qualification for the Champions League group stages.

Bayern Munich meanwhile could only draw 1-1 at relegation-bound Borussia Monchengladbach, that result leaving the reigning champions in fourth spot, which would prove enough for UEFA Cup football next season, 11 points behind Schalke.

Schalke, who have topped the table for the last 12 rounds of matches, had to wait till the 64th minute to find the net through Kuranyi as they look for their first title in almost half a century, though they came close in both 2001 and 2005.

Kuranyi scored his 15th goal of the

season, and 10th with his head, in front of 50,000 fans at the VeltinsArena.

Kuranyi's diving header from a Gerald Asamoh cross must surely be one of the most important goals of his career considering the late stage of the title race.

Schalke coach Mirko Slomka said the championship would go down to the wire.

"We had to show patience today (Saturday)," he said. "But we never faltered and deserved our victory. I think the title will be decided on the

34th and final day."

Schalke's victory was even more important considering Stuttgart's success thanks to goals by Fernando Meira and Fernando Hilbert. It was Stuttgart's sixth successive victory although they are a young side without a lot of experience.

Stuttgart coach Armin Veh said Schalke were still the favourites:

"The situation remains the same," Veh said. "Schalke are the favourites because they have their destiny in their own hands."



PHOTO: AFP

Werder Bremen striker Miroslav Klose (L) shoots past a sliding Hertha Berlin defender Malik Fathi (R) during their Bundesliga match in Berlin on Sunday.

C'Ron assured of greatness

AFP, London



By the time Carlos Queiroz left a secluded restaurant in Madeira and stepped into the searing afternoon heat last July, Manchester United's return to the pinnacle of English football was back on course.

So Alex Ferguson had sent his trusted assistant Queiroz to Cristiano Ronaldo's family home in Portugal in a last-ditch attempt to persuade his prize asset not to walk out on United.

Ronaldo feared he had no future at Old Trafford after being vilified for his role in Wayne Rooney's dismissal during England's World Cup defeat against Portugal.

Caught on camera winking at his teammates after Rooney's red card, the winger became a ready-made scapegoat.

Rooney was reported to be furious with his United teammate and, with English fans preparing a hostile reception, it was no surprise that Ronaldo felt he would be better off elsewhere.

Real Madrid made it clear they were ready to offer him an escape route and Ronaldo was quick to express interest. But in Manchester, Ferguson cast his mind back 11 years to a midnight dash across Paris.

The United manager had been driven on the back of a motorbike through the French capital to find Eric Cantona when his talismanic striker

decided he wanted to retire after being banned for his notorious kung-fu kick on a Crystal Palace fan.

Ferguson had persuaded Cantona to carry on and he decided that Queiroz, who had established a close relationship with his fellow Portuguese, was the right man to repeat the trick with Ronaldo.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.

Over a meal with the player and his family, Queiroz convinced Ronaldo that the storm of controversy would die out in the same way it had after David Beckham was briefly public enemy number one following his World Cup red card in 1998.

As Ferguson looks back on a season in which he broke Chelsea's stranglehold on the Premiership, he is certain to reflect on the significance of that moment.

After all the 22-year-old has driven United to their first title for four years with a series of scintillating displays and a remarkable tally of 23 goals in all competitions.

He has rightly been lauded for his efforts and the PFA and Football Writers' Footballer of the Year awards he has won are a fitting tribute to a player who is already a United icon.

When even Sir Bobby Charlton, one of the finest forwards ever to grace Old Trafford and a former teammate of Best, is moved to describe Ronaldo as being capable of doing things he has never seen before, there can be no question about his talent.

That ability has been allied to a new-found maturity to create an unstoppable force. He has even

toned down the amateur dramatics and Queiroz believes the winger's fierce work-ethic guarantees he will never stop striving to improve his dazzling array of feints and step-overs.

"He is always the first to arrive at training and the last to go," Queiroz said. "Many times when the session

is over he stays behind to train with the session.